KIERKEGAARD ON THE NEED FOR INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

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For my mother and father,

to whom I owe

more than I can repay.

MOTTO

Before there can be any mention of understanding something of what [an author] has communicated, one must first understand him in his distinctive dialectic of communication and in this light understand everything which one understands.

- Søren Kierkegaard

Journals and Papers, 1:645

Antony Aumann

KIERKEGAARD ON THE NEED FOR INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

This dissertation concerns Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication. A central aspect of this theory is what I call the "indispensability thesis": there are some projects only indirect communication can accomplish. The purpose of the dissertation is to disclose and assess the rationale behind the indispensability thesis.

A pair of questions guides the project. First, to what does 'indirect communication' refer? Two acceptable responses exist: (1) Kierkegaard's version of Socrates' midwifery method and (2) Kierkegaard's use of artful literary devices. Second, for what end does Kierkegaard use indirect communication? There are two acceptable responses here as well: (1) helping others become religious and (2) making others aware of the nature of existence.

These responses are interrelated. First, Kierkegaard's notion of religion places restrictions on the means he can use to get readers to become religious. These restrictions ultimately entail that the only viable form of religious pedagogy is the midwifery method. Second, Kierkegaard engages in the midwifery method in part by making readers aware of the nature of existence (especially religious existence). But given the problems plaguing his readers, he thinks a straightforward approach to this project will likely fail. An approach that used artful literary devices such as deception and humor would be more successful. Third, Kierkegaard believes that there is one aspect of religious existence (viz. subjectivity) that people can come to know only first-hand. As such, he cannot directly impart knowledge of subjectivity to his readers. He argues that this means he must use the midwifery method. And he thinks the most productive way to do so is to provide readers with the kind of fictional narratives found in his early pseudonymous writings. Thus artful rhetorical devices play a role here as well.

All of Kierkegaard's arguments for the indispensability thesis turn on debatable assumptions. But the arguments concerning artful rhetorical devices have the additional defect of being merely probabilistic in nature. They lack the strength to support the indispensability thesis even if we grant the relevant background assumptions. Therefore, to the degree that the indispensability thesis has merit, it lies with the arguments concerning the midwifery method.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

In accordance with the standard set by the editorial board of the International Kierkegaard Commentary Series, I use the following abbreviations when referring to the English translations of Kierkegaard's writings. The complete citation information for these translations can be found in the Works Cited section at the end of the dissertation.

AN	"Armed Neutrality"
BA	*The Book on Adler*
CA	*The Concept of Anxiety*
CD	*Christian Discourses*
CUP	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments"*
EO	*Either/Or*
EUD	*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*
FSE	*For Self-Examination*
FT	*Fear and Trembling*
JFY	*Judge For Yourself!*
JP	*Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*
OMWA	*On My Work as an Author*
PC	*Practice in Christianity*
PF	*Philosophical Fragments*
PV	"The Point of View for My Work as an Author"
SLW	*Stages on Life's Way*
SUD	*Sickness Unto Death*
TA	*Two Ages*
TDIO	*Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*
TM	*"The Moment" and Late Writings*
TSI	"The Single Individual"
UDVS	*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*
WA	*Without Authority*
WL	*Works of Love*

INTRODUCTION

1.   THE PURPOSE OF THE DISSERTATION

What continues to attract people to Kierkegaard's writings is his inexhaustible literary creativity. Unlike many philosophers, he does not express his ideas in straightforward, academic prose. He delivers them to us under pseudonyms, through narratives, and in an ironic or humorous style. Even in his seemingly straightforward works, he employs trickery and deception (Pattison 1998, 85-87; 2002a, 21).

What makes Kierkegaard's style of *philosophical* interest is the theory that lies behind it—his so-called "theory of indirect communication." The most exciting and provocative aspect of the theory concerns the alleged importance of indirect communication. Kierkegaard repeatedly asserts that there are some projects only indirect communication can accomplish—a claim not meant to entail the guaranteed success of indirect communication, only its ability to do what direct communication cannot.[1] I will call this the 'indispensability thesis'.

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to piece together Kierkegaard's main reasons for embracing the indispensability thesis. The secondary purpose is to assess the merit of these reasons, i.e. to determine whether indirect communication is as important as Kierkegaard says. I ultimately aim to show that it is, at least in some cases. This represents the tertiary purpose of the dissertation.

In what follows, I will articulate the important scholarly contributions of this dissertation project. I will also provide an outline of the chapters that comprise the dissertation.

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[1] For example, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the pseudonymous Johannes Climacus claims that any attempt to communicate subjectivity or inwardness must make use of an indirect form (CUP, 1:79, 1:242, 1:325). In *Point of View*, Kierkegaard says that he can remove the self-deception plaguing his audience only if he uses indirect communication (PV, 43, 54). In *Works of Love*, he maintains that indirect communication must be used in order to help a loved one achieve what is most beneficial for him (WL, 274). Finally, in *Practice in Christianity*, the pseudonymous Anti-Climacus states that Christ cannot achieve his goals without employing indirect communication (PC, 94, 123, 133-144).

It is worth noting that we find sometimes find weaker claims in Kierkegaard's writings regarding the importance of indirect communication. For example, in *Stages on Life's Way*, the pseudonymous Quidam suggests that indirect communication is the *best* way—but not necessarily the *only* way—to prevent someone from becoming a thoughtless follower (SLW, 344).

2. SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

First and foremost, this dissertation makes a contribution to the scholarly literature on Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication. A serious (but not always overt) disagreement over the importance of indirect communication marks the current literature in this area. On the one hand, several scholars embrace something along the lines of the indispensability thesis. For example, Edward Mooney and Alastair Hannay both say that indirect communication can convey what direct communication cannot (Mooney 2007, 251-252; Hannay 1982, 146-147).[2] On the other hand, several scholars explicitly reject the indispensability thesis. C. Stephen Evans, for instance, claims that Kierkegaard erred in thinking that he needed to use indirect communication to accomplish his aims (Evans 1983, 111-112).[3]

I ultimately aim to settle this debate by showing that, at least in some cases, indirect communication is as important as Kierkegaard makes it sound. Short of that, I will contribute to the debate by clarifying two confusions: (1) One source of confusion in the debate concerns a disagreement over what counts as indirect communication. For example, Merold Westphal identifies it with Kierkegaard's use of pseudonymity (1996, 60, 93n1); Louis Mackey talks about it in terms of a kind of poetry (1971, 295); and Evans (sometimes) treats it as Kierkegaard's version of Socrates' midwifery method

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[2] Many other scholars hold a similar position: Elsebet Jegstrup claims that there is an element in Kierkegaard's ontology about which he cannot directly communicate but which nonetheless plays an essential role in authentic existence. She hints that indirect communication provides a way out of this problem (Jegstrup 2001). Jeremy Walker states that, when it comes to spirituality and inwardness, we can only communicate indirectly (Walker 1982, 56). Finally, Karl Jaspers and Lars Bejerholm both suggest that indirect communication plays the role of communicating what direct communication cannot (Lübcke 1990, 31). It is worth adding that a number of scholars maintain that all communication is indirect communication (Hale 2002, 24; Jansen 1997, 125; Mackey 1971, 294; Pattison 1993, 43; Strawser 1997, 181-183). In so doing, they commit themselves to a trivial version of the indispensability thesis. (Indirect communication can do something direct communication cannot simply because direct communication never occurs and indirect communication does.) Thus, although it is a bit odd to do so, we can say they belong on the same side of the debate as the scholars listed above.

[3] Evans does not stand alone here: Harry Broudy questions whether the failure of direct communication is as inevitable as Kierkegaard makes it sound (1961, 230). Vanessa Rumble cites worries she has about the superiority of indirect communication (1995, 311, 313-314). Finally, Walter Lowrie goes so far as to suggest that Kierkegaard resorts to indirect communication simply out of his own deep personal melancholy. (Lowrie makes the suggestion in footnote 1 of page 96 of his translation of *Indøvelse i Christendom* [Training in Christianity].)

(1983, 102-105).[4] This disagreement over the meaning of 'indirect communication' often goes unnoticed or unacknowledged. As a result, scholars tend to talk past each other when it comes to discussing the merit of the indispensability thesis: one scholar will argue *for* the indispensability of one kind of indirect communication while another scholar will argue *against* the indispensability of another kind of indirect communication.[5] To overcome this confusion, I will provide a clear account of the exegetically and philosophically plausible ways to think about the meaning of 'indirect communication' (see chapter 2). (2) Another source of confusion in the debate over the indispensability thesis concerns a disagreement over the *purpose* of indirect communication, i.e. that for which it is allegedly indispensable. Some scholars believe indirect communication has to do with helping people make a decision for the religious life (Anderson 1963, 214; Evans 1983, 95-113; Lübcke 1990, 31-40; Pattison 1998, 81-94). Others think it has to do with making people aware of the nature of being or existence (Jaspers 1986, 37-53; Jegstrup 2001, 121-131; Mooney 2007, 201-216; Ramsland 1989, 13-23). This disagreement leads scholars to talk past each other in a slightly different way: one scholar will argue for the indispensability of indirect

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[4] Other ways of understanding the meaning of 'indirect communication' abound. For example, Katherine Ramsland talks about it in terms of a kind of metaphorical language (Ramsland 1989, 18-19; cf. Lorentzen 2001, xix). Roger Poole talks about it in terms of a kind of irony (Poole 1993; cf. Strawser 1997). And both Paul Holmer and Alastair Hannay treat it as an analogue to Wittgenstein's method of *showing* something instead of *saying* it (Hannay 1982, 147-156; Holmer 1971, 143). Given the variety of interpretive options it is little surprise that some scholars end up talking about indirect communication in more than one way. This happens in Mooney's recent book, *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time*. At one point he equates the difference between direct communication and indirect communication with the difference between communicating propositional content and communicating non-propositional content (2007, 251-252). Elsewhere he equates it with the difference between those communications that "put our inwardness or subjectivity on notice" and those that do not (2007, 257-260). These two distinctions can cut across each other. Both propositional and non-propositional content can transform us on the subjective level, and both propositional and non-propositional content can concern us only objectively. Thus what counts as direct communication according to the first way of drawing the distinction can count as indirect communication according to the second way and vice versa. See note 5 to see how Evans commits a similar error.

[5] One example of this phenomenon arises *within* Evans' otherwise excellent book, *Kierkegaard's 'Fragments' and 'Postscript'*. Early in the book, Evans claims that indirect communication is indispensable for conveying knowledge that pertains essentially to the life of the learner (1983, 7, 9-11). In a later chapter, however, Evans argues that indirect communication is not necessary for helping people know these things (1983, 111-112). This inconsistency leaves readers perplexed as to Evans' stance regarding the indispensability thesis. We can overcome this perplexity by acknowledging what Evans does not, viz. that he uses the term 'indirect communication' in more than one way. In the early passage he talks about indirect communication in the sense of Socrates' maieutic method (see §1 of chapter 2 below). In the later passage he talks about indirect communication in the sense of using artful rhetorical devices (see §2 of chapter 2 below).

communication with respect to one project while another scholar will argue for its superfluity with respect to a different project.[6] To overcome this confusion, I will lay out the main interpretive options here (see chapter 3).

Second, in and through clarifying Kierkegaard's views on indirect communication, this dissertation makes a more general contribution to the scholarly literature on Kierkegaard. The motto for the dissertation (see p. vi) helps explain the nature of this contribution. Here is the motto in context:

> When in a matter of communicating something it is entirely clear what communication means, when it is so self-evident that not a moment needs to be wasted in speaking about it, when it is the sort of presupposition which does not even need to be mentioned, then, if one has something to communicate, it goes as easily as putting one's foot in a stocking. But if an author has his own distinctive conception of communication, if all his distinctiveness and the reality of his historical significance are perhaps focused precisely in this, well, then it will be a long-drawn-out affair—O, school of patience. Before there can be any mention of understanding something of which he has communicated, one must first understand him in his distinctive dialectic of communication and in this light understand everything which one understands (JP, 1:645).

In this passage, Kierkegaard claims that understanding an author's views on communication is a necessary precondition for understanding that author's message about any topic.[7] His claim has some plausibility. An author's views on communication will say something about what she takes the goal of communication to be. It will also say something about her conception of the roles that the communicator and the receiver of the communication play in reaching that goal. All of these considerations will affect how she expects readers to approach her writings—what she expects them to look for, what attitude towards the text she expects them to take up, etc. A failure to approach her writings in the way she expects will result in a failure to grasp the point of those

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[6] We can find an example of this point by comparing the work of Evans and Mooney. Mooney argues for the indispensability of indirect communication for conveying non-propositional content (2007, 251-260). Evans argues for the superfluity of indirect communication for conveying a particular kind of propositional content (1983, 111-112).

[7] There is potentially a vicious circle here. If understanding an author's views on communication is a pre-requisite for understanding that author's views on *any* topic, then, by instantiation, it is a pre-requisite for understanding that author's views on communication. Thus, knowledge of an author's views on communication presupposes itself! I deal with such problems in §2 of chapter 1.

writings.[8] Thus, the reader who wants to grasp the point of an author's writings serves himself well by first taking the time to understand that author's views on communication.

Kierkegaard points out in the passage quoted above that meeting this demand is especially important when the author has distinctive or unusual views on communication. Although he does not say so, he likely has himself in mind. If so, it follows that all serious Kierkegaard scholars should make a special effort to understand his views on communication before turning to other aspects of his thought. My dissertation makes a significant contribution to their efforts by piecing together these views in a clear and detailed manner.

Third, this dissertation makes a contribution to the scholarly literature on Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion. The old, traditional view in this area held that Kierkegaard endorsed a kind of fideism according to which reason at best plays no role in faith and at worst runs contrary to faith (e.g., Blanshard 1969). Recent scholars have argued that this interpretation constitutes a caricature of Kierkegaard's position. A more accurate picture reveals that he thinks a kind of pragmatic rationality (*ad modum* Pascal's Wager) actually supports faith (R. Adams 1977, 333-335; Rudd 2000, 125-126). My dissertation develops two heretofore unexplored considerations that counter this move and lend support to the traditional view: (1) Kierkegaard holds that faith involves unconditional commitment to God (see §3 of chapter 3), and (2) he maintains that faith must be equally open to and equally difficult for all people regardless of intellectual ability or educational background (see §§3-8 of chapter 5). My discussion of these issues will interest philosophers of religion who have no special concern for Kierkegaard or communication. Such readers can turn directly to the relevant sections.

Fourth and finally, this dissertation makes an indirect contribution to the field of pedagogy. Many of the considerations that lead Kierkegaard to use indirect communication concern pedagogical projects, problems, and situations that we face today: (1) Kierkegaard wants to help others acquire authentic religious faith (see chapter

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[8] Here I ignore Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence according to which we should not concern ourselves with an author's intentions. Some postmodern readers will find this decision strange because they see Kierkegaard as holding a precursor to Derrida's position (Hale 2002, 26; Strawser 1997, 182-183). I admit that Kierkegaard sometimes talks this way (CUP, 1:252, 1:[626]). But he does not do so with any consistency. In fact, at one point he explicitly says that an author *is* the best interpreter of his own words and hence we *should* concern ourselves with an author's intentions (PC, 259). For a more thorough discussion of these matters, see Emmanuel 1992, 245-254.

3). Although Kierkegaard's notion of faith is extreme, it is not uncommon among people who have evangelical inclinations. Such people share Kierkegaard's project. (2) Kierkegaard seeks to assist those who suffer from self-deception, i.e. those who do not want to acknowledge the truth about themselves and the world around them but want to cover it up (see chapter 4). We encounter such people quite frequently, not only in everyday life but also in the classroom. In fact, many of our students hold on to their incorrect pet theories so strongly that they resist learning the correct theories (Nisbett and Ross 1980). (3) Kierkegaard wants to challenge those who try to avoid taking responsibility for their decisions about how to live and what to believe (see chapter 4). We meet such people today in the form of students who do not want to develop their own views but simply want to parrot the views held by friends, peers, and parents. (4) Kierkegaard wants to help people move beyond rote-knowledge, i.e. the kind of superficial knowledge people have when they do not think through the implications for their own lives (see chapter 6). This problem is also endemic in the academic classroom today.

By learning about how Kierkegaard responds to these pedagogical problems, we learn important lessons about how we might respond to them as well. We discover potential errors with our current strategies and uncover new strategies we could pursue. Several scholars have picked up on this point and examined the implications of Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication for a variety of issues and topics within the field of pedagogy.[9] My dissertation expands on this tradition in the four areas listed above.

3.   CHAPTER OUTLINE

Here is an overview of the chapters that make up the dissertation.

In the first chapter, I disarm four methodological problems that threaten to derail the dissertation project before it begins: (1) Kierkegaard enshrouds his discussions of direct and indirect communication in a rich and complicated rhetoric, making it difficult to discern when he is talking about this topic and when he is talking about some different

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[9] Such work has been done in the area of higher education (McPherson 2001; Tubbs 2005), psychotherapy (Dopson and Gade 1981; Ramsland 1989), homiletics (Burgess 1994; Holmer 1957; 1971), and rhetoric (Galati 1969; Lincoln 2006; Mitler 1972; Natanson 1962).

but related topic. (2) He requests that we refrain from hunting through his works for philosophical theories, such as one about indirect communication. (3) He publishes many of his writings on indirect communication under pseudonyms and then claims the pseudonymous works do not necessarily contain his own opinions. (4) He claims a straightforward or direct account of indirect communication, such as the one I aim to provide, would be inconsistent. My basic strategy is to show that most of these considerations would create problems only if I aimed to follow Kierkegaard on every point. But I do not so aim. I intend to depart from him where he goes astray, as he does here. This stance entails that my project will be somewhat un-Kierkegaardian. But it will not therefore be incoherent

In chapter 2, I explain what Kierkegaard means by 'direct communication' and 'indirect communication'. More specifically, I lay out the two main accounts he provides of the distinction between these terms. The first account focuses on whether the communicator relates to her audience in a Socratic or *maieutic* manner. The decisive issue here concerns the level of assistance or amount of guidance the communicator provides the members of her audience and, in particular, whether she allows them to perform some significant part of the relevant work for themselves. The second account of the distinction between direct and indirect communication focuses on the rhetorical style employed by the communicator. The pivotal issue here is whether the communicator utilizes specific artful literary devices such as pseudonymity, fictional narratives, irony, humor, and deception.

Chapter 3 begins with a brief exposition of the two main projects for which Kierkegaard uses indirect communication: (1) helping people become religious and (2) making people aware of the nature of being or existence. I then turn to an extensive discussion of why Kierkegaard thinks he must use indirect communication *in the sense of the Socratic method* for the first project. The core reason is that, for Kierkegaard, becoming religious involves more than assent to propositions such as 'God exists.' It involves unconditional commitment to God. I argue that such commitment cannot be entered into in any old way. Someone cannot make an unconditional commitment on the basis of another person's authority, nor can someone do so on the basis of arguments of any kind. These restrictions limit the level of assistance Kierkegaard can provide those he

wants to help become religious. They ultimately entail that he must relate to such people in a Socratic fashion.

The first section of chapter 4 explains why, given the situation described in chapter 3, the most Kierkegaard can do for his readers is to make them aware of their existential options (without giving priority to any of the options). The rest of the chapter discusses two arguments scholars frequently offer for why Kierkegaard must use indirect communication *in the sense of artful literary devices* to accomplish this project. The first argument builds off Kierkegaard's worry that his readers are not satisfied with learning about their options from him. They also want him to tell them which option to choose. (This is a special case of Kierkegaard's general worry that people would rather thoughtlessly follow public opinion than make decisions for themselves.) His use of artful literary devices addresses this worry by discouraging people from depending on his authority in such an inappropriate manner. For example, he writes under a pseudonym to prevent people from knowing whether he endorses the option under discussion. The second argument builds off Kierkegaard's worry that his readers suffer from a "monstrous illusion." This illusion, which amounts to a kind of self-deception, inhibits his readers from becoming aware of the true nature of their options. Kierkegaard uses artful literary devices in order to by-pass the obstacle created by the illusion. At the end of the chapter, I show that, while both arguments have some merit, they are not as strong as Kierkegaard leads us to believe. They only establish that the use of indirect communication is sufficient for his purposes, not that it is necessary.

In chapter 5, I discuss the role indirect communication in the sense of employing artful literary devices plays in Kierkegaard's attack on the Danish Hegelians. The first half of the chapter explores the nature of the central dispute between the two parties. Against a recent strand of interpretation, I explain that the dispute concerns the importance of philosophical understanding for the religious life. The Danish Hegelians argue that it is of decisive importance; Kierkegaard argues that it is not. The crucial premise of Kierkegaard's argument is that, if philosophical understanding *were* important, the intellectual elite would have an unfair advantage over the simple man on the street. He rejects such unfair advantages because they are inconsistent with his egalitarian conception of religion. A problem arises, however, because Kierkegaard

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claims that the Hegelians fail to become authentically religious in part because they fail to recognize the truth of his position. Thus, he seems to present them with the following paradoxical message:

> Here is a bit of philosophical understanding that *is* important in the sphere of religion: 'Philosophical understanding *is not* important in the sphere of religion.'

In the second half of the chapter, I explain how Kierkegaard's use of humor—and that alone—enables him to escape this problem.

The sixth chapter of the dissertation focuses on Kierkegaard's claim that he cannot directly communicate knowledge of the religious life to his readers. He maintains that knowledge of the religious life has a non-cognitive precondition: passionate interest in one's own existence. In Kierkegaard's terminology, the knower must possess "subjectivity". Unfortunately, no one can *make* another person become subjective; at most one person can help another person become that for herself. (Thus, the relationship between teacher and learner here is essentially Socratic.) The tempting strategy at this point is simply to explain to the learner what subjectivity is and what she needs to do to become subjective. But Kierkegaard argues that knowledge of subjectivity has the same non-cognitive precondition as knowledge of the religious life. Thus one must become subjective in order to know about subjectivity (i.e. "like is only known by like"). The last part of the chapter deals with the strategy Kierkegaard pursues in light of these considerations. He believes that the best course of action is to provide readers with exemplars of subjectivity. And he thinks that the only available exemplars are fictional ones. Herein lies the rationale behind his early pseudonymous literature, which contains precisely such examples.

Finally, in the conclusion to the dissertation, I point out a number of directions in which the dissertation project can profitably be expanded. These suggestions lay the groundwork for the next step in my research.

When approaching the indispensability thesis, the first questions that arise have to do with Kierkegaard's terminology: What does he mean by 'indirect communication'? Likewise, what does he mean by 'direct communication'? We cannot proceed without answering these questions. For we cannot assess Kierkegaard's claims that we need to use indirect communication and that direct communication alone will not suffice if we lack an account of what he means by these words. Accordingly, the first goal of the dissertation is to provide such an account.

Although this lexical project seems straightforward, it is not. Four methodological considerations threaten to derail it before it begins: (1) Kierkegaard enshrouds his discussions of direct and indirect communication in a rich and complicated rhetoric, making it difficult to discern when he is talking about this topic and when he is talking about some different but related topic. (2) He requests that we refrain from hunting through his works for philosophical theories, such as one about indirect communication. (3) He publishes many of his writings on indirect communication under pseudonyms and then claims the pseudonymous works do not necessarily contain his own opinions. (4) He claims a straightforward or direct account of indirect communication, like the one I aim to provide, is inconsistent.

In what follows, I will explain why none of these considerations creates a problem for the project of defining what Kierkegaard means by direct and indirect communication.

1.   KIERKEGAARD'S RICH AND COMPLICATED RHETORIC

A careful search of Kierkegaard's writings to locate those passages in which he discusses direct and indirect communication reveals the following problem. On the one hand, the specific expressions 'direct communication [*directe Meddelelse*]' and 'indirect communication [*indirecte Meddelelse*]' occur only a few times.[10] On the other hand,

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[10] This point is especially true with respect to Kierkegaard's published writings. We find the expression '*directe Meddelelse*' only once (CUP, 1:274). The related verb, '*directe meddele*', also occurs

several linguistically similar expressions occur much more frequently. If we confine ourselves to the first set of passages, we will not have enough data to provide a robust account of direct and indirect communication. Thus, we have a strong practical motivation to turn to the second, larger set of passages to fill out the account. This approach, however, involves treating a number of expressions as synonymous that might not be synonymous. Kierkegaard might use the different expressions intentionally to draw important distinctions. We would be remiss to ride roughshod over these distinctions. Therefore, we need to think carefully about how to understand the relationship between the relevant expressions. In particular, we need to work out a hermeneutic principle that will guide our approach to Kierkegaard's rich and complicated rhetoric. Before we develop this principle, however, we must take a closer look at the nature of the linguistic diversity in question.

Some of the diversity stems from the various adjectives Kierkegaard uses to modify the word 'communication [*Meddelelse*]'. To begin with, the word 'direct' found in English editions is actually a translation of two different Danish words: '*directe*' and '*ligefrem*'. The former is simply the Danish cognate and affords a similar range of meaning. The latter can be translated more literally as 'straightforward' from '*lige*' meaning straight and '*frem*' meaning forward. The idea of straightforward communication resonates well with two other expressions Kierkegaard uses, 'ordinary communication' and 'immediate communication' (CUP, 1:79). But the list of expressions falling under the general category of direct communication does not end here. Expressions such as 'direct paragraph-communication' (PC, 123), 'professor-communication' (ibid.), and 'didactic discourse' (CUP, 1:277) also appear to fit. Matters become simpler when it comes to the modifier 'indirect'. We do not have multiple Danish words translated as a single English word here.[11] Diversity still exists, though, in

only once in any conjugation (CUP, 1:277). The expression '*indirecte Meddelelse*' occurs a few more times (CUP, 1:252, 1:277; PC, 133-135). A close spelling variant, '*indirekte Meddelelse*', occurs in a couple of places as well (PV, 56, 66). The related verbs, '*indirecte meddele*' and '*indirekte meddele*', never occur in any conjugation. Finally, it is worth noting that Kierkegaard sometimes uses '*Communication*' and '*communicere*' instead of '*Meddelelse*' and '*meddele*'. But he never modifies these words with the adjectives/adverbs '*directe*' or '*indirec(k)te*'. These numbers were generated from a search of the PastMasters Intelex Database.

[11] Strictly speaking, this claim is false. There are two spellings of the Danish word for 'indirect': *indirekte* and *indirecte*. Kierkegaard uses them both, the latter more frequently than the former. See note 10.

expressions such as 'doubly-reflected communication' (CUP, 1:[626]), 'redoubled communication' (PC, 133), 'deceitful and artistic communication' (CUP, 1:79), 'communication in the contrastive form' (CUP, 1:263), and the 'maieutic method' (JP, 1:650.13).

The rest of the rhetorical diversity stems from Kierkegaard's use of nouns besides 'communication' that nonetheless appear related to the idea of communication. For example, we find discussions of direct and indirect forms, direct and indirect relations between speaker and listener, and the same for methods, styles, expressions, statements, etc. Kierkegaard sometimes predicates the other modifiers of these nouns, but not every possible pairing occurs.

We can handle Kierkegaard's rich and complicated rhetoric in several different ways. The most convenient way is to claim that the members of the relevant sets of expressions are synonymous with each other. According to this claim, Kierkegaard uses the expressions that *prima facie* appear related to 'indirect communication' interchangeably, whether the variation occurs in the place of the adjective, the noun, or both. The same goes for the expressions that *prima facie* appear related to 'direct communication'.

There are two good reasons to accept this convenient approach. First, a number of passages identify or tightly connect some of the relevant expressions. For example, in both *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *Practice in Christianity*, doubly-reflected communication is identified with indirect communication (CUP, 1:274; PC, 133). In the *Journals and Papers* and in *Postscript*, Socrates' maieutic method is linked to indirect communication (JP, 1:653.24, 6:6783; CUP, 1:80, 1:247-249, 1:277-278; cf. WL, 249). Finally, in *Postscript*, the phrase "communication in the contrastive form" is set opposite to direct communication, which suggests a tight connection between it and indirect communication (CUP, 1:242).

Second, much of the terminological variety under discussion stems from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. This fact is conspicuous for the following reason: the pseudonymous author of *Postscript*, Johannes Climacus, embraces the ideal of saying the same thing in different ways. He first mentions the ideal in the section on Lessing. He chastises Lessing—ironically, in my view—for changing the terminology in which he

expresses his positions in order to confuse those who only want to recite his positions by rote (CUP, 1:68). I say that Climacus' criticism is ironic because only a few pages later he suggests that the paradigm of good style is to "stir the waters of language" such that one continually finds new expressions for talking about the same thing (CUP, 1:86). In addition, he asserts that an author has wealth qua author not because he can write about many things but because he can write about the same thing in different ways (CUP, 1:285n). Finally, Climacus endorses the ideal in his discussion of the relationship between *Either/Or* and the first two parts of *Stages on Life's Way*. He notes that people criticize the latter by saying, "It is just the same as *Either/Or*" (CUP, 1:286). But he takes the intended criticism as a compliment. He points out that the books are not literally word for word the same, nor do they even contain a single phrase that is the same (CUP, 1:286-287). Thus, to judge that the two books are "just the same" is really to judge that they say the same thing in a different way. And Climacus thinks that that is a good thing. Now, admittedly, Climacus never explicitly says that he puts this ideal into practice. Nor does he say, more specifically, that he puts it into practice in his discussions of direct and indirect communication. Nevertheless, given everything else we have seen thus far, it seems plausible that he does so. It thus seems plausible that the most convenient approach to Kierkegaard's rich and complicated rhetoric is appropriate—at least with respect to the text that generates much of the terminological variety.

Despite the positive evidence for the convenient approach, we must remain cautious about it on two fronts. First, we must remain cautious about the *implications* of the synonymy claim entailed by the convenient approach. In particular, we must not think that using the relevant expressions *synonymously* entails using them *univocally*. An example helps explain the point. 'Maieutic method', 'doubly-reflected communication', and 'indirect communication' might all refer to the same concept in *Postscript* (1846). In addition, they might all refer to the same concept in *Practice in Christianity* (1851). As some have suggested, however, Kierkegaard's understanding of the underlying concept might have changed in the intervening years (Holmer 1971; Poole 1993). If so, the expressions in the earlier work would not refer to the same concept as the expressions in the later work *even though Kierkegaard always used the expressions interchangeably*. The possibility of this kind of situation shows why the synonymy claim does not entail

that every passage in which some relevant expression occurs fills out one and the same account of direct or indirect communication. In other words, the synonymy claim is consistent with the existence of multiple accounts of direct and indirect communication.

Second, we must remain cautious about the *merits* of the synonymy claim entailed by the convenient approach. There are several reasons why. (1) Even though we have identity claims for some of the expressions, we do not have a comprehensive set of such claims. Thus, to some extent, the synonymy claim is a matter of conjecture. (2) Even to the extent that we do have identity claims, the claims themselves may not be reliable. Kierkegaard may *say* he uses certain expressions interchangeably, but a close look at the texts may not bear this out. (3) We have one piece of evidence that challenges the universal validity of the synonymy claim:

> The form of a communication [*Meddelelsens Form*] is something different from the expression of a communication [*Meddelelsens Udtryk*]. When a thought has gained its proper expression in the word, which is attained through the first reflection, there comes the second reflection, which bears upon the intrinsic relation of the communication to the communicator and renders the existing communicator's own relation to the idea (CUP, 1:76).

Here Climacus posits a distinction between form and expression. This distinction is important because 'form' and 'expression' are two of the words that get modified by the adjectives 'direct' and 'indirect.' Thus we find passages that speak of direct and indirect forms as well as ones that speak of direct and indirect expressions. But if 'form' and 'expression' refer to different things, then 'direct form' and 'direct expression' also refer to different things. The same holds for 'indirect form' and 'indirect expression'. The existence of these distinctions, however opaque they may be, refutes the idea that *every* member of the relevant sets of expressions refers to one and the same thing.

We now have enough information to formulate a hermeneutic principle that will guide further exegesis. The principle will be that of cautious acceptance of the convenient approach. Here is what the principle will mean in practice. We can start out from the optimistic assumption that the members of the relevant sets of expressions are synonymous. This assumption will allow us to turn to a larger set of passages in order to fill out our account of direct and indirect communication. However, our optimism will have limits. We will not dogmatically insist that all of the passages fit together into a seamless whole. We will remain open to the possibility that Kierkegaard draws

distinctions along terminological lines. And we will remain open to the possibility that his understanding of the underlying concepts shifts over time.

2.	THE PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS

Even if we can navigate Kierkegaard's complicated rhetoric and uncover a theory of indirect communication, there is reason to think we should not do so. Two considerations bear this out:

First, to find a coherent theory of indirect communication, we will have to approach Kierkegaard's writings in a analytic or philosophical fashion. We will have to distill the theoretical content out of them and organize this content into a systematic whole.

Second, Kierkegaard does not want people to approach his writings in this fashion. Several pieces of evidence support this claim, and although no one of them is decisive, together they make a compelling case: (1) In a note he appends to *Postscript* under his own name, Kierkegaard requests that readers not "lay a dialectical hand on this work but let it stand as it now stands" (CUP, 1:[630]). (2) In the preface to *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, he says that the critical (i.e. philosophical) approach to the book misunderstands it (TDIO, 5). (3) In his journals, he criticizes his one-time apprentice, Rasmus Nielsen, for focusing on the philosophical and theological contributions of his works (JP, 6:6574). (4) Johannes Climacus criticizes a reviewer of *Philosophical Fragments* for doing the same (CUP, 1:274n). (5) Climacus also laments that scholars have tried to organize and systematize the philosophical contributions of his two intellectual forerunners, Hamann and Jacobi (CUP, 1:259). (6) He even says that it is "buffoonery and farce" to take the theoretical contributions of someone "who [is] aware of the art of communication"—such as Kierkegaard—and organize them into paragraph form; doing so amounts to trying to "paint a picture of Mars in the armor that makes him invisible" (CUP, 1:79n). (6) Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*, expresses horror at the possibility that people will try to do something similar to his own work (FT, 8). (7) Kierkegaard's writings appear designed to discourage philosophical treatment (Jansen 1997, 125; Pattison 2002a, 3; Swenson 1916, 23-24). For

example, by enshrouding his discussions of indirect communication in a rich and complicated rhetoric, he makes it more difficult to uncover his views on it.

Putting these two considerations together, we get the following conclusion: In order to develop a coherent theory of indirect communication, we must ignore Kierkegaard's wishes regarding how to read his texts. But *should* we ignore his wishes? Might not doing so involve a serious distortion of his texts? Might it not miss the point of what they have to offer?

Whether or not we should respect Kierkegaard's wishes depends on whether or not they are well-motivated. If he has good reasons for making this request, we need to honor it. If his request is the result of an idle whim or something similarly lacking in substance, we can proceed as we see fit.

There exists a certain amount of irony in looking through Kierkegaard's texts for reasons why we should not read his texts in a philosophical manner. By doing so, we effectively violate his request in order to see why we should not violate his request. The only alternative, however, is to follow Kierkegaard's request dogmatically, i.e. to do what he says simply because he says so. And, more often than he asks us to refrain from reading his texts philosophically, he asks us to refrain from acting on his authority. Thus we must either (a) violate his request that we refrain from reading his texts philosophically or (b) violate his request that we refrain from treating him as an authority. I see the former as the lesser of two evils.[12]

We can now turn to the two main lines of reasoning Kierkegaard offers us. We will see that neither line entails that we should *refrain* from reading Kierkegaard philosophically. Each one merely suggests that we should not *stop* with reading him in this way. Thus, we do not have to respect Kierkegaard's wishes and abandon the project of piecing together his theory of indirect communication.

The first line of reasoning stems from Climacus' lament over the philosophical treatment of Jacobi. The relevant passage runs as follows:

> I do not deny that Jacobi has often inspired me, although I am well aware that his dialectical skill is not in proportion to his noble enthusiasm, but he is the eloquent protest of a noble, unadulterated, lovable, highly gifted mind against the system

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[12] There is potentially further irony in taking his request not to act on his authority on his authority. I do not ultimately see this as a problem. For a discussion of the issue, see §2 of chapter 4.

crimping of existence, a triumphant consciousness of and an inspired battling for the significance of existence as something longer and deeper than the few years during which one forgets oneself in studying the system. Poor Jacobi! Whether anyone visits your grave, I do not know; but I do know that the subsection-plow plows under all your eloquence, all your inwardness, while a few paltry words are being registered about your importance in the system. It is said of Jacobi that he represented feeling with enthusiasm; such a report ridicules both feeling and enthusiasm, which have precisely the secret that neither can be reported secondhand (CUP, 1:250-251).

We might think that what Climacus says here about the nature of Jacobi's writing applies with equal force to Kierkegaard's writing. Thus, the (implicit) argument Climacus offers against the philosophical treatment of Jacobi could serve as a template for the argument against the philosophical treatment of Kierkegaard. We can schematize this argument as follows: First, like Jacobi, Kierkegaard's main contribution lies in the pathos and inwardness with which he writes (Lorentzen 2001, xv-xvi). He is essentially a *poet* and not a *philosopher*. In fact, he admits as much himself (JP, 6:6749). Second, looking for the philosophical content of poetry is a category mistake. It plows under what is distinctive and hence important about poetry *qua* poetry. From these two premises it follows that looking for the philosophical content of Kierkegaard's writings is also a category mistake. As one scholar puts it, doing so makes as much sense as trying to uncover the philosophy of Shakespeare by reading his plays (Mackey 1971, ix-x).

I find both of the premises supporting this first line of reasoning objectionable. I will focus, however, on the first one. The main problem with this premise is that it goes too far. Passion and inwardness may be the most important things Kierkegaard has to offer, but they are not the *only* things. There is rich philosophical content behind his passion and in part motivating his passion. Kierkegaard does say in some places that he is only a poet. But, far more often, he claims to be more than this. He claims to be a "poet *and* philosopher" (JP, 3:2649, 5:6135) or a "poet *and* thinker" (JP, 6:6391, 6:6406). Thus, just as focusing only on the philosophical aspects of Kierkegaard's writings would be a mistake, so too would focusing only on their poetic aspects. Accordingly, the request not to treat him philosophically must be viewed only as a *corrective* (at least on this first line of reasoning). It ensures that we not go too far in the philosophical direction, but it does not prevent us from exploring how much Kierkegaard has to offer *in addition* to his passion and inwardness—and that is the main purpose of the present project.

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The second line of reasoning also comes from the hand of Climacus. It has two premises. The first premise presents us with a choice between two ideals regarding how to think.[13] On the one hand, we have the ideal of the authentic human being. Such a person is infinitely interested in her own existence (CUP, 1:314 et passim). This means that she relates her theories and ideas to her own life. She reflects on their significance for who she is, how she should live, and what she should become (CUP, 1:169, 1:317, 1:351). On the other hand, we have the ideal of the philosopher or scholar. This kind of person strives to become objective or disinterested. When he thinks, he abstracts away from any and all personal considerations (CUP, 1:21, 1:32, 1:55, 1:193). The second premise posits the superiority of the former ideal. The conclusion is that we should refrain from activities associated with the latter ideal, such as reading Kierkegaard's books for philosophical theories (CUP, 1:193).

The success of the argument requires that the ideals mentioned in the first premise be inconsistent. Although not every interpretation of the ideals leads to this result, Climacus' does.[14] According to Climacus, when I engage in disinterested thought, I abstract away from my own as well as all other people's particular circumstances in order to examine the general features of some issue or look at it *sub specie aeterni* (CUP, 1:301-308). For example, I think abstractly when I contemplate death in general and not *my* death, ask about immortality in general and not *my* immortality, or reflect on indirect communication in general and not *my* use of it (ibid.; CUP, 1:165-177). By contrast, when I engage in what we can call "existential thinking", I do just the opposite: I think about *my*self, *my* death (CUP, 1:167), and *my* immortality (CUP, 1:174). Insofar as I think the one way I do not think the other way. Either I think about myself or I do not, never both.

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[13] Pattison describes roughly the same distinction in terms of the difference between the "German style of philosophy" and the "Greek style of philosophy" (2002a, 3).

[14] For example, to be disinterested could mean that one ignores or tries to ignore what one stands to gain personally while developing the best position on a topic. This looks like what Kierkegaard endorses when he requests that people pursue the good regardless of whether it will be profitable to them (UDVS, 39). One can be disinterested in this sense and still think about how the outcome will apply to one's life. One simply refuses to change one's thinking if this turns out to be unpleasant, e.g. leads one to take up a vow of poverty, submit oneself to persecution, etc. In fact, it is often because one *cares* about such practical applications that one engages in disinterested philosophical thought in the first place. But this kind of *care* is precisely what Kierkegaard has in mind when he talks about having existential interest in one's thought. Thus, it is possible to be philosophically disinterested in at least one sense and still be existentially interested at the same time.

Given this sharp dichotomy, the question arises as to whether and in what sense the existential ideal is superior to the scholarly ideal. In particular, is it superior in the sense that it obligates us to engage in interested thinking constantly, to the complete exclusion of disinterested thinking? Or is it superior only in some weaker sense that allows for disinterested thinking in some situations?

Climacus does say at various points that people ought to pursue the existential ideal continually and at every moment (e.g. CUP, 1:85). However, the core reason he gives in support of the supremacy of the existential ideal does not license this strong a conclusion. In an important passage, he asks himself: "Now, then, which of the ways [the existential or the scholarly] is the way of truth for the existing spirit" (CUP, 1:193)? He answers:

> Since the questioner specifically emphasizes that he is an existing person, the way to be commended is naturally the one that especially accentuates what it means to exist (CUP, 1:193).

The idea here is that the existential ideal is superior because it acknowledges the existence of the thinker, something the scholarly ideal ignores. Now it seems reasonable to suppose that a person should acknowledge his existence a lot of the time. But in order to establish that we should *never* engage in disinterested thinking, Climacus would have to show that a person should acknowledge his existence constantly or at every moment. And he does not do that. Thus, the most his argument establishes is that we should not *always* or *only* engage in disinterested thinking.[15]

In conclusion, the second line of reasoning does not forbid us from approaching Kierkegaard's texts in a disinterested and scholarly fashion. It only cautions us against stopping at this point such that we never appropriate what we think about into our own lives. Kierkegaard's request that we not approach his writings in a scholarly way should thus be viewed as a corrective against a potential excess and not as a strict rule we must follow literally.

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[15] Climacus appears to accept this point in the following passage: "Therefore, when one considers an abstract thinker *who is unwilling to make clear to himself and to admit the relation his abstract thinking has to his being an existing person*, he makes a comic impression, even if he is ever so distinguished, because he is about to cease to be a human being" (CUP, 1:302, my emphasis). Notice that Climacus does not ridicule the abstract thinker simply because he engages in abstract thinking. He ridicules the abstract thinker because he stops with abstract thinking, i.e. because he never gets around to thinking in an interested manner. And that is a much weaker point.

3.   KIERKEGAARD'S PSEUDONYMITY

Even if it is possible (§1) and permissible (§2) to find a theory of indirect communication in Kierkegaard's corpus, we may worry that we cannot rightly attribute such a theory to Kierkegaard. That is to say, we may not be able to draw the conclusion that what we have found is *Kierkegaard's* theory of indirect communication.

Two considerations generate this problem. First, most of the passages concerning indirect communication come from Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings. Second, in "A First and Last Explanation", Kierkegaard explicitly requests that we not attribute passages found in the pseudonymous texts to him (CUP, 1:[627]). We can see precisely how these considerations create the problem by looking at the following argument:

P1.   In order to develop a coherent theory of indirect communication we need to rely on passages found only in the pseudonymous texts.
P2.   Kierkegaard requests that we not attribute passages found only in the pseudonymous texts to him.
P3.   It is right to follow the request stated in P2.
C1.   In order to develop a coherent theory of indirect communication, we need to rely on passages that cannot rightly be attributed to Kierkegaard (from P1-P3).
P4.   Any theory relying on passages that cannot rightly be attributed to Kierkegaard cannot itself rightly be attributed to Kierkegaard.
C2.   We cannot develop a coherent theory of indirect communication that can rightly be attributed to Kierkegaard (from C1 and P4).

The argument is valid and, if sound, seemingly creates a problem for my project. I aim to develop a coherent theory of indirect communication using Kierkegaard's texts *and* to attribute that theory to Kierkegaard. The conclusion of the argument denies the possibility of doing so.

The problem created by Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms is not something new, nor is it peculiar to my project. Any attempt to develop Kierkegaard's views on some topic using the pseudonymous literature must deal with it. Thus scholars have developed a number of strategies for doing so. I will discuss three common ones.

