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The Dialectics of Faith: Kierkegaard, Irony, and Conversion

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by

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Dedication

For Linda. *Requiem æternam dona eam, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eam*.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations[1]	Title
BA	The Book on Adler
CA	The Concept of Anxiety
CAF	The Corsair Affair
CI	The Concept of Irony
CUP	Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments
FT	Fear and Trembling
JP	Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers
KRSRR	Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception, and Resources
PA	The Present Age
PC	Practice in Christianity
PF	Philosophical Fragments
POV	The Point of View for My Work as an Author
R	Repetition
SLW	Stages on Life's Way
SUD	The Sickness Unto Death
WL	Works of Love

[1] All quotes from Kierkegaard's works come from the Princeton Series Hong translations (Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, I-XXVI.* Edited by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978-2000.). There are two exceptions. First, in chapter 4 *The Concept of Irony* is from Lee Capel's version. Second, in chapter 4 I use a quotation from the Alexander Dru translation of *The Present Age*. I have offered the page numbers of the Hong Princeton editions in footnotes for any who might like to compare.

Abstract

Kierkegaard, the 19th-century Danish philosopher, offers a profound perspective on conversion. According to him, conversion isn't a mere external change, but a deeply personal and internal transformation. It's about moving from a state of despair to faith. Kierkegaard believed that true conversion involves a passionate leap of faith, where an individual confronts their own subjectivity and makes a conscious, often paradoxical, choice to align themselves with their authentic values and spiritual beliefs. In his view, conversion is a constant process, requiring introspection, struggle, and a commitment to live authentically in the face of life's uncertainties. In order to communicate this without violating subjectivity, Kierkegaard had to creatively think through his authorial strategy and the deployment of irony to achieve his task. Understanding his view of conversion then may in turn help us to make sense of the strange authorial strategy he took up in order to achieve his purposes.

Introduction: Transgressing Against Kierkegaard

The best philosophy is always that which is transgressive against its own age and that which came before. This is not to say that transgressive philosophy is automatically good, but rather that the best stuff tends to be transgressive. Whether it is Augustine's *Confessions* or the *Meditations* of Descartes, these texts represent a radical departure both in style and in thinking from the norms of their day. The question then becomes why it needs to be transgressive. What is it that led an author to depart from the norms and standards of the day? What vision had they oriented themselves towards which caused such transgression? In this work I have chosen to focus on the strange and transgressive style of Søren Kierkegaard.

I have always admired Kierkegaard from afar. My undergraduate mentor was a known and celebrated Kierkegaard scholar, and this certainly had some influence upon me. However, I never thought I would be writing about him as my key focus. Early on, I wanted to work on Heidegger and the phenomenological tradition in relation to theology. However, as I made my way through graduate school, things kept leading me back to his work, and eventually I acquiesced. Like most projects, this has had many iterations and originally it was about Augustine's *Confessions* as a precursor to Kierkegaard's indirect communication. However, as time went on and I became obsessed by the question of conversion, it became a project solely about Kierkegaard.

This project was born from a simple question that has become all too poignant in recent years. How does communication lead to conversion? This is not simply the question of religious conversion, although the majority of this project will be concerned with that question. Rather, the

question in general of conversion, of what leads to change someone's mind and behavior. It is challenging enough to get someone to change their mind, but an almost insurmountable obstacle presents itself to those who intend to change the will of someone, especially if their life is committed to troubling or abhorrent causes and beliefs. It seems that knowledge and education is no longer a sufficient answer.

The tenacity with which many people hold onto beliefs, no matter how seemingly absurd, has always been striking. Yet, I've always been skeptical of the optimism of too many philosophers that such mistakes rest solely in ignorance or some other failure of knowledge. Thus, reason and knowledge become the tools to set us free. Perhaps I am an outlier, but I lack the optimism to take such a view seriously. Considering the vast amount of knowledge that's out there, it is strange how people come to believe things like flat earth theories, or other similar but debunked claims. Given the tenacity that is shown by those who hold such beliefs, I have thus been influenced by thinkers who felt the problems we face are more often failures of will than failures of knowledge. Thus I sought to find thinkers who focused upon the will, and also departed from the typical didactic format since I suspect knowledge alone may not be successful when dealing with such tenacious beliefs. This alone has allowed me to narrow the scope of my project to a handful of influential writers with unique rhetorical strategies.

This then leads to another question. If I want someone to change their mind freely without coercion or seduction, how do I do so? The problem becomes even more complex as you consider what role you have as a communicator and how to keep such concerns in balance. This is a problem not only for a philosopher, but for any teacher. How do I get students to have an encounter with the material I teach without them merely parroting my own beliefs back to me? This is a perennial problem of communication, and it can break down in all kinds of ways.

In my own field of philosophy of religion this question has largely turned on how one makes an unbeliever into a believer and vice/versa. Traditionally within this purview this has come about through rational argumentation in the vein of Anselm, Aquinas, Avicenna, and more. In the modern era this largely has taken the form of offering a defense of theism against skeptics. In the present day people of all faiths—including anti-faith—argue that people should share their own view of the world. This project makes no claims about the truth of any faith and is not meant to be apologetic in nature.[2] Rather, what is being done here is considering Kierkegaard's way of approaching how to communicate about faith to his audience.

It is challenging to write about Kierkegaard for numerous reasons. He expertly crafted his authorship in such a way that you can almost never attribute something to him with any kind of certainty. As Maurice Blanchot once remarked, "Kierkegaard is determined not to say anything important about it [his life and work] and bases his greatness on the safeguarding of the secret. He explains himself and he veils himself. He exposes himself and he protects himself. He uncovers himself but only in order to put us in contact with the substance of his shadows and to refuse us that which would explain everything to us."[3] That is, he separates himself even from the most sure claims about him and looks on, much like Socrates, with a certain ironic smile always slightly out of reach. Even when you feel you are on good grounds to claim something, you feel you in some way might be betraying him. Such is the feeling of Johannes writing about Lessing in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript:*

> I now intend to present something that I shall, what the deuce, ascribe to Lessing, without being certain that he would acknowledge it, something that I in teasing exuberance could easily be tempted to want to foist

[2] However, it does however take for granted a particular Lutheran influenced Christian take on things since that is the source material of Kierkegaard. One could read this as confessional, but it is simply this author's attempt to be faithful to Kierkegaard's context and influences as best I can.

[3] Blanchot and Mandell, *Faux Pas*. p18.

> upon him as something he said, although not directly, something for which in a different sense I in admiration could enthusiastically wish to dare to thank him…and then again something that I fear will offend or both him by linking his name to it. (CUP 72)

Johannes's feeling here mirrors the feeling of any scholar of Kierkegaard. As much as I am grateful to Kierkegaard for the insights found herein, I also hesitate to attribute them to him in full for fear of what may have disappointed him. Thus, I ask my reader to accept what is offered here in good faith as the most careful and faithful reading of Kierkegaard I can manage, but still something which Kierkegaard himself might smilingly distance himself from.