FIRST STRATEGY

One way to deal with the problem is to challenge P1 and try to develop a theory of indirect communication that only makes use of passages found in non-pseudonymous texts. This approach encounters a couple of snags. We have already mentioned the first: there is relatively little material with which to work. We do find explicit discussions of the topic in *Christian Discourses* (114-123), *On My Work as an Author* (7-10), and *Point of View for My Work as an Author* (41-56). But these discussions are too brief to help much. In addition, we find implicit references to the topic in *For Self-Examination* (35-44), *Works of Love* (274-279), "Purity of Heart" (UDVS, 5-6; 122-125), as well as a few other places, including Kierkegaard's dissertation on the concept of irony. The oblique nature of these discussions, however, entails that they can provide only ancillary support for an already existent theory. Without a prior conception of indirect communication, we would not be able to determine whether this was the topic being implicitly discussed. We *could* know Kierkegaard was discussing *communication*, but not that he was discussing a kind of communication we could label 'indirect' without begging the question.

The second snag concerns the main non-pseudonymous source for this topic, the "Two Lectures on Communication" (JP, 1:648-657). These lectures were abandoned while still in fragmentary form and as a result offer only slogans, anecdotes, and an extended discussion of Kierkegaard's apprehensions about giving such lectures (see §4 below). There have been several attempts to piece together a theory out of these fragments.[16] But I find none of them satisfactory. In addition, given that Kierkegaard abandoned the lectures, we should worry whether it is any more appropriate to attribute them to him than it is to attribute the pseudonymous texts to him.

One way of responding to the shortage of non-pseudonymous material is to annex some of the pseudonymous material by claiming that it is not *properly* pseudonymous. This is typically done with *Practice in Christianity* and *Sickness Unto Death*, the two texts penned under the name 'Anti-Climacus.' There are good reasons for such a move. Both texts were written after "A First and Last Explanation" and so the disclaimer

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[16] For attempts to develop Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication on the basis of the "Two Lectures on Communication", see N. Adams 2006; Christopherson 1965; Goldstein 1982; Jansen 1997, 119-124; Lübcke 1990, 34-35; 2003, 32; and Pattison 2002a, 16-22.

contained therein does not obviously cover them. In addition, Kierkegaard states in his journals that the Anti-Climacus pseudonym served a special purpose. Instead of indicating that he does not necessarily endorse the ideals expressed in the book, it indicates that he does not live up to those ideals (JP, 6:6433, 6:6528; SUD, xx-xxiii; PC, xii). Thus the addition of the Anti-Climacus literature is probably legitimate. With it, the first strategy might work. Nevertheless, it still has the drawback of neglecting material from the other pseudonymous texts.

3.2.   SECOND STRATEGY

Another way to approach the problem is to reject P3 and treat the pseudonymous texts no differently than the signed ones. This approach has gained popularity in recent years for a number of reasons. The most prominent ones run as follows:

(1) Manuscript research shows that at least two of the pseudonyms, Johannes Climacus and Vigilius Haufniensis, were added at the last minute. Kierkegaard wrote significant parts of the relevant books (*Philosophical Fragments* and *The Concept of Anxiety*) with the intention of publishing them under his own name. This suggests that there is not as much (potential) distance between the views contained in these books and his own views as "A First and Last Declaration" would have us believe. (2) Manuscript research also shows that Kierkegaard indiscriminately used material for pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous works. Material originally intended to appear under his own name was eventually published pseudonymously and vice versa. This too suggests that the gap between pseudonymous and signed works is not always that great. (3) In early nineteenth-century Denmark, pseudonyms were commonplace. They served either to prevent unnecessary embarrassment and offense or to avoid penalty by the public censor. Thus it is likely that no one at that time would have hesitated to look past them to the actual author. (Stewart 2003, 39-43)

While interesting, I do not believe these facts provide a sufficient reason to disregard the pseudonyms. To begin with, the idea that Kierkegaard does not necessarily stand behind the pseudonymous texts is consistent with point (1). It seems plausible to suppose, for instance, that Kierkegaard added the pseudonyms at the last minute because he realized the book made a point he did not endorse or because he changed his mind

about issues in the book. In fact, he tells just such a story about how he came to use the pseudonym 'Anti-Climacus' for *Practice in Christianity* (JP, 6:6526). Something similar could be said about point (2): if Kierkegaard's views changed over time, the interchange of material is not problematic. Finally, with regard to point (3), the way in which Kierkegaard's Danish contemporaries used pseudonyms tells us nothing about how he himself used them. For Kierkegaard says he did not use pseudonyms in the ordinary way. He asserts:

> My pseudonymity or polyonymity has not had an accidental basis in my person (certainly not from a fear of penalty under the law, in regard to which I am not aware of any offense, and simultaneously with the publication of a book the printer and the censor qua public official have always been officially informed who the author was) but an essential basis in the production itself (CUP, 1:[625]).

Thus, it might be appropriate to look past the pseudonyms used by other Danish authors because they used them simply to avoid scandal or penalty. But we cannot do the same for Kierkegaard.

3.3.   THIRD STRATEGY

Ultimately, nothing much hinges on the success or failure of the first two strategies. For it is possible to concede the conclusion of the original argument and still get what we want. Here's how. As set up, the argument does not specify what it means to attribute the notions found in the pseudonymous texts to Kierkegaard. It is important to clarify this point, however, because there are several different ways to think about attribution, and not all of them create problems for my project. In order to determine which sense is in play here we must turn to the relevant section of "A First and Last Explanation":

> What has been written, then, is mine, but only insofar as I, by means of audible lines, have placed the life-view of the *creating*, poetically actual individuality in his mouth, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who *poetizes* characters and yet in the preface is *himself* the *author*. That is, I am impersonally or personally in the third person a *souffleur* [prompter] who has poetically produced the *authors,* whose *prefaces* in turn are their productions, as their *names* are also. Thus 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…In a legal and in a literary sense, the responsibility is mine, but, easily understood dialectically, it is I who have *occasioned* the audibility of the production in the world of actuality, which of course cannot become involved with poetically actual authors and therefore altogether consistently and with

absolute legal and literary right looks to me. Legal and literary, because all poetic creation would *eo ipso* be made impossible or meaningless and intolerable if the lines were supposed to be the producer's own words (literally understood). Therefore, if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author's name, not mine—that is, of separating us in such a way that the passage femininely belongs to the pseudonymous author, the responsibility civilly to me (CUP, 1:[625-627]).

Kierkegaard draws three relevant distinctions in this passage. There is the distinction between (1A) placing views in a fictional character's mouth and (1B) having a close personal relationship to those views; between (2A) having merely a legal responsibility for words and (2B) having those words literally be one's own words; and between (3A) having civil responsibility for a passage of text and (3B) being "femininely related" to that passage. Although the fit is not perfect, it seems as though (1A), (2A), and (3A) are roughly equivalent; so too for (1B), (2B), and (3B). Thus, the three initial distinctions collapse into a single one concerning two ways words can be mine or, to follow the language of the original argument, two ways words can be attributed to me. We can clarify these two senses of attribution as follows:

On the one hand, to attribute words to me can simply indicate that I came up with them. This is a matter of giving me credit for an original expression. On the other hand, to attribute words to me can entail the further claim that I actually believe them. This is a matter of identifying where I stand on a particular issue. Now it is clearly possible to make the former kind of attribution without making the latter. For example, I might attribute to my colleague a powerful way of presenting a position that I am not sure she ultimately believes. This is the attitude Kierkegaard encourages with regard to the pseudonymous texts. We are to believe Kierkegaard came up with the words, but not that they necessarily represent his own opinions (Westphal 1996, 60).

Given this interpretation of the attribution clause, the original argument ceases to create problems for my project. My focus is primarily philosophical: I aim to determine the merit or value of the ideas Kierkegaard develops. Accomplishing this project only requires knowing that it is Kierkegaard who develops these ideas, i.e. attribution in the weaker sense. It does not require knowing that Kierkegaard actually *believes* these ideas, i.e. attribution in the stronger sense. In fact, whether Kierkegaard believes the ideas makes no difference one way or the other as to the philosophical merit of those ideas. I do

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not mean to suggest here that Kierkegaard's beliefs are always unimportant. They would be extremely important if, for example, I were writing an intellectual biography of Kierkegaard (a project that I find interesting and worthwhile in its own right). I only mean to claim that Kierkegaard's beliefs are unimportant as far as this dissertation is concerned.[17]

4.   DIRECT COMMUNICATION ABOUT INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

Let us grant that we have resolved the first three problems and we can find Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication. One final problem remains: can we take what we find and present it straightforwardly in an academic dissertation? In other words, can we issue a direct communication about indirect communication? Evans and Lübcke both raise this problem and quickly dismiss it (Evans 1983, 14; Lübcke 1990, 31).[18] I will treat it in a more thorough manner.

Kierkegaard addresses the issue in both *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and the "Two Lectures on Communication." His answer is clear. He says we should not directly communicate about indirect communication:

> With regard to my dissenting conception of what it is to communicate, I sometimes wonder whether this matter of indirect communication could not be directly communicated…. But this seems to me an inconsistency (CUP, 1:277-278; cf. JP, 1:645-646).

Kierkegaard provides two arguments in support of this judgment. We can look at them in turn.[19]

The first argument occurs directly after the passage quoted above (CUP, 1:278). The main premise is a global principle about teaching any theory whatsoever. Climacus says that it is better to allow the learner to discover or construct a given theory on her own than to convey it to her didactically. The precise motivation for this principle is

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[17] I am not alone in taking up this approach to Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. For others who take up a similar approach, see Emmanuel 1992, 241; Evans 1983, 8-10; and Walsh 1994, 15.

[18] Lübcke cites two others (Diem 1950; Feharenbach 1968) who believe it is inappropriate to communicate in an academic fashion about Kierkegaard's theory of indirect communication. Jansen also briefly discusses the issue, but does not develop a position regarding it (1997, 116-117).

[19] There is an irony here akin to that encountered at the outset of §2. When we straightforwardly discuss Kierkegaard's reasons for why we should not communicate directly about indirect communication, we end up communicating directly about indirect communication. In other words, when we discuss the justification for the rule, we effectively violate the rule. We can handle the irony in the same way we did in §2, i.e. by provisionally suspending the rule until we determine its legitimacy.

unclear. But Climacus seems to be worried that, if the learner does not go through the discovery process on her own, she will end up with a superficial understanding of the theory. She might *appear* to grasp the theory because she can parrot it back to the teacher. But her ability to recite it by rote will hide deeper confusion (see CUP, 1:74). Climacus' worry is a serious one (see Evans 1983, 97). Nevertheless, it is far from clear why leaving the learner to her own devices makes matters any better. Such a strategy does not *prevent* the learner from acquiring an impoverished understanding of the theory. Nor does it obviously lower the probability that this outcome will occur.[20] In fact, leaving the learner to her own devices seems to make matters worse. It opens up the possibility that the learner will never come to understand the theory *at all*. Climacus acknowledges this objection, but dismisses it quickly without argument (CUP, 1:278). This dismissal strikes me as an obvious mistake. Accordingly, I do not accept the first line of reasoning for holding that we should not communicate directly about the theory of indirect communication.

The second line of reasoning comes from the "Two Lectures on Communication." The backdrop for the argument has to do with the proper way to communicate ethical and religious truths. Kierkegaard worries that, when it comes to such matters, people tend not to practice what they preach. They talk about the truths but do not express them in their own lives (JP, 1:649.1-5, 1:649.33; see also Pattison 2002a, 18). The seriousness of the problem stems from Kierkegaard's view that ethical and religious truths have a universal scope. They apply equally to all parties—to the teacher as well as the learner (JP, 1:649.10, 1:649.16). Thus, the teachers' failure to practice what they preach amounts to hypocrisy. Kierkegaard calls their hypocrisy a failure of "reduplication."

As a corrective against the tendency towards hypocrisy, Kierkegaard recommends jerking the wheel in the opposite direction. Teachers of ethical and religious truths should focus first and foremost on reduplication (JP, 1:649.27-28). They should make sure that they embody or express in their lives the truths they want to teach. Ultimately, Kierkegaard says, it is not necessary or even important for them to talk about the truths in

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[20] Current research in educational psychology indicates that, while popular, unguided or minimally guided instructional approaches do not have significant advantages over approaches that involve direct instructional guidance (see Kirschner et al. 2006).

a didactic fashion. In the ideal situation they will remain silent and let their actions speak for themselves (JP, 1:653.16-17).

Now, throughout the "Two Lectures on Communication," Kierkegaard maps the distinction between exemplifying truths and simply talking about them onto the distinction between indirect and direct communication. (For more on this connection, see §2.3 of chapter 2.) If we make the relevant terminological substitutions in the argument just discussed, we generate Kierkegaard's final conclusion: the ideal form of communication with respect to ethical and religious truths is an indirect one (JP, 1:656). This conclusion bears extra weight for Kierkegaard because he holds that we all have an obligation to God to communicate the truth in its ideal form (ibid.).

At the outset of the "Two Lectures on Communication," Kierkegaard raises the worry as to whether the lectures exhibit the sort of reduplication he requires of others (JP, 1:656). He concludes that they do not:

> Because this is direct communication, I do not reduplicate, I do not execute what I am lecturing about, I am not what I am saying, I do not give the truth I am presenting the truest form so that I am existentially that which is spoken. I talk about it (ibid.)

He elaborates on the point a few paragraphs later:

> That which in the strictest form can be communicated only in the situation of actuality and in character (indirect communication)—this I am going to show you in a more direct form…I am going to use direct communication to make you aware of indirect communication (ibid).

We can clarify Kierkegaard's worry by making explicit the line of argument contained in these passages. The first part of the argument builds off our earlier discussion:

> P1. People should use an indirect form when advocating ethical or religious truths.
>
> P2. P1 is an ethical or religious truth.[21]
>
> C1. Therefore, people should use an indirect form when advocating P1 (from P1 and P2).

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[21] It is worth noting that Kierkegaard never gives us any reasons for thinking that P1 is an ethical or religious truth. Thus we might worry that P2 is false. For example, we might worry that P1 is really just a higher order truth regarding how to communicate about ethical and religious truths and not itself an ethical or religious truth. I am not troubled by these worries. P1 speaks to how we should act in relation to others. That is enough to qualify it as an ethical claim (and an ethical *truth* if the claim is true). Moreover, Kierkegaard believes that we are duty-bound to God to communicate ethical and religious truths in the ideal way. If he is correct, that is enough to qualify P1 as a religious claim (and a religious *truth* if the claim is true).

Problems arise for Kierkegaard as soon as we take into account some facts about his lectures:

P3.   Kierkegaard's lectures advocate P1.

C2.   Therefore, Kierkegaard's lectures should use an indirect form (from P1 and C1).

P4.   Kierkegaard's lectures do not use an indirect form.

C3.   Therefore, Kierkegaard's lectures do not use the form they should use (from C2 and P4).

We reach Kierkegaard's ultimate worry about hypocrisy if we add one final premise concerning his lectures:

P5.   Kierkegaard's lectures advocate C1.

C4.   Therefore, Kierkegaard's lectures do not use the form they claim they should use (from C3 and P5).

C5.   Therefore, Kierkegaard's lectures are hypocritical (from C4 and the definition of hypocrisy).

Kierkegaard takes this problem very seriously. He regards the lectures as a concession, an abrogation of his duty to God to communicate the truth in its most rigorous form (JP, 1:656). But he ultimately fails to find good reasons to justify this concession.[22] As a result, he abruptly ends the first lecture and never begins the second one in earnest. He abandons the project of communicating directly about indirect communication.

    I will not follow in Kierkegaard's footsteps for three reasons. First, his decision to abandon his lectures depends on a contentious interpretation of P1. As it stands, P1 only states that people must use an indirect form, i.e. engage in reduplication, when communicating about ethical or religious truths. It does not specify *to what extent* people must do so. P1 will create a problem, however, only if we interpret it as saying that

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[22] Kierkegaard examines two possible motivations for abandoning the truest form for talking about indirect communication. First, the truest form proceeds very slowly with respect to helping listeners understand the material (CUP, 1:278; JP, 1:656). By abandoning it and using a more ordinary form like lecturing a speaker could speed up the process. Although Kierkegaard acknowledges a switch in form like this is sometimes necessary, he emphasizes in both *Postscript* and the "Two Lectures" that it is probably just impatience (ibid.). A communicator who is truly committed to God's ideals should be willing to engage in the ideal form even if it is fruitless labor (ibid.; UDVS, 139-140). Second, although it is a bit difficult to see why, Kierkegaard claims the use of the truest form often leads people to judge the communicator harshly as strange or prideful (JP, 1:656). By abandoning it and adopting a form people approve of this could be avoided. Moreover, previous uses of the ideal form could be clarified and any lingering judgments stemming from them would be lifted. In short, the communicator would "travel along with [people] more easily" (ibid.). As with the first motivation, however, this motivation for abandoning the truest form shows that the communicator "does not unconditionally hold to God" (ibid.). It shows a willingness to make man the authority on how to communicate instead of God, a prime indication that one is not truly religious.

people must *only* engage in reduplication when it comes to ethical and religious truths and *never* pause to give a didactic lecture about them. We saw above that Kierkegaard endorses this extreme view as a corrective against the tendency of his age to do nothing more than give didactic lectures. I am willing to accept that our age exhibits a similar tendency. But I do not believe that endorsing the opposite extreme represents the best way to fight this tendency. The person who pursues such a strategy often gets dismissed as a radical and consequently makes little progress, something Kierkegaard himself admits (PV, 42-43). The better strategy is to pursue the mean between the two extremes, which would allow for at least some didactic lectures.

Second, even if we accept the extreme interpretation of P1, Kierkegaard gives up more than the argument requires when he abandons his lectures on indirect communication. The argument requires that he not communicate directly about P1. But P1 does not exhaust all of the truths concerning indirect communication. Kierkegaard could lecture about these other truths without running afoul of the argument. Granted, an analogous argument might proscribe direct communication about these other truths as well. It would do so, however, only if these other truths were *also* ethical or religious truths. And we cannot know that until we learn more about indirect communication.

Third and finally, even if it turns out that we must not directly communicate about any truth whatsoever concerning indirect communication, all is not lost. As I just indicated, we do not have any reason to hold that position at the present time. We must first climb up the ladder of explanation, describing what else indirect communication involves, for what other tasks it must be used, etc. Only then can we decide whether it is permissible to write a dissertation on indirect communication. If it turns out that it is not permissible, we can *à la* Wittgenstein kick the ladder out from under our feet, or *à la* Johannes Climacus revoke what we have said. But, to repeat, this can only be done at the end of the dissertation. For now, we have some explaining to do.

CHAPTER 2:

CHAPTER 2:

KIERKEGAARD'S TWO ACCOUNTS OF INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

What, then, does 'indirect communication' mean? The unfortunate truth is that it is not clear. Kierkegaard never provides us with a coherent definition, only a number of disjointed discussions of the topic. This situation has led some to say that Kierkegaard does not have a coherent theory of indirect communication (cf. Daise 1999, 30; Lübcke 1990, 32). It has led others to claim that he uses the term 'indirect communication' in an honorific fashion to refer to any kind of communication he deems important (Bejerholm 1962, 208-209, 311).

I acknowledge the difficulties here. Nevertheless, I believe that we *can* organize Kierkegaard's comments concerning indirect communication in a productive way. I think he basically[23] offers us two distinct but related accounts. According to the first account, whether something counts as indirect communication depends on whether the communicator relates to his audience in a Socratic manner. The deciding issue here has to do with the level of assistance or amount of guidance the communicator provides for his audience. According to the second account, whether something counts as indirect communication depends on the rhetorical style of the communication. The deciding issue here is whether the communicator makes use of specific artful literary devices such as pseudonymity, irony, and deception.

Over the course of this chapter, I will elaborate on my position in three ways. First (in §§1-2), I will provide an extensive explanation and defense of each of the two accounts of indirect communication articulated above. Next (in §3), I will discuss how the two accounts relate to each other. This discussion will help further alleviate the confusion surrounding Kierkegaard's discussions of indirect communication. Finally (in §4), I will lay out the implications of my position for the indispensability thesis. I will focus in particular on what it takes to prove that indirect communication is indispensable for each account of indirect communication. In so doing, I will set the agenda for the rest of the dissertation.

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[23] I say "basically" because the two accounts do not exhaust *every* way Kierkegaard uses the term 'indirect communication'. They only pick out the most dominant themes in his writings on the topic. I will suggest several other ways we could expand on these accounts in the Conclusion of the dissertation.

1.	INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AS THE MAIEUTIC METHOD

Kierkegaard often links indirect communication to Socrates' method of communication.[24] His references to Socrates, however, are potentially misleading. Nowadays readers tend to think of the Socratic method in a very specific way. We tend to think it refers to Socrates' practice of engaging in an adversarial dialogue with someone by asking him questions about his beliefs (e.g. Vlastos 1982). Thus, when Kierkegaard describes indirect communication in terms of Socrates' method of communication, we might think he has the same specific practice in mind.

Admittedly, Kierkegaard does say that Socrates' practice of asking questions is indirect communication (CUP, 1:277). But we should interpret the 'is' here as that of predication and not identity. The reason is simple. On the one hand, Kierkegaard claims that many of his own writings count as indirect communication in the sense of the Socratic method. On the other hand, he never writes question-and-answer dialogues. Therefore, when Kierkegaard says that indirect communication is his version of the Socratic method, he must have something else in mind besides question-and-answer dialogues.

What Kierkegaard actually has in mind is the general pedagogical strategy that Socrates' question-asking method instantiates. The strategy involves serving as a kind of midwife. Socrates' view of himself as midwife comes out most clearly in the *Theaetetus* (149a-b, 150a-d). Here Socrates confesses that he has no wisdom of his own. Thus he cannot simply give wisdom to his students. What he can do instead is to help them go through the discovery process for themselves so that they might "give birth" to their own wisdom. In other words, the wisdom people acquire in their interactions with Socrates is ultimately of their own making. Socrates only assists with the acquisition or "delivery" process.[25] That Kierkegaard has this general strategy in mind is evidenced by the fact that he frequently calls indirect communication 'the maieutic [midwifery] method' (JP, 1:109, 1:653.24, 6:6783; CUP, 1:277; OMWA, 7).

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[24] For discussions of the connection in the secondary literature, see Daise 1999, 14-36; Emmanuel 1992, 252; Evans 1983, 9-11, 102-105; Lippitt 2000a, 45-46, 135-146; Mackey 1971, 284; and Westphal 1996, 60-64.

[25] Kierkegaard's version of the midwifery method has much in common with what we nowadays call "active learning" or "discovery learning" in which students "rather than being presented with essential information, must discover or construct essential information for themselves" (Kirschner et al. 2006).

It is important to recognize that Kierkegaard appropriates Socrates' maieutic method for his own purposes and does not simply imitate it. In particular, he makes two important changes. First, he states that he writes to educate *himself* as well as others, something Socrates denies (JP, 6:6700). Second, he does not confine the goal of the maieutic method to helping others acquire *wisdom*. He expands it to cover any situation in which the teacher wants to help the learner do something for himself.

Kierkegaard gives voice to his version of Socrates' maieutic method in the "Two Lectures on Communication." His language differs somewhat from Socrates', but the basic point remains the same:

> 'To stand—only [*ene*] by way of another's help' and 'to stand alone [*ene*]—by way of another's help.' The latter is the maieutic relationship… whereas the first formulation is a direct relationship and a direct statement. There is therefore no reason to use a dash in the first formulation, since it all belongs together (JP, 1:650.15, tr. altered; cf. WL, 275).

The problem with this passage is that Kierkegaard's language remains metaphorical. To learn anything of use from it, we will have to spell out what the metaphor means. Doing so is the goal of the remainder of this section.

1.1. THE NATURE OF THE MAIEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

Kierkegaard's metaphor provides us with one helpful piece of information. It tells us that the difference between the maieutic and the direct relationship (and hence between indirect and direct communication) concerns the degree to which the learner relies on the teacher's assistance or guidance. In the direct relationship, the learner relies more on the teacher. In the maieutic relationship, the learner relies less on the teacher and more on himself (PF, 30).[26] In order to clarify Kierkegaard's metaphor, we need to determine where the tipping point or dividing line lies.

There are two popular camps of interpretation on this point. Some scholars claim that there is no hard and fast dividing line between the direct and the maieutic relationship. What we have instead is a continuum (Jansen 1997, 125; Mooney 1997, 139). On one end of the continuum, we have what we might call a purely direct relationship. Here the teacher does *everything* for the learner, i.e. the learner does not

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[26] Nowadays we might say that the maieutic relationship occurs whenever the teacher promotes "active learning" or "discovery learning."

have to do any work in order for the communication to succeed. However, as soon as the learner must do something for himself or become somehow self-active in order for the communication to succeed, the relationship becomes somewhat maieutic. The more the learner must act on his own, the more the relationship becomes maieutic—until we reach the other end of the continuum, where the learner does *everything* for himself.[27]

There is an interesting corollary to this first position. Notice that all communication requires at least some activity on the part of the learner in order to succeed. Even the most didactic communication of the simplest facts requires a certain amount of uptake on the part of the learner (Evans 1983, 97). Thus, those who adhere to the first camp of interpretation frequently draw the conclusion that, for Kierkegaard, all communication is at least somewhat indirect (Hale 2002, 24; Jansen 1997, 125; Mackey 1971, 294; Mooney 1997, 134; Pattison 1993, 43; Strawser 1997, 181-183).[28]

Other scholars take up what I consider a more restrictive position. They deny that just any old kind of activity on the part of the learner will render the relationship between teacher and learner somewhat maieutic. Instead, a particular kind of activity makes the difference: the kind in which the learner freely appropriates the content of the communication into his own life (Broudy 1961; Evans 1983, 7, 97; Jansen 1997, 125; Lochhead 1982, 102; Walsh 1994, 10-11; Westphal 1996, 64). Appropriation here does not require that the learner go so far as to *act* on the communication. It only requires that the learner "in some way think through the meaning of what is said concretely in relation to his or her own life" (Evans forthcoming).[29]

According to this second camp of interpretation, it is wrong to say that all communication is somewhat indirect. Any communication about objective facts that have no essential bearing on the life of the learner will count as direct communication (Evans 1983, 96; Lochhead 1982, 102; Mooney 2007, 257-260). It makes no difference as far as

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[27] The source of this interpretation is likely *Philosophical Fragments*. Therein Johannes Climacus states that the learner owes the teacher *nothing* in the Socratic situation, whereas the learner owes the teacher *everything* in the contrasting situation (PF, 30, 61-62).

[28] It is worth noting that the other end of the continuum is a purely theoretical ideal as well. After all, if the learner does everything for himself, we are not really dealing with a case of communication any more. Thus, just as all communication is somewhat indirect on this account, so too is all communication somewhat direct.

[29] There is some disagreement on this point among those who belong to the second camp of interpretation. For example, Lübcke claims that indirect communication only occurs when the learner makes a particular kind of decision (2003, 23).

the categorization goes if the learner needs to do a lot of work or a little work to understand these facts. By contrast, any communication that essentially concerns the life of the learner counts as indirect communication (ibid.). Thus, one scholar who adheres to the second camp of interpretation explains his position with the slogan: direct communication is to objective understanding as indirect communication is to subjective (i.e. personal) understanding (Lochhead 1982, 102; see also Evans forthcoming; Westphal 1996, 64).

My own position involves finding a middle path between these two positions. On the one hand, I believe that the first camp provides us with too liberal an account of the maieutic relationship, i.e. one that counts too many things as maieutic. Thus I agree with the second camp that not just any old kind of activity on the part of the learner will render the relationship between teacher and learner somewhat maieutic. There are some restrictions here. On the other hand, I disagree with the particular restrictions the second camp puts into place. While I concede that Kierkegaard almost always talks about the maieutic relationship in situations where the learner must appropriate the content of the communication in a personal way (see chapter 6), I think this fact says more about Kierkegaard's pedagogical goals than it does about the nature of the maieutic relationship. A closer look at the maieutic relationship will reveal that it obtains in several other situations as well. To summarize, I think that Kierkegaard counts more things as indirect communication than the second camp suggests but not as many as the first camp suggests.

In the following subsections, I will provide a more in-depth explanation of my interpretation. First (in §1.2), I will look at the main way Kierkegaard talks about the maieutic relationship. Next (in §1.3), I will look at a variation of this position we find in some of his writings. Both the main position and the variant will occupy middle ground between the two camps of interpretation described above.

1.2. KIERKEGAARD'S MAIN POSITION

We can begin by drawing on a distinction that Anti-Climacus makes in *Practice in Christianity* (PC, 206-209). There is a difference between (a) the results of the learning process and (b) the learning process itself. Or, to speak more generally, there is a

difference between (a) the final state that the teacher wants the learner to attain and (b) the path by which the learner attains that final state.

To put this distinction to use, I propose the following: The difference between the maieutic relationship and the direct relationship hinges on whether the learner relies on the teacher's assistance only with respect to (b) or with respect to (a) as well. More specifically, the difference hinges on whether the learner depends on the teacher's assistance only for coming to the end state or whether he continues to rely on the teacher's assistance even once he has reached the end state. Let me explain in more detail what this means for each kind of relationship.

In the maieutic relationship, the idea is that the learner eventually comes to a point at which he can dispense with the teacher. The teacher may provide considerable assistance along the way, but in the end the learner no longer needs this assistance. He can "thrust the teacher away" (PF, 61-62). In fact, only once the learner becomes independent from the teacher in this way has the true goal of the Socratic midwife been reached. Thus Climacus will say that the indirect communicator seeks to *set free* the learner so that the learner can become independent (CUP, 1:72, 1:74, 1:242, 1:260). Of course, the learner's independence here need not be absolute or unqualified. It need only pertain to those areas that are directly related to the goal of the learning process. Thus a maieutic relationship could still obtain if the learner depended on the teacher in some unrelated area.

In the direct relationship, the idea is *not* to reach a point at which the learner can dispense with the teacher. The teacher does *not* try to set the learner free or get him to become independent from her. The teacher actually wants the learner to depend and continue to depend on her. Once again, this dependence need not be absolute or unqualified. A direct relationship can still obtain if there are respects in which the learner is self-active or independent. The point is simply that, in the direct relationship, the learner depends on the teacher with respect to an essential feature or aspect of the final result. The specific nature of the final result will determine what that aspect will be.

We can further fill out the distinction between maieutic and direct relationships by looking at some examples. The paradigm example of a maieutic relationship that Kierkegaard uses in his "Two Lectures on Communication" is the relationship that

obtains in the process of teaching someone an art or a skill—what Kierkegaard calls "the communication of capability" (JP, 1:649; cf. Pattison 2002a, 18). We can make the example more concrete by talking about a father helping his son learn how to ride a bicycle. During the learning process, the father supplies physical and psychological assistance. Perhaps he walks alongside the boy, providing the requisite balance when the boy is about to tip; perhaps he offers words of encouragement when the boy falls. Eventually, though, the father recedes into the background. He lets the boy go. If the boy successfully rides the bike by himself, if he rides it alone without any help from the father (or anyone else), then the end result of the learning process has been reached.

Kierkegaard's paradigm case of a direct relationship is the relationship that obtains in the communication of knowledge (JP, 1:649). This makes the most sense if we take him as thinking specifically of *testimonial* knowledge. In the case of testimony, the teacher intends for the learner to believe something on his say-so. Notice that the result of the learning process here involves a relationship of dependence between the two parties. In particular, it involves the learner's relying on the teacher (and especially the teacher's authority) for the justification of his belief (see PF, 10-12).[30] Now this relationship of dependence might eventually disappear. For example, the learner might acquire other reasons for believing what the speaker says. But if this happens, if the learner no longer relies on the teacher, we no longer have a case of testimonial knowledge. Thus—and this is the point of emphasis—whereas in the case of teaching a skill the teacher wants the learner eventually to rely on himself, in the case of testimony the teacher wants the learner to rely on her (the teacher).

Because Kierkegaard speaks so often of the communication of knowledge as the paradigm case of direct communication, we might draw the conclusion that the two are identical. We might think that direct communication *just is* testimony (cf. Mooney 1997, 132-134). But given *why* testimony counts as direct communication, this claim is too restrictive. Think, for example, about the act of issuing a command. The person who commands another person to do something intends for that person to act on her say-so. Thus the goal of her communication involves establishing a relationship of dependence

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[30] By emphasizing that testimony involves a relationship of dependence between speaker and listener, Kierkegaard anticipates—albeit in a crude way—the account of testimony developed recently by Richard Moran (e.g. Moran 2005).

between herself and the listener. Of course, the dependence here concerns the motivation of the listener's actions and not the justification of his beliefs. But it is a relationship of dependence nonetheless. Hence, issuing a command will count as direct communication. So too will other kinds of communication that fit this general pattern: begging people to do something, pleading with them to do something, and coercing them into doing something. In fact, Kierkegaard calls many of these things direct communication at one point or another (CUP, 1:247; PC, 140).

In order to sharpen further the distinction between direct and Socratic relationships, we can look at a set of potentially puzzling cases. Take the situation in which the speaker does not try to get the listener to believe something on her authority but rather gives the listener other reasons for forming the relevant belief. Alternatively, take the situation in which the speaker does not command the listener to do something but rather gives the listener other reasons for performing the action. In neither case does the speaker intend for the listener to depend on her. Quite the opposite. She wants the learner to become *independent* from her by having motivations or justifications that do not involve relying on her authority. The speaker does not want to create what we have been calling a direct relationship between herself and the listener but rather a Socratic or maieutic relationship. Thus, given the way we have been drawing the distinctions, we can say that providing people with reasons (other than one's own authority) for believing or doing something counts as *indirect* and not direct communication. And that might strike us as a puzzling result given that providing people with reasons seems to be a relatively *straightforward* process.

The result ceases be puzzling, however, once we take two things into account. First, notice how Socrates himself engages in the maieutic method. His dialogue with the slave boy in the *Meno* provides a good example (82b-85b). Socrates tries to get the slave boy to see the soundness of a geometric proof. To be sure, Socrates provides a lot of help along the way. He prompts the slave boy to notice the right things; he asks leading questions that point to relevant considerations. But the end result is one in which the slave boy does not depend on him. The slave boy believes what Socrates says not because Socrates says it but because the slave boy sees the truth of the matter for himself.

Second, recall that Kierkegaard patterns indirect communication after Socrates' maieutic method. Thus it stands to reason that Socrates' actual use of the maieutic method should serve as a kind of template for indirect communication. As we just saw, however, Socrates' actual use of the maieutic method involves pointing to considerations that support the truth he wants the learner to grasp. This practice seems at least analogous to that of giving the learner reasons. Thus, it should not strike us as odd that our account of indirect communication entails that giving people reasons counts as indirect communication.

1.3. A VARIATION OF KIERKEGAARD'S MAIN POSITION

Kierkegaard sometimes provides a slightly more restrictive account of the maieutic relationship than the one just discussed. The account is "more restrictive" in the sense that the teacher must cede more ground to the learner in order to relate to the learner in a maieutic fashion. That is, the teacher must provide less assistance and allow the learner to do more for himself.

To help clarify the point, we can refer once again to the distinction between (a) the end result of the learning process and (b) the learning process itself or, more generally, between (a) the final state that the teacher wants the learner to attain and (b) the path by which the learner attains that final state. On the main account of the maieutic relationship, there were no limits on the assistance the teacher could provide at stage (b); there will only be limits at stage (a). On the more restrictive account, there will be limits on the amount or kind of assistance that the teacher can provide at stage (b) as well. There will be something that the maieutic teacher could do to assist with the learning process on the main account that she cannot do on the more restrictive account.

We can best understand the additional restriction if we think about cases in which the teacher wants the learner to form some specific belief or perform some specific action. The specific additional restriction in these cases is that the maieutic teacher cannot tell the learner *what* she is to do or believe. To use Climacus' language, the maieutic teacher cannot tell the learner what the *result* of the learning process should be (CUP, 1:242). To elaborate, the point here is not just that the maieutic teacher must refrain from appealing to her own authority in order to explain *why* the learner should form some

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designated belief or perform some designated action. That much was forbidden on the main account. The point is that the maieutic teacher must also refrain from telling the student what that designated belief or action should be in the first place. The maieutic teacher must allow the learner to figure these matters out for herself (JP, 4:4266; cf. Jansen 1997, 121).

To support the claim that Kierkegaard talks about the maieutic relationship in this more restrictive way, we can look at some specific passages in which he does so. We can start with his discussion of the long speeches Socrates sometimes gives, e.g. in the *Gorgias*. Climacus talks about these speeches at some length in *Postscript* and implies that they count as cases of *direct* communication (CUP, 1:277-278). He goes on to criticize Socrates for not taking a more indirect approach. Of particular importance for our purposes is the nature of the criticism. Climacus does not criticize Socrates for appealing to his own authority. Rather, he criticizes Socrates for spelling out his position in an explicit way. He says that Socrates should have followed his usual procedure of allowing the learner to figure out the position for himself. We can infer that it is *this* issue—viz. whether the teacher explicitly states the position he wants the learner to accept—that determines whether a direct or a maieutic relationship obtains. To use language that Kierkegaard employs, the decisive issue is whether the communicator is *didactic* or *elusive* when it comes to what he wants the learner to do or believe.

A second important example comes from Climacus' discussion of Lessing (CUP, 1:68-69). As Climacus describes it, Lessing's strategy involves perpetually changing the way in which he formulates his view, placing a false stress on words that are not important, and spending more time on things that are less worthwhile. Part of the point of this strategy is to prevent his readers from believing something just because he says so. Thus Lessing's approach meets the requirements for the main account of the maieutic method. But Climacus tells us that Lessing is also trying to create an even greater distance between himself and his readers. Lessing writes in this strange way in order to force his readers to come to an understanding of his positions on their own. He seeks to prevent any agreement between himself and others except that which comes about through each party's privately coming to the same conclusion (CUP, 1:69). Lessing's

approach thus meets the requirements for the more restrictive account of the maieutic method.

A third example that supports the more restrictive account of the maieutic relationship comes from *Practice in Christianity*. The following two passages bring the example to the fore:

> [I]t is indirect communication to place jest and earnestness together in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot—and then to be a nobody oneself. If anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself (PC, 133; cf. JP, 1:679)

> A communication that is the unity of jest and earnestness is thus a sign of contradiction. It is no direct communication; it is impossible for the recipient to say *directly* which is which, simply because the one communicating does not *directly* communicate either jest or earnestness. Therefore the earnestness in this communication lies in another place…lies in making the recipient self-active (PC, 125).

In these passages, the indirect communicator offers the reader a kind of puzzle or dilemma—a "knot"—the solution to which is not immediately obvious. Furthermore, he does not tell the reader how to solve the puzzle. He simply recedes into the background, presumably to prevent the learner from trying to figure out the solution by looking at the solution the communicator himself has decided upon. This procedure does have the effect that the learner cannot appeal to the teacher's authority to justify her belief that the solution she accepts is the right solution. But it also has the effect that the learner cannot even learn from the teacher what the right solution is. The learner will have to struggle with the puzzle for herself (or get some help from elsewhere). Thus, the indirect communicator or maieutic teacher here sets the learner free in a more radical way than on the main account.

We can fill out this third example by looking at a concrete version of it, Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. This work contains what amounts to a debate between two fictional characters over the merits of their respective life-views. An important feature of the book is that it does not provide us with a conclusion to the debate (CUP, 1:252, 1:254). It does not end with one character's acknowledging the superiority of the other character's life-view. Nor does the fictional editor step in to render an impartial verdict. Lest readers try to discover who is supposed to win by looking to the life-view of the author, Kierkegaard publishes it under a pseudonym. He even deceives the public into

thinking that he is a loafer or idler who has no interest in writing a book (PV, 58-63). The net effect of these procedures is that it is left completely up to the reader to decide which life-view is better.

One final point deserves mention before going on. Some practices that counted as indirect communication according to Kierkegaard's main position count as direct communication here. One important example is straightforward rational argumentation. I explained above why the main account leads us to classify it as a maieutic practice. But it is *not* an available tactic for the maieutic teacher *here* because it involves pointing the listener towards what he has to do or believe instead of allowing him to figure the matter out for himself (cf. BA, 186). A second example is the present dissertation. It would count as indirect communication according to the main account because I limit appeals to my own authority, instead citing evidence for the positions I set forth. According to the variation of the main position, it counts as direct communication (something I claimed in §4 of chapter 1), since I explicitly lay out the position I want my readers to believe. A third and final example is Socrates' dialogue with the slave-boy in the *Meno*. I explained above why the main account leads us to classify it as indirect communication. But the variation on the main account brings us to the opposite conclusion. The questions Socrates asks the slave-boy are *not* maieutic because they are *leading* questions, ones that contain the answer Socrates wants the slave-boy to believe. Many of Socrates' other dialogues, such as the one in the *Euthyphro*, however, provide us with better examples of the present account of the maieutic method because the questions Socrates asks are not as leading. Thus we can still hold up Socrates' practice as the paradigm of indirect communication for Kierkegaard.

2.   INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AS THE USE OF ARTFUL RHETORICAL DEVICES

Kierkegaard does not always connect indirect communication to Socrates' maieutic method. Thus the difference between direct and indirect communication does not always hinge on the amount of guidance the teacher provides the learner. It sometimes hinges on the kind of rhetorical style the teacher employs. According to this second account,

indirect communication refers to the use of specific artful rhetorical devices, whereas direct communication refers to their lack of use (in an instance of communication).[31]

Chief among the relevant devices is pseudonymity. But pseudonymity is not the only device that counts. Kierkegaard also includes the use of deception, humor, irony, and fictional narratives (among other devices) under the heading of indirect communication (see Evans 1983, 105-107; Mackey 1971, 255-296)

The main problem with this account concerns finding a helpful definition of 'artful rhetorical devices'. An intensional definition is a non-starter. Kierkegaard does not tell us what essential feature all and only artful rhetorical devices share such that they count as indirect communication. That leaves us with an extensional definition. We will have to say that 'artful rhetorical devices' refers to those devices that Kierkegaard explicitly calls indirect (i.e. pseudonymity, deception, irony, narrative, etc.). This definition has obvious drawbacks. It does not tell us what to say about devices Kierkegaard does not discuss, and it does not satisfy our curiosity as to why he picks out the devices that he does. Nevertheless, it does provide enough information to determine the meaning of the indispensability thesis on this account of indirect communication. To wit, to say that indirect communication is indispensable is to say that there are some projects we can accomplish only by utilizing one of the rhetorical devices Kierkegaard designates as indirect. (For an extended discussion of this point, see §4.2.) Since analyzing the indispensability thesis is the main goal of my dissertation, the extensional definition provides me with what I need.

To fill out the definition, I will now take a closer look at three of the artful rhetorical devices that Kierkegaard designates as indirect communication: (1) pseudonymity, (2) "showing", and (3) deception. For each device, I will examine the textual evidence for thinking Kierkegaard considers the use of it an instance of indirect communication. I will also provide some examples of how Kierkegaard puts the device to use.

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[31] The distinction between this second account and the first tends to get overlooked because (as we will see in the next section) Kierkegaard often uses artful rhetorical devices when engaging in the midwifery method. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard does use the phrase 'indirect communication' to refer to these devices independently of whether they get used in the midwifery method. Thus this second account requires independent treatment.

2.1. PSEUDONYMITY

One of the most striking features of Kierkegaard's early writings is his frequent use of pseudonyms. Some of the names he uses are funny or bizarre. For example, he pens *Prefaces* under the name Nicolaus Notabene and *A Writing Sampler* under the name A.B.C.D.E.F. Godthaab. Others are instructive. For example, in *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de Silentio (John the silent one) speaks to us regarding the impossibility of communicating about faith. And in *Philosophical Fragments* Johannes Climacus (John the climber) tells us about the impossibility of ascending to faith under our own power. Finally, some of the names Kierkegaard uses are inscrutable. For example, he writes *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* under the name H. H. without ever telling us to what those initials refer.[32]

Most Kierkegaard scholars include pseudonymity among the class of artful rhetorical devices the use of which counts as indirect communication. Finding textual evidence for this position, however, proves somewhat difficult. In fact, there exists only one main piece of evidence. It runs as follows:

In a few journal entries, Kierkegaard assigns different labels to his early pseudonymous writings and his upbuilding discourses (which are *not* pseudonymous). The former group of texts he calls indirect communication and the latter direct communication. For example, we read:

> Especially in the communication of ethical truth and partially in the communication of ethical-religious truth, the indirect method is the most rigorous form. Yet a more direct form which runs parallel to this can also be necessary… Therefore along with the pseudonyms there always was direct communication in the guise of the upbuilding or edifying discourses (JP, 1:656).

And elsewhere:

> [*On My Work as an Author*] is direct communication about the authorship, about the total authorship, an authorship which has consisted of indirect communication through the pseudonyms and then of direct communication in the upbuilding writings (JP, 6:6701).