My work will also be of a religious and theological tone, perhaps too confessional for some tastes. It is impossible to grapple seriously with Kierkegaard's texts without teasing out the religious dimension of his thought. One could dismiss it outright, and there are various traditions of scholarship which have proceeded along similar lines. Nonetheless, I have chosen not to do so for numerous reasons. First, my own questions about the problem of conversion forced me to make a choice of how large I want the scope of that word to be. In Kierkegaard, conversion does have a wide scope, and so the project demands that I pick a lane and stick with it. For that I have chosen to focus on religious conversion as worked out in the philosophical and theological writings of Climacus. Second, religious conversion does seem to be the goal at the end of Kierkegaard's life. One could argue that this goal was not there in the beginning, but I suspect it was there at least from the time of the Gilleleie journal entry of August, 1835. Upon such a suspicion I have wagered this entire project that we can best understand Kierkegaard's taking up of humor and irony by looking at his work through the problem of religious conversion. By the end of this project I hope my reader will be convinced along with me.

Typically, Kierkegaard scholars walk through his authorship (no small task!) while pointing out the themes, problems, and clues that emerge along the way to put together a cohesive argument about what Kierkegaard is saying/doing/attempting. The benefit of this is that it allows

you to engage, at a distance, with the pseudonymous texts while also acknowledging that these aren't straightforwardly the words of Kierkegaard nor do they index what his actual beliefs are. However, this approach may give us some clue to how to unlock the puzzle of what Kierkegaard actually thought.

Happily though, and to his credit, what Kierkegaard believed is largely unimportant to making sense of his work. He purposely distanced himself from his work and repeatedly set himself up as one who is without authority so that we might not call ourselves Kierkegaardians, something I come across all too often and that probably has him rolling in his grave. We may never know what Kierkegaard actually believed, and this is to his credit, for whatever he may have believed may in some way have softened for those of us who love his writing the demands of subjectivity. Such softening is the opposite of the desired effect it would seem for one who is without authority.

There is an irony sometimes present in Kierkegaardian scholarship in which someone says you can't look at what the text themselves say, but rather what they are doing to figure out what Kierkegaard really means. The comedic nature of this should be apparent, because this attempt to insulate those looking to figure out what is being said from being fooled is just another version of attempting to get at what Kierkegaard really meant. Here it seems that they have been misled all over again by Kierkegaard's pseudonyms only at a deeper and more sophisticated level. As much as is possible, I have tried to avoid altogether falling into the error of trying to discern the secrets of what Kierkegaard really meant. Instead, I have tried to get at the problem he may have been faced with and how this problem may shed light on not only why he chose the authorial style he did, but also the genius behind such a style.

What I have attempted to do here in this work is to focus on an idea, that of conversion, and to use it as a lens to look at various works that are concerned with that idea in order to shed light on how that might make sense of his deployment of irony. So, instead of walking through the entirety of Kierkegaard's authorship, I have focused most on where he discusses the problem and process of conversion on the one hand, and the use of irony on the other.[4] At the heart of the phenomenon of conversion and its relation to communication is an aporia which cannot be easily overcome for the Christian author.

Part of the goal of this text is to show how Kierkegaard's strategy of authorship, that is his style, was fit to accomplish the task of his works. Such dramatic authorial machinations would be unnecessary if he didn't feel they were necessary for addressing a particular problem. Although it is possible that it is all humorous to a genius who pulled one over on everyone, it seems that every bit of historical evidence as well as Kierkegaard's own reflections contradict such a claim. Kierkegaard was a genius no doubt, and he could be incredibly vain, but earnestness in his task pervades all of his reflections on his own authorship. He has a single-minded focus on what he wants to do and agonizes over how to do it. Nothing less than the conversion of his audience will suffice, but as I attempt to show, this presents him with a problem.

In chapter one, I undertake one of the fundamental problems in working on Kierkegaard and conversion. Kirkegaard almost never uses the word conversion/*omvendelse*. I argue that he found the word insufficient for three reasons, and that he ultimately prefers the term becoming a

[4] I fully acknowledge that I may at times slip into language that suggests that I am doing precisely what I deny here in the introduction. This is probably unavoidable in writing about Kierkegaard since he purposely made himself so slippery and unable to pin down. All I can offer my readers in this case is a humble apology and a Socratic smile. The quote about Lessing nicely summarizes my own unease about this. As meticulous as I have tried to be, I have no doubt failed at times to be as careful as I could be with my language.

Christian/*at blive Cristen* instead. First, he doesn't see conversion as something that is ever entirely completed, but rather is the work of a lifetime. Second, conversion conventionally often has to do with a cognitive change, but Kierkegaard wants something that involves the entire person and is driven by pathos. Third, because of Danish Christendom, nobody thought they had need of conversion, so Kierkegaard preferred to use becoming a Christian, which he felt much of Denmark had not yet done. Conversion was thought to be a once and for all event, but for Kierkegaard it was a lifetime process emphasized by becoming rather than being.

In chapter two, I try to demonstrate that Kierkegaard, through Johannes Climacus, Johannes De Silentio, and Constantin Constantinus offers a critique and rejection of the philosophical and speculative tradition's typical approach to conversion. Particularly in the modern period conversion is seen as an epistemological problem, but his rejection of recollection also indicts the entire philosophical tradition under the term "Speculative philosophy." The problem we face in existence for Kierkegaard is not epistemic, but has to do with the will and psychology. Said another way, the problem of sin and despair are deeper than epistemology can reach. No matter what knowledge we could have this will not fix our ability to will what we ought not will, or our wanting to will nothing at all in despair. Thus, he wants something that will inspire the pathos to stir up our will and move us out of despair. For him, such movement will move us towards repetition and away from recollection. The desire to make each moment of eternal significance which relates to our own eternal happiness is the most pathos filled possibility of all and thus needs an inspiration to such pathos. This will then lead us to what it means to become a Christian.

In chapter three I lay out the dialectic of what it means to become a Christian. Simply put, rather than the typical movement through the existential spheres of existence, it is the movement

from despair to faith through the category of offense. In this chapter I stick almost entirely to the Climacuses, both Anti and Johannes to tease out this dialectic. As Anti Climacus shows us, we are always in despair whether we know it or not. The moment we feel despair is proof that it was always there. The offense at Christianity stirs us up to either outright reject it or make the movement towards faith. Either is preferred because they imply a dialectical movement that can't be bridged without a movement of the will. Even if we move to faith by resting in the eternal, despair always remains a possibility. Thus, the dialectical tension is kept alive and remains unable to be mediated away or exhausted.

In chapter four, I argue that because of what Kierkegaard wanted to do, he subtlely tweaks his understanding of irony throughout his authorship. First, he speaks of Socratic irony as infinite negativity. But, he wants it to be connected to some kind of ethical purpose. By the time of the Postscript he has tweaked irony to include humor and a kind of directed irony. Something perhaps like the bumpers in a bowling alley. By the end of his authorship in *The Point of View*, he takes Socratic irony back up into his purposes, which is why, on my view, he claims that he is convinced that Socrates became a Christian.

Lastly, in Chapter 5 I discuss what role Kierkegaard's authorship plays in the process of conversion. This leads to what I call the paradox of conversion. How do you willingly get someone to do something they don't currently will without coercion or alienation? If they already will it, then they are not in need of conversion, but if they don't how does one get them to that point? In this case, Kierkegaard needs to have a light touch as author to avoid either pitfall. Thus, I argue that one of the payoffs of Kierkegaard's use of irony is that it accomplishes this purpose. It does not coercively or seductively (as in Socratic recollection) get someone to accept his message. Neither does he try to get them to accept his teaching.