The important questions at this point concern *why* Kierkegaard assigns the labels in the way that he does. Does he call the pseudonymous texts indirect communication *because* they are pseudonymous? Does he call the upbuilding discourses direct communication

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[32] I wish to thank Andrew Burgess for bringing this problem to my attention.

because they are not pseudonymous? Or, does some other feature determine the nomenclature such that the fact that the groups of texts differ on the point of pseudonymity is simply accidental?

We have a fairly good, although not entirely decisive reason to draw the conclusion that pseudonymity determines the issue: there is no other obvious feature that distinguishes the pseudonymous writings from the upbuilding discourses. First, both groups of texts are maieutic in nature. Kierkegaard himself asserts that the pseudonymous writings are maieutic (OMWA, 7). That the upbuilding discourses are as well can be established as follows: In the preface to each set of discourses, Kierkegaard requests that people not view him as an ordinary teacher or treat him as an authority. He wants "only to be forgotten" by his readers, who are to engage with his writings as independent individuals (EUD, 5, 53, 107, 179, 231 295; UDVS, 5-6; TDIO, 5). Thus, following the main account presented in the previous section, the upbuilding discourses qualify as maieutic. Second, both the pseudonymous writings and the upbuilding discourses contain the use of other rhetorical devices such as deception and fictional narratives (Pattison 1998, 85-87; 2002a, 12-34). Finally, we might be tempted to say that the upbuilding discourses are explicitly Christian, whereas the pseudonymous writings are only implicitly so. Recent scholarship, however, has debunked this myth (ibid.). Thus, by process of elimination, it seems to be the use or lack of use of a pseudonym that leads Kierkegaard to apply the labels that he does to the upbuilding discourses and the early pseudonymous writings (cf. Westphal 1996, 60).[33]

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[33] There is one reason to hesitate about this conclusion. Kierkegaard tells us that some of the pseudonymous works actually count as *direct* communication. For example, he has Climacus assert that the *Concept of Anxiety* qualifies as direct communication even though it is written under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis (CUP, 1:269-270). In the *Journals and Papers*, Kierkegaard himself denies that the pseudonymity of *Practice in Christianity* entails that it counts as indirect communication (JP, 6:6577). I do not think this evidence forces us to overturn the conclusion that the use of pseudonymity counts as indirect communication. It would do so only if Kierkegaard had only one account of indirect communication. But, as discussed above, he does not. Thus we can accommodate the evidence by saying that, in the relevant passages, Kierkegaard is using one of his other accounts of indirect communication. The story here might run as follows: A pseudonymous work could count as direct communication according to the account provided in §1 of this chapter if it explicitly spelled out for readers what to believe about some subject. I think this story captures the situation with respect to the *Concept of Anxiety*. I am less certain about *Practice in Christianity*. But as discussed in §3.1 of chapter 1, the pseudonymity of this work serves a special purpose and so the normal rules governing pseudonymity do not apply.

2.2. SHOWING VERSUS TELLING

A second artful rhetorical device, the use of which counts as indirect communication, is *showing*. The practice of showing is best understood in contrast with that of telling. *Telling* involves making explicit assertions and provides information directly to the reader. It characteristically operates on an abstract level and avoids concrete examples or illustrations. By contrast, *showing* involves pointing out, displaying, or otherwise providing readers with such concrete examples and illustrations. The author who engages in the practice of showing does not convey directly to his readers the information he wants them to know. They must infer or discover it for themselves by examining the provided examples and illustrations.[34]

The most conspicuous examples of showing in Kierkegaard's writings are the so-called "imaginary constructions" that populate the early pseudonymous works. In these imaginary constructions, Kierkegaard develops fictional narratives of characters who occupy various "spheres of existence." He attends to the psychological states of the characters and not just their external behavior. The stories thus capture in a vivid way what it is like to live in the different spheres of existence.

Showing need not involve the use of fictional or imaginary examples; it can involve real or actual ones as well (Cutting 1984, 81-82; Mooney 1997, 141-146). For instance, a teacher who embodies the point he wants to convey by living it out in his life engages in the practice of showing. Kierkegaard calls this particular way of going about the practice 'reduplication' (JP, 6:6224; PC 123, 134).

The best textual evidence that the practice of showing counts as indirect communication comes from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.[35] Therein we find two sets of passages in which Climacus discusses what he must do given "the problem of the age" that "people know too much and have entirely forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is." In one set of passages, Climacus says he must use indirect and not direct communication (CUP, 1:122-123, 1:242, 1:250, 1:259, 1:262). In the other set, he

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[34] Some scholars interpret this distinction in terms of how Wittgenstein presents it in the *Tractatus* (Conant 1995, 249; Hannay 1982, 147-156; Holmer 1971, 143). This is a mistake because it attributes to Kierkegaard a much more narrow conception of the saying/showing distinction than we find in his writings.

[35] In *Practice in Christianity* Anti-Climacus obliquely suggests that engaging in reduplication counts as indirect communication. He writes, "Wherever there is reduplication, the communication is not completely direct paragraph-communication or professor communication" (PC, 123).

says he must "have inwardness come into existence in existing individuals" or describe inwardness concretely instead of abstractly. In other words, he must *show* and not *tell* readers what inwardness is (CUP, 1:250-251, 1:259, 1:264-265, 1:269, 1:299).

The most plausible reading is that the two sets of passages go together, providing us with two different ways of talking about one and the same strategy. (See §1of chapter 1.) If correct, this reading entails that telling and showing count as direct and indirect communication respectively. It is not entirely obvious, however, that the passages do go together in this way. The two sets of passages might refer to *different* strategies. Climacus might think that the problem of the present age requires *two* responses. If so, telling and showing do not count as direct and indirect communication respectively.

To help settle the matter, we can turn to a passage in which Climacus connects the two strategies:

> This had become clear to me, and I was only waiting for the spirit's help in pathos in order to present [inwardness] in an existing individuality, because it should not be done didactically, since in my opinion the misfortune with our age was just that it had come to know too much and had forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is. Consequently, the form had to be indirect (CUP, 1:259).

Simplifying and rearranging, we can present the logical structure of the first sentence in the passage as follows:

1. The problem of the age is that people know too much and have forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness is.
2. (From 1) Inwardness must not be presented didactically—i.e. no *telling*.
3. (From 2) Inwardness must be presented in an existing individual—i.e. it must be *shown*.[36]

The pivotal issue concerns what to do with the second sentence in the passage:

4. The form had to be indirect.

Given the Hong translation, we must read this line as a consequence of what comes before. We face two plausible options: (a) line 4 follows from line 1; (b) line 4 follows from line 3. The rhetorical structure of the passage might suggest the former option. The logical order of the statements, however, dictates that the latter option makes more sense. The best way to account for this superior interpretation is to say that Climacus thinks showing counts as indirect communication.

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[36] The inference from line 2 to line 3 assumes a disjunction between telling and showing.

We need not follow the Hong translation though. In the original Danish, line 4 reads: "*Formen maatte altsaa være indirecte*" (VII, 219). The pivotal word here is '*altsaa*,' which the Hongs translate as '*consequently*'. '*Altsaa*' is an argumentative particle that has no straightforward translation into English (Thrane 2003, 335n11). While it often serves as a conjunctive adverb (Allan et al. 1995, 357-358), it also has other functions. When it follows a finite verb, as it does in the sentence in question, it can serve to express conviction on the part of the speaker about what is being said (Allan et al. 1995, 366-367, 503; Vintenberg and Bodelsen 1998, s.v. "altså"). Translating in accordance with this principle, we get:

4.′   The form obviously had to be indirect.

The sentence now sounds less like a *consequence* of what came before and more like an *emphatic restatement* of it. The only line it makes sense for it to be a restatement of is line 3. The ultimate upshot is that Climacus does indeed think that showing counts as indirect communication.

2.3.   DECEPTION AND IRONY

A third artful rhetorical device, the use of which counts as indirect communication, is *deception*. We must make an initial qualification here: not just any old kind of deception counts. Ordinary cases of lying, for example, do not fit the bill. The kind of deception Kierkegaard has in mind is what he calls "deceiving into the truth" or "pious frauds" (PV, 53-54; OMWA, 7; WL, 277; BA, 177; JP 1:653.24; JP, 6:6205). The idea is that the deception must serve as a means to the end of truth. The Kierkegaardian deceiver initially or provisionally brings people to believe something false so that ultimately they will believe something true.

Two pieces of textual evidence support the claim that deceiving into the truth qualifies as indirect communication. The first one comes from *On My Work as an Author*:

> But just as that which has been communicated (the idea of the religious) has been cast completely into reflection…so also the *communication* has been decisively marked by *reflection*. "Direct communication" is: to communicate the truth directly; "communication in reflection" is: to *deceive into the truth* (OMWA, 7).

Obviously Kierkegaard does not use the expression 'indirect communication' here. But, following the hermeneutic principle articulated in chapter 1, we can assume that 'communication in reflection' refers to 'indirect communication' (cf. PC, 133). If we make the relevant substitution, we get the claim we need.

The second piece of textual evidence comes from *Point of View*. In the midst of a long discussion in which he trumpets the importance of "deceiving into the truth", Kierkegaard summarizes his point as follows:

> The whole thing can be stated in one phrase, the whole thing, which can indeed take days and years of work to develop, the most vigilant attention night and day, incessant scale finger-exercising in the dialectical every day, and a never-slumbering fear and trembling—*the method must become indirect* (POV, 52, my emphasis).

Once again, Kierkegaard does not explicitly say that deceiving into the truth counts as indirect communication. But, given the context, it seems likely that he holds this view.

We can fill out our understanding of the practice of deceiving into the truth by looking at two scenarios in which it gets used. I will provide a general account of each scenario and describe several concrete examples found in Kierkegaard's writings. It is worth adding that some scholars classify some of the examples I will discuss under the heading of *irony* rather than *deception*. I will make note of their position when we come to the appropriate places.

2.3.1. USING DECEPTION TO ATTRACT PEOPLE

In *Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard discusses the first scenario in which "deceiving into the truth" occurs. It is one in which an author uses deception to draw an inattentive or recalcitrant audience into a discussion about some truth (see Pattison 1999, 71). The author proceeds by approaching his audience under false pretenses. He talks in an innocuous manner about some topic the audience find interesting. Then, once he has caught his listeners' attention, he switches to the topic he really wants to discuss (OMWA, 7n; PV, 41-54). In *Point of View*, Kierkegaard quite innocently describes this strategy as one in which the author "meets readers where they are" (PV, 45-47). In *Christian Discourses*, he describes it as "wounding from behind" (CD, 161-162; cf. JP, 5:6107). The latter label strikes me as somewhat better because it

captures the idea of sneaking up on readers without letting them know an attack is coming. However, we can most accurately describe the strategy by saying that it is a version of the bait and switch tactic.[37]

We can further fill out our understanding of this type of deception by exploring three examples. Perhaps the most important one is that of Kierkegaard's own early (pre-1847) authorship (see Jansen 1997, 121-122, 125). Somewhat controversially,[38] Kierkegaard asserts that he does not begin his early authorship by talking about what he ultimately wants to discuss, namely the essential character of the religious life (PV, 54). He attempts instead to "establish a rapport with people" by writing works such as *Either/Or* that people will find aesthetically interesting (PV, 44). Having gained the attention of his target audience, he makes the switch. The result is that "the religious is introduced so quickly that those who, moved by the esthetic, decide to follow along are suddenly standing right in the middle of the decisive qualifications of the essentially Christian" (OMWA, 7n).

Another famous example of this kind of deception occurs in *Philosophical Fragments* (CUP, 1:274n; see Lippitt 2000a, 21; Muench 2003, 139-150). Therein Climacus attracts the attention of the Danish Hegelians by pretending to engage in speculative philosophy. He does so by examining the Socratic theory of recollection and then imagining a competing view that "goes further", something the Hegelians were wont to do. Quite stunningly, the new hypothesis looks just like plain old Christianity—so much so that Climacus imagines someone accusing him of plagiarism (PF, 35). Thus, what started out as a bit of novel theorizing ends up as one more reading of "the old

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[37] We might wonder whether Kierkegaard's bait and switch strategy actually counts as deception. After all, it does not necessarily involve causing readers to acquire a false belief. It only involves preventing the readers from forming a true belief about the author's intentions. There is a scholarly debate over whether this latter activity fits under the rubric of deception. Roderick Chisholm and Thomas Feehan have argued that it does (1977, 144). James Mahon and others have argued that it does not (2007, 186-188). Kierkegaard clearly falls into the former camp. But nothing important hinges on whether his camp is the right one. Even if the bait and switch strategy does not count as deception, it is still an artful rhetorical device. More to the point, it is one of the artful rhetorical devices the use of which Kierkegaard counts as indirect communication. Since indirect communication is my primary focus, I will consider the bait and switch strategy worth investigating.

[38] Many scholars have objected that the account Kierkegaard provides in *Point of View* and *On My Work as an Author* is an exercise in revisionist history (e.g., Fenger 1980; Garff 2005, 562-565; Pattison 2002a, 14-16). For our purposes, the worries about the historical accuracy of the account are irrelevant. Even if Kierkegaard's account is outright fiction, the story he tells still serves as an example of how he understands indirect communication.

familiar text handed down from the fathers" (CUP, 1:[629-630]; WA, 165). Climacus has baited the members of his audience by pretending to talk about things that interest them, only to switch in the end to talking about what interests him.[39]

One final example that deserves mention is the parable the prophet Nathan tells King David in II Samuel 11:2-12:15. Kierkegaard discusses this passage at some length in *For Self-Examination*, where, following his customary practice, he retells the story for his own purposes (FSE, 37-39; see Pattison 1998, 86-87). The narrative begins with King David's committing adultery with Bathsheba and subsequently having her husband murdered. The prophet Nathan learns of David's misdeeds and desires to get the unrepentant king to acknowledge the error of his ways. But Nathan does not proceed straightforwardly. He approaches David with a little story he has written so that the king, "a connoisseur, an expert in matters of taste," can judge its aesthetic merits:

> There lived two men in a certain city. The one was very rich and had great herds of livestock, large and small, but the poor man had only a little lamb that he had bought and raised and that had grown up with him together with his children. It ate from his hand and drank from his cup and it was like a child in his home. But when a traveler came to the rich man, he spared his livestock, large and small, and took the poor man's sheep, slaughtered it, and prepared it for the stranger who had come to him (FSE, 38; cf. II Samuel 12:1-4).

David listens to the story and makes some suggestions about its structure as well as Nathan's mode of presentation. Then suddenly, while David is still caught up in the aesthetic aspects of the story, Nathan changes his tone: "Thou art the man." The transition has its desired effect; David immediately acknowledges the error of his ways and repents.

Kierkegaard does not explicitly call what Nathan does indirect communication. But the story fits the pattern. Nathan baits David into having a conversation with him by telling an interesting but seemingly innocuous story about two men and a sheep. Then, having caught David's attention, he switches to the point he really wants to discuss, the fact that David's own actions have been sinful. Thus Nathan's activity counts as another instance of the first kind of "deceiving into the truth".

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[39] Some scholars interpret this as a case of irony by pointing out that Climacus pretends to take something seriously, viz. speculative philosophy, that he does not in fact take seriously (Hartshorne 1990, 6; Jansen 1997, 122). The basis for this interpretation comes from *The Concept of Irony*, where Kierkegaard calls the practice of saying something seriously that is not meant seriously "the most common form of irony" (CI, 248).

2.3.2. USING DECEPTION TO REPEL PEOPLE

The second scenario in which Kierkegaard uses deception differs from the first in three ways. First, the target audience is different. Before, the deception targeted those who wanted to ignore or resist the deceiver. Here, it targets those who want to parrot or mimic the deceiver. Second, there is a difference in the deception's function: it serves to repel instead of attract others. Third, the audience is deceived into a different kind of truth. The deceiver no longer leads his listeners to an objective truth but rather to what Kierkegaard calls "truth as subjectivity". The salient feature of subjectivity here is independence. And here is where the deceiver goes to work (CUP, 1:244). He utilizes subterfuge to push others away, preventing them from following him in such a way that they become less than fully independent (JP, 1:649.24, 1:653.23-24).

A few illustrations help clarify the idea. One that Kierkegaard frequently discusses is the case of the serious man who pretends to be joking (JP, 1:653.23, 4:4311; UDVS, 96-97; CUP, 1:87-88; SLW, 345).[40] As Kierkegaard explains it, the man (often Socrates) hides his serious position behind a jest in order to prevent listeners from aping him (UDVS, 97). In other words, he does it to prevent listeners from taking his position seriously simply because he himself takes it seriously. Ideally, the listeners will take the position seriously only once they see the seriousness of it for themselves.

A second example of this kind of deception comes from Climacus' description of Lessing's style (CUP, 1:68-69). Among the features that Climacus highlights, we find two deceptive practices: (a) Lessing's habit of placing a false stress on unimportant matters and (b) Lessing's penchant for changing the terminology in which he expresses his position to make it falsely appear as though he has changed his position. These deceptions serve to confuse readers and thereby to prevent them from figuring out what Lessing believes. Lacking such knowledge, would-be followers have nothing to latch on to. As was the case with respect to Socrates, they are able to hold Lessing's position only if they arrive at it independently.[41]

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[40] Some scholars see this as another case of irony (Hartshorne 1990, 6). The basis of this claim is once again Kierkegaard's dissertation: "The second form of irony, to say as a jest, jestingly, something that is meant in earnest, is more rare" (CI, 248).

[41] Using deception to confuse others is a recurring theme in Kierkegaard's writings. It comes up in several other passages in *Postscript* including in connection with Socrates (70n), the early pseudonymous

The final example worth mentioning is biographical in nature. It concerns Kierkegaard's interactions with his erstwhile fiancée, Regine Olsen. We learn of the deception in a journal entry entitled "Indirect Communication":

> Furthermore, consideration for "her" required me to be careful. I could well have said right away: I am a religious author. But later how would I have dared to create the illusion that I was a scoundrel in order if possible to help her. Actually it was she—that is, my relationship to her—who taught me the indirect method. She could be helped only by an untruth about me; otherwise I believe she would have lost her mind. That the collision was a religious one would have completely deranged her, and therefore I have had to be so infinitely careful. And not until she became engaged again and married did I regard myself as somewhat free in this respect (JP, 2:1959).

Kierkegaard's actions follow the pattern described above. He uses a deception to push Regine away from him and prevent her from clinging to him. What sets Kierkegaard's behavior apart here is that he uses his own person or life and not just his writing to create the deception. Thus we must keep in mind that the deceptions involved in indirect communication need not take place on a linguistic level.[42]

3.   THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO ACCOUNTS

Up to this point, we have looked at Kierkegaard's two accounts of indirect communication in isolation from each other. In this section, we will examine the ways in which the accounts relate to each other. This examination will fill in some important pieces to the puzzle regarding Kierkegaard's views on indirect communication.

There are two important points to make here. First, the two accounts can cut across each other: what qualifies as indirect communication according to the first account can qualify as direct communication according to the second and vice versa. We have already alluded to one example of this phenomenon, Kierkegaard's upbuilding discourses. The discourses qualify as indirect communication according to the first

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literature (262-263), and Climacus himself (274n). In addition, some scholars find it in such early texts as *The Concept of Irony* (e.g. Poole 1993). Finally, the practice arises in two cryptic journal entries in which Kierkegaard identifies it as the distinguishing feature of indirect communication (JP, 1:662, 5:6006).

[42] This more existential strategy of deception constitutes another theme in Kierkegaard's discussions of indirect communication. It comes up when the pseudonymous Quidam explains how he will save his beloved (SLW, 273), when Kierkegaard describes the part he played in the *Corsair* affair (JP, 5:5892, 6:6548), when Anti-Climacus explains why Christ adopts the incognito of a servant (PC, 129-130), and when the pseudonymous Petrus Minor argues that Bishop Adler should have made himself look repugnant before proclaiming his new revelation (BA, 164, 168-171).

account because they are maieutic in nature. But because Kierkegaard does not publish them under pseudonyms, they qualify as direct communication according to the second account.[43] Another example of this phenomenon is *The Concept of Anxiety*. This work qualifies as indirect communication according to the second account because Kierkegaard publishes it under the pseudonym 'Vigilius Haufniensis'. It qualifies as direct communication according to the first account, however, because it contains didactic instruction about the dogmatic issue of hereditary sin instead of leaving it to readers to discover the intricacies of the issue for themselves (CUP, 1:269-270).

Second, even though the two accounts of indirect communication can cut across each other, Kierkegaard often draws them together as complementary parts of a larger whole. More specifically, he often uses indirect communication in the sense of artful rhetorical devices (the second account) to engage in indirect communication in the sense of Socrates' maieutic method (the first account). It will help to look at some examples of how this occurs.

The most obvious example is pseudonymity. When Kierkegaard writes a book under a pseudonym, he indicates that he does not necessarily stand behind the views contained in the book.[44] This does not entail that he rejects the views in the book or even that he is ambivalent towards them. It simply means that we cannot draw any conclusions about his views by reading the book (Evans 1983, 7). The upshot is that readers of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works cannot appeal to his authority when it comes to deciding whether they will believe or reject the views contained in those works. They must make up their minds about the matter for themselves. By forcing his readers to become independent from him in this way, Kierkegaard establishes the kind of maieutic relationship described in §1.2.

A second example is the deceptive communication employed by Lessing. Lessing's deceptive practices prevent his readers from determining whether he believes the view in question. Thus, they establish the same kind of maieutic relationship

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[43] George Pattison has argued that the upbuilding discourses count as indirect communication *even on what I call the second account of indirect communication* because they contain other artful rhetorical devices besides pseudonymity (Pattison 1998, 85-87; 2002a, 12-34). His argument reveals that it is possible for us to come to different conclusions as to whether something counts as indirect communication even when operating solely with the second account.

[44] At least this holds for the *early* Kierkegaard. For a discussion of the shift in Kierkegaard's attitude towards pseudonymity, see §3.1 of chapter 1.

established by someone who writes under a pseudonym. But they also do something more. They make it difficult for Lessing's readers to discern precisely what the relevant view is in the first place. If his readers are to learn what he wants them to learn, they must come up with the view on their own—at least to some extent. Lessing's deceptive communication thereby establishes the more radical kind of maieutic relationship described in §1.3.

Something similar holds for the practice of "showing." When I show a student an ethical principle (e.g. by exemplifying it in my life) but refrain from didactically spelling it out, I establish the same kind of maieutic relationship Lessing does. The principle I want to communicate resides implicitly in my actions. Thus, I provide the student with some amount of assistance in learning the principle. Nevertheless, because I do not state the principle explicitly, the student must go through part of the discovery process for herself in order to acquire knowledge of the principle.

The final example worth discussing is the bait and switch deception described in §2.3.1. This artful rhetorical device relates to the maieutic method in a different way than the ones discussed above. It does not establish the maieutic relationship. Rather, it *paves the way* for the teacher to establish such a relationship (JP, 1:649.30; Jansen 1997, 123). The most conspicuous way in which it does so is by capturing the learner's attention in situations where the learner would not otherwise pay attention. (For more on this point, see §4 of chapter 4.) Because the bait and switch deception performs this important preliminary function, it makes sense to see it as part of the overall maieutic process. This is the idea behind Kierkegaard's claim that "indirect communication *first of all* involves deception" (JP, 1:649.22, my emphasis; cf. JP, 1:649.30).

We can now see how the two accounts of indirect communication described in this chapter often complement each other. Thus by treating them separately we have broken apart what Kierkegaard often holds together. Nevertheless, I will continue to treat the two accounts as discrete entities. Here's why. I intend to examine the reasons Kierkegaard provides for the indispensability thesis. These reasons pertain to the discrete accounts of indirect communication and not the overall whole. Moreover, they are strikingly different for each account of indirect communication. Therefore, I will have to

treat the accounts separately in order to analyze Kierkegaard's arguments for the indispensability thesis in a productive way.

4.   IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INDISPENSABILITY THESIS

The motivation behind our extensive inquiry into the meaning of 'indirect communication' was to help us understand the indispensability thesis. For we could not know what it meant to say that "indirect communication is indispensable" if we did not know what indirect communication was. With our inquiry complete, I will take the final section of the chapter to discuss what its results entail. I will focus on two points of interest. First, I will explain what it means to *claim* that indirect communication is indispensable for each of the two accounts of indirect communication. Second, I will explain what it takes to *prove* that these claims are true. These discussions will help set the agenda for the rest of the dissertation.

4.1.   THE INDISPENSABILITY OF THE MAIEUTIC METHOD

To review, according to the first account, indirect communication occurs if and only if the teacher relates to the learner in a maieutic fashion.[45] We can interpret this definition in one of two ways depending on how we understand the maieutic relationship. For the sake of brevity and clarity we can confine ourselves to talking about cases in which the teacher's goal is to get the learner to perform some action or form some belief.

According to the main account of the maieutic relationship, indirect communication occurs if and only if the teacher provides some relevant form of assistance but does not allow the learner to depend on her authority for the motivation of his action or the justification of his belief. In order to prove the indispensability thesis here, we must establish that there is some belief or action that is not properly (per)formed

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[45] It is unclear whether and to what extent the teacher's intentions play a role here. There are three main options: (1) Indirect communication occurs if and only if the teacher *intends* to relate to the learner in a maieutic fashion – regardless of whether she succeeds in doing so. (2) Indirect communication occurs if and only if the teacher actually relates to the learner in a maieutic fashion – regardless of whether she intends to do so. (3) Indirect communication occurs if and only if the teacher intends to relate to the learner in a maieutic fashion *and* succeeds at doing so. (We face the same set of options with respect to direct communication.) Although Kierkegaard does not speak clearly on this matter, he most often embraces the second option. Thus, that is the one I will pursue. But I do not think much hangs on this decision as far as the indispensability thesis goes. Everything I say could be changed to accommodate the other options without affecting the conclusions I draw.

if it is (per)formed on the basis of the teacher's authority. The interest stems from asking why it might ever be a *necessary* aspect of some belief or action that the learner not (per)form it on the basis of the teacher's say-so. We will look at Kierkegaard's answer to this question in §2 of chapter 3.

We can now turn to the implications for the indispensability thesis of the variant on the main account of the maieutic relationship. According to this account, indirect communication occurs if and only if the teacher provides some relevant form of assistance but does not tell the learner what to do or believe, allowing (or forcing) the learner to figure our what to do or believe for himself. To prove the indispensability thesis here, we must find situations in which the teacher can only accomplish her goal if the learner figures out what to believe or do for himself. The interest stems from asking why it would ever be *necessary* for the learner to figure these things out for himself or what would ever *prevent* the teacher from telling the learner these things. We will look at Kierkegaard's answers to these questions in §3 of chapter 3 and again in chapter 6.

4.2.   THE INDISPENSABILITY OF ARTFUL RHETORICAL DEVICES

There are two ways to think about the indispensability thesis when working with the second account of indirect communication.

According to the first way of thinking, the indispensability thesis claims that there is a task for which *some* artful rhetorical device is required but does not stipulate the necessity of any *particular* device. The thesis thus allows that more than one device might accomplish the task in question. It simply denies that a communication that failed to utilize any and all of the relevant artful rhetorical devices can do the task.

According to the second way of thinking, the indispensability thesis claims that there is a task for which one particular artful rhetorical device is required. The thesis thus entails that any communication that does not use this specific device will fail at the task in question—even if it makes use of some or all of the other relevant artful rhetorical devices.

We will follow the first way of thinking about the indispensability thesis in §2 of chapter 4. We will follow the second way in several other places. We saw one of these places back in §4 of chapter 1, where we dealt with the indispensability of the practice of

showing. The next place is in §§4-5 of chapter 4, where we will focus on the indispensability of the bait and switch strategy. In §9 of chapter 5 we will discuss the indispensability of humor. (Humor was not one of the artful rhetorical devices discussed above. As we will see, however, Kierkegaard does think the use of it counts as indirect communication.) Finally, in §4 of chapter 6, we will look at the indispensability of showing once again. We will focus in particular on the kind of showing that involves providing readers with fictional examples or imaginary constructions, i.e. the kind found in Kierkegaard's early pseudonymous literature.

CHAPTER 3:

INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AND UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT

We have been building up to a proof of the indispensability thesis, Kierkegaard's thesis that there are some tasks only indirect communication can accomplish. In the first chapter, we investigated four methodological problems that threatened to undermine our ability to discuss this thesis. In the second chapter, we addressed the first major question that arises in such a discussion, namely: "What does Kierkegaard mean by 'indirect communication'?"

With an interpretation of indirect communication in place, the next step toward proving the indispensability thesis is to specify the projects for which we need such communication. We have already said a bit about this topic. In the last chapter, for example, we noted that indirect communication serves to help others stand alone. But we need to be more specific. With respect to *what* does Kierkegaard want others to stand alone? What is his ultimate goal? We must answer these questions carefully, because only once we have identified Kierkegaard's purposes will we be able to investigate whether or not he really needs to use indirect communication in order to accomplish them.

As was the case with respect to the *nature* of indirect communication, there is disagreement among scholars as to its *purpose*. Roughly speaking, there are two camps of interpretation (Golomb 1992, 65; Lübcke 1990, 31-32). On the one hand, there are those who believe indirect communication has to do with helping others make a decision for the religious life (Anderson 1963, 214; Evans 1983, 95-113; Lübcke 1990, 31-40; Pattison 1998, 81-94). On the other hand, there are those who believe indirect communication has to do with making others aware of the nature of being or existence (Jaspers 1986, 37-53; Jegstrup 2001, 121-131; Mooney 2007, 201-216; Ramsland 1989, 13-23).

My own view on the matter is that we do not have to choose between these two camps. The reason is that I do not believe the two camps actually provide *competing* interpretations; I think they provide *complementary* ones. Let me explain.

If we think about indirect communication in the sense of the midwifery method, the first camp of interpretation is correct: Kierkegaard engages in indirect communication to help people become religious. However, the indirection involved here turns out to revolve around the further project of helping others understand the nature of existence. And helping others understand the nature of existence turns out to require indirect communication in the sense of using artful rhetorical devices. Thus the second camp of interpretation is correct as well.

The legitimacy of my interpretation will become apparent over the next few chapters. In the present chapter I will develop some of its foundational pieces. In particular, I will (1) specify what becoming religious involves for Kierkegaard, and (2) explain why he thinks helping someone become religious requires the use of indirect communication in the sense of the midwifery or maieutic method. Thus, this chapter will provide the first proof of the indispensability thesis.

My general strategy for pursuing these two goals is to draw them tightly together. I will show that accomplishing the first will provide the only resources needed for accomplishing the second. That is to say, a proper understanding of the goal of religious communication will by itself dictate the need for indirection. This is not the usual procedure. Commentators typically justify Kierkegaard's use of indirection by appealing to *additional* considerations. For example, one standard line is to say that we could use direct communication to help people become religious, as the street-corner evangelist in fact tries to do, but *given the nature of human psychology*, we would not be very successful (Daise 1999, 21-24; Evans 1983, 111-112; Pattison 1999, 70-72). Another standard line is to say that direct communication might work, but *given our right to religious self-determination*, it would be unethical (Daise 1999, 24-26). These interpretations do have solid textual footing, which I will discuss at length in chapter 4. Nevertheless, they suffer from a common problem. They both fail to justify the strongest version of the indispensability thesis. We find this version in the following passage from *Postscript*:

> Therefore, the subjective religious thinker, who has comprehended the duplexity of existence in order to be such a thinker, readily perceives that direct communication is a fraud toward God (which possibly defrauds him of the worship of another person in truth), a fraud toward himself (as if he had ceased to

be an existing person), a fraud toward another human being (who possibly attains only a relative God-relationship), *a fraud that brings him into contradiction* [*modsigelse*] *with his entire thought* (my emphasis, 75).

It is the claim at the end of the passage that creates the problem. The standard lines of interpretation sketched out above tell us only that it would be more practical or more ethical to use indirect communication. They do not tell us that we must use it *on pain of contradiction*, which is what the passage claims. Thus, if the standard interpretations provide Kierkegaard's only defenses of this claim, then the claim itself sounds overblown. It comes across as hyperbole or exaggeration. And, indeed, that is what some commentators say.[46] Nevertheless, this claim is precisely what I aim to prove in the present chapter. And the key to the proof will be to ignore any additional considerations and focus on the nature of the religious project itself.

Here are the particulars of my strategy. I will start by examining Kierkegaard's view of the religious life and will distill out one of its central features. From this central feature I will deduce two corollaries of the religious life: (a) individualism, and (b) irrationalism. I will discuss the nature of each corollary and how it follows from the core religious thesis. In addition, I will show how each corollary places conceptual restrictions on the type of communication the religious teacher can use to pursue his goal of helping others become religious. Here is where we will see that direct communication is in fact self-contradictory and incoherent. Finally, at the conclusion of the chapter, I will explain how the conceptual restrictions work together in such a way that the only form of religious pedagogy that could *possibly* succeed is an indirect one.

1.   WHAT IT MEANS TO BECOME RELIGIOUS: UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT

Our discussion of Kierkegaard's account of becoming religious begins with a qualification. Not every aspect of this account will be important for our purposes. Only some of what is involved in helping others become religious will require indirect communication. In fact, Kierkegaard explicitly says that religious pedagogy will first of

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[46] Evans, for example, argues that Kierkegaard has simply exaggerated the need for indirect communication (1983, 111-112). And, in a footnote of his translation of *Training in Christianity*, Lowrie goes further by suggesting that Kierkegaard resorted to indirect communication only because of his deep personal melancholy (96n1).

all require *direct* communication (JP, 1:652). Therefore, the first task here is to separate out the relevant aspects of Kierkegaard's account of becoming religious.

The direct communication in religious pedagogy pertains to the initial presentation of religious dogma.[47] It consists of making people aware of the previously unknown truths that God has revealed:

> As soon as truth, the essential truth, can be assumed to be known by everyone, appropriation and inwardness must be worked for, and here can be worked for only in an indirect form. The position of the apostle is something else, because he must proclaim the unknown truth, and therefore direct communication can always have its validity temporarily (CUP, 1:243).

Why is direct communication necessary to spread this message? The answer brings to mind a point made by Descartes in his Third Meditation. Both Climacus and Kierkegaard claim that a human being would never have thought up these truths on his own and hence the truths must be revealed by God (PF, 35; WL, 24). In addition, since God has revealed these truths only to a select group of people in world-history, those who know about them (i.e. the apostles) have the duty to spread them to others. It would do no good to take up a maieutic or indirect stance here and leave people alone with respect to the task of becoming acquainted with the truths. For the truths would simply never occur to these people.

As the passage quoted above indicates, Kierkegaard thinks the next step in becoming religious is to appropriate the religious truths that one now knows. And, as the passage also indicates, it is this step that pertains to indirect communication. The notion of appropriation, however, is a vague one. Thus if we are to explain why helping others appropriate religious truths requires indirection, we will have to be more specific.

Kierkegaard's account of religious appropriation is expansive and not always consistent. There is one important theme, however, that runs throughout Kierkegaard's discussions of religious appropriation, viz. the theme of unconditional commitment or obedience (see Fabro 1967, 171-172; Mackey 1971, 199; Marino 2001, 122). We find this theme in *Fear and Trembling*, where Johannes de Silentio describes the knight of faith as a person who follows God even if it requires him to transgress social norms or

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[47] This is how Kierkegaard presents the issue in the *Journals and Papers* from 1847 and in the Climacus works. However, we find a different account in *Practice in Christianity*. There Anti-Climacus says that Christ's revelation of his identity as God counts as indirect communication. For a discussion of these points, see Pattison 1999, 75 and 85-94.

give up what in other respects might be his best (JP, 3:3020). We also find it in those passages in *Postscript* where Climacus depicts the authentic religious individual as one who keeps the faith even if it means he must martyr his understanding (CUP, 1:232 et passim). A similar line recurs in *Practice in Christianity*, where Anti-Climacus tells us that the true believer is one who holds fast to his belief even if others find it offensive and persecute him because of it (PC, 91). The idea of unconditional commitment populates the signed works[48] and the journals as well. In the latter, we find the most extended discussion of the theme (JP, 4:4894-4919) and its most explicit statement: "Christianity wants unconditional obedience as a disposition" (JP, 3:3015).

The grounds for Kierkegaard's acceptance of this controversial ideal are primarily scriptural. He sees it exemplified in biblical prototypes such as Abraham (JP, 3:3020) and Christ:

> [Christ] was obedient, obedient in everything, obedient in giving up everything (the glory that he had before the foundation of the world was laid), obedient in doing without everything (even that on which he could lay his head), obedient in taking everything upon himself (the sin of humankind), obedient in suffering everything (the guilt of humankind), obedient in subjecting himself to everything in life, obedient in death (CD, 85).

Kierkegaard also finds the ideal in the greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind" (Matthew 23:37). He explicitly interprets this passage as involving unconditional obedience in *Works of Love*:

> [Y]ou shall love God in unconditional obedience, even if what he requires of you might seem to you to be to your own harm, indeed harmful to his cause; for God's wisdom is beyond all comparison with yours, and God's governance has no obligation of responsibility in relation to your sagacity. All you have to do is to obey in love (WL, 19-20).

One final scriptural passage Kierkegaard uses to support the ideal is Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God." He frequently asserts that those who place conditions on their commitment to God violate this command by implicitly placing something besides God first (e.g. JP, 4:4910).

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[48] The theme of unconditional commitment figures prominently in "Purity of Heart," where Kierkegaard asserts that the pure of heart will pursue God (i.e. the Good) whether it brings pleasure or suffering, victory or defeat. We also find it in *Judge for Yourself!* (106-115, 153-159), *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air* (21-35), *Christian Discourses* (81-91), *On My Work as an Author* (19-20), *Works of Love* (19-20), and *The Moment* (94).

Kierkegaard's acceptance of unconditional commitment as an ideal is not merely dogmatism. He provides a number of philosophical justifications for it as well. These defenses fall into what we might roughly call the eudaimonist tradition, i.e. the tradition that defends virtuous behavior on the grounds that it constitutes the path to human flourishing or *eudaimonia*.[49] Kierkegaard's Christian eudaimonism takes a number of different forms. One version of it, which we find in *Postscript*, focuses on Kierkegaard's ontology. In this text, Climacus rejects the Enlightenment view that human beings are essentially rational beings. In its place, he posits the Romantic view that humans are by nature passionate beings (131). He goes on to say, in good Romantic fashion, that the goal or telos of human existence is to express this passionate nature in the world. Here is where Christianity fits in; for Climacus maintains that the commitment of faith required by Christianity is the most passionate mode of existence possible for human beings (132). Therefore, whether or not Christianity offers the objective truth, it is a perfect fit for the human project (CUP, 1:230; see Pojman 1977, 75-93; Allison 1967, 442-445).

Other versions of Kierkegaard's eudaimonism focus on psychological considerations. The idea here is that Christianity provides the only way to a psychologically healthy life (Mackey 1971, 199-201). We find this theme in "Purity of Heart" and *Christian Discourses*, but perhaps most famously in *Sickness Unto Death*. In this text, Anti-Climacus sides with the Romantics in rejecting the Fichtean idea that self-consciousness can ground itself. By this rejection, he means to claim that a person can understand himself or establish a sense of personal identity only by referring to something other than himself (SUD, 13-14). However, Anti-Climacus thinks all ordinary attempts to find something upon which to base one's identity fail. Each thing a person hits on as a candidate proves to be inherently unstable. Like a moment in the Hegelian system, it contains the seeds of its own downfall. Building a life-view upon it thus constitutes a kind of psychological unhealthiness that Anti-Climacus calls "despair". The only way to avoid despair is to give up the attempt to establish one's own identity. One

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[49] This tradition, which has its roots in ancient virtue ethics, experienced a renaissance of sorts in nineteenth-century Denmark. Kierkegaard's teacher and eventual rival, Hans L. Martensen, advocated a version of it in his lectures on moral philosophy in 1838-1839, which he published as *Grundrids til Moralphilosophiens System* [Outline to a System of Moral Philosophy] (Koch 2004, 284). Martensen seems to have gotten the ideas from *his* teacher, Peter Erasmus Müller. Müller had formulated a moral system that combined Kantian deontology with Wolffian eudaimonism only ten years earlier in his *Moralsystem til Brug ved Academiske Forlæsninger* [Moral System for Use in Academic Lectures] (Koch 2004, 283).

must, instead, unconditionally embrace the identity given to one by God. To use Anti-Climacus' own words, "the self [must] rest transparently in the power that established it" (SUD, 14).

Whether or not these philosophical defenses of unconditional commitment work, we must admit that there is something odd about them. In particular, it is odd to think of them as coming from *Kierkegaard*. After all, Kierkegaard is notorious for disparaging attempts to defend Christianity. For example, in *Sickness Unto Death* we read:

> Now we see how extraordinarily stupid…it is to defend Christianity, how little knowledge of human nature it manifests, how it connives even if unconsciously, with offense by making Christianity out to be some poor, miserable thing that in the end has to be rescued by a champion. Therefore, it is certain and true that the first one to come up with the idea of defending Christianity in Christendom is *de facto* a Judas No. 2: he, too, betrays with a kiss, except that his treason is the treason of stupidity (SUD, 87; see also CD, 162; PC 231).

These are strange words to find in a book that ostensibly contains a defense of Christianity. We can only conclude that there is a tension in Kierkegaard's thought on this point. We will return to this tension later in the chapter when we discuss the rationality of the religious life in more detail. First, we must spend a section on another important aspect of Kierkegaard's view of the religious life.

2. THE INDIVIDUALITY COROLLARY

As noted before, there are two corollaries to Kierkegaard's thesis that becoming religious involves an unconditional commitment to God. In this section we will discuss the first one. It states that the unconditional commitment must be made individually or, as Kierkegaard puts it, by "the single individual." We must be careful with this idea, however, because it is easily misinterpreted. Accordingly, we will devote the first part of the section to setting aside a tempting but ultimately misleading interpretation. We will then set out an explanation of what individuality actually means for Kierkegaard and why it follows as a corollary of his view of religion as involving unconditional commitment. Finally, we will examine how this corollary places restrictions on religious communication.

2.1.   A MISLEADING INTERPRETATION

It is tempting to think that, for Kierkegaard, religious individualism involves being physically separate and/or distinct from other people. According to this view, Kierkegaard would function as a foil for the right-wing Danish Hegelians. While they believe one becomes religious only by entering into a religious community, such as the church, he would believe that one becomes religious only by remaining separate from such a community (Koch 2004, 285).

This view gains support from a number of passages. For example, early in *Postscript*, Climacus praises Lessing for understanding that the religious individual must shut himself off in isolation from others (65, 69). Shortly thereafter, he accuses Jacobi of failing to realize that a person must make the religious movement alone (100). We find a similar sentiment in *Fear and Trembling*. There Johannes de Silentio describes the path of the religious individual as being so lonely that such a person does not meet a single other traveler (FT, 76). And all of these passages fit well with the ones in "Purity of Heart" and *Two Ages* where Kierkegaard rebukes people who pass through life as members of the crowd.

There are, however, at least two problems with this interpretation. First, it implies that Kierkegaard advocates a kind of hermitic monasticism. This implication does not sit well with the fact that, at least in the early works, Kierkegaard levels harsh criticisms against the monastics (CUP, 1:401-405, 1:414-417). In fact, the thrust of these criticisms is that the monastics were wrong to pride themselves on their outward distinctiveness. It would thus seem strange for Kierkegaard to *advocate* outward distinctiveness.

Second, in the very same texts in which Kierkegaard emphasizes religious individualism, he also emphasizes another aspect of the religious life, namely hidden inwardness. Johannes de Silentio, for example, tells us that the knight of faith looks just like any other man (FT, 39). And Johannes Climacus repeatedly asserts in *Postscript* that the religious individual is utterly unrecognizable (CUP, 1:410, 1:475). These descriptions do not fit the picture of a person who is outwardly separate and distinct from others. Therefore, when we come across talk about individuality in these texts, it must refer to some kind of inward and not some kind of outward separation or distinction.

Of course, it must be conceded that Kierkegaard abandons the ideal of hidden inwardness later in his life (Westphal 1996, 194-200). Particularly in *The Moment*, but also in *Practice in Christianity*, he demands that authentic religiousness have definitive outward signs. But we must be careful of what conclusions we draw from this fact. Kierkegaard's rejection of *hidden* inwardness was probably not part of a rejection of inwardness *simpliciter*. His emphasis on the outer was probably not an abandonment of his emphasis on the inner. More likely, Kierkegaard's later demand for outward manifestations of religiousness constituted an *additional* requirement to the early demand for inwardness. Supporting this view, of course, would require a careful study of the reasons for Kierkegaard's change of heart. And that goes beyond the scope of the present chapter. But even if such a study would not support the suggested view, it remains the case that Kierkegaard emphasized an inward kind of individuality early in his life. And it is this kind of individuality that has ramifications for religious communication. Therefore, it is this kind of individuality that we will now investigate in more detail.