Rather, what his work attempts to do is provide the conditions for someone to subjectively come to have an encounter with what is demanded of them. Thus, the encounter is to be entirely for subjectivity to have with whatever the text means to reflect to them. This for him is different from his own authority. Like the Apostle who announces a message that is not his own, Kierkegaard offers it as a phenomenological gift to those who would experience it. Simply put, irony allows Kierkegaard's work to offer an experience rather than a message. The whole authorship then is an offering towards the possible conversion of his reader, and looking at it through conversion helps make sense of some of the more puzzling aspects of his thinking.

Thus, the totality of what follows offers this simple argument: Kierkegaard's use of irony is sufficient for the task of the problem that conversion presents to the author. Simply put, irony as Kierkegaard tweaks it is better able to accomplish conversion as Kierkegaard desires than straightforward teaching. Put another way, irony is the form appropriate to the paradox (namely, Christianity and conversion to its demands) as content. This puzzle of how to communicate this effectively but with the lightest of touch is the paradox which motivated Kierkegaard's authorship and thinking.

Chapter One: Silence on Conversion: From Conversion to Becoming a Christian

Many scholars have noted the importance of conversion for Kierkegaard's thinking. Merold Westphal, following Walter Lowrie, refers to Kierkegaard's own conversion as the "precondition and presupposition for Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole."[5] Yet, one is struck by two things at the outset. First, the term itself rarely appears in Kierkegaard's work. Second, it has been largely ignored in secondary scholarship. As Noreen Khawaja remarks in her book *The Religion of Existence*:

> While "becoming a Christian" is a pervasive phrase in Kierkegaard's published and unpublished writings, "conversion" (*Omvendelse*) is a word one finds only by looking, and even then not in abundance. Scholarly discussions of Kierkegaard's work mirror this tendency very closely. While there are countless books, edited volumes, and essays devoted to restless faith and becoming and struggle—not to mention to Kierkegaard's infamous "leap"—there has been next to nothing written about Kierkegaard as a thinker of conversion. Kierkegaard was a master of disguises. Here, too, he seems to have been successful.[6]

Khawaja rightly remarks that the secondary scholarship has largely ignored the term conversion due to its relative rarity. Kierkegaard's sparing use of the term conversion has been taken as indicative of its unimportance. Only a few articles have been written paying particular attention to conversion, and most of them are recent which shows that it is a topic that has long been ignored. Additionally, the authoritative KRSRR, multiple volumes exhaustively covering various topics in Kierkegaard's corpus by some of the best scholars, doesn't have an entry for "Conversion", whereas it does have entries for "Becoming a Christian," "Repentance,"

[5] Westphal, *Becoming a Self : A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. p4.
[6] Khawaja, *The Religion of Existence : Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre*. p72.

"Religiousness," "Faith," and several other related terms. Despite this, we are not without resources for analyzing the importance of conversion for his thought.

It has been common practice to take for granted the interchangeability of conversion and becoming a Christian in Kierkegaard's work which, taken in conjunction with the rarity of the term, may explain the lack of scholarship dedicated to the term conversion itself. However, I shall argue that Kierkegaard preferred the term "becoming a Christian" over conversion because conversion is indicative of a mistaken way of thinking about what it is to be a Christian that has been instilled through Christendom. Thus, we shall see Kierkegaard largely eschews conversion in favor of becoming a Christian as he gets further into his authorship.

First, I will analyze the most prominent appearances of the Danish word for conversion (*omvendelse*) to show how natural it became for Kierkegaard to interchange and ultimately replace it with becoming a Christian (*at blive Cristen*). Then, I shall look at possible biographical moments of Kierkegaard's own personal conversion and the ambiguity surrounding it which is suspicious. Finally, I shall discuss what Kierkegaard saw as his task in Danish Christendom to call people from Christendom to Christianity. From all of this we shall begin to get a picture of what conversion is, and perhaps more importantly what conversion isn't. My wager is that having this picture, or at least a clear understanding of what conversion isn't, may give us a better understanding of why Kierkegaard largely eschews the term in favor of his exhaustively used phrase "becoming a Christian," which he will later remark animates the whole authorship (POV 8).

1.1 Dissatisfaction with Conversion

As has been mentioned above, the term conversion rarely appears in his works. The Danish word, *omvendelse* is uncommon. Most cumulative indexes both in English and Danish have the

word appearing just about ten times throughout his entire published work. The Danish *vende om* signals a turning around in conventional use. This optative form of turn around comes from the infinitive *omvende*, which means to go in reverse. For instance, when Anti Climacus says to "*turn around* and come here, here is rest," (PC 19 italics mine), the Danish is *vende om* or *omvende* and *omvendt*. The latter of which Kierkegaard frequently uses and English translators have variously translated to "transform" "change" "turn" "invert" and "repent."[7] Kierkegaard's sparing use of the term *omvendelse* has three plausible explanations. First, it just wasn't an important concern of his or didn't cross his mind. Second, it has a highly specialized use and is deployed only in a specialized way. Third, the insufficiency of the term caused him to avoid it to achieve his purposes. The first explanation can be dismissed outright since Kierkegaard was obsessed with what it means to become a Christian. It would seem the best explanation given the evidence seems to be a mixture of the second and third. Let us look at some of the main points where he uses the term to see why Kierkegaard largely eschews the term conversion in favor of becoming a Christian.

To start, let us look at the conventional use in Kierkegaard's time. A Danish dictionary that was in regular use from 1793-1805, offers this: "Every change in custom, either supposed in external appearance, or in disposition/emotion."[8] Further, it gives a theological definition which it defines either as "a changing of mind due to the gift or goodness of God. Some other notable

[7] I am indebted here to Murray A. Rae's *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation*. In comparing the term omvendelse to the Greek metanoia (μετάνοια) p163, he tries to find all possible uses of the term. His own chapter supplemented my own search. Rae argues that there are several reasons to think that Climacus's use of *omvendelse* means nothing other than the New Testament meaning of metanoia. Given the fraught and complicated debate there about metanoia and my lack of qualification as a biblical scholar, I will simply leave it as is. The point stands that Kierkegaard's use of *omvende* has close resonance both with conversion and repentance (the latter of which in Danish is *anger*). As we shall see, the two are closely related in Kierkegaard's dialectic of becoming a Christian.

[8] Kongelige Danske videnskabernes selskab, *Dansk Ordbog*.

uses can involve changing to another religion, but the word here is often *omvender*.[9] It can also mean repentance as in Matthew 9:13 and Romans 2:4. Hegelian (and Kantian) influenced Danish theologians such as Martensen and Heiberg tended to speak of conversion largely in terms of the progressive enlightenment of rationality.[10] That is, conversion wouldn't be a deep existential change—although Mynster does speak of it in these terms in a way that bears some similarity to what Climacus will lay out in the Postscript—for the Danish Hegelians, it would only be a change of mind or knowledge. Thus, from all this we can conclude the word *omvendelse* itself probably means something very similar to what it does today in English. It does then, as Murray A. Rae points out, seem to be pretty close in nature to the Greek (μετάνοια). This may be a clue as to why Kierkegaard largely avoids it. However, all of this is hardly definitive. Let us look at how he uses it.