2.2.   INDIVIDUALITY AS A KIND OF INDEPENDENCE

Granting that the relevant kind of religious individualism pertains to something inward, to what might it refer *in particular*? What might constitute inward or internal individuality for Kierkegaard? As we will see, the target idea is a kind of inner independence from others. This independence manifests itself in two spheres: an intellectual one and a volitional one. We can discuss them in turn.

2.2.1.   INTELLECTUAL INDEPENDENCE

Kierkegaard talks about intellectual independence in a couple of different ways. In some places the idea refers to being independent from others with respect to the content of one's beliefs. This kind of independence arises when someone undertakes the discovery process for himself and acquires what we might call first hand knowledge of the material. It fails to arise when someone learns about something from someone else. In such a case, we might say that the person only has second hand knowledge. One famous example of this distinction comes in *Philosophical Fragments.* Therein, Climacus differentiates "the follower at first hand," who physically saw Jesus, from "the follower at second hand,"

who never saw Jesus and learned about him only by talking with others. The former exhibits intellectual independence, the latter intellectual dependence.

Kierkegaard sometimes expresses distaste for this variety of intellectual dependence. For example, he criticizes Socrates for encouraging it in the *Gorgias* (CUP, 1:277-278). In this dialogue, Socrates engages in a long speech, a didactic discourse in which he spells out his position to listeners. The dialogue would have been better, suggests Kierkegaard, if Socrates had reverted to his usual, ironic form of communication. This form of communication would have forced Socrates' listeners to come to an understanding of the material on their own (see Lippitt 2000a, 141). Kierkegaard makes the suggestion because he worries that if Socrates allows his listeners to depend on him, they will end up only with a superficial or rote understanding of the material. To use Kierkegaard's words, their understanding will lack "inwardness" (CUP, 1:278). Even though they might be able to report back to Socrates what he has told them, the words they use will not have the same deep, personal meaning they had for Socrates. Thus, the two parties might actually misunderstand each other at a deep level (see CUP, 1:74, 1:283).

The worry that intellectual dependence leads to rote knowledge is an important one for Kierkegaard. It comes up repeatedly in *Postscript* and often enters into the debate over whether to engage in direct communication. (For more on this point, see chapter 6 and §4 of chapter 1.) However, this worry has its limits. In particular, it does not lead Kierkegaard to disparage intellectual dependence across the board. We know this because he explicitly allows a place for such dependence in the religious realm. As noted earlier, Kierkegaard thinks human beings cannot come up with the content of the religious dogmas on their own. God must reveal it to them. And since God does not reveal the content to everyone, people *must* be allowed to depend on each other with respect to the content. Otherwise, religion would simply not get off the ground.

Consequently, the most important type of intellectual independence in the religious realm does not pertain to the *contents* of one's beliefs. It pertains, instead, to the *justification* of one's beliefs. Independence in this arena means that one does not need to appeal to the authority of others when it comes to the question of whether or not one will

hold a belief. Correspondingly, dependence means that one believes only on someone else's say-so.

One place Kierkegaard advocates this kind of independence is the *Upbuilding Discourses*. In these works, he tells readers not to treat him as an authority; they are not to accept his views simply because it is he who presents them. These directives, of course, refer to Kierkegaard qua authoritative figure in particular. Nevertheless, they are motivated, at least in part, by the more general view that no person should ever depend on another person's authority when it comes to religious matters. We find a version of this more general view in *Postscript*. Therein, Climacus praises Lessing precisely because Lessing realizes that people should not appeal to one another in religious matters (CUP, 1:65). He also levels harsh criticisms against those who try to figure out Lessing's views on religion in order to adopt similar ones (ibid.). Finally, Climacus asserts that he himself must not mistakenly appeal to Lessing: "It occurs to me that [appealing to Lessing] would be rather dubious, because with such an appeal I would also have contradicted myself and canceled everything…*all appeal to another individuality will be only a misunderstanding*" (CUP, 1:66, my emphasis; see Lippitt 2000a, 59-60, 65).

Climacus' position is motivated by the worry that depending on the authority of others leads to a deficiency in the believer. He describes the deficient state variously as one in which the dependent individual relates to God only "through another person" (CUP, 1:65), one in which God gets relegated to the status of a third party (CUP, 1:66), and one in which the dependent person's relationship with God is relative to his relationship with the authoritative figure (CUP, 1:75). Climacus does not go on to explain *why* these states are deficient. But given what we have said thus far, we can make a conjecture. It seems that when a person depends on someone else's authority, he falls short of the religious ideal of unconditional commitment. He falls short because his belief varies with certain changes in the authoritative person. Were it the case that the authoritative person advocated something else or somehow became discredited, his belief in God would fall away. Of course, unconditional commitment demands that one's belief never fall away. The belief must remain in place regardless of changes in the opinions and views of other people:

> [E]ach individual…responsible before God, must make his own decision whether he wants to walk along the [Christian] way or not, indifferently, utterly indifferent, to whether no one or everyone is walking along the same way, indifferent, utterly indifferent, to whether no one or countless millions have walked along the same way (PC, 210).

Therefore, Kierkegaard's ideal of unconditional commitment is inconsistent with intellectual *dependence* on others and requires intellectual *independence* instead.[50]

We must stop at this point to note an important objection. Time and again, Kierkegaard not only makes room for but downright emphasizes the importance of respecting the authority of apostles. He does so most conspicuously in *The Book on Adler* (173-188). But we can find lines that suggest such a position in *Postscript* as well:

> [T]he secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free, and for that very reason he must not communicate himself directly; indeed, it is even irreligious to do so. This latter applies in proportion to the essentiality of the subjective and consequently applies first and foremost within the religious domain, that is, *if the communicator is not God himself or does not presume to appeal to the miraculous authority of an apostle* but is just a human being (CUP, 1:74, emphasis added; see also CUP, 1:243).

These lines stand in tension with the idea that, for Kierkegaard, no person should ever depend on the authority of another with respect to religious matters. Indeed, they open up a clear exception to this general rule for apostolic authority.

We can deal with this tension by noting the reasons *why* Kierkegaard says we should respect the authority of apostles. For Kierkegaard, apostles have authority because they come from God. God has entrusted them with a special revelation and in so doing has given them a kind of *divine* authority (BA, 176-177). He has made them, in effect, his mouthpieces.

But notice what this means. We will only accept the authority of apostles if we *already* accept the authority of God. The former presupposes the latter. And while this will not create problems in many situations, it will create one with respect to the core

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[50] Climacus also worries that intellectual dependence involves "an attempt to become objective" (CUP, 1:66-67). By using this phrase, Climacus means to draw an analogy between depending on other people's authority and depending on evidence or reasons, which he also calls objective. The analogy is important because, in a prior section of *Postscript*, Climacus discussed the shortcomings of such objective tactics. Thus, by drawing the analogy, he is telling us that appeals to authority will suffer from similar shortcomings. We will not discuss the particulars of these shortcomings here because we will devote an entire section to them later on in the chapter. But, suffice it to say, the objective tactics fail in large part because they cannot support an unconditional commitment to God. Thus, once again, we find Climacus telling us that appeals to authority are inconsistent with the religious ideal.

religious belief, namely belief in God. Here we cannot appeal to apostolic authority. To do so would be tantamount to appealing to God's authority, and that would be circular reasoning. The only way to escape the circle would be to say that one does not appeal to the apostles qua divine mouthpieces in this situation. But such a move would relegate the apostles to the status of ordinary human beings and, consequently, all the original problems with appealing to the authority of others would return (Houe 2000, 4).

In conclusion, Kierkegaard does not demand complete intellectual independence in the religious realm. He allows room for depending on apostles with respect to the content of our religious beliefs and the justification of *some* of our religious beliefs. But when it comes to the core religious issue, i.e. belief in or commitment to God, absolute intellectual independence with respect to justification is required. One cannot appeal to the authority of *any* other person here without reasoning in a circle or running aground on the ideal of unconditional commitment.

2.2.2. VOLITIONAL INDEPENDENCE

As was the case with the intellectual aspect of independence, the volitional aspect has two sides for Kierkegaard. Using Aristotelian language, we can say that the first side involves not having other people as the final cause of one's actions and the second side involves not having other people as the efficient cause of one's actions. We can treat these two sides in turn.

What does it mean for another person to serve as the final cause of one's actions? Roughly put, it means one acts to realize some goal that revolves around the other person. This can occur in any number of ways. Sometimes it will involve a positive relationship to the other person, as when one acts to please the other. And sometimes it will involve a negative relationship to the other person, as when one acts out of spite. But in every case, the person in question depends on the other in a counter-factual sense. If the other had wanted him to do something else or had exhibited a less despicable character, he would not have done what he did.

One good example Kierkegaard provides of this kind of dependence is the so-called "captain of the popinjay shooting club." He has Climacus describe how the captain follows God in order to fit in with his community:

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> Just as a mother admonishes her child who is about to attend a party, "Now, mind your manners and watch the other polite children and behave as they do," so he, too, could live on and behave as he saw others behave. He would never do anything first and would never have any opinion unless he first knew that others had it, because "the others" would be his very first. On special occasions he would act like someone who does not know how to eat a course that is served at a banquet; he would reconnoiter until he saw how the others did it etc. (CUP, 1:244).

Climacus' stance towards the captain of the popinjay shooting club is decidedly negative. He calls the man "a satire on what it is to be a human being," noting that "it is really the God-relationship that makes a human being a human being, but this is what he would lack" (ibid.).

The problem with the captain of the popinjay shooting club mirrors the problem with the followers of Lessing: he ends up with a derivative relationship to God and consequently fails to live up to the religious ideal. To see why, notice that it is possible for the people on whom the captain depends to lose credibility or alter their views. Insofar as the captain really depends on these people and derives his relationship with God from them, such changes will lead him to abandon his religious ways. However, if he was authentically religious in Kierkegaard's sense and committed himself to God unconditionally, he would never abandon his religious ways. Thus the religious ideal excludes acting after the pattern of the captain of the popinjay shooting club, i.e. it excludes depending on others as the final cause of one's religious action.

Setting the first kind of volitional dependence aside, we can turn to the second kind. Here one person serves not as the *final* but as the *efficient* cause of another's action. More particularly, what are at stake here are cases where someone manipulates or coerces someone else into doing something. The dependent person in such cases does not bring about his own action, but functions like a puppet in the hands of its master. One example of this might be what goes on in some revivalist settings, where the preacher plays on the emotions of his listeners to get them to make religious commitments.

It is conceivable, however, that Kierkegaard denies the possibility of this kind of dependence. Whether or not he does depends on his metaphysics of freedom, which he never clearly articulates. For example, he might maintain a Sartrean account of free will, according to which individuals are radically free and always personally responsible for their actions. If so, he would think true cases of manipulation were impossible. Cases

where it appeared as though manipulation occurred would actually be nuanced cases of the first kind of volitional dependence. They would be cases where one person served as the *final cause* of the other's action. We can illustrate this point by returning to the case of the revivalist. On the Sartrean account of freedom, the revivalist does not actually coerce his listeners into acting. Instead, he utilizes social considerations to raise the cost of ignoring him. When he has raised the stakes so high that some listeners freely prefer to do what he wants them to do rather than suffer the consequences, he has succeeded.

The Sartrean interpretation has the benefit of making it easy to understand why Kierkegaard stands against the second kind of volitional dependence. Because the second kind reduces to the first kind, he stands against it for the same reasons he stood against the first kind. However, we need not be reductive like this to see Kierkegaard as opposing manipulation and coercion. Even if his metaphysics of freedom allows for such things, he will not tolerate them in the religious realm. Here's why.

In cases of religious coercion, the coerced person does not really end up with a real commitment. A real commitment would require that the person make the decision regarding whether to follow God *for himself*. It would require, in other words, that the person take responsibility for the decision. However, this requirement does not obtain in cases of coercion. In such cases, the coercer makes the decision *for* the coerced person and the coerced person is in no way personally responsible for his actions. Thus, the person who has been coerced into a religious commitment has not really lived up to the religious ideal.

Now it might appear as though we have added something extra here. It might appear as though we have appended a kind of "authenticity clause" to the religious ideal such that a person must not only make an unconditional commitment to God but an authentic one as well. If so, my claim that the notion of unconditional commitment by itself entails the individuality corollary will not hold.

However, this suggestion strikes me as incorrect. I think the notion of commitment includes what we mean here by authenticity. A coerced commitment is, in my mind, no commitment at all. Thus by making explicit the idea that religious commitment cannot be coerced, I do not see myself as adding something *extra*. But little hangs on this assertion. The idea that religious individuals must be self-active runs

throughout Kierkegaard's works and clearly serves as an integral part of his overall religious ideal (see CUP, 1:244). Therefore, whether or not the authenticity clause counts as a distinct part, we can say Kierkegaard's overall religious ideal excludes coercion and entails the relevant kind of volitional independence. And that is enough for what I want to accomplish in this chapter.

2.3.   Implications for Religious Communication

Having inspected both aspects of the individuality corollary, we are now in a position to see how they place restrictions on the kind of communication one can use if one wants to get others to become religious. We will begin by examining the way in which the *first* aspect of the corollary creates restrictions. From this examination we will derive a general argument that can be used to explain how the *second* aspect of the corollary creates restrictions as well.

The restrictions arise from the first side of the individuality corollary as follows. This side of the corollary states that a person cannot become authentically religious on the basis of another person's authority. Any commitment formed on the basis of another person's authority is *eo ipso* not an authentic religious commitment, however much it might appear to be one.[51] Consequently, a teacher who appeals to his own authority to get people to become authentically religious performs an incoherent act. To wit, he employs a means that contradicts his end. Here's why. The conventional purpose of the means he uses, viz. an appeal to authority, is to get people to believe or act at least in part on the basis of that authority. Thus, if his means serves its conventional purpose, his interlocutors will in fact believe or act at least in part on the basis of that authority. Such belief or action may take on the *appearance* of religion. But it will not *be* authentic religion. For, as noted, people cannot become authentically religious on the basis of another person's authority. Therefore, if the teacher's means serves its conventional purpose, he will have failed to achieve his ultimate end of getting his interlocutors to become authentically religious. This is the force behind an important comment that Climacus makes in *Postscript*:

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[51] Here and throughout this section, I assume that the religious teacher operates with *Kierkegaard's* notion of the religious life. Should a religious teacher have a relevantly different notion of the religious life, the argument will not go through.

Just as important as the truth, and of the two the even more important one, is the mode in which the truth is accepted, and it is of slight help if one gets millions to accept the truth *if by the very mode of their acceptance they are transposed into untruth*. And therefore all good-naturedness, all persuasion, all bargaining, all direct attraction with the aid of one's own person…all such things are a misunderstanding, in relation to the truth a forgery by which, according to one's ability, one helps any number of people to acquire a *semblance of truth*" (CUP, 1:247; my emphasis).

Recall at this point that making an appeal to one's own authority in order to get the learner to form some belief or perform some action involves an attempt to establish a *direct* and not a *Socratic* or *maieutic* relationship with the learner (see §1 of chapter 2). Thus, it qualifies as a kind of *direct communication*. Using this information, we can reconstruct the argument given above so that it connects up with Climacus' specific criticisms of direct communication.

P1.   The conventional purpose of an appeal to authority is to get the learner to form some belief or perform some action at least in part on the basis of the cited authority. (Assumption about the Nature of Appeals to Authority)

P2.   An appeal to authority is a kind of direct communication. (Definition of Direct Communication)

C1.   The conventional purpose of the kind of direct communication described in P2 is to get the learner to form some belief or perform some action at least in part of the basis of a cited authority. (From P1 and P2)

C2.   If the kind of direct communication described in P2 serves its conventional purpose, the learner will in fact form some belief or perform some action at least in part on the basis of a cited authority. (From C1)

P3.   A person cannot become authentically religious on the basis of another person's authority. (Individuality Corollary)

C3.   If the kind of direct communication described in P2 serves its conventional purpose, the learner will not become authentically religious (unless she otherwise would). (From C2 and P3)

This version of the argument allows us to understand two of Climacus' most explicit criticisms of direct communication, namely that it is "a fraud toward God (which possibly defrauds him of the worship of another person in truth)… a fraud toward another human being (who possibly attains only a relative God-relationship)" (CUP, 1:75). But, if we take one more step, we get something more:

C4.   It is *inconsistent* for the teacher to use the kind of direct communication described in P2 with the aim of helping the learner become authentically religious. (From C3)

Here we find the justification for Climacus' most devastating criticism. To wit, direct communication is actually "a fraud that brings [the communicator] into contradiction with his entire thought" (CUP, 1:75).

Although we have developed Kierkegaard's argument by using the first part of the individuality corollary, using the second part will work just as well. The second part of the corollary states that the person making a religious commitment must not depend volitionally on others. Consequently, for reasons analogous to those provided above, the teacher who intends to help his students become authentically religious by providing volitional assistance also engages in an incoherent action. Of course, providing volitional assistance involves establishing a direct and not a Socratic or maieutic relationship with the learner. Hence, it too qualifies as a kind of direct communication (see §1 of chapter 2). Thus, we can see how the second part of the individuality corollary also places restrictions on the use of direct communication.

2.4. CLARIFYING A POTENTIAL MISUNDERSTANDING

Immediately after Climacus' explicit criticisms of direct communication, he provides us with the famous story of the man who wants no followers. The story helps us set aside a potential misunderstanding of Climacus' criticisms and so it is worth examining closely. Here is the relevant passage:

> Suppose it was the life-view of a religiously existing subject that one may not have followers, that this would be treason to both God and men; suppose he were a bit obtuse (for if it takes a bit more than honesty to do well in this world, obtuseness is always required in order to be truly successful and to be truly understood by many) and announced this directly with unction and pathos—what then? Well, then he would be understood and soon ten would apply who, just for a free shave each week, would offer their services in proclaiming this doctrine; that is, in further substantiation of the truth of his doctrine, he would have been so very fortunate as to gain followers who accepted and spread this doctrine about having no follower (CUP, 1:75).

One way to understand this story is to see the problem as lying on the side of the listeners. After all, they seem to misinterpret the speaker's utterance. He intends to issue an edict that people should appropriate in their lives—what Climacus calls an "existence-communication." But the listeners interpret him as offering a doctrine to be circulated and believed. As Daise would put it, they mistake the speaker's imperative statement for an

indicative one (Daise 1999, 28-30). The moral of the story, therefore, is that we should not use direct communication because it is prone to this kind of misinterpretation.

The upshot of such a reading is that Climacus' criticisms of direct communication sound overblown. Although *some* people might confuse an imperative statement for an indicative one, the problem does not seem terribly common. It might be prevalent enough to caution us away from using direct communication in a few very specific situations, but it will not be enough to proscribe the use of direct communication across the board. Yet, such a universal rejection seems precisely what Climacus has in mind with his assertion that direct communication is a fraud that brings the religious person into contradiction with his whole way of thinking. Thus his stance is just too strong for the provided line of reasoning.

However, if we take a hint from the previous section, we can see that this reading misses the point. The real problem is not on the side of the listeners but on the side of the speaker. He utilizes a means that is incommensurable with his ends. On the one hand, he desires to get people to have no followers. But, on the other hand, the means he uses to pursue this goal, viz. direct communication, is structured precisely to create followers. That is to say, the conventional purpose of his mode of communication is to create followers. Thus, if his communication serves its conventional purpose, it fails to achieve his ultimate goal. And the only way he can achieve his ultimate goal is if he abandons the kind of communication he utilizes, i.e. if he abandons direct communication.

2.5.   ADDRESSING A POTENTIAL OBJECTION

Before moving on to the irrationality corollary, we must pause to investigate a potential objection. For it seems Climacus' arguments overlook an obvious possibility. Climacus proves that a teacher cannot successfully help people realize the religious ideal by using direct communication. But we need not think of the teacher who uses direct communication as trying to bring about the religious ideal. We can think of him, instead, as trying to bring about a lower level of commitment. The teacher, of course, would not want the learner to remain at the lower level. He would want this only to be a transitional state—a kind of stepping stone along the way to the religious ideal (see Fabro 1967 176-

177). Thus the teacher would not see it as his task to take the learner to his final resting place, but only to start the learner on a journey to that point.

If we think of the religious teacher in this way, Climacus' objections to direct communication fall away. There is no problem with the teacher's using this form of discourse, which makes listeners dependent upon him, because he does not aim to make people independent from him. (At least he does not have this aim initially.) Thus he does not run aground on the means-ends contradiction that lies at the center of Climacus' worries.

There is reason for thinking Kierkegaard would have some sympathy for this account of the religious teacher. First of all, like so many of his contemporaries, he embraces a developmental picture of human existence. We find this in no less conspicuous a place than his famous stages on life's way. Second, Kierkegaard advocates bringing people through the stages gradually. He has Climacus describe at great length how the early pseudonymous authorship introduces readers to increasingly deeper levels of inwardness one step at a time (CUP, 1:251-270). And, in his own descriptions of the authorship, he emphasizes how crucial it is that a religious teacher start at the level of the audience and not at the level of the highest ideal (PV, 54).

Do these considerations mean Kierkegaard must make room for direct communication? I do not think so. Although Kierkegaard may desire to bring his readers through the stages of existence gradually, there is one transition he wants to effect right away. From the outset, he concerns himself with moving people *from* the point of depending on others for their decisions *to* the point of taking personal responsibility for their decisions. That is to say, he emphasizes the individuality corollary as an important part of even the first steps of human development. We can see this emphasis in his decision to publish the accounts of the lower stages under pseudonyms. And we can see it in his refusal to tell readers who he thinks wins the debate between the aesthete and the ethicist in *Either/Or*. Both of these tropes constitute attempts by Kierkegaard to force people to make up their own minds on existential matters.

Once we account for this point, all the problems with direct communication return. For, on the one hand, Kierkegaard always tries to engender *independence* in others. And, on the other hand, the kinds of direct communication we have been

discussing involve trying to engender *dependence* in others. Therefore, someone with Kierkegaard's aims will always find the kinds of direct communication we have been discussing self-defeating.

3.   THE IRRATIONALITY COROLLARY

The conclusion of the previous section would not have come as a surprise to Kierkegaard's contemporaries. Many of them also rejected the strategy of using authority to get people to engage in the religious life. This line of thinking was embodied, among other places, in Hegel's "right of subjectivity." The right of subjectivity stated that each individual subject must be allowed to accept only those maxims which were in accord with his own judgment (Beiser 2005, 230-231; *Philosophy of Right* §132). This principle had its roots in two Enlightenment commitments. First, reason was the ultimate guide as to which beliefs one should hold and which courses of action one should pursue. Second, human beings were rational creatures. From these two commitments it followed that each individual had the ability to judge for himself whether some principle or belief was worth accepting. He needed only to consult his own intellect (ibid.). This ability to judge for oneself was important because it allowed a person to be self-sufficient and independent from others. For the Hegelians, this meant it allowed a person to be free. Thus, subjectivity ultimately became a right because it paved the way to the goal of human existence, realizing freedom (Beiser 2005, 197-198).

The upshot of the right of subjectivity was a phenomenon Kierkegaard pejoratively called "leveling". If all people had the right to judge for themselves whether a theory, belief, or law was valid, no one person could be raised above the others as an authoritative leader. Such a leader would merely be infringing upon the others' right to self-determination and ultimately the others' freedom (see Pattison 1999, 72-73). Taken to its extreme, as it was during the first days of the French Revolution, leveling entailed that each soldier be permitted to reject the commands of his superior if he judged them to be irrational (Beiser 2005, 31). Thus, although the reasons were different, the Enlightenment thinkers found no more place for a direct communication in which the communicator functioned as an authority than Kierkegaard did.

But if Enlightenment rationality closed the door to one kind of direct communication, it opened the door to another. It showed that the way to engage in religious pedagogy, indeed pedagogy in general, was through rational argumentation. And this was something that Kierkegaard could seemingly accept. On the one hand, rational argumentation would secure the learner's freedom and individuality. The learner would not be *forced* to agree with the conclusion because he would be permitted to judge for himself whether it merited approval. On the other hand, rational argumentation would secure a "proper" outcome. Because the principles of reason were universal, all intelligent people would judge in the same way. So if the teacher thought the religious ideal was rational and hence worth pursuing, he could rest assured that the learner would come to a matching conclusion. All he would have to do is explain to the learner why he himself found the ideal worthwhile.

Kierkegaard, however, did not go down the Enlightenment path. He belonged to an important camp of thinkers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who believed that the Enlightenment project of trying to found religion on reason was bankrupt. Exactly *why* Kierkegaard embraced the counter-Enlightenment tradition is a controversial issue. The most popular explanation is to say that Kierkegaard thought some Christian doctrines were paradoxical. He believed, or so this line of thinking goes, that the Incarnation posited the existence of a Being that was simultaneously finite and infinite, temporal and eternal (CUP, 1:210; PC, 125-6). Committing oneself to such a doctrine would thus involve committing oneself to a kind of contradiction. And reason certainly would not support that (see Hannay 1982, 106-110; Garelick 1965, 28; Pojman 1984, 136; Blanshard 1968, 14-16; Allison 1967, 445). This explanation has come under fire in the secondary literature. Several commentators have argued that Kierkegaard did not think the Incarnation constituted an *actual* contradiction but only an *apparent* one (e.g. Evans 1989, 347-362; 1992, 96-118). So it is by no means obvious that the most popular explanation will do the job.

But we need not embrace the most popular explanation to see why Kierkegaard was an irrationalist. As commentators such as Robert Adams and Alasdair MacIntyre have noted, it is not just the *content* but also the *nature* of religious belief that stands in tension with reason for Kierkegaard (R. Adams 1977, 325-333; MacIntyre 2001 39-43).

In what follows, I will pursue a version of this line of interpretation. I will show, in particular, how Kierkegaard's requirement that religious belief be unconditional entails that it also be irrational.

3.1. THE FAILURE OF OBJECTIVE REASONING

Kierkegaard's argument that objective reasoning cannot serve as a basis for unconditional commitment occurs at two levels. The first level targets evidential reasoning in particular. It arises early on in *Postscript*, in the form of what Robert Adams calls "the postponement argument" (R. Adams 1977, 325-328; see also Evans 1998, 108; Roberts 1980, 82-85).[52] The second level has a broader scope and accommodates the potential shortcomings of the first level. The raw material for the second level can also be found in *Postscript*, but its most explicit statement comes in Kierkegaard's later journal entries. We will look at the two levels in turn.

Roughly put, the postponement argument states that a person who insists on having empirical evidence for his religious commitment will never actually make the commitment. He will refrain from making the commitment *today* because the current evidence for Christianity is less than convincing. He will wait until tomorrow, or the next day, or whenever people uncover better evidence. But since a total commitment requires an impossible amount of evidence, every day will be like today. The man will always find himself wanting more certainty than he currently has. Thus he will perpetually postpone his commitment as he waits for a ship that will never come in.

Adams turns the underlying idea here into a formal argument, which we can present as follows:

P1.   Authentic religious faith requires total commitment: a resolution not to abandon faith under any possible circumstances.[53]

P2.   One cannot be totally committed to a belief that one bases on an inquiry in which one recognizes any possible need to revise the results.

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[52] Lest we think that the postponement argument is something we can only attribute to Climacus, note that we also find versions of it in two works that Kierkegaard pens under his own name, *Christian Discourses* (88) and *Judge for Yourself!* (195n, 195-196).

[53] Here I follow Adams in using the language of "total commitment." However, his use of this phrase maps onto my use of "unconditional commitment" as evidenced by the definition he gives and the fact that he lapses into talking about "unconditional commitments" at one point.

C1. Authentic religious faith cannot be based on an inquiry in which one recognizes any possible need to revise the results.

P3. In every empirical inquiry there is always, objectively considered, some epistemic possibility that the results of the inquiry will need to be revised in view of new evidence.

C2. Authentic religious faith cannot be based on an empirical inquiry (R. Adams 1977, 326-327).

The argument is valid, but we must examine the premises closely.

The most controversial premise is the first one. Both Adams and Evans object to it on the grounds that it fails to account for human beings' humble stature (R. Adams 1977, 327-328; Evans 1998, 110). We are fallible creatures, they say, and "must admit to the possibility of being mistaken" (Evans 1998, 110). The totally or unconditionally committed person closes himself off to this possibility because he will never willingly revise his views. He thus lacks the requisite amount of humility.

This is an important objection to the ideal of unconditional commitment and, unfortunately, one that Kierkegaard never explicitly addresses. The most relevant thing he does say is that his religious ideal will appear overblown to outsiders. He admits that the secular mindset, with its motto "everything in moderation," will see unconditional commitments as a kind of lunacy and intoxication (JFY, 106-107). Therefore, we might think that Kierkegaard would simply bite the bullet in response to the accusation of hubris. Of course, that does not mean he would be defenseless. He could support the ideal of unconditional commitment from other corners. He could support it, for example, by appealing to the eudaimonist arguments discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Ultimately, such justifications might not outweigh the worry about hubris. But, noting the potential problem, we will let these justifications suffice for now.

The second premise is less problematic. Robert Adams defends it by imagining the person who actually bases his belief on an inquiry in which the results might have to be revised. He notes that two things could happen in the event that new evidence comes in and the results do have to be revised. First, the person could alter or abandon his belief. If so, he would reveal that he was not totally or unconditionally committed to his belief. Second, the person could stick to his belief. But if he did, then he would not really be basing his belief on the results after all. Therefore, in neither of the two possible cases do we encounter a person who bases an unconditional commitment on results which might

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have to be revised. And therefore, as the second premise states, we must reject the idea that it can be done.

The third premise refers us to the notion of "empirical inquiries," and in order to assess its merit, we must explain what this phrase means. As Climacus sets out the territory in *Postscript*, the phrase refers to inquiries into the reliability of (a) the Bible, (b) the Church, and (c) the chain of witnesses extending back to Christ. Given this specification, the third premise is probably correct. However much these empirical inquiries accomplish, they will never provide us with *absolute* certainty. They will never be able to overcome the possibility that some future discovery will overturn the results and lead to a new conclusion. Thus, as Climacus says, these empirical inquiries will "never arrive at anything more than an approximation [to certainty]" (CUP, 1:24). And even an approximation to certainty will be too unstable for the person who wants to make an *unconditional* commitment.[54]

But even if Climacus is wrong about the third premise, it does not matter. For Climacus thinks he can reject the third premise and still maintain the conclusion that objective reasoning is insufficient for religious commitment. That is to say, he believes that, even if scholarly inquiries into Christianity produced absolute certainty, they would not thereby produce faith (CUP, 1:22). He makes the point explicit with respect to inquiries into the Bible:

> I assume, then, that with regard to the Bible there has been a successful demonstration of whatever any theological scholar in his happiest moment could ever have wished to demonstrate about the Bible…Thus everything is assumed to be in order with regard to the Holy Scriptures—what then? Has the person who did not believe come a single step closer to faith? No, not a single step. Faith does not result from straightforward scholarly deliberation… (CUP, 1:28-29).

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[54] Creating problems for empirical inquiries, however, does not show that *all* objective approaches to Christianity fail. There are objective approaches that do not appeal to empirical considerations. For example, there are *a priori* arguments for certain parts of Christian dogma, such as the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. The person who bases his faith on these arguments does not have to worry about the threat of future empirical discoveries. He can be completely indifferent to whatever the newest studies show. Consequently, he seems to escape the problem posed by the postponement argument.

Climacus does not put any more trust in *a priori* bases for faith than he does in empirical bases. *Pace* Hegel and the Danish Hegelians, he denies that there can be a proof for Christian dogma that could begin without presuppositions (CUP, 1:111-115). Any premise set forth would have to be argued for. These arguments would in turn contain their own premises that would have to be supported. An infinite regress or a vicious circle would ensue. Thus, *a priori* philosophical inquiry has a kind of endlessness or infinity of its own analogous to the endlessness of empirical inquiry (CUP, 1:112). And thus those who approach religious commitment by way of the *a priori* will succumb to a similar kind of procrastination.

Climacus has a host of arguments in reserve to support this position. One of the most compelling builds off the central thesis of the present chapter. It takes the ideal of unconditional commitment, already present in the postponement argument, and pushes it to another level. The steps to this argument run as follows:

The first premise consists of the religious ideal as Climacus presents it in the heart of *Postscript*. In a motto that Kierkegaard frequently repeats, Climacus says that the religious subject takes God along "*à tout prix* [at any price]" (CUP, 1:200; see also PC, 115; UDVS, 87, 140). Given the context, we are led to believe that "any" price includes that of going against rationality. The religious individual is willing "to do away with introductory observations, reliabilities, demonstrations from effects, and the whole mob of pawnbrokers and guarantors" (CUP, 1:212). He is willing, as Climacus expresses it at one point, to endure "the martyrdom of believing against the understanding" (CUP, 1:232).

We can juxtapose this point with the concession made above as follows. Even if a person possesses absolute certainty with respect to the Bible or God's existence, Climacus' view entails that he must be willing to go without it. We need not envision some lunatic situation here in which the person continues believing after his absolutely certain proofs have been refuted. We need only envision a situation in which the person no longer has (or never did have) access to the proofs. Perhaps he grows up in a time or a place where word of absolute certainty has not yet reached. Or perhaps worldly concerns lead him to forget the details of the proofs so that he (wrongly) comes to doubt whether they do indeed offer certainty. In these or similar situations, the authentic religious person would remain committed to God. Anyone who would not remain committed reveals the existence of a condition on his commitment—a price he is not willing to pay for the sake of his allegiance to God. In other words, he reveals that he falls short of the religious ideal.

The second premise of the argument picks out a truth about commitments in general. No commitment can be made on the basis of that to which it is indifferent. If a commitment will be kept whether or not some particular thing is present, the commitment cannot be based on that thing. Case in point: if a commitment is indifferent to the presence or absence of reasons, it cannot be based on reasons. (This premise holds for

analogous reasons to those used to support the second premise of the postponement argument.)

The conclusion that follows from these two premises is that a truly religious or unconditional commitment cannot be made on the basis of reasons. Kierkegaard makes the point in a striking journal entry:

> The unconditioned cannot be assisted by reasons—for whatever needs to be supported by reasons is *eo ipso* not the unconditioned (JP, 4:4895).

And again in the following entry:

> Just as the statement must read: faith cannot be comprehended; the maximum is, it can be comprehended that it cannot be comprehended—so also: reasons cannot be given for an unconditioned; the maximum is, reasons can be given for the impossibility of giving reasons for an unconditioned (JP, 4:4896).[55]

It is important to note, once again, that it is not a matter of there being *no* reasons. Although Kierkegaard believes this to be the case, he is prepared to engage those who disagree. The point is rather that reasons are, so to speak, out of play. Even if one had them, one could not appeal to them in defense of the unconditioned commitment.

3.2. THE POSSIBILITY OF A PRAGMATIC DEFENSE

We must now return to a point made earlier in the chapter. For, despite everything we just said, it remains the case that Kierkegaard offers a number of eudaimonist-style defenses of unconditional commitment. These defenses seem to indicate that Kierkegaard remains open to a kind of rationality not yet discussed, namely pragmatic rationality (eudaimonist-style defenses falling roughly into the pragmatic camp). Indeed, a significant number of scholars have interpreted him in this way (R. Adams 1977, 333-334; Hannay 1982 119-122; Mehl 2001; Piety 2001; Rogers 2000; Rudd 2001). So before we conclude that Kierkegaard is an irrationalist, or that irrationality follows as a necessary corollary of his religious ideal, we must take this interpretation into account.

A straightforward pragmatic defense of religious commitment, however, will clearly not work. And it will not work for the same reasons that appealing to evidence will not work. True religious commitments must be "hyper-stable"; they must remain in

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[55] The fact that we find this point in Kierkegaard's journals overturns McKinnon's claim that Kierkegaard should not be taken as an irrationalist because considerations supporting an irrationalist reading only arise in the pseudonymous literature (McKinnon 1969).

place even if reasons are not available. And the domain of reasons must not, in *ad hoc* fashion, exclude pragmatic ones. Kierkegaard says as much in "Purity of Heart" when he states that the religious individual must be willing to suffer all hardships and forego all rewards. The language in the relevant passages is different, referring to "willing one thing" and "the Good" instead of "unconditional commitment" and "God," but the basic point is there:

> To will the good for the sake of reward is double-mindedness; therefore to will one thing is to will the good without regard for reward; in truth to will one thing is to will the good but not to want the reward for it in the world (UDVS, 39).

> The person who wills the good in truth *even hopes for punishment*, but accordingly the person who in his double-mindedness *wills the good only out of fear of punishment* is far from willing the good in truth (UDVS, 55-56, emphasis in original).

Therefore, following the argument developed above, the religious individual cannot *straightforwardly* base his unconditional commitment upon pragmatic considerations.

Nevertheless, it seems possible to develop a *more sophisticated version* of the pragmatic justification that gets around this problem. To see how, we can appeal to an analogy Kierkegaard himself uses—that of marital commitment. Getting married is a good analogy because it involves something like an unconditional commitment. In the marital vows, people promise to stay true to their future spouses in good times and bad, in sickness and health…to the point of death. Therefore, the marital commitment *should* suffer from all the same problems that the religious commitment does. Yet, people get married all the time and a fair number of those who do so keep their commitments. Finding out why this happens should help solve the problem with religious commitments.

Of course, people get and stay married for all kinds of reasons. And some of those reasons are better than others. The person who gets married because he finds his future wife attractive hits on a poor reason. It will not sustain his commitment in the event that she loses her aesthetic appeal. So too for the person who marries because his future wife makes him happy. This reason will also, properly speaking, fail to support the marital commitment. However, if we alter the latter reason just slightly, we find a justification that seems to work. Imagine a man who marries because it offers him the *possibility* of happiness. He believes that, given his own character and that of his wife, the two of them will likely flourish if they make a life-long commitment. He acknowledges that, of

course, happiness is not guaranteed and the two of them could grow to hate each other. And he affirms that in such a case he would have to remain married. In fact, he even affirms that once he ties the knot he will remain with his wife *no matter what*. However, he is so passionate about the mere possibility of happiness with her that he judges it to be worth the risk.

Prima facie, it seems Kierkegaard would want the religious individual to follow in the path of our married man. The married man's commitment, after all, exhibits many of the features Kierkegaard wants to build into the religious commitment. It requires extreme passion, involves great risk, and, most importantly, will not be broken under any conditions. In addition, the story of the married man lines up with what Kierkegaard has to say about Socrates' religiousness, which often serves as a precursor to Christian religiousness (JP, 1:73). The relevant passage comes in *Postscript*, where he has Climacus explain why Socrates believes in the immortality of the soul. Departing from Plato's account in the *Phaedo*, which appeals to the "three proofs," Climacus declares that Socrates has faith in the immortality of the soul because it offers the mere possibility of happiness (CUP, 1:201). As Kierkegaard puts the point in the *Journals and Papers*:

> Socrates did not first of all try to collect some proofs for the immortality of the soul in order then to live, believing by virtue of the proofs. Just the opposite. He said: 'The possibility of immortality occupies me to the point that I unconditionally venture to wager my whole life unconditionally upon it' (JP, 1:73).

Finally, it must be noted that Kierkegaard structures *Postscript* itself around a version of the married man's story. Climacus tells us at the outset of the book that the *sine qua non* of the religious life is an infinite, passionate concern for one's own eternal happiness (CUP, 1:16; see also CD, 188-189; PC, 67). It is this concern alone, he says, which allows the prospective Christian to make the leap of faith over the ditch of insufficient evidence.

Ultimately, however, I do not think Kierkegaard can endorse a religious version of the married man's story. Why not? Well, for all the similarities between marital commitment and religious commitment, there is one significant difference. The religious commitment, unlike the marital commitment, must be *entered into* unconditionally and not just *kept* unconditionally. Not only must there be no conditions placed on the

religious individual's willingness to *maintain* his commitment, there must also be no conditions placed on his willingness to *make* the commitment in the first place.

The additional requirement entails that nothing can be placed before God as something that must obtain *first* before the commitment to God occurs. Kierkegaard explains in a late journal entry:

> You must commit yourself unconditionally to Christ; nothing, neither the most trifling nor the most important thing, must stand between you and him in such a way that it is a condition and signifies that in a certain situation you cannot commit yourself (JP, 4:4894).

To illustrate the idea, Kierkegaard uses the Gospel story of the man who insists on burying his father before following Jesus. The man fails to follow Jesus unconditionally because he postulates a situation in which he would not follow, namely the one in which Jesus forbids him to partake in the burial. The man should have made the decision to follow Jesus *first* and then asked about his father:

> He should have committed himself unconditionally, should have said: Even if I am asked to give up doing what I want so very much to do—bury my father—all right, I will give it up. I commit myself unconditionally; I do not make burying my father a prior condition—no, after I have unconditionally committed myself I request of you that this may be permitted (JP, 4:4894).

This additional requirement clearly does not hold for marital commitments. There are a large number of things it is legitimate to place before getting married. I could tell my beloved that we must *first* finish graduate school or *first* get her parents' approval. Saying such things might remove some of the luster of the marriage, but it would not disrupt the marital commitment as such. There is nothing wrong with placing conditions on *getting* married.

How does this distinction help explain why the religious person cannot follow in the steps of the married man? Notice that the proposed justification for getting married plays on the fact that the additional requirement does not have to be met. When the married man says he bases his commitment on the possibility of future happiness, he places a condition on getting married. He demands that it *first* become clear that happiness with his potential spouse is possible (or even likely). We see this demand nowhere more clearly than in the fact that the man may pass by a number of candidate spouses with whom it seems unlikely that he will be happy. The religious individual

cannot do this. He cannot place *any* conditions on entering into a relationship with God, not even the condition that it offer him the possibility of eternal happiness:

> God is not like something one buys in a shop, or like a piece of property that one, after having sagaciously and circumspectly examined, measured, and calculated for a long time, decides is worth buying (CD, 88).

Therefore, the religious individual cannot utilize the same justification as the married man.

Another way to put the point here is to say that Kierkegaard equates choosing God unconditionally with choosing (obedience to) God as one's highest good.[56] There must be no thing higher than God with which one's choice of God competes (CD, 88-89). On this line of thought, it is quite obvious why pragmatic justifications fail. All such justifications proceed by postulating some good for the sake of which one makes the commitment. By doing so, the justifications posit a good that is higher than God. But, by hypothesis, God (or obedience to God) is supposed to be the highest good. Thus pragmatic justifications necessarily fail at doing what they set out to do.

In conclusion, Kierkegaard's ideal of religious commitment *does* entail irrationality as a corollary. No reason of any kind can be given for it—not even a sophisticated pragmatic one. Simply put, there is no "why":

> Thus there is but one view left, but it is adequate—it is that a person says to himself: As far as venturing everything is concerned, I have no "Why" at all… That is to say: with the intellectual awareness which a more eminent individual may have these days, no consideration of ends-in-view can get him actually to venture everything. We urgently need the unconditioned again. In the unconditioned all teleology vanishes. We have been living in the inversion that the more "Why's" there are the easier it is for a man to be able to venture everything—no, every "Why" simply subtracts. Only when every "Why" vanishes in the night of the unconditioned and becomes silent in the silence of the unconditioned, only then can a man venture everything; if he dimly glimpses one "Why," something is impaired, he sees 1,000 "Why's"—watch out, he will never venture a thing but will become a professor of the 1,000 "Why's" (JP, 4:4901).

What does this conclusion mean for the pragmatic or eudaimonist justifications of the religious life that we find in Kierkegaard's works? At the least, it means we must treat them with caution. They can, perhaps, explain why unconditional commitment to God is a worthy ideal. But they cannot offer us a basis for entering into such a commitment.

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[56] This thought lies behind all of the arguments in this chapter that turn on Kierkegaard's extreme notion of unconditional commitment.

3.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION

Just as the individuality corollary placed restrictions on the kind of communication a religious teacher can employ, so too does the irrationality corollary. And the argument is basically the same. The irrationality corollary tells us that authentic religious faith cannot be based on reasons. Consequently, any direct communication that aims to bring about authentic religious faith by way of giving reasons is an incoherent act.[57] Here's why. The conventional purpose of the act of giving someone reasons is to get that someone to believe or act at least in part on the basis of those reasons. Thus, if this kind of direct communication serves its conventional purpose, that someone will in fact believe or act on the basis of those reasons. Now this belief or action may take on the *appearance* of authentic religious faith. But it will not *be* that. For, as noted, authentic religious faith cannot be based on reasons. Therefore, if the direct communication serves its conventional purpose, it fails to achieve its ultimate end of getting the person to become authentically religious.