Conversion appears as a key concern primarily in the Climacian authorship where it has a uniform use that Climacus lays out near the very beginning of the *Fragments.* After speaking about the status as a human being as one who is in untruth, he explains:

> He was continually in the process of departing from the truth; as a result of receiving the condition in the moment, his course took the opposite direction, or he was turned around. Let us call this change *conversion*, even though this is a word hitherto unused; but we choose it precisely in order to avoid confusion, for it seems to be created for the very change of which we speak. (PF 18)

Simply put, conversion is a changing of one's course as a result of learning one had departed from the truth. Much as *vende om* represents a simple change in direction, so here it represents a

[9] I've also been informed that this is still the common use of this word even today, and its most common use has to do with someone leaving the Danish state church.

[10] Space doesn't permit me to explore this here, but I am indebted to this point to Curtis L. Thompson's chapter "H.L. Martensen's Theological Anthropology," in *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark*. It is precisely this kind of theology Kierkegaard is taking aim at in the works of Johannes Climacus. See David R. Law "Making Christianity Difficult," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*.

change in direction sparked by the realization one is living incorrectly in untruth.[11] The continuous nature of this process of conversion is what Climacus argues is the counterpoint to the philosophical tradition of recollection and speculation as we shall see in Chapter 2. Thus, it cannot be a mere momentary achievement, but requires the carrying out of the change in direction towards something new.

What we see in this quote is important to understanding the way Kierkegaard takes up the term conversion and transforms it from an achieved moment into a process of becoming. Johannes Climacus will argue philosophy the problem we face is epistemic because it can be solved by mere knowledge, but Climacus thinks the problem is deeper in that our very existence is untruth and leads us to despair. This is the key concern in the *Fragments,* and the *Postscript* will supplement this by exhaustively emphasizing the process throughout its rather lengthy discourse. However, it does so in terms of favoring "becoming a Christian/*at blive Cristen*" while the term "conversion/*omvendelse*" largely drops off by the time of the *Postscript* and beyond. However, what we see is that the disappearance of the latter in favor of the increasing frequency of the former tells us that Kierkegaard preferred that term to get his point across.

This is not to say that the word disappears altogether, for "conversion" makes a brief return in the texts of Anti Climacus as well. Anti Climacus speaks of "the laborious pace of conversion," which, "from him [Christ] there is help and forgiveness on the way of conversion that leads to him, and with him is rest." (PC 19) What is important in these two quotes is that it seems to show that conversion is a lengthy and challenging process rather than a single moment. Although the process will be occasioned by a specific moment of revelation and decision, it is

[11] In the third chapter I will discuss Climacus's view further to show that the concern of conversion represents a decisive break from modern philosophy which was concerned with epistemic concerns, but Climacus thinks the problem goes deeper to despair.

not encompassed by that moment. Additionally, he also comments about its pace in his journals, that it "proceeds slowly." (JP 1178 104) It is a long process which ends in rest. It is used similarly in a quite conventional way in the *Book on Adler* (BA 68) and personal notes found in *The Corsair Affair*. (CAF 261-63) But what about the journals?

True to form, the term conversion appears sparingly in his voluminous journals, papers, and notebooks. Sometimes he uses it there in conventional ways, but it does have noticeable features which set it apart from conventional use. For instance, "Heterodoxly one may say that conversion precedes and conditions the forgiveness of sins; orthodoxly one may say: the forgiveness of sins precedes conversion and strengthens men to truly be converted." (JP 1206 VII A 167) Here he is contrasting two ways of thinking about conversion, in which one can either think of conversion is something one undergoes in order to receive forgiveness of sins or after one has experienced the forgiveness of sins one is inspired to conversion. This understanding would mean it is a process that happens after the liberation of not being weighed down by sin. Thus, conversion does not occasion the forgiveness of sins, but the forgiveness of sins occasions the process of conversion. The question is whether this process is the same thing as becoming a Christian.

Conversion and becoming a Christian are closely linked together. In fact, in one journal entry he equates the two terms, "In everything I have read about *conversion, the transitions of becoming a Christian*, in none of them, even in the most famous and historical conversions, have I seen the pain of becoming a Christian described." (JP 2080 XI A 125 italics mine) Kierkegaard's penchant for extremity is on full display here, but we can glean two important insights from it. First, Kierkegaard seems to have outright hostility towards typical testimonies and accounts of conversion because they lack something essential to what he sees as conversion

and becoming a Christian. Second, it is of importance here that he switches seamlessly between the terms conversion and the transitions of becoming a Christian. That is, conversion and becoming a Christian are synonymous for Kierkegaard. The ease with which he switches between the two in conjunction with the fact that Kierkegaard becoming a Christian is central to his authorship implies that conversion is important to Kierkegaard. The word itself is rare, but we have to ask why rather than dismiss its sparing use. Since Kierkegaard so rarely uses the term conversion, perhaps we can find some clues to his view of conversion by looking at his own conversion story.

1.2 Kierkegaard's Personal Conversion

One piece of evidence for Kierkegaard's preferring becoming a Christian over conversion is the curious absence of an explicitly mentioned personal conversion story anywhere in Kierkegaard's journals or works. Before discussing the possible candidates, it is important to understand why the absence is conspicuous. Kierkegaard's father was part of strict sect of Danish/German pietism known as Herrnhutism. Bruce Kirmmse describes them this way:

> Herrnhutism thus combined anti-intellectualism, covert anti-clericalism, and an emotional emphasis upon "blood and wonders," yet at the same time it insisted on a religion of inwardness, saying that God was not interested in outward things, in rote, external exercises of piety, but only in a reborn heart.[12]

Here we have all the ingredients driving Kierkegaard's own philosophy. Although Kierkegaard will modify them in some fashion or other, these are easily recognizable. So, another feature of Herrnhutism that Kirmmse mentions is, "an unhealthy stress upon conversion."[13] It would have been normal practice to make note of this conversion, "as a precondition without which no amount of God-fearingness could suffice."[14] Herrnhuts were explicit and pious in their diaries

[12] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark.* P32.
[13] Ibid p32.
[14] Ibid p32.

and made sure to describe everything in terms of their relation to God. Kirmmse also explains that the stifling environment led many youths raised in it to reject it in their adulthood. This may be the explanation for why no clear conversion account of Kierkegaard exists. It may be some small act of rebellion on his part, and unless it was redacted, Kierkegaard is departing from the common practice of his father's tradition. Perhaps there are indications of conversion in his journals and biographical materials.

He does mention a few formative experiences in his journals, of which two stand out as possible conversion stories. First is the infamous Gilleleie journal from August 1, 1835 in which Kierkegaard seems to find his calling. He explains, "What I really need is to get clear about *what I am to do*,* not what I must know, except insofar as knowledge must precede every act. What matters is to find my purpose, to see what it really is that God wills that *I* shall do; the crucial thing is to find a truth that is truth *for me.*" (JP V 5100 I A 75) After this section, he spends several paragraphs reflecting on the relationship of Christianity to knowing oneself and finally concludes with "So let the die be cast—I am crossing the Rubicon! No doubt this road takes me *into battle*, but I will not renounce it." (JP V 5100 I A 75) Kierkegaard leaves Copenhagen in search of his life's mission and comes back having found it. This may indicate a kind of conversion story, but we have no reason to think that it is a conversion any more than to think it is a young man steeling himself for what he believes is his vocation. Such is perhaps a kind of conversion, but it isn't the movement to faith that is central to his thinking.

The second moment is often pointed out in biographical materials. On May 19th, 1838 at 10:30am, Kierkegaard remarks about having felt an indescribable joy (JP 5324)—which came in the midst of a typically despairing point of his life—and there are hints the story may have been a commemoration of the moment of conversion. In the passage he refers to Saint Paul's

exhortation in Philippians 4:4 and the call of the watchmen based in Psalms 51. Kierkegaard mentions that the joy came through for no apparent reason and makes no indication the experience is a conversion. The only thing clear from the entry is the effusive joyous nature of it. In his biography of Kierkegaard, Walter Lowrie interprets the May 19th entry in light of another from July 9th, 1838 (JP 5328). This entry, penned shortly before the death of his father, offers a prayer of thanksgiving for his father and another entry of the same day (JP 5329) promises to "strive to come into a far more inward relationship to Christianity; for until now I have in a way been always standing outside it."[15] Walter Lowrie argues that this is must be a description of the moment of Kierkegaard's conversion which also launches Kierkegaard's authorship. Although later that year Kierkegaard's authorship would begin with *From the Papers of One Still Living*, I don't think we can confidently conclude this is a disguised, and certainly not forthright, conversion story.

These entries are ambiguous at best as conversion stories. They may just as well have been powerful mystical experiences or even a day where he felt extremely grateful. As noted Kierkegaard biographer Joakim Garff explains, "We do not really know what happened that morning…the journal entries that precede and follow it do not provide the slightest clue.[16]" Garff goes on to note that Kierkegaard's humble mention may be in keeping with the pietistic practice of his father's religious practice of commemorating a date of conversion. The pious practice of his father's tradition is to publicly confess one's conversion, but Kierkegaard's omission of this seems suspicious at least. Here he is deliberately departing from practice for one reason or another. What stands out most is Kierkegaard's including the exact time of the experience in the May 19th entry. Such may have been some leftover of pietistic inheritance.

[15] Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*. p168
[16] Garff and Kirmmse, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*. p128.

This was the Christianity that young Søren grew up in and came to influence his own understanding of the faith. However, this is a conjecture at best. This may be Kierkegaard's rejoicing at nothing more than reconciling his notoriously fraught relationship with his father whom he deeply loved and respected. Kierkegaard may have simply reported on his calling, making Michael proud before his death arrived. Kierkegaard may have felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for having his father knowing of his impending death as many children do when their parent's end nears. What we can conclude is that this is the moment that Kierkegaard had found his answer to the concerns of the Gilleleie journal. Kierkegaard would seek to have a relationship to Christianity in inwardness and would launch his authorship in full force. Such may be a kind of conversion, or a beginning on the road, but it is not a road to Damascus story.

In launching his authorship, we have one more moment where Kierkegaard speaks of something resembling a conversion story. In *The Point of View* he writes, "When I began *Either/Or*…I was *potentialiter* as deeply influenced by the religious as I ever became. I was so profoundly shaken…I either had to plunge into despair and sensuality or absolutely choose the religious as the one and only." (POV 35) Again, what we have are numerous ambiguities in that Kierkegaard marks this proclamation with a "*potentialiter*" and speaks about the category of the religious rather than a particularly spiritual experience. The timing of beginning *Either/Or* (1840-1841) is long after the above journal entries, so it would seem Kierkegaard was not converting at that moment. The best we could infer is that Kierkegaard was still riding the tail winds of whatever experience had inspired the above journal entries.

Despite their lack of providing an obvious moment or experience of conversion, I think we can take these three stories as indicative of something consistent throughout Kierkegaard's writings. An often-quoted journal entry that "Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must

be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other clause—that it must be lived forwards," (JP 1030) is apt here. Kierkegaard, both as author and as individual, was always in the process of becoming. Thus, he wanted to continue this process of becoming without putting a stamp on a certain way of being whether retrospectively or in the moment. He was continually in a process of conversion and was aware of it to the very end of his life.

Despite how hard we look, there is no story in which he hears "*tolo lege*" nor an appearance of Christ or Mary to hand him his new mission. Kierkegaard doesn't even call anything he does a conversion. And as Lowrie points out, "S.K. frequently and emphatically affirmed that he enjoyed no mystical experiences, 'no direct relationship with God.'"[17] Both Lowrie and Kierkegaard attest to the fact that there is no explicit mystical conversion story, only a mirage of one that some scholars have tried to piece together. But the absence of any explicit conversion story is conspicuous and deserves further attention.

Kierkegaard, who so meticulously planned his public image and left trails of breadcrumbs throughout his writings, seems to have hidden the possibility of knowing when his conversion happened. As both Garff and Kirmmse point out, it was common practice to commemorate one's conversion as a testimony publicly in Herrnhutism. Kierkegaard seems to be shying away from this, if not fully departing from the practice. It is conspicuous by its absence. Thus, we can only ask why he hid this rather than whether he did. Are we to believe that Kierkegaard accepted his baptism as a moment of conversion when he will so stringently condemn this belief in his later authorship? To try to understand Kierkegaard's own account of conversion then by searching for triumphant tales of his coming to believe something or committing to a new way of life would be a fool's errand. The available evidence seems to suggest that he preferred to omit it, and the

[17] Lowrie, *Kierkegaard.* p170.

transformation of the concept of conversion into becoming a Christian seems to suggest that he wanted to do away with the term altogether as sufficient to describe what he wanted out of his audience. Thus, we should ask what the meaning of this noticeable omission might be.

Kierkegaard felt that Christianity, particular his pious father's practice of Herrnhutism and the despairing aura from a sin in his youth, was like the air he breathed in the house of his father. Perhaps there was no need for a conversion story given his upbringing. Since the beliefs of Christianity were as familiar to him as the air he breathed, there need not be any dramatic moment of conversion. However tempting this might be, such a belief goes against everything Kierkegaard spent his life writing and thinking about. He obsessed about what it meant to become a Christian in Christendom. Thus, it would be absurd to think that he took for granted his own having become a Christian simply by his birth without the need for conversion. There is no evidence in the journals nor his published works that Kierkegaard took for granted his own faith as a matter of having achieved it from childhood. Thus, the absence of an explicit account of conversion shouldn't count as evidence that Kierkegaard found it unimportant or uninteresting.

So, what are we to conclude from this? There are a handful of options. We can conclude that Kierkegaard never did become a Christian, or that he never wanted to be referred to as a Christian. It is also possible that Kierkegaard wanted to keep his own conversion, something purely subjective, out of the public eye because subjectivity cannot be directly communicated. Additionally, we could assume that this is a mere oversight or display of humility such as Garff suggests. The best we can glean from the fact that there is no conventional conversion story means it could not be understood in conventional ways. This could be further evidence, admittedly not decisive, that Kierkegaard's own views of conversion depart from conventional thinking about it.