Therefore, Kierkegaard says, the good religious teacher "dares not give reasons at any price; he must say: This is a betrayal of the unconditioned" (JP, 4:4895). If he does give reasons he "reveals that he is a blockhead who cannot think two thoughts together, for 'reasons' by means of the reasons transpose into relativity precisely that to which they are added, put it on the same level as that which is such only to a certain degree, like a pasha with seven reasons, another with only three reasons" (JP, 4:4900).[58]

4. CONCLUSION: BRINGING TOGETHER THE TWO COROLLARIES

Let us pause to take stock of what we have accomplished in this chapter. We began by identifying Kierkegaard's religious ideal as one that involved an authentic, unconditional commitment. Upon inspection, we discovered that this ideal had two corollaries:

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[57] For an explanation of why giving someone reasons counts as an act of direct communication, see §1.3 of chapter 2.

[58] There is another side to the coin here. If the religious teacher cannot successfully provide an explanation for why others should become religious, he also cannot provide an explanation for why he himself has become religious (if he indeed has). The most he can say is that, by virtue of the absurd, he has willed it (CUP, 1:100). But he can provide no justification, no answer to the question, "Why?" (JP, 1:488; see also PC, 116-117, 120). In this respect, he finds himself in a situation remarkably similar to that of Abraham. As Johannes de Silentio describes it, Abraham too could not explain why he was willing to do what he was willing to do. He was "quite incapable of making himself understood" (FT, 74, 76).

individuality and irrationality. Both corollaries placed restrictions on the way an aspiring teacher could help his students realize the religious ideal. In particular, each corollary ruled out the use of a central kind of direct communication (in the sense defined in §1 of chapter 2). The individuality corollary entailed that the teacher could not appeal to his own authority, utilize his personal charisma, or otherwise coerce his students into faith. The irrationality corollary entailed that the teacher could not argue his students into becoming religious.

The natural question to ask at this point is whether there is anything left for the religious teacher to do. At first glance, it seems as though the answer is "no." There is nothing the teacher can tell to the learner or otherwise do for him that could serve as a basis for his becoming authentically religious. If the learner is to come to faith—if he is to realize the religious ideal—the impetus must come from within him. He must make the requisite movement of the will on his own.[59]

But notice what this means. The pedagogical situation just described is what Kierkegaard would call a Socratic or maieutic one. The pedagogical goal requires the learner to be independent of the teacher. To use Kierkegaard's metaphorical language, the learner must "stand alone" in order to reach the goal. Therefore, if the teacher wants to help, he can—but he has to function as a Socratic midwife. He has to help the learner in such a way that the learner still stands alone. Now "helping the learner stand alone" is just another way of talking about indirect communication (see §1 of chapter 2). Therefore, we can conclude that if the teacher wants to help the learner become religious, he must engage in indirect communication. This is the first proof of the indispensability thesis.

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[59] Kierkegaard's rejection of Pelagianism makes the situation more complicated than I suggest here. Because he accepts the doctrine of original sin, Kierkegaard believes the human will is corrupt. In this corrupt state, it cannot choose to be obedient to God. Thus the will must first be transformed before obedience to God is possible (JP, 6:6966). This transformation happens only by way of God's grace. (In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus describes this point by saying that human beings must receive the condition for salvation from God.) It is important to add, however, that Kierkegaard does not believe God's grace is *sufficient* to bring about obedience to God (JP, 4:4551). God does not force himself upon the learner. He constrains himself in such a way that the learner still gets to decide the matter for herself (CUP, 1:243-244; JP, 2:1251; 2:1450). In particular, God allows the learner to decide whether or not to humble herself before him and accept his grace. And there is nothing anyone can tell the learner that can get her to do this. It requires a movement of the will that she can only make for herself.

Of course, to say that the religious teacher must use indirect communication is a bit abstract. For it to be helpful, we must add some concrete details. We must explain what in particular this kind of communication involves for Kierkegaard. We will turn to a discussion of this point in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4:

INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AND SELF-DECEPTION

At the outset of chapter 3, I presented an account of the projects for which indirect communication is allegedly indispensable. That account contained three claims: First, Kierkegaard assigns indirect communication *in the sense of the maieutic method* to the project of helping others become religious. Second, Kierkegaard thinks we maieutically help others become religious in part by helping them with the further task of understanding the nature of existence (especially religious existence). And, third, Kierkegaard maintains that accomplishing this further task requires indirect communication *in the sense of using artful rhetorical devices*.

The previous chapter addressed the first of these claims. The present chapter will focus on the latter two. I will begin (in §1) by explaining how Kierkegaard's use of the maieutic method revolves around the project of imparting information about the nature of being or existence. I will then (in §2) look at one standard account of why imparting such information requires the use of artful rhetorical devices. I will find it lacking. Next (in §3), to pave the way for a better account, I will examine a peculiar problem that plagues one faction of Kierkegaard's audience. As I will show, the peculiar problem is that of self-deception. Finally (in §4), I will discuss the reasons Kierkegaard gives for thinking that he needs to use artful rhetorical devices in order to accommodate the self-deception that plagues his audience. I will conclude (in §5) that, while this argument has some merit, it does not have as much as Kierkegaard would like us to believe.

The ultimate upshot of the chapter will be that we must draw on other resources if we wish to explain adequately Kierkegaard's claim that imparting information requires artful rhetorical devices. Doing so will be the goal of the final two chapters of the dissertation.

1.   KIERKEGAARD'S MAIN PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY

Recall how, at the end of chapter 3, it was tempting to despair over the project of religious pedagogy. Given all the restrictions discussed in the chapter, the religious teacher had seemingly few options. He could not make use of customarily forbidden

tactics such as manipulation and coercion; and he could not have recourse to the generally more acceptable practice of providing arguments. He had to allow people to make the religious decision entirely on their own. Consequently, the only hope for the religious teacher was to find some way to *help* people stand alone with respect to their decision. At first glance, talk of "helping people stand alone" sounded promising given that Kierkegaard used the phrase to describe his "maieutic method" or "indirect communication." But it was not *all that* promising, since the original phrase as well as the related terms remained empty formalisms devoid of any real content.

Now it may well be that, upon reflection, we could drum up a number of different ways to "help people stand alone" with respect to their religious decision. But one seemingly fruitful way to go would be to lay out people's existential options for them. This would include, among other things, helping people understand the nature of the religious mode of existence, its drawbacks and advantages, as well as those of the other available modes of existence.

As it turns out, this is the path Kierkegaard himself takes. He tells us several times in *On My Work as an Author* that the category of his entire authorship is "to make people aware" of the essentially religious or essentially Christian mode of existence (6n, 6-7, 7n, 12). This series of assertions culminates in the following passage:

> My strategy was: with the help of God to utilize everything to make clear what in truth Christianity's requirement is—even if not one single person would accept it (OMWA, 16).

Later, in *Armed Neutrality*, he adds:

> But what I have wanted and want to *achieve* through my work, what I also regard as the most important, is first of all to make clear what is involved in being a Christian, to present the picture of a Christian in all its ideal, that is, true form, worked out to every true limit, submitting myself even before any other to be judged by this picture (AN, 129).

And again:

> Therefore, to present in every way—dialectical, pathos-filled (in the various forms of pathos), psychological, modernized by continual reference to modern Christendom and to the fallacies of a science and scholarship—the ideal picture of being a Christian: this was and is the task (AN, 131).

Given this textual evidence, it is safe to say we have located Kierkegaard's basic strategy.

However, does this "making aware" strategy really provide Kierkegaard with what he needs? Does it really allow him to "help people stand alone"? I think so. First, it clearly provides people with something *helpful*. Few people would succeed at becoming Christian if they lacked awareness of what it took to do so. Second, the "making aware" strategy allows people to *stand alone* in the relevant way. To be more precise, as long as the religious teacher stops with making people aware and goes no further, he does not violate either of the restrictions on religious pedagogy outlined in chapter 3. He does not push people (i) rhetorically or (ii) argumentatively towards the Christian option. Kierkegaard discusses this issue in *Point of View*:

> Compel a person to an opinion, a conviction, a belief—in all eternity, that I cannot do. But one thing I can do, in one sense the first thing (since it is the condition for the next thing: to accept this view, conviction, belief), in another sense the last thing if he refuses the next: I can compel him to become aware…By compelling him to become aware, I succeed in compelling him to judge. Now he judges. But what he judges is not in my power. Perhaps he judges the very opposite of what I desire (PV, 50).

Thus, the "making aware" strategy meets both conditions required for "helping people stand alone".

By focusing on Kierkegaard's "making aware" strategy, we have done two things. First, we have fleshed out one concrete way to understand what it means to "help people stand alone". In so doing, we have alleviated the threat of despair that hovered over the project of religious pedagogy at the end of the last chapter. Second, we have found the connection between (a) the maieutic method or indirect communication (represented by the "helping people stand alone" slogan) and (b) the project of imparting information about the nature of being or existence (represented by the "making aware" strategy). That is, we have accomplished the first goal of the present chapter.

2.   THE PROBLEM OF ATTRACTING FOLLOWERS

It is not easy to explain why Kierkegaard thinks he must use indirect communication in the sense of artful rhetorical devices to "make people aware" of their existential options. The main problem is that, at least at first glance, it seems as though he could "make people aware" of their options *without* using any such special devices. It seems he could

just come right out and straightforwardly explain what it would take for people to become Christian. Thus, it seems indirect communication is not really indispensable for the task.

One standard response to this problem is to bring up a potential error Kierkegaard wants to prevent.[60] Kierkegaard thinks that, when it comes to making the religious decision, people often suffer from weakness of the will. In particular, they seek to avoid the burden of responsibility that comes with standing alone in the decision. This weakness manifests itself in a tendency to depend on the religious teacher *even when the teacher does not want them to do so*. In other words, even when the religious teacher wants to stop at the point of making her students aware of their options, the students tend not to cooperate. They ferret out ways to become her followers or adherents.[61] (See

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[60] For discussions of this standard response, see Brandes 1877, 280; Emmanuel 1992, 252; Evans 1983, 106; Lippitt 2000a, 25-26, 136; Mackey 1971, 247; Mooney 1997, 135-137; Pattison 1999, 69-73.

[61] This worry is a special case of a more general worry Kierkegaard has about his age. He thinks that people have succumbed to the "herd mentality" instead of becoming "single individuals". What this means is that they have frivolously and thoughtlessly accepted the judgments of "the crowd" instead of carefully coming to conclusions by and for themselves (UDVS, 127-37; TA, 90-94). They have lacked the courage to make decisions—especially those having to do with ethics and religion—without appealing to public opinion (see TSI, 108; JP, 3:2964; JP, 3:3229; and JP, 4:4941).

People fear making decisions for themselves because doing so opens up undesirable possibilities. First, if they make a decision for themselves, they might not end up making the same decision as other people. They therefore might not enjoy the natural *comfort* that comes with human solidarity (JP, 4:4885). And they might experience the *discomfort* of persecution or "peer pressure" (TSI, 120; UDVS, 136). (After all, other people also want to enjoy the comfort of solidarity. If someone does not share their opinion, that person inhibits them from enjoying this comfort fully.) Second, and more fundamentally, if people make a decision for themselves, they bear the ultimate responsibility for that decision (UDVS, 132-33). Thus if they happen to decide wrongly, they will be subject to *blame*. This blame might come from other people. But, even more frightfully, it might come from God or from themselves in the form of the voice of conscience (UDVS, 128-29).

Kierkegaard claims that people follow the crowd because they think it enables them to avoid these undesirable possibilities (UDVS, 128; JP, 3:2968). If they follow the crowd, they will not have to worry about missing out on the comfort of solidarity. Nor will they have to worry about suffering the discomfort of persecution and peer pressure. More importantly, people think that following public opinion enables them to escape the possibility of becoming blameworthy (UDVS, 128-29). They believe they can shift responsibility for their decisions to the public and use the fact that "everyone does it" as an excuse (TSI, 107). This explains why people become emboldened when they join a crowd and do things they would not do as single individuals (TSI, 108, 110).

While Kierkegaard grants that following the crowd provides certain psychological comforts, he denies that it enables people to avoid responsibility. He offers two reasons for this denial. First, the "public" does not really exist. He calls it a "phantom" and a "mirage." It is simply an abstract entity that the press has reified (TA, 90-93; TSI, 108). Because the "public" does not really exist, people cannot actually shift responsibility to it. There is simply nothing there to blame (TSI, 108; TA, 91). Second, and more importantly, even if the "public" did exist, going along with it *still* does not allow people to avoid responsibility. For they are still responsible or accountable for their decision to go along with the crowd in the first place. Thus Kierkegaard says: "How you act and the responsibility for it is finally wholly and solely yours as an individual" (here I cite Douglas V. Steere's translation of *Purity of Heart* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956] 189).

Climacus' discussion of Lessing's students at CUP 1:66-70.) According to the standard view, the function of Kierkegaard's special rhetorical devices—his indirect communication, to use the second account described in chapter 2—is to head off this potential error. The devices do so by pushing people away, encouraging or even forcing them to stand alone (JP, 1:653.23-24; SLW, 343-345; WL, 274-275).

Textual support for the idea that indirect communication serves to create distance between author and reader abounds. Take the following passage, where Climacus suggests it implicitly:

> Indirect communication makes communicating an art in a sense different from what one ordinarily assumes it to be…To stop a man on the street and to stand still in order to speak with him is not as difficult as having to say something to a passerby in passing without standing still oneself or delaying the other, without wanting to induce him to go the same way, but just urging him to go his own way (CUP, 1:277; see also CUP 1:260, 1:274).

The same idea occurs more explicitly elsewhere in *Postscript*. For instance, in the section on Lessing, Climacus asserts that the secret of indirect communication is to set readers free (CUP, 1:74, 1:77). And later he says that such communication "establishes a chasmic gap between reader and author and fixes the separation of inwardness between them" (CUP, 1:263). For still further support, we can look at how Kierkegaard actually employs his special rhetorical devices. His pseudonyms, for example, inhibit readers from learning whether he himself endorses the views contained in his books. And his "imaginative constructions"—those thought experiments he develops in a hypothetical or subjunctive mood—achieve the same end by making it unclear whether he actually stands behind what he says.

Let us grant, then, that Kierkegaard uses indirect communication to push people away and discourage them from improperly depending upon him. The question remains:

Following the herd, therefore, really only allows people to *ignore* that they are responsible (Lippitt 2000a, 41). This is a problem because it means ignoring important facts about their nature qua moral and religious agents. Kierkegaard maintains that acknowledging these facts—owning up to and taking seriously personal responsibility—is an essential part of authentic human existence (UDVS, 127). This is what he means when he says "the single individual" is something every human being should become (TSI, 117; OMWA, 10). Kierkegaard consequently wants to discourage people from following the herd. As a first step towards that end, he wants to discourage people from following *him* in particular (OMWA, 9). (Almost all of the considerations that motivate and create problems for dependence on the "public" will also do so for dependence on Kierkegaard in particular. The obvious exception is that, while the "public" is a fictional entity, Kierkegaard is not.) And, according to the standard view, the purpose of his artful literary devices is to accomplish this latter goal. They serve to push people away, encouraging or even forcing them to "stand alone."

does he *need* special rhetorical devices for this purpose? Are the devices *indispensable* for this purpose? I doubt it. As Vanessa Rumble points out, Kierkegaard could push readers away with a straightforward or direct communication (Rumble 1995, 311, 313-314). He could, for example, simply tell them not to depend on him. In fact, Kierkegaard seemingly follows this procedure in his signed writings. We read in the preface to each of his *Upbuilding Discourses*:

> [This little book] is called "discourses," not sermons, because its author does not have the authority to *preach*, "upbuilding discourses," not discourses for upbuilding, because the speaker by no means claims to be a *teacher*… (EUD, 5; cf. 53, 107, 179, 231, 295).

And, in the preface to *For Self-Examination*, we read:

> My dear reader, read aloud, if possible…. By reading aloud you will gain the strongest impression that you have only yourself to consider, not me, who, after all, am "without authority," nor others, which would be a distraction (FSE 3; see also JFY 91-92).

It seems likely that these straightforward requests will discourage at least *some* people from depending improperly on Kierkegaard. If so, indirect communication is not the only way to accomplish this end.

Someone might try to rescue the standard response (i.e. the view that artful literary devices are indispensable for heading off improper dependence) by raising the following two objections. First, the considerations just raised underestimate the depth of the problem. Kierkegaard worries about people who will depend on him *even when he does not want them to do so.* Simply telling such people that he does not want them to depend on him will not make a difference (and, presumably, neither will explaining to them why they should not do so). Kierkegaard must use more drastic measures. He must actually prevent these people from figuring out what position he endorses in the first place.

This initial objection raises an important point. But it does not successfully rescue the standard response. Even if we grant that Kierkegaard must hide his own position from view, it is unclear that doing so *requires* the use of special rhetorical devices. For instance, he could simply remain silent about the matter. Or, he could straightforwardly say, "I do not necessarily advocate the lifestyles I describe." Both of these strategies

would involve being evasive. But neither one would qualify as particularly artful or deceptive, at least not obviously so.

The second objection someone might raise in order to rescue the standard response runs as follows. A straightforward attempt to push people away seems to involve a performative contradiction (see CUP, 1:75). When the teacher straightforwardly encourages the learner to stand alone, she actually *discourages* him from standing alone with respect to one particular decision, viz. the decision about whether or not to stand alone. With respect to this decision, she actually gives the learner a rhetorical push toward one option—which is the exact opposite of letting him stand alone. Therefore, if the teacher wants the learner to stand alone *with respect to everything,* including the decision of whether or not to stand alone, she contradicts herself when she straightforwardly encourages him to stand alone. And perhaps that is why the religious teacher must use indirect communication.

We can sharpen this second objection by putting it in slightly different terms. Kierkegaard says he wants to leave it up to his readers to decide for themselves how to live their lives. But some of them might decide that they want to live their lives as Kierkegaard's followers. Their honest decision might be to become Kierkegaardians and to do whatever he does. By pushing these people away, Kierkegaard prevents or at least discourages them from choosing this option. Thus, he will not have left it entirely up to them to decide how to live their lives. And thus he will not have done what he says he wants to do.

We can address this second objection in two ways. First, it is not clear the objection actually applies to Kierkegaard's case. Kierkegaard does not insist that the learner stand alone *unconditionally* or *with respect to everything*. He *only* insists that the learner stand alone *with respect to the actual religious decision*. This qualification opens up room for giving rhetorical pushes elsewhere and, in particular, with respect to the higher order decision about whether or not to stand alone. Once such room exists, the aforementioned contradiction goes away. Second, even if the objection *did* apply to Kierkegaard's case, it is not clear that shifting to indirect communication would help. We would still have to explain why using indirect rhetorical devices did not succumb to a parallel problem. That is, we would have to explain why it too did not involve a self-

undermining or self-contradictory rhetorical push with respect to the decision about whether or not to stand alone. And I doubt such an explanation is in the offing.

Thus, the second objection does not rescue the standard response. The standard response still does not explain why Kierkegaard's "making aware" strategy *requires* the use of artful rhetorical devices. At best, it provides an account of how such indirect communication wards off an error that sometimes arises in the process of carrying out the "making aware" strategy. But it fails to show how indirect communication is the *only* way to ward off the error.[62] And that is what we need in order to prove the indispensability thesis here.

3.   THE PROBLEM OF SELF-DECEPTION (THE "MONSTROUS ILLUSION")

I suggested in the introduction to this chapter that there are multiple accounts of why Kierkegaard uses indirect communication to impart information to his readers about the nature of being and existence. We just examined one of the standard accounts and found it lacking. In what follows, we will turn to a somewhat better account. In order to get at it, we will have to look closely at one important faction of Kierkegaard's audience. Our inspection will reveal that the members of this target audience do not suffer from any ordinary problem. Their lack of awareness of their existential options is in some sense peculiar. Thinking about the nature of their peculiar problem will shed light on why Kierkegaard must use indirect communication to address them.

The most common way to describe the problem plaguing Kierkegaard's target audience is to refer to his assertion that it suffers from "a monstrous illusion [*uhyre Sandsebedrag*]" (PV, 41).[63] The illusion is that Denmark is a Christian nation, a country in which "all are Christians." To say that the members of Kierkegaard's audience suffer from the illusion is just to say that they buy into this falsehood. They consider themselves and each other Christians when in fact they are not. Kierkegaard calls this unfortunate state-of-affairs "Christendom" (PV, 41-44)

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[62] The pseudonymous Quidam endorses this more tentative conclusion in *Stages on Life's Way* (SLW, 344).

[63] See also PV, 23, 48, 88; OMWA, 8n**. For helpful discussions of the illusion plaguing Kierkegaard's audience see Bouwsma 1984, 73-86; Cavell 1984, 233; Conant 1995, 272-281; Pattison 1999, 70-71; Phillips 1993, 210-212.

It is tempting to think that the problem here is one of ordinary ignorance. The relevant story might run as follows: Kierkegaard's audience never learned what it really takes to be a Christian. As a result it operates under some well-meaning but ultimately erroneous standard. According to this erroneous standard, everyone *does* qualify as a Christian; the appearance that all are Christians is *not* misleading but an accurate reflection of the truth. Thus the members of Kierkegaard's audience fall prey to the illusion simply because they do not know any better.

However, this is not the story Kierkegaard leads us to believe. He insists his audience does not suffer from ignorance (see Conant 1995, 272-273). As far as he is concerned, the facts of the matter are clear and no honest person could entertain the idea that all are Christians:

> Everyone who in earnest and also with some clarity of vision considers what is called Christendom, or the condition in a so-called Christian country, must without any doubt immediately have serious misgivings. What does it mean, after all, that these thousands and thousands as a matter of course call themselves Christians! These many, many people, of whom by far the great majority, according to everything that can be discerned, have their lives in entirely different categories, something one can ascertain by the simplest observation! People who perhaps never go to church, never think about God, never name his name except when they curse! People to whom it has never occurred that their lives should have some duty to God... That there must be an enormous underlying confusion here, a dreadful illusion [*frygteligt Sandsebedrag*], of that there can surely be no doubt (PV, 41).

In short, Kierkegaard thinks the members of his audience *know better* than to do what they are doing. They know they should not call their way of living "Christianity," yet they do it anyway.

We can elaborate on what it means to say Kierkegaard's audience "knows better" by picking up on a distinction Climacus draws in *Postscript*. The distinction concerns the difference between "abstract Sunday-understanding" and the concrete understanding of the rest of the week (CUP, 1:469). On Sundays, when they listen to the pastor preach, the Danish citizens grasp the concept of Christianity properly. They realize it picks out a set of strenuous behaviors. They understand that living a Christian life involves denying oneself, loving one's neighbor, following the paradigm of Christ, etc. On the other six days of the week, however, they fail to engage in these behaviors. They do not practice self-denial; they do not love their neighbors; and they do not follow the paradigm of

Christic.[64] *Yet they still call themselves Christians*. They thereby betray that they understand the concept of Christianity differently during the week than they did on Sunday. It no longer picks out a set of strenuous behaviors. It picks out something more trivial—like being a citizen of Denmark or having a baptismal certificate at home in a drawer (CUP, 1:367). In other words, when the Danish citizens use the concept of Christianity during the week, they water down its meaning. Given their acquaintance with the proper meaning of the concept, this use or rather *misuse* of the concept cannot qualify as an honest mistake. It cannot be the result of simple ignorance. They *know better* than to talk this way. [65]

Humorous examples of this phenomenon abound in Kierkegaard's writings. But a particularly illuminating one arises in *Postscript*. Here Climacus describes a Sunday sermon on the Christian principle that "a man is capable of nothing [without God]" (CUP, 1:467). The principle is ostensibly a statement of the doctrine of conservation, which holds that every state of affairs depends on God for its occurrence. But the real

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[64] There is good reason to think that, by his own lights, Kierkegaard has no right to make these claims. Following Kant, he locates the source of moral and religious value in the possession of a good will (WL, 4, 13-14). In addition, like Kant, he holds that we cannot discern the presence or absence of such a will in others simply by observing their behavior (WL, 13-14, 228-30). Yet, we have no other evidence to go by. Consequently, we cannot make definitive judgments regarding the moral or religious standing of others. Given this fact, Kierkegaard argues, love demands that we operate by a principle of charity. We have an obligation to provide the best possible interpretation of others' action and even to offer mitigating explanations when their actions appear censurable (WL, 292-94). Thus, if he follows this hermeneutic of charity, he should not believe the members of Christendom fail to be Christians. On the contrary, he should believe they are Christians! In fact, the pseudonymous H. H. suggests as much in *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* (WA, 87). I discuss the implications of this point in the Conclusion to the dissertation.

[65] A tangential question arises here concerning what really makes Climacus upset. On the one hand, it might be that Climacus objects to what he sees as the *improper* use of Christian language during the week. He might believe there is some objectively correct way to use Christian language that people learn about on Sundays yet fail to employ during the week. On the other hand, it might be that Climacus simply dislikes the inconsistency between the Sunday understanding of Christianity and the weekday understanding. On this reading, Climacus would be perfectly happy if people embraced the weekday understanding—if only they would openly reject the Sunday understanding. James Conant embraces the latter option. He claims that "Kierkegaard would have no dispute at all with someone *who actually thinks* one can be a Christian simply by being a citizen" (Conant 1995, 274). Admittedly, Climacus sometimes talks this way: "But one of the two must be a jest: either what the pastor says is a jest, a kind of parlor game one plays at times and bears in mind that a human being is capable of nothing, or the pastor must indeed be right when he says that a person must always bear this in mind—and the rest of us, the pastor, and I, too, are wrong in that we exegete the word "always" so poorly (CUP, 1:471)." However, I think the former option outlined above is the better one. I think Climacus believes there is an objectively correct way to use Christian language. Evidence for this position comes from the passages where he accuses people of turning Christianity into something it is not (CUP, 1:369-381). It would be impossible to turn Christianity into something it was not if there was no objective truth regarding what Christianity was. Thus, passages such as the one just quoted should not be read straightforwardly but rather as a kind of rhetorical posturing.

point of the principle has to do with the existential attitudes that occasionalism evokes. To wit, people should shun hubris and embrace humility. They should not become self-important or prideful when assessing their abilities. In particular, they should not think that they can accomplish more than anyone else. Instead, they should modestly acknowledge that, just like everyone else, they do even the least thing only with God's help (CUP, 1:467).[66]

Climacus says that the sermon was easy to understand and that everyone grasped exactly what the pastor meant (CUP, 1:467). Still, he decides to send a spy out among the people to discover how they interpret the message during the rest of the week. After numerous run-ins, the spy reports his findings:

> And so it goes, for six days of the week we are all capable of something. The king is capable of more than the prime minister. The witty journalist says: I will show so-and-so what I am capable of doing—namely, make him look ridiculous. The policeman says to the man dressed in a jacket: You very likely do not know what I am capable of doing—namely arrest him. The cook says to the poor woman who comes on Saturdays: You apparently have forgotten what I am capable of doing—namely, of prevailing upon the master and mistress so that the poor woman no longer receives the leftovers of the week. We are all capable of something, and the king smiles at the prime minister's capability, and the prime minister laughs at the journalist's, and the journalist at the policeman's, and the policeman at the blue collar worker's, and the blue collar worker at the Saturday-woman's—and on Sunday we all go to church (except the cook, who never has time, because on Sunday there is always a dinner party at the councilor's house) and hear the pastor declare that a human being is capable of nothing at all—that is, if by good fortune, we have not gone to a speculative pastor's church.
>   But wait a minute. We have entered the church; with the help of a very capable sexton (for the sexton is especially capable on Sundays and with a silent glance indicates to so-and-so what he is capable of doing), each of us takes a place in relation to one's specific capability in society. Then the pastor enters the pulpit—but at the last moment there is a very capable man who has come late, and the sexton must demonstrate his capability. Then the pastor begins, and now all of us, from our respective different seats and points of view, understand what the pastor is saying from his elevated standpoint: that a human being is capable of nothing at all. Amen (CUP, 1:470).

Thus we have an example of what it means to say that the members of Kierkegaard's audience "know better." On the one hand, they *do* understand Christianity. For on Sunday they hear, understand, and acknowledge the truth that they cannot do anything without

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[66] Kierkegaard discusses this principle at greater length in his signed discourses (EUD, 321-26; CD, 298-300).

God's help. On the other hand, they *do not* understand Christianity. For during the rest of the week they take every opportunity to attribute power to themselves and become self-important—yet still call themselves Christians.

At this point, an important set of questions arises. Why does this inconsistency persist? Why do people continue to misuse Christian language if they know better? Or, in Kierkegaard's words, why do people continue to claim "all are Christians" if they can "ascertain by the simplest observation" that no one lives Christianly?

The striking answer is that people *want* to misuse language in this way; they *want* the illusion to remain in place. Thus Kierkegaard says the delusion [*Indbildning*] exists because the people are deluding themselves [*indbilder sig*] (OMWA, 8n**). That is to say, the monstrous illusion [*Sandsebedrag*] is actually a case of self-deception [*Selvbedrag*].[67] To be sure, Kierkegaard thinks the pastors play a role in encouraging the illusion (JP, 3:3620; TM, 136). But the people are not any less blameworthy as a result. For the pastors simply give them what they want (CUP, 1:478). And, as Kierkegaard starkly puts it in *Judge for Yourself!*, the people "want to be deceived":

> Yes, it is true that people will very readily blame the proclaimers of Christianity and seek fault in them (and this may well be the way to become the Christian public's favorite); but it is perhaps rather the Christian public, which because of the fear of men (to which the proclaimers certainly should not yield) forces the proclaimers to deceive this Christian public… The world *wants* to be deceived; not only is it deceived—ah, then the matter would not be so dangerous!—but it *wants* to be deceived. Intensely, more intensely, more passionately perhaps than any witness to the truth has fought for the truth, the world fights to be deceived; it most gratefully rewards with applause, money, and prestige anyone who complies with its wish to be deceived (JFY, 139-140; see also TM, 45; CD, 170-171).

Here we can see the truth of our initial suggestion that the problem is not one of ordinary ignorance. The problem is rather that people do not want to overcome their confusion, their inconsistency, and their misuse of language. In fact, they want to maintain a lack of clarity about their souls (CD, 181).

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[67] Kierkegaard uses the words "illusion [*Sandsebedrag*]" and "delusion [*Indbildning*]" interchangeably. For evidence, see the following passage from *The Point of View*: "On the assumption that Christendom is an enormous illusion [*Sandsebedrag*], that it is a delusion [*Indbildning*] on the part of the multitude who call themselves Christians, in all probability the illusion [*Sandsebedrag*] we are discussing here is very common" (48).

Of course, this conclusion begs another set of questions. Why do the members of Kierkegaard's audience want to misuse language? Why do they want the illusion to remain in place? Why do they want to be deceived?

Kierkegaard answers these questions obliquely in part three of *Christian Discourses* (see esp. 163-187). He says that people want to be deceived because owning up to the truth would force them to make a decision they desperately want to avoid. If they owned up to the truth, they would *either* have to stop calling themselves Christians *or*, if they wanted to continue calling themselves Christians, have to change dramatically how they live their lives. But they do not want to do either of these two things. On the one hand, they want the psychological benefits of calling themselves Christians. They want to be able to say of themselves and their countrymen that they are doing what, as far as they are concerned in a Christian nation and a Christian era, is the highest thing a human being can do. On the other hand, they want the comfort and joy of living cozy, *aesthetic* lives (CUP, 1:85). They do not want to engage in the constant struggle and strain of the Christian life with its demand of self-denial and its promise of suffering (CD, 171, 179). Thus, we can see how Kierkegaard's audience is well-motivated to cover up the distinction between the Christian-religious mode of existence and the aesthetic mode of existence—a distinction that, in some sense, they already recognize.

4.   INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AND SELF-DECEPTION

Armed with this understanding of the problem plaguing Kierkegaard's audience, we can now investigate the claims he makes about how to accommodate it. The thrust of these claims comes out clearly in the following passage:

> An illusion can never be removed directly, and basically only indirectly. If it is an illusion that all are Christians, and if something is to be done, it must be done indirectly (PV, 43).

We find a similar message a few lines later:

> On the assumption, then, that a religious author has from the ground up become aware of this illusion, Christendom, and to the limit of his ability with, note well, the help of God, wants to stamp it out—what is he to do then? Well, first and foremost no impatience. If he becomes impatient, then he makes a direct assault and accomplishes—nothing. By a direct attack he only strengthens a person in the illusion and also infuriates him (ibid.).

To summarize these passages, we can say that Kierkegaard believes indirect communication is indispensable for the task of removing an illusion. That is, he believes only indirect and not direct communication can stamp it out (cf. Emmanuel 1992, 242; Jansen 1997, 120, 124; Lippitt 2000a, 20-21).

To see why Kierkegaard's position might make sense, we need to understand what he means by a "direct" approach. Although he does not explicitly say so, we are led to believe he means "direct" in the sense of blunt talk and straight shooting, i.e. in the sense of avoiding deceptive, ironic, and otherwise elusive speech. Thus the person who approaches the illusion directly comes right out and straightforwardly tells the Danish people that (1) there is a distinction between the Christian-religious mode of existence and the aesthetic mode of existence, (2) they have intentionally confused the two, and hence (3) they lie to themselves when they profess to be Christians.

In an important passage from *Point of View*, Kierkegaard details what will happen to someone who engages in such a direct communication:

> Every once in a while a religious enthusiast appears. He makes an assault on Christendom; he makes a big noise, denounces nearly all as not being Christians—and he accomplishes nothing…First and foremost, [the people] pay no attention to him at all, do not read his book but promptly lay it *ad acta* [aside]; or if he makes use of the Living Word, they go around on another street and do not listen to him at all. Then by means of a definition they smuggle him outside and settle down quite securely in their illusion. They make him out to be a fanatic and his Christianity to be an exaggeration—in the end he becomes the only one, or one of the few, who is not a Christian in earnest (since exaggeration, after all, is a lack of earnestness); the others are all earnest Christians (PV, 42-43).

Why does Kierkegaard think things will turn out this way? Given what we now know, the answer is not hard to come by: the religious enthusiast (the direct communicator) and his audience are at cross-purposes. The audience wants to obfuscate or conceal what the direct communicator wants to bring to light, viz. the difference between the religious mode of existence (which the audience says it chooses) and the aesthetic mode of existence (which it actually chooses). Consequently, if the direct communicator comes out and announces his agenda, the audience will work against him. It will see him coming and arm their defenses.

It is important to emphasize that the opposition between the direct communicator and his audience does not result from a factual or theoretical disagreement. In some

sense, the audience knows and accepts what the direct communicator has to say about the difference between the aesthetic and religious modes of existence. The audience is aware of the true nature of Christianity and knows that it involves more than being a citizen or having a baptismal certificate in a drawer at home. The opposition arises at the next point, the point of determining what to do about these facts. The direct communicator wants to bring them to light and the audience wants to cover them up. Thus, Kierkegaard says in his journals that what the members of his audience really want to avoid is a showdown with the speaker, i.e. a situation in which they would have to take him seriously (JP, 1:516). For if they had to take him seriously, they would have to admit he was right, which is the last thing they want to do.

Granting that the direct approach faces these obstacles, what is the alternative approach that allows us to avoid them? That is to say, what does the indirect approach look like? Curiously enough, Kierkegaard tells us that the indirect approach to removing an illusion [*Indbildning* or *Sandsebedrag*] involves the use of deception [*Bedrag*]:

> Do not be deceived by the word *deception*. One can deceive a person out of what is true, and—to recall old Socrates—one can deceive a person into what is true. Yes, in only this way can a deluded person be brought into what is true—by deceiving him (PV, 53).

The deception serves to prevent the deluded audience from realizing what the communicator is up to. The hope is that the communicator will thereby avoid setting off the audience's defense mechanisms and hence gain the opportunity to make the audience aware of what it does not want to be made aware.

We can get a better handle on the indirect approach by looking at two versions of it that Kierkegaard recommends. First, Kierkegaard says the religious teacher must not self-righteously declare that he himself is the rare Christian in a land of non-Christians. Rather, he must allow the members of the audience to continue thinking they are Christians and humbly confess that he himself is not one:

> That is, one who is under an illusion must be approached from behind. Instead of wanting to have for oneself the advantage of being the rare Christian, one must let the ensnared have the advantage that he is a Christian, and then oneself have sufficient resignation to be the one who is far behind him (PV, 43; see also 54).[68]

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[68] Although Kierkegaard describes this procedure as a deception, it is not obvious it would be in his own case. He frequently claims that he does not consider himself to be a Christian or live up to that standard (e.g. AN, 129-141). If we take these remarks at face value, the claim that he himself is not a

The goal here is for the religious teacher to avoid judging or condemning the members of his audience, even though such a judgment would be correct, because doing so would likely set off their defense mechanisms.

Second, Kierkegaard says the religious teacher should not begin by talking about what he ultimately wants to talk about, viz. the difference between the aesthetic and religious modes of existence. As noted, such talk would repel the audience. Instead, the teacher should begin by talking about what would interest the audience. He should, Kierkegaard repeatedly says, being where the audience is (e.g. PV, 45). The idea here is for the teacher to "make a big splash" with the members of the audience or establish a rapport with them (PV, 44). Then, once he has captured their attention, he is to switch over to what he ultimately wants to talk about. The hope is that he will thereby force the audience to see what it does not want to see (ibid.; see also CD, 235). Kierkegaard explains the point in the following passage:

> The maieutic lies in the relation between the esthetic writing as the beginning and the religious as the *telos*. It begins with the aesthetic, in which possibly most people have their lives, and now the religious is introduced so quickly that those who, moved by the esthetic, decide to follow along are suddenly standing right in the middle of the decisive qualifications of the essentially Christian, are at least prompted to become *aware* (OMWA, 7n).

Following the suggestion in §2.3 of chapter 2, we can categorize this kind of deception as a version of the "bait and switch" tactic.

5. CONCLUSION REGARDING THE INDISPENSABILITY THESIS

Let us pause for a moment to take stock. We have established two things. First, the use of direct communication to help people out of self-deception faces a serious obstacle. Second, indirect communication provides a way around this obstacle. That is not to say indirection is infallible, nor does Kierkegaard suggest as much (PV, 49). The point is just that indirect communication can avoid a difficulty that threatens the success of direct communication.

But—to return to the central issue—are these two points strong enough to support Kierkegaard's indispensability thesis? To recall, the indispensability thesis states that

Christian would not count as a deception. Of course, the claim that others around him really are Christians would still be one.

indirect communication can accomplish some task that direct communication cannot. For this thesis to hold, direct communication must *necessarily* or *inevitably* fail at the task in question. To wit, it must *necessarily* or *inevitably* fail at removing self-deception. We have seen that Kierkegaard does make a claim to this effect (PV, 43). However, I believe that the evidence at hand does not support something so strong. Let me explain.

For starters, all Kierkegaard tells us is that the obstacle facing direct communication stems from a conflict of desires. The audience wants the opposite of what the direct communicator wants. In particular, it wants to obscure the truth that the direct communicator wants to bring to light. But why should we believe that the audience will *necessarily* or *inevitably* win this conflict? Why should we believe that, just because the audience *wants* the direct communicator to fail, he will fail? For all we know there are cases where, perhaps simply out of dogged perseverance, the direct communicator succeeds at making the audience aware of the truth even though it does not want to be made aware of the truth. Of course, it might turn out that there are no such cases. But this is not something Kierkegaard or any one else can know *a priori*.

Moreover, even if we discovered that every previous attempt at direct communication had failed, we still would not have a strong enough case. We could not rule out the possibility that these failures occurred because the direct communicator gave up too soon. Moreover, we could not rule out the possibility that the tide would turn in favor of direct communication in the future. As long as these possibilities are in play, we cannot conclude that the failure of direct communication is *necessary* or *inevitable*.

In conclusion, we can grant that the evidence Kierkegaard provides gives us reason enough to think that his turn to indirect communication was prudent. It also gives us reason enough to think that turning to indirect communication in the future when faced with the task of removing self-deception would be prudent. But the evidence is not strong enough to establish Kierkegaard's claim that indirect communication is *indispensable* for this task. To find support for a claim this strong, he will have to draw on other resources. Determining what those resources might be and whether they are capable of providing the needed support is the goal of the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 5:

INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AND THE ATTACK ON THE HEGELIANS

Although those who suffer from illusions or self-deception take up much of Kierkegaard's attention, they are not his only focus. He also desires to play the role of religious teacher with respect to another problem-plagued group of people. We hear of this second target audience in *On My Work as an Author*, where Kierkegaard asserts that he wants to bring his readers to Christianity from *two* distinct non-Christian starting points:

> The movement the authorship describes is: *from* 'the poet,' from the esthetic— *from* 'the philosopher,' from the speculative—*to* the indication of the most inward qualification of the essentially Christian (OMWA, 5-6).

He confirms this bipartite picture of his authorship in *Point of View*:

> The task that is to be assigned to most people in Christendom is—away from 'the poet' or from relating oneself to or having one's life in what the poet recites, away from speculative thought, from having one's life imaginatively (which is also impossible) in speculating (instead of existing) to becoming a Christian. The first movement is the total significance of the esthetic writing in the totality of my work as an author; the second movement is that of *Concluding Postscript*, which, by drawing in or editing all the esthetic writings to its advantage in order to throw light on its issue, the issue of *becoming a Christian*, itself makes the same movement in another sphere: away from speculative thought, away from the system etc., to becoming a Christian (PV, 78).

To summarize, Kierkegaard first of all intends to draw people away from a life lived in terms of aesthetic or pagan categories. This side of the authorship corresponds to the target audience discussed in the previous chapter. But, in addition, he desires to draw people away from a life of speculative thought or philosophy. This latter target audience constitutes the focus of the present chapter.

The motivation for turning to the second target audience is that, as with respect to the first target audience, Kierkegaard thinks accommodating it requires the use of indirect communication. However, because the problems plaguing the members of this second audience are not the same, the reasons he must use indirection to help them are also not the same. The goal of this chapter is thus to examine this new set of reasons and thereby to unearth a new foundation for the indispensability thesis. We will set out upon the way

to this goal by looking at the problem plaguing the second audience, a group of people who, following Kierkegaard, we can call 'speculative thinkers.'

1.   THE TWO SIDES TO KIERKEGAARD'S CRITIQUE OF THE SPECULATIVE THINKERS

The expression 'speculative thought' or 'speculative thinking' is a difficult one to get a handle on. In the past, commentators simply interpreted it as a kind of buzz-word for Hegel's thought (e.g., Himmelstrup 1964, 189). But this is not entirely correct. For starters, Kierkegaard's contemporaries used the term to refer to something broader—an entire way of doing philosophy of which Hegel's thought was but one instance. Roughly put, the speculative method involved providing a rational explanation for a fact or concept by appealing to the whole of which the fact or concept was a part. To use more technical terminology, it involved explaining the Given in light of the Idea.[69] Speculative thought was thus a kind of Idealism.

When the Idealist movement came to Denmark, it took on a particularly religious slant. Most of the Danish thinkers were Christians and hence were concerned with applying the speculative methodology to Christian issues. They desired "to show accordance between the Christian truths and the rest of human knowledge," and thereby to confirm the Christian faith.[70] Now, to some extent, Hegel served as the point of departure for their project. At the very least, it was he who inspired them to take up the project in the first place. We can thus say the Danish thinkers were Hegelians of a certain stripe. Or, perhaps more precisely, we can say they were "right-wing Hegelians," i.e. Hegelians who tried to see Hegel's thought as consistent with more or less orthodox Christianity.

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[69] One important Danish thinker who defined 'speculative thought' in this way was Kierkegaard's teacher, F.C. Sibbern (1785-1872). Carl Koch writes: "Sibbern distinguishes between explicative philosophy, which interprets and analyzes the facts, and speculative philosophy, the task of which is rationally and thereby in *a priori* fashion to ground and clarify the facts in their facticity and thereby to erect a comprehensive rational world-view. This task is pursued, roughly, by understanding the facts in light of what Sibbern here calls 'the speculative *a priori*', 'the philosophical idea', or merely 'the fundamental idea'" (Koch 2004, 112, my tr.).

[70] Koch, again commenting on Sibbern, writes: "It is thus the task of speculative philosophy to ground objectively that which is present subjectively, to generalize it into an overall world-view, to show accordance between the Christian truths and the rest of human knowledge, to grasp philosophically the problems Christianity contains—Sibbern may be thinking here about the classical problem of theodicy or about the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, which for centuries had been a burden for reason— and, in general, to provide confirmation of the living faith" (2004, 98-99, my tr.).