1.3 Kierkegaard's Task as Author in Christendom

Etymology, sparing appearances in his works, and biography have not helped us see what conversion is, but they have at least given us some sense of what conversion doesn't involve for Kierkegaard. Conversion can't be a mere moment of changing one's mind. At the very least, we have a clearer understanding of his decision to become an author as noted in the Gilleleie journal entry from 1835. What is sometimes read as Kierkegaard's personal conversion story is simply the decision to launch his authorship in 1835 and again later to make good on that promise after the death of his father. Thus, it is important to turn now to Kierkegaard's task as an author to bring us closer to understanding why he eschews the term conversion in favor of becoming a Christian. The contemporary situation of his fellow Danes was one of familiarity with Christianity, but it lacked the fiery passion required so far as he was concerned. If people saw themselves as already in possession of Christian identity, there would be no need for conversion, so perhaps Kierkegaard needed to use different language than conversion.

Kierkegaard's whole authorship, by his own description, is about what it means to become a Christian. However, the task set before him was something different. It was not to convert unbelievers into believers—to bring the gospel to the Pagans—but to bring those in Christendom (*Cristenhed*), the institutional and political appearance of a "Christian Nation" in lockstep with Christian theology, face to face with Christianity (*Cristendom*), which is contemporaneity with Christ and individual responsibility to faith. This is the task of re-presenting the Christian message to those who thought they already were Christians simply by their Danish heritage. He was obsessed then to "take measures against the illusion: calling oneself a Christian." (POV 8) Kierkegaard thought his task was something entirely new. He didn't have the situation of the apostles who were able to share the newness of the Christian message with those who had never

heard it and wondered at the announced good news. Kierkegaard wanted to avoid putting new wine in old wine skins since they would burst.

In the eighteen centuries that had passed, Christianity had become a commonplace and taken for granted in its stronghold of northern Europe where it faced almost no opposition or alternative views. According to Kierkegaard, it was something everyone thought they had possession of merely by being born there. Being a Christian, Anti Climacus remarks, "Became as simple as pulling on one's socks." (PC 35) It was the very cultural air that 19th Century Denmark breathed, and its influence was just as taken for granted by the typical Danish Christian. The message of Christianity, according to Kierkegaard, was no longer radical nor offensive in the minds of his contemporaries, but for him it should still be as radical as it was in the first century.[18] Anti Climacus remarks about his contemporaries that, "One does not know what it is to be offended, even less what it is to worship." (PC 36) This lack of offense had taken the edges off the Christian message. It had been dulled down to suit the tastes of those who were called Christians simply by having been born in a majority Christian country.

In fact, there was almost no separation between national and Lutheran identity in Denmark. For instance, as Bruce Kirmmse points out, "For the vast majority—almost the entirety—of the Danish population, legal adulthood was conferred with the granting of the confirmation certificate by the pastor of the local parish of the official Lutheran State Church."[19] Thus, Christian identity and national identity were intertwined, and nobody sought to distinguish between the two in Kierkegaard's eyes. The spiritual malaise that Kierkegaard wanted to combat,

[18] In *Practice in Christianity*, Anti Climacus will explain contemporaneity with Christ as the fundamental way of having faith. For him, this means to be in direct relation to Christ and to hold onto a personal faith that mirrors that of Christ, the Apostles, and the early church established at Pentecost. This belief probably betrays the lasting impact of Herrnhutism upon his thinking.

[19] Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*. p27.

was in a certain sense being given to the people by the highest authorities in church and state since anyone could receive it regardless of their seriousness about Christianity.

As much as Kierkegaard's own faith was formed by his father's passionate Herrnhutism, so was the Christianity of the Danish citizenry shaped by the identity of the national church. The general thinking seemed to be that to be a member of one group was simultaneously to be a member of the other, and there need be no questions about that. This irked Kierkegaard to no end and shows up as a thorn in his side throughout his authorship. Thus, to fulfill the task of conversion required not sharing the good news first but sharing the bad news first. Kierkegaard himself noted that, "This in turn is the category of my whole authorship: to *make aware* of the religious, the essentially Christian—but "without authority." (POV 6, 12)[20] His making aware of the extreme offense and the religious is not his own teaching, but rather something he feels he must pass on. This is why he will take great pains to separate himself from his works. His work then serves to remind people of the demand placed on them by daring to call themselves Christian.

[20] It is worth pointing out here that scholars are often reticent to take seriously *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*. Here, they seem to be following Kierkegaard's own hesitance to publish. Nonetheless, the first 20 pages of the Princeton publication contains the 1851 published "On My Work as an Author." Thus, at least this Kierkegaard himself published and it is worth considering in detail. Most of the quotes from this chapter will come from these pages. If one wants to call the pages beyond those into question, I have no issue, but Kierkegaard's willingness to publish the first 20 pages seems to me reason enough to trust them.

Additionally, most of Kierkegaardian scholarship has focused on that amazing year of production between 1841-42 in which so many of Kierkegaard's most famous texts were produced in such a short period of time. Although this is a truly awesome feat for us scholars, Kierkegaard himself still was much more laudatory towards his production in 1848 which included the works of Anti Climacus as well as "On my Work as an Author." From 1848 onward Kierkegaard would think of these as the best work he had ever done and his praise for this year of production comes up throughout his journals.

This exact demand is recast just a few pages later as, "the issue of the whole authorship: becoming a Christian." (POV 8) Thus, a kind of taking ownership of what it means to call oneself a Christian is the task of becoming a Christian. Yet, it is precisely this which is resisted. In a journal entry from 1835, he states "Christianity or becoming a Christian is like every radical cure: One puts it off as long as possible."[21] Kierkegaard may have also been speaking about himself here. Regardless, what he is offering is not something new—although his task is—but merely a reminder of something of which he is neither the origin nor creator. Part of his strategy involves thinking how to do this without being another name to follow (Grundtvigians, Martensians, Hegelians, etc.) He is one who is not able to be in authority over them and rather wants to inspire the passion in others to subjectively appropriate the truth for themselves.

Thus, Kierkegaard doesn't want us to become street preachers declaring the hell that awaits those who fail to repent. In fact, both heaven and hell are subjects Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms barely broach. Rather, he wants to return us to the awareness of the despair that would make us see Christianity as good news again. In this sense, the street preacher condemning the people to hell is just expediting the whole process that got us to the point of Christendom in the first place. Scaring hell into people only to lull them back into security with the promises of heaven while not making them come face to face with the demands of subjectivity is just as faulty as the faith in Christendom. For Kierkegaard, subjectivity is the key category because each one must stand in faith alone and appropriate it in personal pathos. Thus, the street preacher offers only an alternative form of complacency with a less publicly appropriate face.

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[21] See Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, p31. NB: This journal entry from October 9, 1835, was not in any of the volumes of the journals I have access to. I am trusting in Garff's excellent scholarship here.