Kierkegaard's own use of the term 'speculative thought' is best understood against this backdrop. While many of the things he says about speculative thought apply to Hegel, he often does not have Hegel himself in mind. Instead, he has in mind the particular Danish thinkers who advocated right wing Hegelianism.[71] The two most influential of these Danish thinkers were Johann Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860) and Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884), both of whom played pivotal roles in introducing Hegelian thought to Denmark during Kierkegaard's student years. In this chapter, I will predominantly focus on Kierkegaard's interaction with Martensen. But since Heiberg's views on the relevant topics are simply more extreme versions of the same, what I say about Martensen will apply *a fortiori* to Heiberg.

Kierkegaard's critical assessment of speculative thought can be found in a number of different texts. But perhaps the most famous critique comes from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. There Climacus presents us with what he calls "the misunderstanding between speculative thought and Christianity":

> But primarily I sought through my own reflection to pick up a clue to the ultimate misunderstanding. I need not report my many mistakes, but it finally became clear to me that the deviation of speculative thought…might not be something accidental, might be located far deeper in the orientation of the whole age—most likely in this, that because of much knowledge people have entirely forgotten what it means to *exist* and what *inwardness* is (CUP, 1:242).

The problem mentioned in the final clause of this passage—that excessive knowledge has led the speculative thinkers to forget what it means to exist—becomes something of a mantra for Climacus. He brings it up many times throughout *Postscript*, almost always using the same wording (CUP, 1:120, 1:215, 1:249-250, 1:259, 1:263, 1:264, 1:269, 1:274n, 1:280, 1:571). Thus there can be little doubt it stands at the center of his assessment of the Danish Hegelians. But, more importantly for our purposes, it also stands at the center of his call for indirect communication. Notice the sentence immediately following the one quoted above:

> When I had comprehended this, it also became clear to me that if I wanted to communicate anything about this, the main point must be that my presentation would be made in an *indirect* form (CUP 1:242).

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[71] A great deal of recent scholarship has been devoted to confirming this view (e.g. Stewart 2003; 2004a; Waaler and Tolstrup 2004).

Similar passages connecting indirection and the problem of "too much knowledge" also crop up elsewhere (CUP, 1:259, 1:263). Therefore, it seems prudent to take a closer look at what Climacus is talking about.

Most recent scholars interpret Climacus' mantra as picking out an unhealthy psychological disposition (Conant 1995, 311n35; Lippitt 2000a, 13-18; Muench 2003, 140; Stewart 2003, 486). According to this view, the speculative thinkers have gotten caught up in their speculative thought and the knowledge it promises to provide. The unfortunate result is that they have missed out on, ignored, or "forgotten" what really matters: actually living out their own lives (CUP, 1:344). To use Climacus' religious language, they have spent all their time reflecting on Christianity instead of engaging in the everyday tasks of becoming and being Christians (CUP, 1:606). Simply put, their speculative thought has become a distraction (Roberts 1980, 88; Stewart 2003, 486).[72]

If we stop here, it seems as though Climacus does not have any real philosophical objections to level against speculative *thought*. He seems rather to have personal objections to level against particular speculative *thinkers*. His problem, in other words, is not with *Hegelianism* but rather with particular *Hegelians*. In fact, this is the conclusion that Stewart draws in *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Stewart 2003, 486-488).

Contrary to Stewart, I do not think we should stop here. While I agree Climacus refers to an unhealthy psychological disposition when he talks about "knowing too much," I do not think that is the end of the story. I think there is something else going on between Climacus and the speculative thinkers besides an attack on their character.

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[72] Notice how, on this interpretation, the speculative thinkers do not literally possess "too much knowledge." Rather, they get caught up in the activity of acquiring knowledge. A more literal approach to Climacus' description of their problem is possible and even makes some sense. For example, Climacus often talks about how the Hegelians have acquired knowledge of Persia and China, French and Italian, water works inspection and geography, even astronomy and veterinary science (CUP, 1:164, 1:259, 1:307n, 1:351, 1:464, 1:469, 1:498). The problem with this great knowledge, he says, is that it makes knowledge of everyday existence seem trivial by comparison. (After all, of what importance is the life of one individual human being compared with all of world history?) Because the Hegelians see knowledge of everyday existence as trivial, they do not pay any attention to it. However, Climacus thinks it is precisely knowledge of everyday existence that is important for authentic existence. Thus we can see how the actual possession of great knowledge leads the Hegelians astray. That being said, I do not think much hangs on how we cash out the problem. Everything I say about the less literal interpretation will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the more literal interpretation.

Underlying Climacus' *ad hominem* attacks, I detect a philosophical objection. Let me explain.

As I intend to demonstrate in the next two sections (§§2-3), at least part of the reason why the speculative thinkers spend so much time thinking is that they believe thinking is important. More to the point, they believe thinking is important *for Christian existence*. Far from believing they have gone astray when engaging in speculative thought, they see themselves as performing an essential Christian task.[73]

Now if Climacus' objection were merely personal and not philosophical, he would have to agree with this position. He would have to acknowledge that speculative thinking is an essential Christian task. But as I will show (in §4), Climacus does *not* acknowledge this point. He denies that speculative thinking is an essential Christian task. In fact, he claims that speculative thought plays no role whatsoever in Christian existence (CUP, 1:571). Therefore, Climacus' objection must not be merely personal. It must not be simply that the Danish Hegelians engage in too much thinking. He must also be criticizing them for believing that thinking is important in the first place. And that is a philosophical point, not just a psychological or personal one.

Bringing out the philosophical side of this criticism is important for our purposes because it feeds into a new story about the need for indirect communication.[74] However, we are not yet in a position to see how this story goes. We must first get a better handle on the dispute between Kierkegaard and the speculative thinkers. We will start out (in §2) with an overview of the speculative project. Next (in §3), we will examine why the speculative project allegedly has importance for Christian existence. We will then (in §4) take an extended look at Kierkegaard's competing position. In the following section (§5), we will turn to a problem that arises for this competing position. In the final sections of

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[73] If we took the more literal interpretation of Climacus' criticism (see note 72), we could say that the reason the speculative thinkers spend so much time on China and Persia and consequently forget about the simple things is that they think knowledge of China and Persia is more important. Therefore, they would deny that by concentrating on China and Persia and ignoring the simple things they have forgotten what it means to exist. On the contrary, they would say that they are pursuing the path to true self-actualization.

[74] That is not to say the psychological dimension of the problem has nothing to do with indirect communication. It does (e.g., Muench 2003, 139-150). I will briefly look at the argument connecting these two issues in §4.1.2 of chapter 6.

the chapter (§§6-9), we will see why Kierkegaard needs to use indirect communication to avoid this problem.

2.   THE SPECULATIVE PROJECT

We can come to grips with the speculative project by thinking about a debate that occurred during Kierkegaard's student days between the aforementioned Martensen and some of the other Danish luminaries of the time. Recent scholarship has shown that Kierkegaard was well acquainted with this debate and that much of what he says about speculative thought was in response to it (Stewart 2003, 184-195, 339-355; Stewart 2004a, 184-207; Waaler and Tolstrup 2004, 208-234). Thus the debate serves as a particularly appropriate backdrop for our discussion.

It is actually Martensen's dissertation that indirectly sets off the debate.[75] A reviewer of the dissertation, Johann Alfred Bornemann (1813-1890), declared that Martensen had attempted to identify and move beyond two theological positions on the relationship between faith and reason: (i) rationalism and (ii) supernaturalism.[76] According to Bornemann, Martensen thought these positions were "antiquated standpoints that belonged to a lost time" (qtd. in Koch 2004, 242n4, my tr.). In order to make progress in theology, it was necessary, in good Hegelian fashion, to "mediate" between them. That is to say, Martensen thought it was necessary to find a synthesis of the two positions that embraced the good parts of each and left the bad parts behind (Stewart 2003, 189-191; 2004b, 565-6; 2004c, 584; Koch 2004, 242n4).

The idea of synthesizing rationalism and supernaturalism struck some members of the Danish intellectual community as wrong-headed. J.P. Mynster (1775-1854), for example, insisted that rationalism and supernaturalism were contradictory positions.[77]

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[75] The dissertation was originally published in 1837 in Latin under the title *De autonomia conscientiae sui humanae in theologiam dogmaticam nostri temporis introducta* before being translated into Danish four years later under the title *Den menneskelige Selvbevidstheds Autonomie* (ctd. in Koch 2004, 274n1). It has also been translated into English as "The Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology" and is included in Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas (eds.), *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's philosophy of religion*, (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1997).

[76] J.A. Bornemann's review is entitled "Af Martensen: *de autonomia conscientiae. Sui humanae*," and was published in the *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, 1, 1839, pp. 1-40.

[77] The relevant article by Mynster was written in 1839 and entitled "Rationalism, Supernaturalism." Mynster was an important figure in Kierkegaard's life. He served as the pastor of Kierkegaard's father's church and later became the primate of Denmark. Mynster's death also occasioned

Therefore, by virtue of the law of non-contradiction, it was impossible to synthesize them. In addition, by virtue of the law of excluded middle, it was impossible to find some third way to go. Mynster acknowledged that Hegel and others[78] thought they could disprove or "sublate" these laws. But he remained unconvinced, citing Aristotle's point that a rejection of the law of non-contradiction implicitly appealed to the law of non-contradiction (Stewart 2004b, 567-568; see also CUP, 1:304-305). He insisted that Martensen had to embrace either rationalism or supernaturalism but not both and not some middle ground between them (Stewart 2004b, 568-569).

Martensen's actual contribution to the debate, his 1839 article entitled "Rationalism, Supernaturalism, and the *principium exclusi medii*," is a direct response to Mynster's attack. His goal in responding is two-fold. Primarily, he aims to explain how a synthesis of rationalism and supernaturalism is possible. But in addition he aims to explain why he rejects the laws of excluded middle and non-contradiction within the domain of Christianity. (It is worth noting that given how Martensen will set up the two positions, they are not actually contradictory. Thus he does not reject Aristotelian logic in order to synthesize them. His rejection of Aristotelian logic comes into play at a different place.) Following the presentation given by Waaler and Tolstrup, we can summarize what Martensen says thus.

According to Martensen, old unmediated rationalism was the view that human reason could provide us with everything we wanted in the realm of religion without any help from God. Unaided human reason could ascertain the content of basic Christian dogmas such as the Incarnation and the Trinity as well as prove their truth. In addition, reason could penetrate these puzzling dogmas and explain how they were internally

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Kierkegaard's attack on the state Church, the downfall of which Kierkegaard attributed to Mynster and Martensen.

[78] One person Mynster had in mind was Johan Ludwig Heiberg (1791-1860), who played a pivotal role in introducing Hegelian thought to Denmark during Kierkegaard's student years. Heiberg had defended Hegel's rejection of Aristotelian logic as early as 1832 in his *Ledetraad ved Forelæsningerne over Philosophiens Philosophie eller den speculative Logik ved den kongelige militaire Høiskole* [Guiding Lectures on the Philosophy of Philosophy or Speculative Logic at the Royal Military College] (Koch 2004, 230, 242n2). Heiberg would respond to Mynster's criticisms in 1839 with an article entitled "Om Contradictions- og Exclusions-Principet. En Logisk Bemærkning i Anledning af H.H. Hr. Biskop Dr. Mynsters Afhandling om Rationalisme og Supernaturalisme" [On the Principles of Non-Contradiction and Excluded Middle: A Logical Reflection in Response to Bishop Mynster's Discussion of Rationalism and Supernaturalism] (Koch 4004, 232n3, 243n2).

coherent. A supernatural revelation from God that communicated these doctrines was therefore superfluous (Waaler and Tolstrup 2004, 215-216).

By contrast, old unmediated supernaturalism was the view that unaided human reason could do nothing on its own. In order to learn about the Christian doctrines, human beings had to rely on a supernatural communication from God. Moreover, because reason could not confirm the truth of these doctrines once they were revealed, humans had to believe them simply on God's authority. Finally, because reason could not even grasp their content, the doctrines remained nothing more than incomprehensible mysteries (ibid.).

Martensen synthesizes or mediates these two positions in the following way. On the one hand, he rejects the self-sufficiency of human reason posited by old unmediated rationalism. As he had in his dissertation, he insists that human beings must rely on a supernatural revelation from God in order to become acquainted with truths about the divine. On the other hand, Martensen rejects the claim made by old unmediated supernaturalism that unaided reason is helpless. Although reason cannot establish or confirm the truth of the revealed dogmas, it can nevertheless grasp them on the conceptual level. That is to say, it can show how religious dogmas such as the Incarnation and the Trinity, which initially appear incoherent, are actually comprehensible. Here is where Hegelian logic comes into play. For the dogmas become comprehensible only once the laws of excluded middle and non-contradiction are rejected. And it is the breakthrough of Hegelian logic that makes such rejections possible (Waaler and Tolstrup 2004, 215-216.; Stewart 2003, 349-351).

In his 1837-1838 lectures on the topic, Martensen associates his position with the mediaeval slogan "*credo ut intelligam*," which means "I believe so that I may understand" (Koch 2004, 282). It is easy to see why this slogan fits. Like the mediaevals, Martensen thinks it is necessary to start from the standpoint of simple belief or faith. Since unaided reason cannot establish the Christian truths on its own, human beings must humbly embrace what God supernaturally reveals. However, human beings need not stop with this kind of naïve faith; they can go further. By utilizing the insights of Hegelian logic, they can raise the initially mysterious dogmas up to the level of intelligibility. That is to say, they can make the dogmas comprehensible. Doing so is the goal of the

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speculative project or what sometimes gets called "mediation theology" (Koch 2004, 233).

3.   THE EXISTENTIAL PAYOFF OF THE SPECULATIVE PROJECT

I stated above that the Danish Hegelians saw speculative thinking or the speculative project as important for Christian existence. They believed it would provide them with a kind of existential pay-off, i.e. benefits for their everyday Christian lives. In order to understand why they held this position, we can once again turn to Martensen. In particular, we can look at some provocative comments he makes about the Jews.

In his article on rationalism and supernaturalism, Martensen claims that the Jews did not reject Jesus merely because they were wicked people (Martensen 2004, 588). They rejected him in part because they could not understand his claim to divinity. And the reason they could not understand his claim to divinity was that they embraced Aristotelian logic. The specific sticking point was the laws of excluded middle and non-contradiction, which ruled out the possibility that contradictory predicates such as "God" and "man" could both apply to one and the same subject—something Jesus' claims to be God entailed:

> It understandably struck them as blasphemy that the supernatural Lord of heaven and earth should appear here in a natural, human form. Seen from the point of view of logic, their accusation rested on the *principium exclusi medii* or on the assumption that the contradicting predicates "God" and "man" could not be mediated in the selfsame subject (ibid.).

This passage implies that the Jews would have been less likely to reject Christ had they not embraced Aristotelian logic. Of course, Martensen thinks they would not have embraced Aristotelian logic had they understood Hegelian or speculative philosophy. Thus the moral of the story is that the Jews would have been better off, Christianly speaking, had they known the lessons Hegel was to share with the world.

Martensen uses this story to construct a more general thesis about human nature. He believes the Jews were not somehow unique in resisting the call to believe what they did not understand. Almost all reflective believers will get frustrated in such a situation. And they will remain unsettled as long as there is tension between faith and understanding or, as Martensen sometimes puts it, between what theology teaches and

what philosophy teaches (Martensen 2004, 592-593; see also Koch 2004, 275). Such people will not feel satisfied with old supernaturalism's naïve faith in mysteries. Relief will come only once they have comprehended these mysteries (Martensen 2004, 592-593). Thus, the practical payoff of the speculative project lies in its ability to grant people the relief they crave. And it does so by helping them to acquire religious knowledge.

To put the same point in another way, Martensen embraces a developmental picture of Christian life. He identifies the final goal of the development, i.e. the ideal mode of Christian existence, as a state of inner harmony. Among other things, this inner harmony pertains to the believer's cognitive faculties. Martensen discusses the idea in a later work:

> Human nature is not meant to be divided against itself and to live with a divorce between faith and understanding. For this reason, we must aspire to harmony in our beings and strive towards full agreement with ourselves (qtd. in Koch 2004, 375, my tr.).[79]

On this line of thinking, the speculative project has practical or existential importance because it makes this inner harmony between cognitive faculties possible. That is, it paves the way for human beings to attain the highest mode of existence.

It is important to realize that Martensen's position was common in his day and age. Martensen's teacher, F.C. Sibbern (1785-1872), had defended a version of it as early as the 1820's (Koch 2004, 94-102).[80] And both of them were merely recasting a view they had heard about from the German thinker Henrich Steffens (1773-1845), who had lectured and published on it in Copenhagen at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Koch 2004, 275; Schiørring 1982, 179-180). Moreover, Steffens himself was merely bringing to Denmark an ideal that was already popular among the German Romantics.

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[79] Koch quotes pp. 46-47 of Martensen's work, *Dogmatiske Oplysninger. Et Leilighedsskrift* [Dogmatic Inquiries. An occasional publication], from 1850. The work is a rejoinder to comments made by Rasmus Nielsen (1809-1884) in *Mag. S. Kierkegaard's "Johannes Climacus" og Dr. H. Martensen's "Christelige Dogmatik." En undersøgende Anmeldelse* [Magister S. Kierkegaard's "Johannes Climacus" and Dr. H. Martensen's "Christian Dogmatics."An investigative review]. Nielsen saw himself as Kierkegaard's disciple and defended what he took to be Kierkegaard's view.

[80] See Koch 2004, 99: "Thus [Sibbern's] speculative philosophy, qua Christian philosophy, must help form man into a Christian personality on the intellectual level" (my tr.). See also Koch 2004, 107: "Ideologically speaking, the culture of Golden Age Denmark was a culture of unity in which the goal was to unify religion, morality, social life, nature, and culture. Sibbern's philosophy of development and personality was a valid expression of this ideology… Sibbern's ideal was the harmonious individual in which the tensions between body and soul, between earthly and heavenly, between ideal and real, and between individual and state are abolished" (my tr.).

They too had thought that the goal of human development was to attain an inner harmony of one's faculties and that the way to achieve this goal was to acquire knowledge (Beiser 2005, 37).

If we think in terms of the basic structure of Martensen's position, we find still more historical analogues. For example, Hegel believed the goal of human existence was to attain absolute freedom. But he thought the way to reach such freedom was by acquiring knowledge of all the considerations and circumstances that led one to be who one was—i.e. by acquiring what he called "absolute knowledge" (Koch 2004, 100, 211-212). Thus, Hegel too located the importance of knowledge in its ability to help human beings develop or flourish (Forster 1998, 18-22). In addition, before Hegel, a number of Enlightenment thinkers, including Diderot and Kant, had held that the way to improve humankind was to teach them the arts and sciences (Beiser 1987, 32-33). Their view constitutes yet another version of Martensen's position. Finally, earlier still, Socrates had maintained that knowledge is virtue and hence that which makes human flourishing possible. Thus, he too seems to fit into the tradition under discussion.

4.   KIERKEGAARD'S POSITION

Kierkegaard flatly rejects Martensen's claim that speculative thought can provide existential benefits for Christian believers. In fact, he rejects the entire tradition connecting human flourishing with the acquisition of knowledge. His argument for this position runs as follows.

4.1.   PART ONE

The point of departure is Kierkegaard's egalitarian conception of Christianity. Kierkegaard believes that God sets up Christianity as a universal human task—i.e. a task given to everyone (CD, 263; see also Evans 1983, 73-75, 87).[81] In addition, he believes

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[81] Especially in *Fear and Trembling*, but also elsewhere, Kierkegaard describes the religious individual as standing outside the universally human, as being the single individual [*hiin Enkelte*] who refuses to join in with the crowd. This description seemingly stands in tension with the claim that Christianity comprises a universally human project. How can we alleviate this tension? First, we can bring up the point made at the end of chapter 3, viz. that the religious individual cannot explain to others why he engages in the religious project. He thus stands outside the universal in the sense of being unable to justify himself in the domain of common human discourse. That is to say, he does not act in a way that everyone

that out of consideration for fairness, God designs the task so that it is equally open to and equally difficult for everyone. He declares:

> But it must always be remembered that Christianity is in no way whatsoever associated with differences between man and man, the differences of capacities and endowments. No, no, it offers itself unconditionally to every human being (JP, 3:2679; see also TM, 180; SLW 398).

Climacus makes the same point in *Postscript*:

> Let it be ten times true, then, that Christianity does not consist in differences; let it be the most blessed comfort of earthly life that the sacred humaneness of Christianity is that it can be appropriated by everyone (CUP, 1:366; see also JP, 2:1609).

In a later passage, Climacus adds:

> The easiness of Christianity is distinguished by one thing only: by the difficulty… And in turn the difficulty is absolute, not comparative dialectical (easier for one person than for another), because the difficulty pertains absolutely to each individual in particular and absolutely requires his absolute effort, but no more, *because in the sphere of the religious there are no unjustly treated individualities* (CUP, 1:430-431, my emphasis; see also CUP, 1:377, 1:383).

The general idea here is that no one can have a harder time with Christianity simply because she lacks certain abilities or suffers from unfortunate life circumstances. And no one can have an easier time simply because she possesses certain abilities or enjoys fortunate life circumstances.[82]

It is possible to provide a more precise account of Kierkegaard's point. An egalitarian conception of Christianity rules out the possibility that anyone can have *an unfair advantage* when it comes to the task of becoming and being a Christian. Such an advantage would exist if and only if:

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else can understand. Second, we can note that the Christian project is extremely strenuous. Although it is assigned to everyone, very few people actually choose to engage in it. Most people choose to live ethical or esthetical lives. Thus those who do choose the religious life end up outside the *de facto* universal human way of life.

[82] An egalitarian conception of Christianity also entails that becoming a Christian cannot be easier now than it was in the first century. People of later generations cannot have advantages over people of earlier generations (CUP, 1:606; PC, 66, 107, 203, 207-209). However, it is not clear how far Kierkegaard can take this point. Do the people living in North America in the twenty-first century not have advantages over the people who lived in North America in the first century? After all, at least the former have heard of Christ! For a discussion of the issue, see the journal entry where Kierkegaard talks about those who have not heard of the gospel and the possibility that God makes the task ("the terms of salvation") different for each individual (JP, 4:4922) .

(1) Some person $\mathcal{P}$ enjoyed some capability or circumstance $\mathcal{C}$ that some other person $\mathcal{P}^*$ could not enjoy; and

(2) the enjoyment of $\mathcal{C}$ provided $\mathcal{P}$ with some Christian benefit $\mathcal{B}$ that $\mathcal{P}^*$ could not acquire in some other way.

A few remarks concerning these two conditions are in order. First, it is not enough that person $\mathcal{P}^*$ *does not* enjoy capability or circumstance $\mathcal{C}$. Her failure to enjoy it must be out of her control; it must be the case that she could not enjoy it even if she so desired. For there is nothing unfair about a situation in which person $\mathcal{P}^*$ *could* enjoy capability or circumstance $\mathcal{C}$ and hence acquire Christian benefit $\mathcal{B}$, *but simply decides not to do so*.

Second, by 'a Christian benefit,' I mean anything that makes the task of becoming and being a Christian easier than it otherwise would have been (all else being equal). Of particular note, something that enabled one to avoid difficulties or obstacles concerning the task of becoming or being a Christian that one would otherwise have to face would qualify as a Christian benefit, so too would something that enabled one to progress farther along the Christian journey to beatification than one could otherwise go.

Third, it is important that Christian benefit $\mathcal{B}$ cannot be acquired in some other way than through the enjoyment of capability or circumstance $\mathcal{C}$. If $\mathcal{B}$ could be had in multiple different ways, the fact that one particular way was closed off to some people would not necessarily be unfair. It would still be possible for the playing field to be level in a complicated way, with different people receiving the same benefit from different sources.

4.2. PART TWO

Kierkegaard's egalitarian conception of Christianity shows its relevance to the matter at hand when applied to the intellectual differences that obtain between people. If one person cannot have an easier time with Christianity because of her circumstances or natural endowments, then by instantiation a smart person cannot have an easier time because of her intelligence. Similarly, a cultured person cannot have an easier time because of her culture and an educated person cannot have an easier time because of her

education. In short, Christianity cannot be "difficult for the obtuse and easy for the brainy" (CUP, 1:557; see also CUP, 1:469; SLW 398; Fabro 1967, 174).

It will serve our purposes to bring our more precise account of Kierkegaard's egalitarianism to bear on this particular case. Doing so yields the following. For Kierkegaard, no one can have an unfair advantage with respect to Christianity on account of her sophisticated philosophical understanding. Such an advantage would exist if and only if:

(1) Some person $\mathscr{P}$ grasped some bit of philosophical understanding $\mathscr{U}$ that was too sophisticated for some other person $\mathscr{P}^*$ to grasp; and

(2) grasping $\mathscr{U}$ provided $\mathscr{P}$ with some Christian benefit $\mathscr{B}$ that $\mathscr{P}^*$ could not acquire in some other way.

In what follows, I will refer to this general conclusion as SPUNCA [ˈspuŋ-kə] for **S**ophisticated **P**hilosophical **U**nderstanding is **N**ot **C**hristianly **A**dvantageous.

4.3. PART THREE

Kierkegaard ultimately rejects Martensen's claim that speculative thought provides benefits for Christian believers because it entails a violation of SPUNCA. Here's why. First, not everyone has the ability to engage in speculative thought. In fact, very few people can do so. Thus, condition (1) for violating SPUNCA is easily met. Second, as we see in the case of the Jews, those who grasp Hegel's teachings, i.e. those clever enough to engage in speculative thought, have an easier time becoming Christians. In addition, those intelligent enough to grasp the results of the speculative project get to a higher level of Christian existence. Unlike the simple folk who on account of their simplicity remain at the level of naïve faith, the speculative thinkers acquire understanding as well. They leave behind naïve faith as "a lesson for slow learners in the sphere of intellectuality, an asylum for dullards" (CUP, 1:327; see also CUP, 1:609). Thus, condition (2) for violating SPUNCA is met as well.

In summary, Kierkegaard rejects Martensen's view because it entails that smart people have an unfair advantage when it comes to Christianity. To use slightly different

words, he rejects Martensen's view because it entails an intellectual elitism that is at odds with Christianity. He has Climacus say:

> If the speculative thinker explains the paradox [of the Incarnation] in such a way that he cancels it and now consciously knows that it is canceled…then there is an essential difference between the speculative thinker and the simple person, whereby all existence is confused…and humankind is vexed because there is not an equal relationship with God for all human beings (CUP, 1:227)

Kierkegaard adds in his journals:

> But I cannot escape the thought that every man, unconditionally every man, no matter how simple he is or how suffering, nevertheless can comprehend the highest, specifically, the religious. If this is not so, then Christianity is really nonsense. For me it is frightful to see the recklessness with which philosophers and the like introduce differentiating categories like genius, talent, etc., into religion. They have no intimation that religion is thereby abolished… Think of the highest, think of Christ—suppose that He came into the world in order to save a few clever people, for others could not understand Him. Detestable! Disgusting! He is not nauseated by any human suffering, by anyone's stupidity—but the society of clever people: yes, that would have nauseated Him (JP, 1:1017).

Thus it is by way of a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* that Kierkegaard concludes Martensen's position must be false. Speculative thought must not provide any existential benefits that are relevant to Christian life (CUP, 1:571).

4.4. Dénouement

Kierkegaard can accommodate his rejection of Martensen's position in two different ways. First, he can insist that the speculative project simply has to fail. The idea here is as follows. *If* the speculative project were to succeed and the speculative thinker could explain away the paradox of the Incarnation, she would have an advantage over the simple person. Unlike the simple person, she would not have to believe something she could not understand. The task of becoming and being a Christian would be psychologically less stressful for her. This advantage, however, would be unacceptable since it would run afoul of the egalitarian nature of Christianity. Therefore, by way of *modus tollens*, the speculative project must fail. The speculative thinker must not be able to explain away the paradox (CUP, 1:213-218). In other words, on this account,

Kierkegaard's interpretation of the relationship between reason and religion is the one Martensen describes as old, unmediated supernaturalism.[83]

The second way Kierkegaard can accommodate his rejection of Martensen's position is by interpreting Christianity so that the results of the speculative project simply become irrelevant. To see how this would work, notice that Kierkegaard rejects the idea that faith simply involves the assent to certain propositions. He has Climacus explicitly deny that "a Christian is one who accepts Christianity's doctrine" (CUP, 1:607; see also CUP, 1:37, 1:215, 1:326). Christian faith is instead something much more personal; it is a passionate and unconditional commitment to following Christ (CUP, 1:610-616). By definition, the unconditionally obedient person will follow Christ whether or not the speculative project succeeds. Insofar as her faith is concerned, she will be indifferent to the results of the speculative project. But on this interpretation of Christianity, there is no need to claim the speculative project must fail. Speculative thought provides no Christian benefits simply because its results are *irrelevant* to the Christian way of life.[84]

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[83] Recent scholars have argued that this is the best place to fit Kierkegaard within Martensen's schema (Waaler and Tolstrup 2004, 223-224). However, I am not certain Kierkegaard and Martensen are as far apart as this categorization indicates. On the one hand, unlike some of his Danish contemporaries (e.g. Heiberg), Martensen seems willing to acknowledge that not all aspects of Christianity can be brought within the realm of human understanding (Koch 2004, 231, 277; Stewart 2003, 477-480). For example, he says the actual historical figure of Christ, "the word-made-flesh," cannot be grasped by speculative thought. It remains a supernatural mystery, something for faith alone (Koch 2004, 277; Martensen 2004, 592). Only the abstract idea regarding how a divine essence and a human essence could coexist in a single body can be speculatively understood (ibid.). On the other hand, Kierkegaard seems willing to concede that it may well be possible to understand an abstract unity of a divine and human essence; we may well be able to resolve the paradox of the incarnation from an abstract point of view or, as he sometimes puts it, *sub specie æterni* (CUP, 1:212, 1:214, 1:562; JP, 2:2287). But the actual historical Incarnation, the actual unity of God and an individual existing human being, cannot be understood. As Anti-Climacus says in *Practice in Christianity*, the paradox remains irresolvable on this level:

> In Scripture the God-man [i.e. Christ] is called a sign of contradiction—but what contradiction, if any, could there be at all in the speculative unity of God and man? No, there is no contradiction in that, but the contradiction—and it is as great as possible, is the qualitative contradiction—is between being God and being an individual human being (PC, 125).

Thus Kierkegaard and Martensen might not actually be in great disagreement about whether or how speculative philosophy can understand Christian dogmas. The effect of this more nuanced view is to shift the crux of the debate between Kierkegaard and Martensen to the question of what existential importance understanding the abstract unity of God and man might have. Martensen will say that it has great importance and Kierkegaard that it has none.

[84] While *Kierkegaard* sometimes takes the second path (e.g. JP, 3:3026), there are at least two reasons why *Climacus* refuses to do so. First, Climacus fears that those who do not *have to* exercise a disposition to believe without understanding will not actually acquire one. On account of their laziness, they will acquire one only if absolutely necessary. Therefore, true faith—i.e. true unconditional commitment—will only arise if people are forced to believe against their understanding. Or, as he puts it, true faith will only arise if the object of faith is an irreconcilable paradox, i.e. only if the speculative project

But whichever way Kierkegaard goes—whether he goes the first way and insists that the speculative project must fail or goes the second way and simply says it is irrelevant—the final conclusion remains the same. Speculative thought must not provide unfair Christian advantages. On pain of the aforementioned *reductio ad absurdum*, it must not provide the elite few who can engage in it with Christian benefits that simple people cannot get in some other way.

5.   THE APPARENT PROBLEM WITH KIERKEGAARD'S POSITION

At the end of section one, I said that Kierkegaard's position would suffer from a serious problem. It is now time to address that problem.

The crux of the matter is that SPUNCA seems to violate its own rule. That is, SPUNCA seems to meet the two conditions stipulated earlier for violating SPUNCA. To see why, notice how it comes across in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

First, SPUNCA comes across as a rather sophisticated bit of philosophical understanding. Climacus offers a number of arguments for it, one of which we just examined. In addition, he takes over 600 pages to develop its implications, many of which tax even the brightest of minds. Thus, it would not be surprising if SPUNCA proved too sophisticated for some people to grasp.

Second, SPUNCA—or rather grasping and ultimately accepting SPUNCA— comes across as providing an important Christian benefit that cannot be had in any other

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fails (CUP, 1:230, 1:610-611, 1:614; cf. CUP, 1:423-427). Second, Climacus thinks the true knight of faith is not only *willing* to pay any price in order to follow Christ but actually *wants* to pay it. The knight of faith, therefore, will work hard to keep his understanding at bay and ensure that he sacrifices it (CUP, 1:233, 1:564-565). In this respect, Climacus claims, the knight of faith is like "a girl truly in love." Such a girl wants to express her love by paying the highest price for it and becomes disappointed if she gains the beloved on the cheap (CUP, 1:231).

    Climacus' two reasons for rejecting the second path suffer from a common problem. There is nothing about them that pertains specifically to the disposition to believe against the understanding. The same reasons should entail, *mutatis mutandis*, that the knight of faith must realize all of his other difficult dispositions, for example, his disposition to abandon all his possessions in order to follow Christ. However, Climacus does not require the knight of faith to realize these other dispositions. With respect to them, he requires only that the disposition exist (CUP, 1:406, 1:410). Therefore, he seemingly treats the disposition to believe against the understanding as a special case (R. Adams 1977, 330-333). Unfortunately, it is not at all clear why it warrants such treatment. It seems Climacus ought either to require the knight of faith to realize all of his dispositions or to concede that the knight of faith does not have to realize his disposition to believe against the understanding. If he pursues the latter option, which seems by far the more reasonable one, he could allow for the speculative project to succeed as outlined above. (Cf. the passage in *Judge for Yourself!* where Kierkegaard explicitly pursues the former option (JFY, 137).)

way. In particular, *Postscript* suggests that those who accept SPUNCA are less likely to get distracted by philosophical reflection than those who do not. Thus, those who accept SPUNCA have one less obstacle to face on the road to becoming and being Christian. And that fits the stipulated definition of 'Christian benefit.'[85]

But if SPUNCA meets the two conditions for violating SPUNCA, then we have a troublesome situation on our hands. Climacus seems to be telling us:

> Here is a bit of sophisticated philosophical understanding that is Christianly advantageous: 'sophisticated philosophical understanding is not Christianly advantageous.'

Abstracting away, we get the following formal structure:

> Here is an S that is P: 'No S's are P's.'

This structure is obviously problematic. For the statement 'No S's are P's' serves as a counter-example to the claim it itself makes, viz. no S's are P's. We can describe this problem as a self-reference paradox or a self-referentially inconsistent statement. And, to the extent that it helps, we can say it bears analogy to the relativist's paradox (the only universal truth is that there are no universal truths), Rorty's paradox (the only good meta-level theory is that all meta-level theories are bad), and the paradox of Socrates' ignorance (the only thing Socrates knows is that he is ignorant).

At this point it is worth noting that not every interpreter of Kierkegaard would balk at this problem. Certain postmodern readers, who actually delight in the paradoxes and contradictions they find in Kierkegaard's writings, would embrace the problem rather than try to resolve it (see Jegstrup 2004, 4). I admit to having a small amount of sympathy for this position and think there are times when it is the right stance to take up. However, I do not think that *now* is one of those times. For I do not believe we actually encounter a contradiction here. More pointedly, I do not believe SPUNCA *actually* generates the self-reference paradox that it *appears* to generate. Over the next several sections (§§6-9), I will explain why I hold this position.

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[85] We can raise the problem in a more concrete way by imagining the following person whom we will call 'John.' On the one hand, John is philosophically inclined. He is what contemporary psychologists would call 'high in need for cognition.' As a result, he is the sort of person who will get distracted by philosophical investigations into Christianity if he does not see the truth of SPUNCA. On the other hand, John is not terribly bright. Despite the fact that he is philosophically inclined, he does not have what it takes to grasp sophisticated philosophical truths. In particular, he does not have what it takes to see the truth of SPUNCA. If John (or someone like him) exists—and it seems as though he might—then knowledge of SPUNCA will provide those who have it with an unfair over advantage over him.

It is worth noting that Kierkegaard is aware of the relevant type of paradox. He even has Climacus describe several tokens of it, some of which sound eerily similar to the one under investigation. For example, early in *Postscript*, Climacus discusses the person who wants to communicate the conviction that "truth is inwardness; objectively there is no truth, but the appropriation is the truth" (CUP, 1:77). The challenge facing this person is to communicate his conviction without turning it into something that is itself an objective truth:

> Suppose, then, that someone wanted to communicate the following conviction: truth is inwardness; objectively there is no truth, but the appropriation is the truth. Suppose he had enough zeal and enthusiasm to get it said, because when people heard it they would be saved. Suppose he said it on every occasion and moved not only those who sweat easily but also the tough people—what then? Then there would certainly be some laborers who had been standing idle in the marketplace and only upon hearing this call would go forth to work in the vineyard—to proclaim this teaching to all people. And what then? Then he would have contradicted himself even more, just as he had from the beginning, because the zeal and enthusiasm for getting it said and getting it heard were already a misunderstanding. The main point was indeed to become understood, and the inwardness of the understanding would indeed be that the single individual would understand this by himself. Now he had even gone so far as to obtain barkers, and a barker of inwardness is a creature worth seeing (CUP, 1:77).

On the very next page, Climacus provides another example. He describes the difficulty of communicating the conviction that "the truth is not the truth but that the way is the truth, that is, that the truth is only in the becoming, in the process of appropriation, that consequently there is no result" (CUP, 1:78). The challenge here is to communicate the position without turning it into an instance of what it denies, namely a truth in the form of a result. Finally, in the section on Lessing, he discusses the problem of communicating the view that actual existence is important, while abstract doctrines are not. The temptation here is to present the view as itself being an important abstract doctrine (CUP, 1:122-123).

Two comments are in order. First, since paradoxes analogous to the one threatening *Postscript* get discussed within *Postscript*, it is likely that Kierkegaard was aware of the threat. It is even plausible that Kierkegaard has Climacus discuss the paradoxes *precisely because* he was aware of the threat. Thus if we want guidance for

dealing with the paradox threatening the book as a whole, it seems prudent to look at how Climacus deals with the analogous paradoxes within the book.

Second, in every example he discusses, Climacus suggests that the potential paradox is *performative* and not *conceptual*. That is to say, the potential paradox is not internal to the conviction in question. Rather, it has to do with the way in which the conviction gets expressed. It arises only when the communicator expresses the conviction or view using the wrong form or style—a form or style that contradicts the content of the conviction. Consequently, it does not arise if the communicator uses the proper form or style. For example, notice that Climacus does not suggest that there is something internally incoherent about the conviction "truth is inwardness; objectively there is no truth." He suggests there is something incoherent about the way in which the conviction gets communicated or expressed. To wit, the person in the example communicates the conviction *as an objective truth*. More precisely, he communicates it in a form or a style that makes it appear to be an objective truth. Climacus goes on to suggest that the problem would go away if the conviction were communicated properly (CUP, 1:78-79). That is, it would go away if the person communicating the conviction did not use such a misleading form.

Bringing the two comments together, we can say that the paradox threatening *Postscript* as a whole should be *performative* and not *conceptual.* There should be no problem with the content of *Postscript* itself. A problem should arise only if Climacus uses an improper form or style to communicate this content. Finally, this problem should go away if Climacus uses a proper form. I will now look at two strategies for dealing with the potential paradox that embrace this suggestion. The first will fail, but in an instructive way (§7). The second one will succeed and, in so doing, will pave the way to a new argument for the indispensability thesis (§§ 8-9).

7.   THE ALLISON AND CONANT SOLUTION

Two important commentators, Henry Allison and James Conant, have addressed something akin to the paradox described in §5.[86] They both acknowledge that one of

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[86] Henry Allison was the first commentator to discuss something resembling the paradox of communicating SPUNCA. He did so in his 1967 paper "Kierkegaard and Nonsense." James Conant's

Climacus' goals in *Postscript* is to make people aware that acquiring more philosophical knowledge will not help them with the Christian project (Allison 1967, 433, 459-560; Conant 1993, 205-206). In other words, they both admit that Climacus desires to communicate something akin to SPUNCA. In addition, they both confess that the challenge facing commentators is to understand how Climacus can accomplish this goal without contradicting himself (Allison 1967, 458; Conant 1993, 207-208). Here is how they take on that challenge.

Allison and Conant start by conceding that if we read *Postscript* straightforwardly, i.e. if we read it as a serious philosophical work that should be taken at face value, we get our paradox (Allison 1967, 458; Conant 1993, 210, 215-216). However, both insist there are good reasons for *not* reading *Postscript* in this way. First, as suggested earlier, Kierkegaard is aware of the relevant type of paradox. Thus it would seem strange for him to fall prey to the paradox unintentionally (Allison 1967, 459; Conant 1993, 211-245). Second, several of the arguments presented in *Postscript* appear so poorly constructed and so absurd that it is hard to imagine someone with Kierkegaard's intellectual acumen forwarding them seriously (Allison 1967, 453; Conant 1993, 214-215). Third, Climacus revokes everything he says in *Postscript* and declares that the book is superfluous (CUP, 1:618-621). A person with a serious philosophical message is not likely to say this. Fourth, Climacus claims to be a humorist, someone whose fundamental attitude towards life is not serious (CUP, 1:501, 1:617). And fifth, when Climacus reviews his earlier work, *Philosophical Fragments*, he downplays the importance of its content and emphasizes its ironic or humorous form. These comments might make us suspicious that something similar goes on in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to* Philosophical Fragments (CUP, 1:274n; Conant 1993, 210, 215).

The conclusion Allison and Conant draw from this evidence is that we should not treat *Postscript* as a piece of serious philosophy or as a work that contains serious philosophical positions. We should instead treat it as a joke—perhaps even a parody of serious pieces of philosophy (Allison 1967, 454-456; Conant 1993, 205, 207, 215). This

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attempt to address the paradox is much more recent ("Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense" appeared in 1993), although it proceeds along the same basic line. Since Conant's version has received more attention in the secondary literature, I will include it in my discussion. I can also mention here that Stephen Mulhall has addressed the paradox in his book, *Faith and Reason* (1994). However, his account has been less influential and so I will not discuss it.

move does indeed let Climacus avoid the self-reference paradox. *Postscript* no longer offers readers a Christianly advantageous piece of sophisticated philosophical knowledge about how sophisticated philosophical knowledge is not Christianly advantageous. It does not do so because it simply does not offer readers a piece of sophisticated philosophical knowledge. It offers something else: a joke, a parody of sophisticated philosophical knowledge.

This position has received a significant amount of criticism in recent times. The standard line of objection involves challenging the reasons Allison and Conant give for reading *Postscript* as a joke.[87] While these challenges are important, there is a much more effective way to attack the Allison and Conant position. It runs as follows.

To begin with, neither Allison nor Conant is content to say *Postscript* is merely a joke. Both insist that, while it is a joke, it is a joke with a serious point (see, e.g., Allison 1967, 456). To leverage a phrase Kierkegaard often uses, it is a unity of jest and earnestness (CUP, 1:274n). Both Conant and Allison speak of this serious point in (what at least some people have called) non-cognitive terms. Allison claims, for example, that the joke serves to help us "see" or "come to grips with" the futility or irrelevance of philosophy when it comes to the task of being Christian (1967 433, 460). Conant adds that Climacus uses the joke to "show" or "reveal" to us that, with respect to Christianity, there is nothing more we need to know (1993, 205-206). He also talks about how the joke "shatters the illusion" that we can get somewhere, Christianly speaking, by acquiring philosophical understanding (1993, 207).

Allison and Conant use non-cognitive terminology to speak about the serious point of Climacus' parody for a very important reason. They want to avoid saying that Climacus is trying to get us to *know* something or that he is trying to impart philosophical *understanding* to us (see, e.g., Conant 1993, 205). If they came out and said either of these things, the paradox would have its revenge. For the relevant bit of knowledge or understanding would certainly be that philosophical understanding is not Christianly advantageous. Hence, Climacus would once again be trying to communicate the Christianly advantageous piece of philosophical understanding that philosophical

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[87] See, primarily, Lippitt 2000a, 47-71 and Rudd 2000, 119-126. But see also Ferreira 1994, 29-44; Lippitt 1997, 181-202; Lippitt 2000b, 107-117; Lippitt and Hutto 1998, 263-286; Muench 2007, 424-440; and Weston 1999, 35-64.

understanding is not Christianly advantageous. And that is just the original paradox of communicating SPUNCA. Of course, Climacus would now be communicating SPUNCA by way of a joke and not by way of an ordinary assertion. But the paradox would arise nonetheless.