But what does one with Kierkegaard's concerns do with a public in Christendom that already knows and accepts all the doctrines, believes all the foundational beliefs, and has accepted the basic framework of Christian morality? What need for an apologist or teacher would there be? To put it simply, the objective content of belief was all there, but Christianity wasn't. Or, to put it in the language of Climacus, the objective was freely available, but their subjective relation to it remained stagnant and dispassionate. In the state of Christendom—at least modern Christendom since Kierkegaard has mostly kind words for pre-modern Christianity—the objective beliefs the apologists might try to get people to believe were already there. Yet, faith seemed entirely absent because of the general decadence and unseriousness of Christianity in the Denmark of his day.[22]

This was the state that so concerned Kierkegaard and had him convinced that the methods of direct communication wouldn't work. There could be no pronunciation of the gospel bringing conversion of the pagans to Christianity. The pagans had become Lutherans in Denmark,[23] but such were a sorry excuse for Christianity according to Kierkegaard's own Herrnhut formed piety, and so something needed to be done to shock them to their core. They needed to be reintroduced to the despair of human existence which would find hope and then ideally faith in Christianity. In a very real sense then, Kierkegaard's task was entirely new to "make difficulties everywhere." (CUP 187)

He demonstrates this with metaphor of sustenance and disgorging. First, "When at a banquet where the guests have already gorged themselves, someone is intent on having more courses served and someone else on having an emetic ready, it is certainly true that only the former has understood what the guests demand, but I wonder if the latter might not also claim to have

[22] Here again Kierkegaard betrays the influence of early 19th century revival movements on his thinking.
[23] PC 107 "Christendom has thereby become paganism."

considered what they might require." (CUP 187) Thus, the one who induces vomiting in his guests has given them what they *need*, while he who gives them more cake only has given them what they *desire*. This metaphor appears again in similar form but tied directly to communication.

> When a man has filled his mouth so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat and it must end with his dying of hunger, does giving food to him consist in stuffing his mouth even more or, instead in taking a little away so that he can eat? Similarly, when a man is very knowledgeable but his knowledge is meaningless or virtually meaningless to him, does sensible communication consist in giving him more to know? (CUP 275)

Both quotes show what Kierkegaard thinks is the task of his authorship. The essential thing, what someone truly needs is an offense which can cause one to spit out the refuse blocking the essential things. Offense then will motivate some portion of his authorship since it is emetic in function.

We can see from these analogies that objective beliefs will not get one in Christendom to the point of conversion if they are not capable of doing anything with said knowledge and being made to see the demand it makes on them as an individual. There may be some isolated cases, but in general they will have mere intellectual assent and not faith. Since objective content will not help, as is the constant refrain of the Climacian texts, we can also conclude that conversion itself must not be a matter of cognition but will require something more. Thus, Kierkegaard didn't feel the need to write further speculative treatises or apologetic argumentation. He had to find a way of clearing a path through the beliefs people already had in such a way that they could be encountered, reappropriated, and believed again in a way that brings about real change to one's life. Simply put, Kierkegaard wanted to free Christianity of the leash Christendom had put upon it. In high society, and amongst the elite in Danish culture, this leash had been fixed by the Danish Hegelians and the influence of Hegelian philosophy itself.

The neutering of Christianity had been done at the intellectual level by various forebears influenced by the mediating tendencies of Hegelianism. This was most displayed in Copenhagen by Kierkegaard's teachers and cultural elites such as Heiberg and Martensen. Heiberg, also known as Dr. Hjortspring in the *Postscript*, tries to synthesize Christian thought with Hegelian/speculative recollection. This is an all too familiar move in the history of Christian thought. There are constant points of synthesis and disintegration between Christian thought and pagan philosophy throughout the tradition such as Augustine's melding it with Plato, Boethius with Stoicism, and Aquinas with Aristotle. Although Kierkegaard was reacting specifically to Heiberg, his critique can perhaps apply to this impulse more generally. As Bruce Kirmmse notes, "Heiberg's understanding of truth is precisely what Kierkegaard will later call 'Socratic Recollection,' which he contrasted with the radically new and external truth brought to humanity by the consciousness of sin and the reality of redemption."[24] Another way of saying this is that the recollective tradition could work for Christianity were there not the need for something entirely other, rather than already possessed knowledge, to bring about conversion. Revelation is a necessary component of Christianity, and so this revealed content is something that lies beyond what reason alone can achieve.

The movement "beyond faith" (FT 5) had already occurred since Christianity had been seen to be rather inoffensive and not as interesting as pursuing the aims of the highest rationality. The content of Christianity could be transmuted into theoretical jargon appropriate to the tastes of 19th century intellectuals and the additional influence of European pantheistic trends of that

[24] Kirmmse. *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark*, p145.

era.[25] What remained was to put faith in its place as lower than rationality and to go beyond what it had to offer.

Kierkegaard wanted to do the opposite. He repeatedly stresses that he wants to make things harder while also returning things to the simple. The idea here is that becoming a Christian is simple conceptually, but incredibly hard to do as an existing individual. As an analogy one can think about getting in shape. Conceptually it is simple: eat right and stay active. However, in existence this is one of the most challenging things to bring about and stick to. The big sin of Hegelian influenced Christianity is that it flips this dichotomy. It makes Christianity incredibly complex, but easy. It takes Christianity and makes of it the most complex conceptual world-historical framework, but this framework requires nothing of your life besides thinking about it and dismissing it. Kierkegaard worried here about the lack of offense in the Christian message presented to the masses because it would turn it into a sympathetic trifle to be carried around in the same way one collects stamps.

So, Anti Climacus tells us, "If something must be done, one must attempt again to introduce Christianity into Christendom." (PC 36) Kierkegaard wanted to take Christian thinking off the speculative road and return it to a concrete existence commitment. Reflection, something the Danish intellectuals excelled at, was part of this task but it wasn't the main task. What was needed was offense. Otherwise, Christian thinking would continually become wholly unrecognizable to Christianity. The cultural product then of Danish Hegelianism, was an overstuffed, but unedified public which was entirely unmoved by the hope or the demands of Christian life, completely unaware of the despair exhibited by their aesthetic boredom displayed daily in the decadence of 19th century Copenhagen.

[25] Ibid. p97.

Perhaps here we can suggest another argument. This is to claim that perhaps Kierkegaard saw that the inevitable cultural product of Christendom would be the emptying of all its Christian content. It is difficult to prove this because Kierkegaard, like his pseudonym Johannes Climacus, was quite resistant to thinking world-historically and tended to avoid thinking genealogically.[26] His concern was always with the moment, and with the psychology of that moment. However, we can get a glimpse of a prediction he makes through the voice of Anti Climacus.

Practice in Christianity offers the most systematic take down of Christendom[27] throughout Kierkegaard's corpus, and the third part of the book consists of a stream of seven sermons on texts from the Gospels. In them Anti makes a distinction between merely admiring Christ and imitating him. He declares that only the imitation of Christ is true Christianity. Admiration, on the other hand, moves us away from this because it demands nothing of us but observation and basic stirring of our emotions. Admiration he thinks is the fruit of Christendom, and though it is laudable, will inevitably fade to apathy about Christianity. Towards the end of the sixth sermon, he guesses at what the inevitable product of this will be. He states, "Soon it will have gone so far that an admirer of Christianity is a rarity; the average person is lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, and many are atheists, mockers, nonreligious persons, deniers. But in the strictest sense the admirer is still not a true Christian…Only the imitator is the true Christian." (PC 256) The distinction between the admirer and the imitator is that the former merely looks on without a change in behavior, like a spectator at a sporting event. However, the imitator tries to model their

[26] A notable exception to this is his work on *The Two Ages*, in which he compares the present age to previous ages. In this you can see some of his own worries about the decadence endemic to European Christendom. However, an analysis of this entire text is more than is necessary here.
[27] In other works he offers more scathing takedowns in a most polemical manner, but none are as systematic and sustained as *Practice in Christianity.*

life after what it is that they see. Thus, the imitator is the one who turns the stirring of emotions into action.