The pivotal question, therefore, is whether it really helps to speak about the serious point of *Postscript* in non-cognitive terms. Does it really allow Allison and Conant to avoid the revenge of the paradox? I do not think so. The main reason is that it seems right to extend the domain of SPUNCA so that it covers the kind of non-cognitive states Allison and Conant have in mind. That is to say, it seems right to interpret SPUNCA so that it rules out Christian advantages stemming from sophisticated *non-cognitive* states in addition to those stemming from sophisticated *cognitive* states. For if there was a non-cognitive state that provided Christian advantages only to those sophisticated or clever enough to adopt it, we would once again have a violation of the egalitarian conception of Christianity. And it would make little sense for Kierkegaard to allow a violation here but not with respect to cognitive attitudes. Indeed, on what basis could Kierkegaard treat cognitive and non-cognitive states thus differently?

On this expanded interpretation of SPUNCA, Allison and Conant's appeal to non-cognitive terminology does not help. When construed in non-cognitive terms, the serious point of *Postscript* still violates SPUNCA. And since the serious point of *Postscript* on the non-cognitive account is to get us to see SPUNCA, we once again have a version of our original paradox. In particular, Climacus is prompting us to adopt a Christianly advantageous non-cognitive state in which we can see *inter alia* that such non-cognitive states cannot be Christianly advantageous.

8.   AN ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

I laud Allison and Conant for taking the paradox seriously and I think they are right to focus on humor as the key to getting around it. But I believe they go too far when they say we must stop reading *Postscript* straightforwardly. And I believe they go in the wrong direction when they appeal to non-cognitive states. There is, however, a way to proceed that does not require either of these maneuvers. In what follows, I will outline the steps to this alternative solution.

The first step is to deny that SPUNCA is itself a piece of *sophisticated* philosophical understanding. It might be a piece of understanding or even a piece of philosophical understanding, but it is not *sophisticated*. It is, instead, something a simple person can grasp. For a simple person can grasp the idea that, when it comes to following Christ, becoming a serious philosopher or theologian is no advantage. In fact, most simple people already accept some version of this principle, at least implicitly. As Climacus says, the simple person "feels no need for a deeper understanding" (CUP, 1:180-181) and "finds comfort in the thought that life's happiness does not consist in being a person of knowledge" (CUP, 1:170n**).

The upshot of this first step is that SPUNCA itself does not actually generate a self-reference paradox. To recall, SPUNCA rules out the possibility of information that (1) is so sophisticated that simple people cannot grasp it and yet (2) provides some Christian benefit that simple people cannot acquire in some other way. In order for a self-reference paradox to arise, SPUNCA itself would have to meet both conditions. But given what we have just said, we can see this is not the case. In particular, the first condition is not met: simple or unsophisticated people can and do grasp SPUNCA.

This is all well and good, someone might say, but Climacus does not write for the simple people. As he repeatedly tells us, he writes for the speculative thinkers—thinkers who happen to be quite sophisticated (CUP, 1:170n**, 1:383). These people *do* feel a need for deeper understanding; that is part of what makes them sophisticated people. Because they feel this need, they will not embrace SPUNCA without good reasons for doing so. Appropriately, part of what Climacus does in *Postscript* is to provide them with such reasons, one of which I have outlined above.

But now our paradox threatens to return. Here's why. First, even if SPUNCA itself is not sophisticated, the arguments given in its defense certainly are. We would not be hard pressed to find people who lack the intellectual ability to grasp them. Second, these arguments seem to provide Climacus' sophisticated readers with an important Christian benefit that at least *they* could not get in any other way. For without these arguments, such readers will not accept SPUNCA and hence will continue to engage in speculative thought instead of living Christianly. Putting these points together, we have a piece of information that is both philosophically sophisticated and Christianly beneficial

to know. That is, we once again have an apparent violation of SPUNCA. Granted, it is not SPUNCA itself that comprises the new counter-example but rather the arguments for SPUNCA. Still, these arguments occur within *Postscript* and *Postscript* endorses SPUNCA. Therefore, we can say that *Postscript* seemingly serves as a counter-example to one of the theses it endorses. And that sounds like our original self-reference paradox, albeit in slightly different form.

To avoid this sticky situation, we must take a second step: we must accommodate the humorous aspect of *Postscript*. To start off, note that the sophisticated arguments for SPUNCA contained in *Postscript* really only have derivative value. That is to say, they only have value insofar as they help people accept SPUNCA, and it is accepting SPUNCA that provides the real Christian benefits. However, as argued above, the benefits of accepting SPUNCA are already enjoyed by simple people. For simple people start out from the point of embracing this truth. Therefore, all things considered, the sophisticated arguments of *Postscript* do not provide the sophisticated people who can understand them with any benefits that unsophisticated people do not already possess. Herein lies the humorous aspect of the book. After more than 600 pages, it brings its sophisticated readers no further than where the simple man on the street gets without reading it.[88] Climacus foreshadows this humorous point in the following passage:

> [H]ow close to satire it is that one has spent time and energy for a number of years and ends up with nothing more than what the most obtuse person knows— rather than, alas, during the same time and with the same energy, possibly having accomplished something pertaining to China, Persia, even astronomy (CUP, 1:498).

And he confesses it explicitly at the end of *Postscript*:

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[88] Kierkegaard here echoes the haunting words at the end of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*: "I will not boast here of the merit that philosophy has on account of the laborious effort of its critique of human reason, supposing even that this should be found in the end to be merely negative, for something more about that will be forthcoming in the next section. But do you demand then that a cognition that pertains to all human beings should surpass common understanding and be revealed to you only by philosophers? The very thing that you criticize is the best confirmation of the correctness of the assertions that have been made hitherto, that is, that it reveals what one could not have foreseen in the beginning, namely that in what concerns all human beings without exception nature is not to be blamed for any partiality in the distribution of its gifts, and in regard to the essential ends of human nature even the highest philosophy cannot advance further than the guidance that nature has also conferred on the most common understanding" (A831/B859).

> I am a friend of difficulties, especially of those that have the humorous quality, so that the most cultured person, after having gone through the most enormous effort, essentially has come no further than the simplest human being can come (CUP, 1:607).

To put the point another way, what pertains to Christianity generally, applies to *Postscript* as well: "more understanding goes no further than less understanding. On the contrary they go equally far, the exceptionally gifted person slowly, the simple person swiftly" (CUP, 1:607; see also TDIO, 78).[89]

We can now see why Climacus' sophisticated arguments for SPUNCA do not constitute a counter-example to SPUNCA. They would constitute a counterexample only if both (1) they were so sophisticated that simple people could not understand them and yet (2) they provided a Christian benefit that simple people could not acquire in some other way. But given what we have just said, we know the arguments for SPUNCA do not meet the second condition. While the arguments do provide a Christian benefit, it is not one that "simple people cannot acquire in some other way." Rather, it is one that can be and indeed is had by those too simple to understand the arguments. Thus we can say that the arguments do not bring the intellectual elite beyond the simple people. Rather,

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[89] Notice that Climacus turns the tables here on the speculative thinkers. Far from its being the case that their sophistication provides them with an advantage with respect to Christianity, it actually provides them with a disadvantage. Because they feel a great need for understanding, they have a hard time accepting the fact that understanding provides no advantage, i.e. they have a hard time accepting SPUNCA. It takes them a lot longer to come to terms with this truth than it takes the simple people. Climacus thus asserts in the Conclusion to *Postscript*, "cultured people have only a very ironic advantage over simple folk with regard to becoming and continuing to be Christians: the advantage that it is more difficult" (CUP, 1:606).

Of course, we might worry that we now have an inverted version of our problem. There are still some people who have an easier time with Christianity—it just happens to be the simple people instead of the wise people. But if Climacus' egalitarian interpretation of Christianity holds, i.e. if Christianity is supposed to be "equally difficult for all," then this difference seems out of place. Why should it be okay for the simple people to have an advantage now when it was not okay for the wise people to have an advantage before?

This worry rests on a failure to understand the "equally difficult for all" corollary in the way Climacus intends it. The point of Climacus' egalitarian interpretation of Christianity is to make the Christian task involve the same amount of effort for everyone. But, Climacus thinks, this means the difficulty must correlate with the abilities of each individual such that the person with greater abilities faces greater challenges:

> [E]very essential existence task [and Christianity is the paradigmatic one] pertains equally to every human being and therefore makes the difficulty proportionate to the individual's endowment (CUP, 1:383).

We can think here of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) or the parable of the faithful servant (Luke 12:48): from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. Thus, rather than it being a problem that Christianity is more difficult for the more sophisticated people, it is precisely the way things ought to be.

they bring the intellectual elite, who on account of their sophistication *think* they have gone beyond the simple people, back to the point where the simple people already are. Therefore, not only SPUNCA itself but the arguments for SPUNCA avoid a self-reference paradox.

9.   RETURN TO THE INDISPENSABILITY THESIS

I will now connect what I have just said about the paradox facing *Postscript* as a whole to my earlier comments about the paradoxes found within this work. I will argue that, as with respect to these other paradoxes, it is actually the proper form—ultimately, the *indirect* form—of Climacus' communication that lets him off the hook. My argumentative strategy will consist of showing that the same content (i.e. the arguments for SPUNCA) communicated in an improper—i.e. direct—form would succumb to the paradox. The work of Kierkegaard's blundering apprentice, Rasmus Nielsen (1809-1884), will serve as a foil.

Like many Danish thinkers who came of age during the 1830's, Nielsen was initially caught up in the Hegelian furor. But, as time passed, his infatuation with speculative thought waned. By the end of the 1840's he had become something of a Kierkegaard disciple. This conversion culminated in a number of books and lectures in which Nielsen took up what he saw as Kierkegaard's cause.[90] Armed with select bits and pieces of information from the pseudonymous literature, and primarily the Climacus writings, he engaged in what Kierkegaard later called a "learned dispute with the eminent professor M[artensen]" about the importance of philosophy for Christian existence (JP 6:6574). Nielsen's serious, academic tone led Kierkegaard to declare that "his presentation, his address, are more or less direct teaching, especially if compared with the pseudonym's" (JP, 6:6574).

Although Kierkegaard had taken Nielsen under his wing and for a while saw Nielsen as a potential protégé, he was ultimately disappointed with Nielsen's books. He

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[90] The two most important works were *Evangelietroen og den moderne Bevidsthed. Tolv Forelæsninger holdte ved Universitet i Kjøbenhavn i Vinteren 1849-50* [Evangelical faith and the modern consciousness. Twelve lectures held at the University of Copenhagen in the Winter of 1849-1850] (Koch 2004, 392) and *Mag. S. Kierkegaards "Johannes Climacus" og Dr. H. Martensens "Christelige Dogmatik"* [Magister S. Kierkegaard's "Johannes Climacus" and Dr. H. Martensen's "Christian Dogmatics"] (Koch 2004, 363-364).

frequently criticizes them in his journals and at one point even declares that he "must categorically take exception to Prof. Nielsen's books" (JP, 6:6869). His disapproval does not stem from Nielsen's failure to understand the content of his position; he even concedes that Nielsen succeeds at making people aware of his cause (JP, 6:6574). It stems rather from Nielsen's serious, academic tone (ibid.). Kierkegaard claims that this tone gives the impression that Nielsen cares very much about sophisticated philosophical thought. It leads readers to believe that he sides with Martensen in maintaining that focusing on "science, scholarship and theory" is worthwhile (ibid). More to the point, Nielsen's tone makes it appear as though he sides with Martensen in maintaining that engaging in scholarship is worthwhile *because it provides existential or Christian benefits*.[91] This creates a problem because the conclusion of Nielsen's scholarship is a version of SPUNCA. And SPUNCA entails that such scholarship *cannot* provide such benefits. Therefore, the style of Nielsen's books cuts against the grain of their content. In Kierkegaard's words, when Nielsen defends SPUNCA in a serious, academic fashion, "from the standpoint of the idea, the cause has retrogressed, because it has acquired a less consistent form" (ibid.). To put the point in the terminology we have been using, Kierkegaard thinks Nielsen's presentation falls prey to a self-reference paradox.[92]

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[91] This is the dubious step in Kierkegaard's argument. It seems right to say that Nielsen's serious, academic tone would give the impression that he thinks "science, scholarship, and theory" are important. It is less obvious that his tone would give the impression that he thinks such things are important *because they provide existential benefits*. Two points are in order here. First, when explaining the importance of academic scholarship, many people at the time (especially the Hegelians) appealed to its existential benefits. Given that Nielsen accepted the importance of academic scholarship, it is little stretch to think that people would attribute to him the standard explanation as to why. Second, we have reason to think that some people did in fact see Nielsen as holding this view. In one of his later works, *Dr. H. Martensens Dogmastiske Oplysninger Belyste* [Dr. H. Martensen's Dogmatic Inquiries Reviewed], Nielsen is forced to clarify that he is interested in philosophical and theological scholarship for its own sake and not in order to provide readers with existential benefits (Koch 2004, 377). He would not have had to make this clarification if people were not attributing to him the view that his scholarship had existential payoffs.

[92] In his journals, Kierkegaard levels another accusation against Nielsen. He says Nielsen's academic style simply feeds into the speculative thinkers' psychological problem (JP, 6:6574). Their psychological problem, to recall, is that they are obsessed with abstract reflection and theorizing. Thus, by providing the speculative thinkers with academic tomes, Nielsen effectively encourages them to do more of what they already do excessively. His behavior calls to mind Climacus' image of the person who stuffs more food in the mouth of the man who is starving precisely because his mouth is too full to swallow (CUP, 1:274n). The problem with this accusation is that Climacus seems to fall prey to it as well. As I have argued, Climacus provides his readers with philosophical arguments for SPUNCA. And it makes a certain amount of sense to say that the philosophical nature of these arguments would encourage his readers to engage in reflection. If it did, then, like Nielsen, Climacus would be stuffing food into the mouths of those whose mouths were already too full. Of course, Climacus denies that he engages in such impropriety. He claims to be taking food away rather than stuffing it in people's mouths (CUP, 1:274n). Whether or not his

What Nielsen ought to have done, Kierkegaard claims, is be less didactic or academically serious and more indirect. More specifically, he ought to have taken up something akin to Climacus' humorous attitude (ibid.). This humorous attitude or jesting tone, which comes out most clearly when Climacus revokes all 600+ pages of *Postscript* as superfluous, indicates that Climacus does not think he gets anywhere important in his book. And, as argued above, this is much more consistent with the content of SPUNCA. Just as Climacus ridicules other thinkers' philosophical endeavors, so too does he laugh at his own; what applies to everyone else, applies equally to himself. Thus, he avoids the self-reference paradox to which he would have succumbed had he been as academically serious as Nielsen.

We must concede that Kierkegaard's terminology here is somewhat strained. It is clear that he *wants* to call Nielsen's academic style 'direct communication' and Climacus' humorous style 'indirect communication.' However, it is less than clear *why* he thinks these labels fit. The best we can do is to say that he is operating with the second account of these terms discussed back in §2 of chapter 2. (To recall, according to that account, 'indirect communication' refers to the use of artful rhetorical devices, where the relevant set of devices can be defined only extensionally. By contrast, 'direct communication' refers to a communication that does not make use of those devices.) But, as discussed, this explanation fails to provide as much clarity as we would like.

Nevertheless, if we grant Kierkegaard the terminological point, two conclusions follow. To wit, *if* Nielsen's academic communication counts as direct communication, *then* a direct communication of the arguments for SPUNCA falls prey to a self-reference paradox. And *if* Climacus' more humorous communication counts as indirect communication, *then* an indirect communication of the arguments for SPUNCA escapes the self-reference paradox. Now the consequents of these two conditional statements comprise the core of the indispensability thesis, i.e. Kierkegaard's thesis that indirect communication can do something direct communication cannot. It follows that, if we grant Kierkegaard the terminological point, we have a strong argument for the indispensability of indirect communication. But even if we do not grant the

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claim is true and what it might mean if it were are issues I will save for a later date. (For some guidance regarding the postponed discussion, see Muench 2003.)

terminological point, we still have a substantive and important conclusion: communicating the arguments for SPUNCA requires the use of an unusual style of communication, one that differs from the standard style used by academics of the day.

CHAPTER 6:

INDIRECT COMMUNICATION AND "LIKE IS ONLY KNOWN BY LIKE"

The previous two chapters looked at reasons why Kierkegaard uses indirect communication to make readers aware of their existential options, i.e. the different ways in which they can live their lives. In both cases, the reasons cited had to do with problems plaguing Kierkegaard's audience. (In chapter 4, the problem was that the audience suffered from "illusions." In chapter 5, the problem was that the audience held an erroneous belief, viz. that sophisticated philosophical understanding was Christianly advantageous.) The general argument was that Kierkegaard needed to use indirect communication in order to accommodate these problems.

The present chapter will once again broach the issue of whether Kierkegaard must use indirect communication to make people aware of their options. But it will do so from a different direction. This time around, no appeals will be made to problems plaguing Kierkegaard's audience. The question will rather be whether Kierkegaard must still use indirection once all the problems have been removed. My thesis is that the answer to this question is "yes." Kierkegaard believes there is something special about the religious option in particular that precludes a straightforward description of it. If he wants his readers to have knowledge of this option, he must use indirect communication. More specifically, he must use the kind of indirect communication exemplified by the fictional narratives found in his early pseudonymous writings.

My strategy for proving this thesis runs as follows. First, I will provide textual evidence for thinking Kierkegaard believes the religious option defies description. Second, I will explain why Kierkegaard holds this belief, appealing in particular to his defense of the ancient "like is only known by like" thesis. Third, I will specify the problems for communication created by the "like is only known by like" thesis. And, finally, I will discuss why Kierkegaard (or at least the early Kierkegaard) maintains he must use fictional examples to get around these problems.

1.   THE EXISTENCE OF PROBLEMATIC CONTENT

There are two versions of the claim that, for Kierkegaard, the religious option resists straightforward description. The difference between the versions has to do with what aspect of the religious option supposedly causes the problems. According to the first version of the claim, what allegedly defies description for Kierkegaard is the *object* of religious faith or *what* the religious individual believes. According to the second, the purported problem area concerns the *life* of the religious individual or *how* the religious individual relates to the object of belief.

    Both versions of the claim are controversial.[93] My own position is that a case can be made *in favor* of both versions. That is, Kierkegaard thinks problems arise with describing *either* the object of faith *or* the life of faith. In this chapter, however, I will only focus on the problems associated with the life of faith.[94] What follows is my defense of the version of the claim corresponding to this aspect of the religious option.

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[93] For examples of those who argue that Kierkegaard thinks some aspect of the religious option *cannot* be adequately communicated see Jaspers 1986, 37-53; Jegstrup 2001; Lorentzen 2001, xix; Mooney 1997, 129-148; and Ramsland 1987, 327-334; 1989, 13-23. For examples of those who hold the opposing view, see Conant 1993, 196; 1995 310n33; Ferreira 1994, 29-44; and Lübcke 1990, 31-40.

[94] With respect to the object of faith, let me say the following. Early in his authorship, Kierkegaard held that we need no special form of communication to make people aware of the object of religious faith. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), for example, Climacus asserts that direct communication is in order when it comes to telling people what to believe:

> As soon as truth, the essential truth, can be assumed to be known by everyone, appropriation and inwardness must be worked for, and here can be worked for only in an indirect form. The position of the apostle is something else, because he must proclaim an unknown truth, and therefore direct communication can always have its validity temporarily (CUP, 1:243).

We find a similar line in the *Two Lectures on Communication* (1847-1848). Here Kierkegaard says that all religious communication first of all involves conveying a bit of knowledge about the revealed doctrines. For this task, direct communication is appropriate. Indirect communication comes into play only after people possess this knowledge (JP, 1:657, 1:651, 1:653.27-29). The basic idea is that the problem does not lie in describing what people must believe (CUP, 1:580). That is easy enough to do. The real challenge lies in getting people actually to believe it (ibid.). And that is where special forms of communication come into play.

    But by the time of *Practice in Christianity* (1850), if not earlier, a different picture emerges. In *Practice*, Anti-Climacus asserts that Christ cannot communicate directly about himself. The problem is that Christ possesses a paradoxical nature. He is both God and man, infinite and finite, eternal and temporal. Therefore, all his communication about his nature contains paradoxes, making it less than straightforward (PC, 134-135; see also JP, 2:1959). Since Christ's nature as God-man comprises the object of faith, it follows that Christ can only communicate about the object of faith indirectly. Whether Anti-Climacus would restrict this conclusion to Christ or would say other people also must communicate indirectly about the object of faith is unclear. Nevertheless, the point stands that in some situations straightforward language is inadequate to the task of describing the object of faith.

    Of course, even early on in his authorship, Kierkegaard maintained that the object of Christian faith was a paradox. Thus Anti-Climacus' statement that Christ's communication about himself is

My argument has two premises. The first premise is that Climacus defines the religious life, and especially the Christian life, using the technical terms "subjectivity" and "inwardness." Now passages in which Climacus draws *some kind of connection* between the Christian life and "subjectivity" abound. Three selections from early in *Postscript* serve as good examples:

> Christianity is spirit; spirit is inwardness; inwardness is subjectivity; subjectivity is essentially passion (CUP, 1:33).

> Christianity, therefore, protests against all objectivity; it wants the subject to be infinitely concerned about himself. What it asks about is the subjectivity; the truth of Christianity, if it is at all, is only in this; objectively, it is not at all (CUP, 1:130).

> Christianity explicitly wants to intensify passion to its highest, but passion is subjectivity, and objectively it does not exist at all (CUP, 1:131).

Of course, the most famous passage in which Climacus draws the connection is the one where he asserts that, with respect to the religious life, "subjectivity is truth" (CUP, 1:203; see also WL, 137).

Unfortunately, readers of *Postscript* have often misinterpreted *the particular kind of connection* between subjectivity and religion Climacus intends to draw. They assume when he says "truth is subjectivity" he means something akin to "the truth is subjective." According to this reading, Climacus takes up an anti-realist stance on religious doctrines and truths. He claims they are only true for or a product of the individual subjects who hold them. In short, religious doctrines lack any objective or mind-independent reality (Evans 1983, 69-72).

While some passages lend themselves to this interpretation, it is not the best way to read Climacus. Most scholars today agree that Climacus does not deny the objective truth of religious doctrines.[95] He simply denies that their objective truth is what matters most. He does so because he wants to emphasize the importance of *how* people believe or *how* they relate themselves to their beliefs. The point comes out in the passage where

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paradoxical does not in and of itself constitute something new. What is new, however, is Anti-Climacus' further claim that the paradoxical nature of Christ's communication makes it indirect. None of the earlier works made this connection.

[95] For good discussions of this point see Evans 2005; Kosch 2006, 189-195; Pojman 1999, 127-143; Roberts 1980; and Westphal 1996, 114-116.

Climacus declares that the pious pagan possesses greater merit than the lukewarm Christian:

> If someone who lives in the midst of Christianity enters, with knowledge of the true idea of God, the house of God, the house of the true God, and prays, but prays in untruth, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with the passion of infinity, although his eyes are resting upon the image of an idol – where, then, is there more truth? The one prays in truth to God although he is worshipping an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore in truth worshiping an idol (CUP, 1:201).

Notice that Climacus does not claim the Christian's beliefs lack objective truth. He even admits the Christian possesses the true idea of God. His point is rather that possession of the objective truth does not suffice to make the Christian an authentic religious individual. What makes for authenticity is a proper relationship to one's beliefs (CUP, 1:199-203; see also CD, 244-245). And it is this proper relationship Climacus speaks of when he uses the terms "subjectivity" and "inwardness."

The second premise of my argument is that Climacus thinks he cannot communicate directly about subjectivity or inwardness. To get at this point, we can note that Climacus endorses the "like is only known by like" thesis.[96] More importantly, he endorses it with respect to subjectivity and inwardness. He makes this commitment in an early passage from *Postscript*:

> [W]hat if Christianity is indeed subjectivity, is inward deepening, that is, what if only two kinds of people can know something about it: those who are impassionedly, infinitely interested in their eternal happiness and in faith build this happiness on their faith-bound relation to it, and those who with the opposite passion (yet with passion) reject it – the happy and unhappy lovers? Consequently, what if objective indifference cannot come to know anything whatever? Like is understood only by like, and the old sentence, *quicquid cognoscitur per modum cognoscentis cognoscitur* [whatever is known is known in the mode of the knower], must indeed be amplified in such a way that there is also

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[96] This thesis arises in many places throughout Kierkegaard's writings with respect to many different topics. For example, the author of the first volume of *Either/Or*, *A*, claims that when it comes to boredom "like is recognized [*erkjendes*] only by like" (EO, 1:37). Later he argues that with respect to aesthetics "like is only understood [*forstaaes*] by like." In particular, he says the esthetician only understands the inspiration of poetic works insofar as he too has been inspired (EO, 1:237). In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard asserts that with respect to love "like is only known [*kjendes*] by like." That is, only the person who loves can know love (WL, 16). Later, in *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard defends the view that with respect to suffering "only like understands [*forstaaer*] like." In particular, he argues that non-martyrs fail to understand adequately the suffering of martyrs (CD, 223). Finally, Johannes Climacus defends a version of the thesis with respect to lovers. He insists two unequal or unalike lovers cannot understand each other and hence can enjoy only an unhappy love (PF, 25).

a mode in which the knower knows nothing whatever or that his knowing amounts to a delusion. With reference to a kind of observation in which it is of importance that the observer be in a definite state, it holds true that when he is not in that state he does not know anything whatever… If Christianity is essentially something objective, it behooves the observer to be objective. But if Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake if the observer is objective. In all knowing in which it holds true that the object of cognition is the inwardness of the subjective individual himself, it holds true that the knower must be in that state (CUP, 1:52-53).

The upshot of this passage is that only the person who is subjective can understand subjectivity. Anyone who is not subjective cannot understand subjectivity. At most she can possess the appearance of understanding subjectivity.

One response to this passage set forth by James Conant is to see it as undermining the reliability of *Postscript*. The idea here is that Climacus himself claims not to be subjective. Hence, by virtue of the "like is only known by like" thesis he cannot really understand subjectivity. We thus cannot trust what he says about subjectivity because it comes from an unqualified source. Simply put, Climacus does not know whereof he speaks (Conant 1989, 245; 1995, 257-289).

Several commentators have raised powerful objections to this response. They point out that contrary to what Conant suggests we have good reason to believe Climacus *is* subjective. In fact, we have good reason to believe he *exemplifies* the subjective attitude. Hence, Climacus *can* know about subjectivity and his discussions about it *can* be trusted (Lippitt 2000a, 47-71; Muench 2007; Rudd 2000, 120).

I agree with the general spirit of this rebuttal and I think it dissolves the unpleasantness of the initial response to the passage. Nevertheless, I think a deeper problem remains. *For even if Climacus does know whereof he speaks, the "like is only known by like" thesis entails that he cannot communicate his knowledge to his target audience.* As discussed in the previous chapter, Climacus' target audience lacks subjectivity (see §1 of chapter 5). But according to the "like is only known by like" thesis, those who lack subjectivity cannot understand subjectivity. How, then, can Climacus give *these people* an understanding of subjectivity? How can he communicate to *them* about *this topic*? It seems he cannot.

Climacus actually concedes this point in the section of *Postscript* on Lessing. Therein he categorizes knowledge of subjectivity as "an essential secret" (CUP, 1:79-80).

Such essential secrets, he says, must be distinguished from merely accidental ones. The latter concern things that can in principle be made public. They remain secrets only as long as those who hold them see fit to keep them secrets. (An example would be what a lawyer learns from a client in a confidential meeting.) Essential secrets are not like this. They cannot be made public even if those who hold them desire to make them public. They cannot be directly communicated (CUP, 1:79). Therefore, since knowledge of subjectivity is an essential secret, it too cannot be directly communicated (ibid).

At this point, two questions arise. First, why does Climacus accept the "like is only known by like" thesis? Second, given that he does accept it, how does he get around the problems it creates for communication? The rest of the present chapter will be devoted to answering these questions. I will answer the former question in section two. In section three, I will use this answer to develop a more precise account of the resultant problems for communication. Finally, in section four, I will explain how Climacus proposes to get around these problems. As suggested in the introduction, Climacus' strategy will revolve around the use of fictional narratives.

2.   THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE "LIKE IS ONLY KNOWN BY LIKE" THESIS

There is a long and respected tradition in the history of philosophy of accepting the "like is only known by like" thesis. The earliest known defenders of it were Pythagoras and Empedocles, the latter of whom Kierkegaard cites approvingly (JP, 1:702).[97] Sextus Empiricus accepted it too and Kierkegaard also cites him with approval (JP, 1:42).[98]

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[97] Schopenhauer attributes the thesis to Pythagoras, citing Porphyry's *De Vita Pythagorae*. However, the precise passage in Porphyry Schopenhauer has in mind is difficult to locate (see note 101). Sextus Empiricus also claims the position comes down from Pythagoras, but he too does not provide any direct quotations (*Against the Professors* I.303). The reference to Empedocles stems from *Fragments* 17/109: "By earth we see earth; by water, water; by aither, shining aither; but by fire, blazing fire; love by love and strife by baneful strife" (Inwood 1992, 213). Aristotle also attributes the "like is only known by like" thesis to Empedocles at *De Anima* 404b8-15 and *Metaphysics* 1000b1-20 before rejecting it himself (Inwood 1992, 84, 96). See also Theophrastus *De Sensibus* 1: "On the topic of sense-perception, most opinions are in general of two types: for some make it a result of the like, and others a result of the opposite. Parmenides, Empedocles, and Plato [make it] a result of the like, and the Anaxagoreans and Heracliteans of the opposite" (Inwood 1992, 187).

[98] Kierkegaard cites pp. 308-309 of volume 5 of Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie*. The original passages in Sextus come from *Against the Logicians* I.92 and I.121 and *Against the Professors* I.303: "But the man who sets out from physical investigation knows clearly that the dogma "like is known by like" is nothing but an old one which is thought to have come down from Pythagoras and is found also in Plato's *Timaeus* [45c; cf. *Protagoras* 337c]; and it was stated much earlier by Empedocles

This tradition was still very much alive during the modern period. Goethe, for example, explicitly defended the "like is only known by like" thesis in his theory of colors.[99] Herder embraced it in his argument that a culture can only be known from within (Beiser 1987, 141-145). And Schlegel endorsed it in his claim that only the poet can understand the poet (Beiser 2003, 127). Hegel's acceptance of the "like is only known by like" thesis can be found in his assertion that thought can grasp being only if thought and being are identical (Baillie 1993, 315). Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Feuerbach's acceptance of it can be detected when they defend various versions of the view that the divine is only known by the divine.[100] Finally, Schopenhauer's acceptance of it can be located in his discussion of how genius is understood only by genius.[101]

Although the "like is only known by like" thesis enjoyed a certain amount of popularity among Kierkegaard's contemporaries, it would be a mistake to think of Kierkegaard as simply following suit. He had his own reasons for embracing the thesis. To understand them, we must turn to his epistemology of concepts.

2.1.   THE OBJECTIVE APPROACH AND THE SUBJECTIVE APPROACH

Kierkegaard draws a distinction between two different ways to approach concepts. The first way to approach them is in an "objective" fashion. The defining feature of this approach is that the person using the concepts brackets their significance or meaning for her own life. In her dealings with the concepts, she abstracts away from her own life

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himself." For a discussion of how Sextus' views relate to a Biblical tradition of embracing "like is only known by like," see Sandnes 2005, 158-162.

[99] "The eye may be said to owe its existence to light, which calls forth, as it were, a sense that is akin to itself; the eye, in short, is formed with reference to light, to be fit for the action of light; the light it contains corresponding with the light without. We are here reminded of a significant adage in constant use with the ancient Ionian school – "Like is only known by Like;" and again, of the words of an old mystic writer, which may be thus tendered, "If the eye were not sunny, how could we perceive light? If God's own strength lived not in us, how could we delight in Divine things" (Goethe 1967, xxxix).

[100] Fichte alludes to this position in *On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Government of the World* (1994, 150-152). Schelling defends it explicitly in *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (2006, 10). Schleiermacher discusses a version of it in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1996, 22). Finally, Feuerbach mentions it in *The Essence of Christianity* (1989, 9).

[101] From the chapter on "Psychological Observations" in *The Art of Controversy*: "The Pythagorean principle (note: see Porphyry, *de Vita Pythagorae*) that *like is known only by like* is in many respects a true one. It explains how it is that every man understands his fellow only in so far as he resembles him, or, at least, is of a similar character… This is why it is mind alone that understands mind; why works of genius are wholly understood and valued only by a man of genius" (Schopenhauer 1951, 53).

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circumstances; she remains disinterested. The second way to approach concepts is in a "subjective" fashion. The defining feature of this approach is that the person who uses the concepts does *not* bracket the relationship between them and her own life. She has a passionate interest in and a deep concern for what the concepts mean for how she should live and what she should do. As Robert Roberts puts it, she employs the concepts in a "self-implicating" manner (1980, 79).[102]

Kierkegaard often talks about this distinction in terms of whether a person uses her own *I*. A person who takes the subjective approach *does* use it; a person who takes the objective approach *does not*. We find this kind of talk in the following passage:

> Men are not being born, for they are without subjectivity. It is subjectivity which determines the relation to spirit, or it is the possibility of spirit. Subjectivity, the I, which ceaselessly reminds and arouses the I, the I which applies everything to itself, the I which on viewing the glorious or on hearing about it promptly applies it personally: *How does it stand with you; are you striving in this way etc.,* the I that is the sleeplessness which defines the ethical (JP, 3:3587, my emphasis).

We should not be misled into thinking the subjective approach simply involves a proliferation of first-person pronouns. For Kierkegaard insists a person can use the word "I" without really thinking about herself. In fact, he says the pastors sometimes talk in this way:

> People seem to fear that an I might be a kind of tyranny, and therefore every I might be a kind of tyranny, and therefore every I must be leveled and pushed behind some objectivity… If a pastor at times uses his I in the pulpit, it is forgiven, because his I in the pulpit is still not taken to be in the strictest sense his personal I but a kind of dramatic I, or an I qua public official (JP, 4:4548).

Thus subjectivity or the subjective approach requires more than just the use of the word "I." It requires an inner, personal identification of oneself with this "I."[103] By contrast,

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[102] Some scholars use a Wittgensteinian framework to present this distinction. They see Kierkegaard as engaging in "grammatical analysis," i.e. the practice of clarifying the meaning of various concepts in different contexts. In this particular case, Kierkegaard is said to be distinguishing the grammar of two different kinds of contexts. In the first kind of context, the grammar dictates that the one who uses the concepts should not use them in relation to his own life. One example of this kind of context might be the academic context. The grammar of the second kind of context dictates that the person who uses the concepts should do so in a self-implicating way. Other than the fact that using Wittgenstein to interpret Kierkegaard in this way is a bit anachronistic, I have no real scruples against this approach. For examples, see Bouwsma 1984, 83; Cavell 1984, 169-174; Conant 1989, 255-256; 1995 275-280; Phillips 1993, 211-214; and Roberts 1980, 78.

[103] This principle lies behind Climacus' claim that assertions about whetherI am subjective or inward do not prove that I am in fact subjective or inward. See CUP, 1:260: "Inwardness cannot be communicated directly, because expressing it directly is externality (oriented outwardly, not inwardly), and

objectivity involves ignoring the inner, personal I. And one may take up this objective stance even when one populates one's speech with the word "I."

A number of examples help flesh out this distinction. One example that receives a good deal of attention in *Postscript* is the concept of Christianity. Climacus devotes Part One of *Postscript* to explaining the objective approach to this concept. Such an approach, he says, involves determining whether the concept picks out historical truths, whether it is internally coherent, etc. (e.g. CUP, 1:21-22). In Part Two, Climacus turns to the subjective approach. An individual approaching Christianity in this manner reflects on the relationship she should have to Christianity. She asks herself: What does Christianity mean for *my* life? How could *I* become a Christian? How can *I* enter into a relationship with Christianity such that *I* can share in the salvation that Christianity promises (CUP, 1:15, 1:17)?

We come across another example of the distinction in question if we compare the approach to religious concepts found in the first volume of *Either/Or* with the approach found in the last part of *Stages on Life's Way*. In the first volume of *Either/Or*, there is no shortage of religious words. But the author of the volume, *A*, does not use the words in such a way that they (seriously) implicate his own life. He simply plays with the words to amuse himself. Take the following characteristic passage:

> "Never lose courage! When troubles pile up most appallingly about you, you will see a helping hand in the clouds" – so said His Reverence Jesper Morten at vespers recently. Well, I am accustomed to walking a great deal under the open sky, but I have never noticed such a thing. A few days ago while on a walking tour, I became aware of such a phenomenon. It was really not a hand, but more like an arm, that reached out of the cloud. I fell into contemplation, and the thought came to me: If only Jesper Morten were here so he could decide whether this was the phenomenon he referred to. As I stood there lost in these thoughts, a passerby addressed me and said as he pointed up to the clouds, "Do you see that funnel-shaped cloud? One seldom sees such a thing in these parts. Sometimes it carries whole houses along with it." Good heavens, I thought, is that a funnel-shaped cloud – and took to my heels as fast as I could. What would His Reverence Jesper Morten have done, I wonder, in my place (EO, 1:27)?

By contrast, in the third part of *Stages on Life's Way*, Quidam writes morning and night about the relationship between his own life and religious concepts. His many diary entries

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expressing inwardness directly is no proof at all that it is there (the direct outpouring of feeling is no proof at all that one has it…)."

concern whether he is guilty or not guilty for the things he has done. Although he takes it to the point of insanity, Quidam does provide us with a picture of the subjective approach.

One final example is in order before moving on to the next point. It comes from the Old Testament story of how the prophet Nathan rebuked King David. Kierkegaard makes use of this story in *For Self-Examination*, where he retells it in the following way (FSE, 37-39). Shortly after King David commits adultery with Bathsheba and has her husband killed, Nathan comes to him with a story about a rich man who takes advantage of his poor neighbor. At first, David approaches the story objectively: he thinks about its poetic merits and praises Nathan's mode of presentation. But Nathan interrupts him, shouting: "Thou art the man!" David's thought shifts. He no longer focuses on the aesthetic dimensions of the story. He reflects on the relationship between the story and his own life. In other words, he thinks about the story in a "self-implicating" way. Kierkegaard tells us this shift marks the difference between the objective approach and the subjective approach (FSE, 38; see also Bouwsma 1984, 74).

2.2.   THE NECESSITY OF THE SUBJECTIVE APPROACH

Climacus thinks there are some concepts that we fully understand only when we approach them in a subjective way.[104] To put the point more concretely, there are some concepts *I* cannot fully understand unless *I* appropriate them into *my* life and so too for you: in order for *you* to understand them fully *you* must appropriate them into *your life*. I will call such concepts "existential concepts."[105]

In *Postscript*, Climacus explicitly places the concept of death in this category. He asserts that everything he learns about death while occupying the objective standpoint is inadequate:

> For example, *what it means to die*. On that topic I know what people ordinarily know: that if I swallow a dose of sulfuric acid I will die, likewise by drowning myself or sleeping in coal gas etc. I know that Napoleon always carried poison with him, that Shakespeare's Juliet took it; that the Stoics regarded suicide as a

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[104] Several scholars have made note of this point in passing. See Bouwsma 1983, 74; Conant 1995, 261-263, 280; Evans 1983, 97-98; Kjældgaard 2005, 108-109; Lippitt 2000a, 25; Pojman 1999, 126; Roberts 1980, 77-79; and Rudd 2000, 124; 2001, 142.

[105] This phrase comes from Kierkegaard himself, who uses it in *The Concept of Anxiety* to refer to the kind of concepts I am discussing (CA, 147).

courageous act and others regard it as cowardice, that one can die from such a ludicrous trifle that the most solemn person cannot help laughing at death, that one can avoid certain death, etc. I know that the tragic hero dies in the fifth act and that death here gains infinite reality in pathos but has no such pathos when an alehouse keeper dies. I know that the poet interprets death in a variety of moods to the point of verging on the comic; I pledge myself to produce in prose the same variety of effects in mood. Moreover, I know what the clergy usually say; I know the stock themes dealt with in funerals…*However, despite this almost extraordinary knowledge or proficiency of knowledge, I am by no means able to regard death as something I have understood* (CUP, 1:165-166; my emphasis).

Climacus goes on to say he will understand death only once he thinks about his own death. Kierkegaard spells out the position in a parallel passage written under his own name:

If someone wants to name a proper object of earnestness, one names death and "the earnest thought of death," and yet it seems as if there is a jest underlying death, and this jest… is essential to every contemplation of death in which the contemplator himself is not alone with death and does not think of himself and death at the same time. A pagan has already declared that one ought not to fear death, because "when it is, I am not, and when I am, it is not." This is the jest by which the cunning contemplator places himself on the outside; but even if the contemplation of death uses pictures of horror to describe death and terrifies a sick imagination, it is still only a jest if he merely contemplates death and not himself in death, if he thinks of it as the human condition but not as his own (TDIO, 73).

Climacus reiterates the point with respect to the concepts of immortality (CUP, 1:171-177), thanksgiving (1:177-179), and marriage (1:179-181). Later, in *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus extends the point to Christianity in general. He declares that no matter how much objective understanding a person may have of Christianity, if he does not appropriate this understanding into his life he has missed the point of Christianity (PC, 225).[106]

Why does a purely objective approach miss the point? Why does a failure to employ the subjective approach entail a failure to understand existential concepts?

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[106] There is some confusion as to how much action is required here. Must I actually *believe* what the concept of Christian guilt says about me in order to *understand* it? Must I actually become a Christian in order to understand Christianity? Climacus explicitly rejects this position. He insists a person does *not* have to become a Christian in order to understand Christianity (CUP, 1:372). A person does not have to believe what the Christian concepts say about her in order to understand them. She need only *think* about what they say about her. And she can do that much without actually believing these implications hold true. That this must be Climacus' position is clearest in the case of death. For, as Climacus points out, if a person must die in order to understand death the requirements of knowledge are too high (CUP, 1:168).

Climacus does not explicitly tell us. Nevertheless, there is an implicit and important line of defense for the point in *Postscript*. The following three considerations bring it to light.

First, Climacus claims it is essential to existential concepts that they have a universal scope. As he sometimes puts it, they are "totality categories" (CUP, 1:537-538). The idea here is that existential concepts in some way implicate or have consequences for the lives of all human beings. More precisely, they implicate the life of *each human being individually* (see TA, 84-112; UDVS, 127-137). For example, it is essential to the concept of death that it represents the fate of each individual human being and not human beings in general (CUP, 1:166-167). It is essential to the concept of ethics that it places demands upon individual people and not merely groups of people (CUP, 1:320). And it is essential to the concept of Christianity that it requires each individual person to become a Christian and not just the community as a whole.

Second, Climacus thinks any human being who sees that a concept implicates all human beings should see that, by instantiation, it implicates her in particular (see also CA, 138). If she does not see this implication, she suffers from one of two problems. Sometimes Climacus says such a person denies her own humanity. After all, she refuses to include herself in the class of human beings to which she admits her concept applies. Climacus swears that if he ever met such a person he would recoil in horror lest it prove true that she was not a human being after all but a machine with glass eyes and a floor mat for hair (CUP, 1:196). In some sense, however, Climacus levels this first accusation in jest. He does not think his readers really want to deny their own humanity.[107] His more serious accusation is that they fail to understand the concept in the first place. In particular, they fail to understand the essential point that the concept applies to all human beings. They may have no trouble stating this point. They may even work themselves into a frenzy defending it. But their words have no meaning for them. They merely "recite by rote" or "parrot" the point without understanding what they say (CUP, 1:195-196, 1:255, 1:283, 1:623).[108]

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[107] Climacus thinks anyone who *did* seriously deny her own humanity could not rightly claim to have understanding of existential concepts. Like Fichte (see Beiser 2003, 135), he believes self-knowledge serves as the foundation for all other knowledge (CUP, 1:307n, 1:311). And a person who does not know she is a human being cannot have self-knowledge (CUP, 1:311).

[108] The Danish word translated as "parroting" or "reciting by rote" in these passages is "ramse." In an interesting passage in *Stages on Life's Way*, Frater Taciturnus uses this word to refer explicitly to the

Third, for Climacus, a person who sees that a concept implicates her in particular *eo ipso* takes up the subjective approach. For the person who sees that a concept implicates her in particular precisely thereby thinks about the relationship between that concept and her own life. And, as discussed above, thinking about the relationship between a concept and one's own life is the definition of the subjective approach. Thus Climacus can say the person who thinks not just about death in general but about his own death has already become subjective (CUP, 1:169).

Bringing these three considerations together, it follows that a person who never takes up the subjective approach with respect to a given existential concept misses out on an essential feature of that concept. Of course, anyone who misses out on an essential feature of a concept *eo ipso* fails to understand that concept fully. And that was Climacus' original claim.

2.3. THE PRIVATE NATURE OF THE SUBJECTIVE APPROACH

The third part of Climacus' epistemology of concepts is that the subjective approach is essentially *private*: one person cannot go down the subjective path for another person. That is to say, one person cannot think through the implications of a concept for another person and give the resultant knowledge to the other person. Each person must acquire the knowledge that results from taking up the subjective approach – what we might call "subjective knowledge" or "subjective understanding" (Evans 1983, 96) – by and for herself.

Climacus makes this point in his discussion of Lessing. The relevant passage runs as follows:

> Whereas objective thinking is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker as existing is essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it. Therefore, his thinking has another kind of reflection, specifically, that of inwardness, of possession, whereby it belongs to the subject and to no one else. Whereas objective thinking invests everything in the result and assists all humankind to cheat by copying and reeling off the results and answers (CUP, 1:73).

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practice of talking about a rule that implicates the whole human race but not oneself: "Now, my gambler is a man who has understood the old saying *de te narrator fabula* [the tale is told of you]; he is no modern fool who believes that everyone should court the colossal objective task of being able to rattle off [ramse op] something that applies to the whole human race but not to himself" (SLW, 478).

Notice how Climacus affirms that subjective thinking belongs exclusively to the person who engages in it. What this means is that the person who engages in subjective thinking cannot share what she thinks about with other people. She cannot give the content of subjective thinking to other people, nor can she receive it from them.

Another place where Climacus makes the relevant point is in the passage on "essential secrets" discussed earlier:

> Ordinary communication, objective thinking, has no secrets; only doubly reflected subjective thinking has secrets; that is, all its essential content is essentially a secret, because it cannot be communicated directly. This is the significance of the secrecy. That this knowledge cannot be stated directly because the essential in this knowledge is the appropriation itself, means that it remains a secret for everyone who is not through himself doubly reflected in the same way (CUP, 1:79).

Once again Climacus suggests that the kind of knowledge one acquires by taking up the subjective approach or going through the subjective reflection process has a special status. It cannot be shared with others or received from others. It cannot be transferred like chattel from one person to the next. The only way a person can acquire it is to go through the subjective reflection process for herself.

It is difficult to understand why Climacus holds this position. *Prima facie* the position just seems false. It seems someone *could* go through the subjective reflection process for me and give me the results. For example, someone who understood the universality of death could recognize its implications for my life. She could then tell me that death is not just the fate of all people but my fate in particular. And it seems her communication would provide me with subjective understanding or knowledge.

For Climacus' position to work, he must posit a distinction between the content of such communications and the content of subjective understanding. To go back to the example, he must posit a distinction between what I learn when someone tells me "Antony Aumann will die" or "you will die" and what I learn when I internally realize the fact of my own death. Unfortunately, Climacus does not explicitly discuss such a distinction in *Fragments* or *Postscript*. Nevertheless, it does operate in the background of several other texts. And we can use these texts to illustrate and substantiate the point Climacus presupposes.

Recall the journal entry cited earlier in which Kierkegaard claims the Danish pastors refer to themselves in speech without thinking about themselves internally. They fail to identify themselves as the referent of the sentences they utter even though they are in fact the referent of those sentences (JP, 4:4548). If we take this point and invert it, we get the distinction Climacus needs. For just as a person can *speak* about herself without thinking internally about herself, so too can she *hear* someone else speak about her without thinking internally about herself. Kierkegaard suggests this point in a story about a drunken peasant from *Sickness Unto Death*:

> There is a story about a peasant who went barefooted to town with enough money to buy himself a pair of stockings and shoes and to get drunk, and in trying to find his way home in his drunken state, he fell asleep in the middle of the road. A carriage came along, and the driver shouted to him to move or he would drive over his legs. The drunken peasant woke up, looked at his legs and, not recognizing them because of the shoes and stockings, said: "Go ahead, they are not my legs" (SUD, 53).

The drunken peasant commits a very peculiar error. He receives some information from the carriage driver and in a certain sense he understands it. He grasps that the driver wants him to move the legs lying in the middle of the road. But what he fails to recognize is that this information concerns *him*. He fails to identify the legs lying in the middle of the road as *his* legs. Kierkegaard tells an analogous story in the *Two Lectures on Communication*:

> They tell a story about an army recruit who was supposed to learn to drill. The sergeant said to him: You, there, stand up straight. R.: Sure enough. Sgt.: Yes, and don't talk during drill. R.: All right, I won't do that. Sgt.: No, you are not supposed to talk during drill. R.: Yes, yes, if I just know it (JP, 1:653.32).

In this story, the army recruit receives a communication from his drill sergeant. To a certain degree, the army recruit understands the communication. He grasps that the sergeant is giving him instructions about drilling. His problem is that he takes the wrong attitude towards these instructions. He approaches them in an *objective* way. That is to say, he does not think about the implications of the drill sergeant's instructions for his own life – and especially not about their implications for his own life as he lives it right now. As a result, he does not see that the instructions *do in fact* have implications for his life as he lives it right now.

These stories help illustrate the gap between what I learn from a communication about me and what I learn from engaging in subjective reflection. They show how even if someone else sees that a concept applies to me and proceeds to tell me as much, I do not thereby acquire subjective understanding. I still need to identify myself with the person the communicator is talking about. I still need to recognize that the communication refers to *me*. The communicator cannot make this movement for me. I can only make it for myself. It is in this respect that subjective understanding constitutes an essential secret for Climacus.[109]

2.4. THE "LIKE IS ONLY KNOWN BY LIKE" THESIS

The fourth and final point to understand is that Climacus sees the concept of subjectivity as an existential concept. Like the concepts of death, he thinks it has a universal scope. It has implications for the life of every human being. In fact, Climacus argues at length that becoming subjective is the highest task assigned to every human being (CUP, 1:133-163).[110]

If we grant that subjectivity has a universal scope for Climacus, it follows (by way of the reasoning provided in the previous section) that only someone who recognizes the implications of subjectivity for her own life can fully understand subjectivity. Only

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[109] An analogous problem arises with respect to communication about other topics. Just as a person can fail to recognize that a communication about her is about her, so too can a person fail to recognize that a communication about some objective content is about that objective content. She can, for example, fail to recognize that my statement about the coffee cup is a statement *about the coffee cup*. Here too, the communicator relies on the receiver of the communication to grasp internally the meaning of what she says. Thus words can transfer objective understanding no better than they can transfer subjective understanding. (We might think of this point as akin to the one Socrates makes in the *Meno*.) Although Climacus briefly alludes to this parallel problem (CUP, 1:252), for the most part he ignores it. In fact, early in *Postscript* he explicitly denies that communication of objective content creates the same problems that communication of subjective content creates (CUP, 1:74-76). Nevertheless, some scholars have tried to show that Kierkegaard acknowledges and embraces the parallel problem (Hale 2002; Strawser 1997).

[110] We can sketch out an outline of Climacus' argument as follows: He begins by asking "*what ethics would have to judge if becoming a subjective individual were not the highest task assigned to every human being*" (CUP, 1:133). He then repeats this question for an entire range of issues. In each case, he responds by showing how theoretical and practical difficulties arise if becoming subjective is not the highest task. He then argues that "everything turns out beautifully" when becoming subjective *is* the highest task (CUP, 1:159). In other words, viewing subjectivity as the highest task makes the most sense of the human situation. Climacus concludes that we therefore ought to take becoming subjective as the highest task. Moreover, we ought to take it as the highest task for our entire lives: "Consequently, to become subjective should be the highest task assigned to every human being… Moreover, becoming subjective should give a person plenty to do as long as he lives; thus it should not happen to the zealous person but only to the busy trifler that he will be finished with life before life is finished with him" (CUP, 1:163). For a somewhat more detailed version of this argument, see Kosch 2006, 187-197.

someone who sees that she too must become subjective can get the point. Of course, to see the implications of subjectivity for one's life is to become subjective. Therefore, it follows that *only someone who approaches the concept of subjectivity in a subjective fashion can have adequate knowledge of it*. This statement represents Climacus' version of the "like is only known by like" thesis.

3.   CLARIFICATION OF THE PROBLEMS FOR COMMUNICATION

With Climacus' epistemology of concepts in place, we can turn once again to the problem of communication. Climacus himself draws the relevant conclusion: one person cannot convey complete knowledge of existential concepts to another person (CUP, 1:274). The most one person can do is prompt the other person to turn inward and acquire the information for himself. Teaching people about existential concepts is thus a Socratic or maieutic endeavor: the teacher cannot directly give the learner the relevant truth but only indirectly help the learner "give birth" to her own truth (CUP, 1:80; see also Evans 1983, 102-105).

Of course, since the concept of subjectivity qualifies as an existential concept, it carries with it the same problems. One person cannot convey to another person the entirety of what subjectivity means. She cannot give complete knowledge of subjectivity to her readers or listeners. At most, she can prompt them to turn inward and acquire the relevant information for themselves. Thus, teaching people about subjectivity is also a Socratic or maieutic endeavor and hence a kind of indirect communication.

We can see the radical implications of Climacus' point if we apply it to a concrete case. One such case is the communication about subjectivity found in the present chapter. To begin, recall the following statement from §2.1.:

> The defining feature of [subjectivity] is that the person… *does* think about the relationship between the concepts and her own life. She has a passionate interest in and a deep concern for what the concepts mean for how she lives.

And recall the statement from §2.4.:

> [O]nly someone who recognizes the implications of subjectivity for her own life can fully understand it. Only someone who sees that she too must become subjective can get the point. In other words, *only someone who approaches the concept of subjectivity in a subjective fashion can have knowledge of it*.

Now imagine how the purely objective person will read these two passages. She will not think about the implications of the definition contained in the first passage for her own life. Moreover, she will not interpret the requirement in the second passage as applying to her in particular.

In order to provide assistance, I could tell her what she needs to do. I could explain what is required for her to understand the concept of subjectivity:

> You need to recognize that the requirement of subjectivity pertains to you in particular.

But since *ex hypothesi* she is not subjective, she will not think about herself when she receives this additional statement. She will not interpret the word "you" used in these instructions as referring to her in particular. I could try to help her once again by pointing out this error. I could say:

> You need to interpret the word "you" used in my previous statement as referring to you in particular.

But since *ex hypothesi* she is not subjective, my pupil will once again not think about herself. She will no more recognize herself in the "you" of my second statement than she recognized herself in the "you" of my first statement.

The two of us could cut a lovely pair by continuing on in this fashion *ad infinitum*. I could keep telling her she needs to think about herself when I say "you" and she could keep failing to do so. (This is what happens in Kierkegaard's story about the sergeant and the army recruit.) Granted, at some point she could make the subjective turn and come to understand my message. And hopefully she would do so sooner rather than later. But nothing I say would *force* her to make the transition. At most, I would prompt her in Socratic fashion to make it for herself.

4.   THE NEED FOR INDIRECT COMMUNICATION

Given that communicating about subjectivity requires using the Socratic or maieutic method, an important question arises. How does Climacus think we should engage in the maieutic method? That is, in what way does Climacus think we should prompt others to turn inward and become subjective?

Climacus' answer is that the best strategy is to provide people with examples of fictional individuals engaged in the process of becoming subjective. In other words, the

best strategy is to write the kind of pseudonymous literature Kierkegaard writes early in his career.

Climacus' defense of this position takes the form of an argument against the plausible alternatives. There are two such alternatives worth mentioning: (1) a purely abstract account of subjectivity that contains *no concrete examples* and (2) an account of subjectivity that does contain concrete examples but of *actual* as opposed to *fictional* individuals. As we will see, Climacus thinks these two strategies suffer from problems that do not plague the strategy exemplified by Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship. Climacus concludes that Kierkegaard's strategy constitutes our best available option for communicating about subjectivity.

4.1. AGAINST A PURELY ABSTRACT ACCOUNT OF SUBJECTIVITY

By an abstract account of subjectivity, I mean one that describes the general process of becoming subjective. Such an account would explain what all attempts to become subjective have in common. But it would not delve into the concrete details of a particular person's attempt to become subjective. A paradigm example of such abstraction is the academic writing we find in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Of course, Hegel writes about human consciousness rather than subjectivity. Still, he almost completely avoids reference to particulars. And that is the kind of abstraction Climacus wants to target.

4.1.1. FIRST ATTACK ON ABSTRACTION

Climacus eschews an abstract account of subjectivity for two reasons. First, he thinks an abstract account leaves out the difficulty involved in existential tasks (CUP, 1:301-318). This difficulty becomes apparent only when we look at what the abstract account must leave out, namely what the task involves in its concrete details:

> But that is the way it is – in abstract generality, the ethical and ethical-religious are so quickly said and so terribly easy to understand, whereas in the concretion of daily life speaking about it is so slow and practicing it so very difficult (CUP, 1:481; see also CUP, 1:472).

In other words, we see the difficulties involved in a given existential task only when we look at a particular person trying to do it in "the particular moment on the particular day,

with this and that particular state of mind, with this and that particular circumstance" (CUP, 1:495).

For example, Climacus says the strenuousness of the maxim *de omnibus dubitandum est* [everything must be doubted] does not come across when a professor lectures about it in the classroom. At such a moment, the project appears easy enough to understand and easy enough to do. But when we start to think about an actual person's trying to doubt everything, the matter appears differently. We find not only an infinitely difficult task but an impossible one (CUP, 1:255).[111] Or, to take another example, Climacus says we can easily understand the pastor's request on Sunday morning that we always keep the content of his sermon in mind (CUP, 1:467). But Monday afternoon at four o'clock the matter appears differently. Then, Climacus claims, it is extremely difficult "to understand this 'always' as applying to a mere half hour" (ibid.).

The fact that a purely abstract account leaves out the difficulty involved in existential tasks is a problem for Climacus because of how he sees the present age. He thinks his contemporaries are trying to get rid of the difficulties. They are trying to reduce the cost of existence in order to make life easier (CUP, 1:186-188; cf. FT, 5). Thus he says to himself:

> [W]herever you look in literature or in life, you see the names and figures of celebrities, the prized and highly acclaimed people, prominent or much discussed, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit human kind by making life easier and easier, some by railroads, others by omnibuses and steamships, others by telegraph, others by easily understood surveys and brief publications about everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who by virtue of thought systematically make spiritual existence easier and easier and yet more and more meaningful (CUP, 1:186).

Climacus worries that the drive to make things easier has gone too far (ibid.). In an effort to reduce the cost of faith and subjectivity people have actually *altered* faith and subjectivity. In other words, they have watered down the tasks. Faith and subjectivity no longer represent great and noble projects but mere trivialities.[112] As a result, people

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[111] See also the narrative *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*. There a young Johannes Climacus relates his own failed attempt to live out the maxim which his philosophy professors spoke of so highly.

[112] In his journals, Kierkegaard frequently criticizes Luther for having altered the gospel's account of faith in order to make faith easier for people (JP, 3:2481, 3:2539, 3:2554). In addition, in his final "attack on Christendom," he explicitly raises the same charge against Mynster (e.g. TM 3-4). Underlying Kierkegaard's position is his commitment to the idea that, with respect to existential tasks, you get what

imagine they can acquire faith and subjectivity as a matter of course. They fail to see these tasks as ones they need to dwell on. They falsely believe they should move on to something else.

In order to remedy the problem, Climacus believes he must reacquaint people with the difficulty of existential tasks (CUP, 1:187, 1:381-384, 1:557, 1:587). He must remind people of how strenuous the projects of faith, subjectivity, Christianity, etc. really are (cf. FT, 121-123). But he cannot make people aware of these difficulties if he uses purely abstract language. For, as discussed, abstract language leaves out the difficulties. Therefore, providing concrete examples becomes necessary.

Of course, Climacus admits that spelling out the tasks in concrete detail will still not capture the difficulties perfectly. Even an extreme effort using this form will still come up short:

> Therefore, even if the discourse makes the most enthusiastic and most desperate effort to show how difficult it is, or makes an extreme effort in an indirect form, it still always remains more difficult to do than it appears in the discourse (CUP, 1:463).

Nevertheless, concrete examples will do a better job than pure abstraction. And Climacus believes he should prevail upon himself to do the best he can (CUP, 1:465).

4.1.2. Second Attack on Abstraction

The second reason Climacus eschews a purely abstract account of subjectivity is that he worries it would give readers the wrong impression. He sees abstract language as the language of academic currency, i.e. the language used by those who write for academic purposes. If he used it, his readers would naturally think he had academic goals. They would be led to believe they should treat his books in an academic fashion. In other words, Climacus worries that if he wrote in an abstract way his readers would simply reflect on his words instead of appropriating them. They would debate his "theory," find objections to it, come up with new arguments for and against it, and try to synthesize it with other theories (CUP, 1:249-251; see also Evans forthcoming). Eventually, he claims, someone would distill his "theory" into a paragraph and include it in a history of

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you pay for (CUP, 1:231; JP, 4:4375). Making an existential task easier or lowering its price is really no benefit. To lower its price is *eo ipso* to lower its value.

philosophy (CUP, 1:299). But at no point would his abstract account prompt people to become subjective. At no point would it serve as an occasion for people to turn inward and think about themselves.

Two considerations help motivate Climacus' worry. First, Climacus believes his readers are psychologically predisposed to proceed in an academic fashion. They are all too eager to treat everything in academic terms (see §1 of chapter 5). Giving them what looks like another academic theory would feed into this disposition. It would amount to stuffing more food into the mouths of men who are dying from hunger because their mouths are so full of food they can no longer eat (CUP, 1:274n; see also Muench 2003, 139-151). Second, two of Climacus' intellectual heroes, Hamann and Jacobi, had previously tried to prompt people to become subjective. But they were treated in an academic fashion in part because they proceeded abstractly. In order to avoid suffering the same fate, Climacus believes he must try a different strategy. He must proceed on the concrete level and describe how subjectivity comes into existence in the particular individual (CUP, 1:250-251)

Climacus' suspicion that readers would treat an abstract account of subjectivity in an academic fashion has some merit. Yet history has shown that a concrete account does not *necessarily* fare better. Kierkegaard's own descriptions of concrete individuals have hardly dissuaded scholars from approaching him academically. In fact, his artful style of presentation has even *encouraged* some to hunt for philosophical theories in his works (see Evans forthcoming). Thus although Climacus is probably right to think using concrete examples is better than writing in a purely abstract way, he may have exaggerated the extent to which this is the case.

4.2.   AGAINST AN ACCOUNT OF SUBJECTIVITY CONTAINING *ACTUAL* EXAMPLES

Given Climacus' decision to pursue a concrete account of subjectivity, the question arises as to what kind of concrete account he should use. In particular, should his examples be of actual individuals or fictional ones?

Climacus rejects the idea of using actual examples (i.e. examples of real or actual people) for two reasons. First, such examples tend to *delay* people from becoming subjective just as often as they *motivate* people to do so. Second, and more seriously,

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actual exemplars of subjectivity prove difficult if not impossible to find. We can investigate these reasons in more detail as follows.

4.2.1. THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF ACTUAL EXAMPLES

Climacus' worry about the ineffectiveness of actual examples stems from a psychological conjecture. He suspects that talk of an actual person becoming subjective will distract people from the task of becoming subjective rather than encourage them to do it. We might *think* that telling people about someone who has done what they must do would stir them up to wanting to do the same. But, Climacus maintains, this will not always happen. Indeed, "the fact that this person and that person actually have done this and that can just as well have a delaying as a motivating effect" (CUP, 1:358).

Two considerations motivate this worry. First, Climacus thinks people tend to stall out at the point of admiring the exemplary individual. They tend to transform her into someone extraordinary, a person with unusual talents and abilities. People thus see the exemplar as someone who can do something rare and exceptional such as know twenty-four languages, swim the Channel, or walk on one's hands (CUP, 1:358). But they do not see her as doing the universally human. They do not interpret her activity as something they can and should do as well. By marginalizing the example in this way, they excuse themselves from having to emulate her:

> The reader merely transforms the person who is being discussed (aided by his being an *actual* person) into the rare exception; he admires him and says: But I am too insignificant to do anything like that (CUP, 1:358).

Climacus insists fictional examples have an advantage over actual examples in this respect. People will not be inclined to admire a fictional character in the way they do an actual person (CUP, 1:358-359). Thus using fictional examples will rule out one way people evade the task of imitation.

Climacus' insight into human psychology seems accurate. People do evade the task of imitation by marginalizing exemplars in the manner he describes. Moreover, using fictional examples probably will head off this particular problem. But Climacus ignores the fact that an analogous evasion tactic exists with respect to fictional examples. He overlooks the fact that readers who want to excuse themselves from having to imitate a fictional example also have a way out. Instead of marginalizing the exemplar as having

rare abilities, they can marginalize her as having *unrealistic* abilities. They can claim she possesses abilities no human being could hope to possess. She is, after all, a fiction! Now whether people would be *more likely* to marginalize actual examples than fictional ones remains an interesting question. Empirical studies would have to be done to decide the matter. Performing such studies, however, goes beyond the scope of Climacus' project. He simply presumes fictional examples would have an advantage.

The second consideration motivating Climacus' worry about the ineffectiveness of actual examples is that actual examples pique our curiosity. We get caught up in wondering whether the exemplar is as good as the communicator makes her sound. We soon start gossiping about whether the person actually has done what the communicator says she has done:

> [T]he presentation in the form of actuality draws the eyes of a crowd esthetically upon itself, and whether it is "actually now" etc. is discussed and examined and turned and turned over, and that it is "actually now" etc. is admired and blathered about (CUP, 1:359).

The problem is that satisfying our curiosity delays us from doing the task ourselves. It allows us once again to evade the task of imitating the exemplar. Fictional examples will help here because they do not pique our curiosity in the same way. They do not provide us with an actual person about whom to gossip. Because they head off this particular delaying tactic, Climacus concludes fictional examples are more likely to stir us into action (CUP, 1:360).

Once again, Climacus' insight into human psychology seems accurate. We do have a tendency to let our curiosity get the better of us when it comes to actual exemplars. And we often let this tendency distract us from pursuing the task of imitation. Moreover, Climacus is right to say fictional examples will not provide an occasion for this particular evasion strategy. But, once again, he overlooks the fact that fiction has analogous drawbacks. It can pique our curiosity in its own ways. For example, we can get caught up in trying to interpret the story in just the right way (see Evans forthcoming). Or we can think about how the author could have written the story better. These projects also can distract us from the more important task of imitating the exemplar in the story. Thus, once again, the question becomes an empirical one. Is our curiosity *more likely* to get the better of us with respect to fictional examples or actual ones? And, once again, Climacus

simply presumes the verdict will come out in favor of fictional examples. Nevertheless, if he is correct, he will have a solid reason for going in this direction.

4.2.2. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF FINDING AN ACTUAL EXAMPLE

In addition to the worry about ineffectiveness, Climacus raises a more fundamental worry about actual examples. He claims the person who wants to describe an actual example of subjectivity will have trouble finding one in the first place. The problem is not that exemplars of subjectivity fail to exist (although that may well be the case). The problem is rather that their subjectivity remains hidden from view. One person cannot discern the presence of subjectivity in another person even when it is there. In other words, the person who wants to describe actual exemplars of subjectivity cannot observe what he wants to describe. Climacus concludes that if he wants to provide a concrete account of subjectivity, he will have to construct his own examples or rely on those constructed by someone else.

Climacus grounds his position in the following two observations. First, becoming subjective is primarily an *internal* task. It is an activity that takes place inside a person's mind or that concerns a person's inner psychological states. For this reason, Climacus often uses the word "inwardness" to talk about subjectivity (e.g. CUP, 1:33). Second, we relate to other people only through *externals*. We learn about them only through what we hear them say and see them do. Even the person we know best, Climacus insists, only becomes intelligible to us in this way (CUP, 1:141-142). It follows from these two observations that we never directly observe another person's subjectivity (CUP, 1:320). At most we infer its presence and nature from the person's outward behavior.

Of course, the contrast between the inward states Climacus wants to describe and the outward states he can observe need not create a problem. If outward states were reliable indicators of the presence and nature of inward ones, Climacus could still describe actual examples of subjectivity. His observations of outward states would provide him with all the information he needed. But Climacus rejects this possibility. Like many of Kierkegaard's other pseudonymous authors, he doubts that the outer and the inner always line up. It is always possible that a person is less subjectively developed

than she appears. In addition, it is always possible that she is *more* subjectively developed than she appears. Climacus explicitly makes this point with regard to ethical subjectivity:

> With regard to the observational question about ethical interiority, irony and hypocrisy as antitheses (but both expressing the contradiction that the outer is not the inner – hypocrisy by appearing good, irony by appearing bad) emphasize that actuality and deception are equally possible, that deception can reach just as far as actuality. Only the individual himself can know which is which (CUP, 1:323).

Thus the contrast between the inward states Climacus wants to describe and the outward states he can observe does indeed create a problem. Climacus can never conclude with certainty that the person he examines is (or is not) the exemplar of inwardness he seeks.

In itself, this initial worry is not too troubling. It merely shows that outward states *might not* indicate the presence and nature of subjectivity in a reliable way. In some passages, however, Climacus takes a more skeptical stance. He goes so far as to say outward states *cannot* serve as reliable indicators of subjectivity. In other words, there are no outward signs from which he can infer the presence and nature of another person's subjectivity.

Climacus accepts this more skeptical position in part because he sees subjectivity as something *infinite*. He interprets the ideal subjective person as someone who is *infinitely* concerned about her self, her life, and her happiness (CUP, 1:16, 1:24, 1:33, 1:130). She does not think about herself only some of the time. She does not reflect on her life during major moments of upheaval only to forget everything when the matter is over (CUP, 1:535). She does not strive to understand herself only a little bit on weekends and holidays (CUP, 1:85-86). Her pursuit of subjectivity is enduring and continual (CUP, 1:408). It comprises a life-long task, one she is not finished with before her life is over (CUP, 1:163). By contrast, Climacus sees all outward expressions and behaviors as *finite*. They are finite because they are performed by a limited human being in a finite amount of space and a finite amount of time. As such, external expressions are *incommensurate* with ideal subjectivity (CUP, 1:236, 1:407, 1:505). When the truly subjective individual tries to express her infinite passion in the world, she finds the available resources inadequate (CUP, 1:236). She always wants to do more and say more than she can do or

say in a finite world (see Evans 1983, 283; Westphal 1996, 168-169).[113] But – and herein lies the rub – if she cannot express true subjectivity, then neither can anyone detect it in her. Her *finite* external expressions will never license the conclusion that *infinite* subjectivity lurks beneath. Such a conclusion would involve a qualitative leap beyond what the available evidence proves.

Climacus' skepticism about detecting inwardness, however, does not hang solely on his commitment to the incommensurability of inwardness and outwardness. He insists that even if the exemplar of inwardness *could* adequately express his inwardness, he would not choose to do so. Out of a sense of humility, he would do the opposite. Climacus explicitly makes the point with respect to the inwardness of one's relationship with God:

> [I]f anything is pride and arrogation…then every direct expression for the relationship with God is that, every direct expression whereby the religious person wants to make himself distinguishable.
> If the relationship with God is a person's highest distinction (even though this distinction is available to everyone), then direct expression is arrogation, yes, even the direct expression for being what is called an outcast, yes, even the changing of the world's mockery of oneself into a direct expression of one's being religious is arrogation, because the direct expression indirectly charges everyone else with not being religious (CUP, 1:510-511; see also CUP, 1:492).

That is to say, the exemplar of inwardness would work hard to *hide* the fact that he possessed inwardness. He would make sure he appeared no different and no better than anyone else (CUP, 1:410). To use Climacus' words, he would "use all his skill in order that no one [would] detect anything in him" (CUP, 1:475; see also CUP, 1:500-501).[114]

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[113] Climacus' favorite analogy is love. He claims no finite expression does justice to the infinite passions lurking within the true lover's soul. No external act exhausts his love. He is always willing to do more than he has done. He is never finished loving simply because he has finished giving some particular, finite expression to his love (CUP, 1:73n). Other analogies abound in *Postscript*. For example, Climacus says there is no adequate expression for true prayer because it involves infinite passion (CUP, 1:90). In addition, he says true guilt cannot be adequately expressed in the external world, even though people try by performing penance, because it is infinite (CUP, 1:539, 1:554). Finally, he claims the error of the monastic movement lay in thinking it could find an adequate external expression for infinite religious passion (CUP, 1:405).

[114] The precise reasons why Climacus thinks the subjective individual will possess such extreme humility are unclear. Perhaps Climacus has in mind Christ's decision to take on the form of a lowly servant even though he was in fact divine (Philippians 2). Or perhaps he is thinking of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus advocates hiding from other people the fact that one is fasting by anointing one's head and washing one's face (Matthew 6:16-16; Brandes 1877, 230). Finally, perhaps he is thinking of Socrates' maxim that one should avoid the appearance of doing the good, a maxim Kierkegaard frequently cites (e.g. PC, 129; JP, 3:3329, 3:3745, 5:5892). Whatever Climacus' reasons for endorsing this kind of humility,

Of course, if the exemplar of inwardness successfully hides her inwardness, then it will be impossible for anyone to observe it (cf. Kosch 2006 157-158). And the person who seeks out actual examples of inwardness will not be able to find one. If she nonetheless insists on describing an actual exemplar, she will end up in the kind of absurdity that Climacus says plagues *Fear and Trembling* (CUP, 1:500n). In this text, Johannes de Silentio purports to observe and then describe an actual knight of faith. Yet the person he describes is indistinguishable from any other person; his faith is perfectly hidden (see FT, 39-40). How then, Climacus asks rhetorically, can Silentio observe him in the first place (CUP 1:500n)?

It might seem as though there were an obvious way to get around the problem of finding an actual example of inwardness. If Climacus follows the advice he gives others, if he is not a hypocrite, then he himself will comprise the kind of example he seeks. With respect to himself, he will not have to worry about the fact that the inner cannot correspond to the outer or that the inner must remain hidden from the outer. He will have direct access to the exemplary inner because it is his own inner. Thus, it seems he could provide people with an actual example just by describing himself.

On closer inspection, however, this strategy proves untenable. Just like any other exemplar of inwardness, Climacus will want to hide his inwardness. Out of humility, he will want to keep it a secret from those around him. And he cannot keep it a secret at the same time as he presents himself publicly as an exemplar of inwardness. In fact, trying to do both would constitute a performative contradiction, one which Climacus describes and ridicules early on in *Postscript*.[115]

Kierkegaard does not accept them later in his life. By 1848, Kierkegaard ridicules his decision to hide his own inwardness. He claims it was a kind of cowardice. Hiding his inward states was simply a ploy to avoid the persecution that would have resulted from publicizing them (JP 1:656, 2:2119, 2:2125). Kierkegaard's shift in view regarding the importance of humility corresponds with a shift in how he communicates. Precisely as he comes to think he should not hide his inwardness, he abandons fictional examples and moves towards presenting himself as an exemplar of inwardness. This shift in approach culminates in the final months of Kierkegaard's life, when he takes a very public stance against the shortcomings of the state church of Denmark.

[115] "Suppose someone wanted to communicate the conviction that a person's God-relationship is a secret. Suppose he was a very congenial kind of man who was so fond of other people that he simply had to come out with it. Suppose he nevertheless still had enough understanding to sense a bit of the contradiction in communicating this directly and consequently he communicated it under a pledge of secrecy – what then? Then either he must assume the pupil was wiser than the teacher, that the pupil was actually able to keep silent, something the teacher was unable to do (a superb satire on being a teacher!), or he must become so blissful in gibberish that he completely failed to discover the contradiction" (CUP, 1:78).

From the forgoing considerations, Climacus draws the conclusion that he cannot describe an actual example of subjectivity. If he wants to provide a concrete account of subjectivity, he will have to go another route. He will have to use *fictional* examples or what he calls "imaginary constructions." (Notice how Climacus praises the pseudonymous author of *Stages on Life's Way*, Frater Taciturnus, because he recognizes the need for fictional examples and thereby advances beyond the absurdities of *Fear and Trembling* (CUP, 1:500n).) Using fictional examples will enable Climacus to circumvent the problem of trying *per impossibile* to observe the nature of an actual person's hidden inwardness. Since he creates the fictional exemplar himself, the inwardness of the exemplar will be whatever he says it is.

5.   THE IMPORTANCE OF KIERKEGAARD'S EARLY PSEUDONYMOUS LITERATURE

By way of conclusion, I want to make two observations. First, it is striking that Kierkegaard's early pseudonymous literature contains precisely the kind of fictional examples Climacus recommends. It provides us with narratives about imaginary people who strive to become subjective in one way or another (see Evans 1983, 14; Mackey 1971, 247; Westphal 1996, 8-9). For example, in the first volume of *Either/Or*, *A* struggles with his own despair and the attempt to find meaning in his own aesthetic life; in *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio examines whether he could have the faith of Abraham or only the infinite resignation of a tragic hero; in *Stages on Life's Way* Quidam wrestles with the question of whether he himself is guilty; etc. The idea that this literature represents what Climacus has in mind gains support from the section of *Postscript* entitled "A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature" (CUP, 1:251-300). Here Climacus relates that he had intended to provide a concrete account of subjectivity. But just as he was about to begin, someone (Kierkegaard) beat him to the punch by publishing *Either/Or*. Climacus responds: "What I aimed to do had been done right here" (CUP, 1:251). To make matters worse, each time Climacus decided to describe another example, someone (Kierkegaard) came out with a new pseudonymous book. And although Climacus dislikes the fact that he receives none of the credit, he acknowledges that his cause had indeed been advanced in each case (CUP, 1:251, 1:261).

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Second, Climacus considers Kierkegaard's early pseudonymous literature to be a paradigm case of indirect communication (see Evans 1983, 105-106; Mackey 1971, 255; Westphal 1996, 93n1). He explicitly uses this label to refer to the fictional examples or "imaginary constructions" contained in the pseudonymous literature (CUP, 1:263). And he either explicitly states or implicitly suggests each of the individual pseudonymous works counts as an instance of indirection.[116] Moreover, Kierkegaard himself endorses this identification in his journals. At one point he writes: "No, [*On My Work as an Author*] is direct communication about the authorship, about the total authorship, an authorship which has consisted of indirect communication through the pseudonyms and then of direct communication in the upbuilding writings" (JP, 6:6701). And again: "The little book *On My Work as an Author* declares: 'It must end with direct communication,' that is, I began with pseudonymous writers representing the indirect communication I have not used under my signature" (JP, 6:6786; cf. JP, 1:656, 6:6532, 6:6577, 6:6636).

If we combine these observations with the forgoing analysis, we come to an important conclusion. For Climacus, the person who wants to help others understand subjectivity (and hence the core of the religious life) must use the kind of indirect communication we find in Kierkegaard's early pseudonymous literature. Granted, the force of the "must" here is not that of necessity. Climacus does not prove all other strategies necessarily fail to help people understand subjectivity. Nevertheless, he does provide strong reasons for thinking the kind of indirect communication found in the early pseudonymous literature is the best way to go.

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[116] For the suggestion that *Either/Or* counts as indirect communication see CUP, 1:252; for *Fear and Trembling* see CUP, 1:259; for *Repetition* see CUP, 1:263; and for *Stages on Life's Way* see CUP, 1:264, 1:289. The main exceptions here are *Concept of Anxiety*, which he categorizes as an instance of direct communication (CUP, 1:269-270), and the Anti-Climacus works, which weren't written yet. See note 33 for a discussion of these exceptions.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of directions in which my dissertation project could profitably be expanded.

First, I have limited the focus of the dissertation to the reasons why *human* beings must engage in indirect communication. This means I have left out any discussion of the reasons why *divine* beings must engage in indirect communication (cf. Evans 1983, 107-108). Yet, this is an important part of the story for Kierkegaard. For example, in *Practice in Christianity*, he has Anti-Climacus state that the God-man (Jesus Christ) must use indirect communication (PC, 123-144). He has Johannes Climacus make the same claim with respect to God in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (243-247; cf. JP, 2:1450). In both cases, the use of indirection results from a decision not to disclose some important fact in a clear and unambiguous way. For Christ, it is a decision not to disclose the fact of his own divine nature. For God, it is a decision not to disclose the fact of his own existence. Both Climacus and Anti-Climacus argue that the motivation behind such divine hiddenness is a desire to aid human beings. More specifically, it is a desire to make genuine faith possible. Now Kierkegaard sides with Luther in believing that salvation comes through faith alone (e.g. JP, 2:1139). It follows that divine hiddenness—i.e. the indirect communication employed by God and Christ—is necessary for salvation.[117] An exhaustive discussion of the indispensability thesis would develop the details of this part of the story.

Second, I have frequently discussed how Kierkegaard uses indirect communication to convey information *to* his readers. But I have omitted any discussion of an interesting way in which Kierkegaard reverses this picture. He sometimes claims that indirect communication allows him to *gather* information *from* his readers. More specifically, he claims it enables him to function as a spy or secret agent who surreptitiously detects the thoughts hidden in the hearts of others (PV, 87; PC, 134; WL, 347). We might say he thinks indirect communication allows him to overcome the

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[117] This conclusion actually requires strengthening the premises of the argument in ways that impinge upon divine omnipotence. First, it requires that divine hiddenness is the *only* way for God to make faith possible. Second, it requires that God could not set up a different "economy of salvation" according to which faith was not required for salvation. Any further development of Kierkegaard's views in this area would have to explain the rationale behind these contentious views.

problem of other minds. This Copernican revolution regarding the purpose of indirect communication is interesting in its own right. It has special importance for Kierkegaard, however, because of its ability to solve the following problem facing his project of ethical and religious pedagogy:

Following Kant, Kierkegaard locates the source of moral and religious value in the possession of a good will.[118] In addition, like Kant, he holds that we cannot discern the presence or absence of such a will in others simply by observing their behavior.[119] Yet, we have no other evidence to go by. Consequently, we cannot make definitive judgments regarding the moral or religious standing of others. Given this fact, Kierkegaard argues, love demands that we operate by a principle of charity. We have an obligation to provide the best possible interpretation of others' actions and even to offer mitigating explanations when their actions appear censurable (WL, 292, 294). This hermeneutic of charity creates a serious problem for Kierkegaard's project of moral and religious pedagogy. For, on the one hand, his decision to engage in such pedagogy presupposes that his intended audience stands in need of his assistance. Yet, on the other hand, the principle of charity entails that he can never come to this conclusion.[120]

If Kierkegaard had a way to look beyond the external behavior of the members of his audience and discern their inner motivations and intentions, this problem would

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[118] Kierkegaard is radically anti-consequentialist when it comes to assigning religious value to actions. From the point of view of eternity—the only point of view that is of religious importance—the merit of a particular action does not depend on what kind of results it brings about or even whether it brings about any results at all. "It depends on *how* the work is done" (WL, 13, 14). More specifically, the merit of an action depends on whether the action is done out of love. Kierkegaard articulates this position in the stage-setting prayer that opens *Works of Love*: "There are indeed only some works that human language specifically and narrowly calls works of love, but in heaven no work can be pleasing unless it is a work of love: sincere in self-renunciation, a need in love itself, and for that reason without any claim of meritoriousness" (WL, 4). Thus, it is the *inward* motivations and *inward* intentions of the action that matter. No matter what the work achieves in the world and in temporality, even if it achieves nothing, eternity will consider it a work of love if it is properly motivated and has the proper intentions (WL, 316, 326). Conversely, no matter what the work is called by the world, even if it is called a work of love, it is no work of love if it is not so motivated and so intended (WL, 13).

[119] Kierkegaard explicitly says that "there is *no* work, *not one single one*, not even the best, about which we can unconditionally say about it: The one who does this unconditionally demonstrates love by it" (WL 13, my emphasis). We get the complementary claim that there are no negative signs that prove love is absent on the following page: "But here again it holds true that there is *nothing, no 'thus and so,'* that can unconditionally be said to demonstrate the presence of love *or to demonstrate unconditionally its absence*" (WL, 14, my emphasis; cf. WL, 228). Thus it is possible for two loving people under the same circumstances to do the opposite action. (WL, 230; cf. WL, 254).

[120] The pseudonymous author of *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*, H.H., explicitly says that only God has the knowledge of other minds required to discern whether those who claim to be Christians are not actually Christians (WA, 87).

disappear. Now if indirect communication can serve to detect the thoughts hidden in others' hearts, as the passages referred to above suggest, then it provides him with precisely the tool that he needs. I have yet to see a definitive treatment of this way of thinking about the purpose of indirect communication. Such a project strikes me as both intriguing and worthwhile.

Third, there is good reason to think that Kierkegaard gives up on the indirect method at the end of his life.[121] In his final writings and especially in *The Moment*, he ceases to write under pseudonyms, tell narratives about fictional characters, or employ irony and deception. Instead, he lays out his own views in serious, didactic fashion. For example, he straightforwardly says that the Danish pastors are frauds (or worse) and any real Christian would stop going to church (e.g. TM, 73). Yet, in his late writings, Kierkegaard continues to pursue a project that he previously said required the use of indirect communication, introducing authentic Christianity into Christendom (see chapter 3). Thus, by all appearances, Kierkegaard's thinking about the indispensability thesis has undergone a radical shift. I have not included a treatment of this shift in the dissertation. A more comprehensive account of his views on indirect communication would have to do so.

Fourth and finally, I have confined myself in the dissertation to talking about one historical figure, Kierkegaard. Yet, as Richard Crouter points out, the notion of indirect communication was "not made up in Copenhagen out of whole cloth" (1994, 224). Kierkegaard himself gives much of the credit to Socrates and most scholars follow suit (see §1 of chapter 2). These attributions make sense when we speak of indirect communication as a version of Socrates' maieutic method. I have argued, however, that we should also understand indirect communication as the use of specific artful rhetorical devices such as pseudonymity, deception, humor, and fictional narratives. I think Crouter's point holds with just as much force when we shift to this heading. The primary influence on Kierkegaard here, however, is not Socrates but rather the German Romantics. Many of them shared the commitments that led Kierkegaard to use indirect communication, such as respect for the autonomy of readers. More strikingly, they employed some of the very same artful rhetorical devices. For example, anticipating the

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[121] I thank Robert Perkins for bringing this point to my attention.

strategy Kierkegaard takes up in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Lessing presents his views in an ambiguous way in order to force his readers to decide for themselves how to interpret him. And, foreshadowing the strategy Kierkegaard deploys in *Either/Or*, Schleiermacher refuses to provide the readers of *Confidential Letters Concerning Lucinde* with a final conclusion. Instead, he presents them with a set of alternative viewpoints on Schlegel's novel, *Lucinde*, and allows them to form their own conclusion as to which viewpoint is the correct one. I believe we would better understand Kierkegaard's own motives and purposes in using this kind of indirect communication if we had greater knowledge of this larger tradition. Some work has been done on this topic (Pattison 1999; 2002b, 116-136). But, to my knowledge, a definitive treatment is still in the offing.

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EDUCATION

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DISSERTATION

Kierkegaard on the Need for Indirect Communication

What attracts many people to Kierkegaard's writings is his inexhaustible literary creativity. Unlike many philosophers, he does not present his theses in staid academic prose. He delivers them under pseudonyms, through narratives, with irony, and by way of deception. What makes Kierkegaard's style of philosophical interest is the radical claim he makes about it. He insists he could not achieve his existential and pedagogical goals without proceeding in such an "indirect" manner. The purpose of my dissertation is to determine whether this "indirect communication" is as important as Kierkegaard says. Against the grain of recent scholarship, I conclude that in some cases it is.

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AREA OF SPECIALIZATION

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FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

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College of Arts and Sciences Travel Grant, Indiana University, 2008

Research Excellence Travel Grant, Dept. of Philosophy, Indiana University, 2008

Summer Kierkegaard Fellowship, Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College, 2007, 2006, 2002

Graduate Award for Academic Excellence, Dept. of Philosophy, Indiana University, 2005

Betty Neal Hamilton Award for Scholarly Excellence, Dept. of Philosophy, Indiana University, 2003

Oscar R. Ewing Essay Prize, Department of Philosophy, Indiana University, 2002

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Presidential Scholarship for Academic Excellence, Calvin College, 1997-2001

PUBLICATIONS

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"Kierkegaard's Case for the Irrelevance of Philosophy" (under review)

PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

"Kierkegaard's Case for the Irrelevance of Philosophy"
Søren Kierkegaard Society Group
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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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P140 Introduction to Ethics (Fall 2008)
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GUEST LECTURES

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Guest lecture for P535, *Phenomenology and Existentialism* (P.V. Spade)
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ACADEMIC SERVICE

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