Here, he anticipates that the generally hospitable, albeit noncommittal, climate of European Christendom would inevitably lead to indifference or outright hostility towards Christianity. His thinking here would in many ways anticipate Heidegger's destruction of the onto-theological synthesis or the theologians of the death of God such as Tillich and others.[28] Kierkegaard had already seen how Kant and Hegel were the logical endpoints of cultural Christendom, those who would leave the skeleton of Christianity untouched in order to preserve ideological stability but would plunder it of all of its distinctive commands and content. It would not be surprising if Kierkegaard already saw a figure like Nietzsche and the proclamation of the death of God as an inevitability. Thus, the task on the other side of Christendom couldn't be the same as the task before Christendom had come to be. The task could not be the direct communication of the Christian message—if such a thing were ever possible—and instead there would first need to be a reintroduction of offense to bring the hearer up short and cause her to disgorge her overstuffed gullet. This is because the direct communication of Christian truth would be blocked by the other knowledge that is in the way.

So, the question remains as to what precisely conversion is and why Kierkegaard so rarely uses the term. It may perhaps be easier to pinpoint an argument in negation from what has been presented so far. In doing so, I can return afterwards and try to piece together why it is that

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[28] Jack Mulder Jr argues along these lines in his paper "Knowledge, Virtue, and Onto-Theology: A Kierkegaardian (Self-)Critique." However, Mulder Jr's strategy focuses largely on Kierkegaard's contrasting faith as an existence communication rather than the Hegelian knowledge communication that can be moved beyond. My concerns are much more historically oriented.

Kierkegaard's legacy here would then extend far beyond the so-called existential legacy he is typically credited for to also be credited as a father of phenomenological philosophy.

Kierkegaard prefers becoming a Christian. By negation so far, we have the omission (mostly) of the term itself and the omission of any particular moment or account of conversion. Keeping these things in mind we can present an account of what conversion isn't and why he prefers to speak of becoming a Christian.

As we have seen, conversion isn't merely cognitive or objective knowledge. Based on what has been covered above, we also have good reason to think it isn't a single moment. Andrew Torrance makes this same point in his text on Kierkegaard and conversion, "…the account of conversion that emerges [from Kierkegaard] does not concern a single event in which a person *suddenly* becomes a Christian…Rather, it concerns a *formative process* of becoming."[29] That is, it is the task of an entire life which ends in an achievement and rest, but it is not achieved at the moment one decides to become a Christian. Deciding to become a Christian is the decision to go on a journey of becoming. The road to becoming a Christian is long and laborious.

Additionally, in Kierkegaard's journals he distinguishes between mere human conversion—something like changing one's mind or a moral conversion—and a conversion to faith. That is, conversion cannot happen without faith, because that would be a mere "human conversion." (JP 4621 IX A 330) Something else we can conclude is that conversion can't be about external rites or cognitive knowledge. This is one of the great errors of Christendom and why he rails vehemently against the idea that options as varied as baptism or philosophical systems make one a Christian. Most of all, conversion should be simple, but not easy. As Kierkegaard remarks, "the traversed path is: to *reach,* to *arrive at* simplicity." (POV 7) To make it simple is to follow the example of Christ, to make it easy is to do the opposite. One who follows the example of

[29] Torrance, Andrew B. *The Freedom to Become a Christian: A Kierkegaardian Account of Human Transformation in Relationship With God.* New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2016. P2. Brackets are added by me.

Hegelian reflection reflects oneself out of Christianity into Christendom (POV 7). All of this tells us that conversion, in its conventional sense, is a term that fails to express the outcome Kierkegaard aims toward.

1.4 From Conversion to Becoming a Christian

I am now in a place to discuss why Kierkegaard largely eschews the term conversion in favor of his oft used "becoming a Christian." In fact, I think we can present two reasons why Kierkegaard prefers to speak in terms of becoming a Christian rather than in terms of conversion. First, conversion in its conventional use is too often spoken in a cognitive connotation that doesn't fully capture the process he envisions. As Kierkegaard repeatedly attests from his earliest writing, knowing isn't important, "except insofar as knowledge must precede every act." (JP 5100) Now of course existential commitment could come to follow the acquiring of a new belief, but such a movement doesn't adequately capture what Kierkegaard is trying to do. Instead, he wants us to see the impossibility, and even stumbling block, that construing conversion in terms of mere cognitive content provides for coming to have faith. The understanding of conversion as a changing of one's mind (μετάνοια) is largely conceived of for a situation in which the people didn't already believe, e.g. the Apostles carrying the Christian message to the Pagans and other Gentiles. Thus, a changing of the mind would almost inevitably lead to change in action because of the radical changing of perspective. Kierkegaard is obsessed with inspiring action and movement rather than winning an apologetics battle. He wanted to see change and so conversion would have only signified a kind of intellectual assent to propositions that may or may not bring this movement. Kierkegaard had already seen where that winds up.

The second reason he eschews the term conversion is that it implies a static nature as something which is already achieved or complete. Kierkegaard thought of Christianity as an

ongoing transformation that continually makes demands of subjectivity. His desire to emphasize this is indexed by his switching to the incomplete action of *becoming* a Christian. As Claudine Davidshofer puts it, "Christianity is not a settled state, not something that the individual simply is once and for all. Being a Christian is always becoming a Christian. The individual must at every moment repeat and renew the double movement of Christianity."[30] Kierkegaard's favorite epistle was the book of James, and the virtue of perseverance is heavily emphasized in this epistle. Thus, it shouldn't surprise us that his account of conversion would require such perseverance. Everything in Kierkegaard's corpus will point to processes of becoming and remaining in dialectical tension rather than a moment of decision bringing all tension to an end.

Such an understanding of conversion then goes some way towards understanding the conspicuous absence of his own conversion account within any of Kierkegaard's biographical materials. Clare Carlisle puts it quite perfectly, "The meaning of "Christianity" is inseparable from the meaning of "task" and "becoming," and indeed these latter terms receive more attention than the former."[31] Kierkegaard is obsessed with the process by which one becomes a Christian more so than what Christianity itself is, since everyone already knows the latter. Thus, we can conclude that the term conversion, because of all that it implies is insufficient to the picture Kierkegaard wants to paint about the demands of becoming a Christian. Thus, he eschews the former in favor of the latter throughout most of his work.

Any account of conversion which fails to account for the continuous and ongoing demands of existence would be mistaken on Kierkegaard's view. As such, the word itself is somewhat bankrupt and the more continuous becoming a Christian is preferred. Now that we have

[30] Claudine Davidshofer. KRSRR 15.1 p142.
[31] Carlisle, Clare. "Climacus on the task of becoming a Chrisitan" in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A critical guide* p171.

understood Kierkegaard's general movement from conversion to becoming a Christian, what remains is to explain what becoming a Christian entails. Here then, we need to focus on a specific pseudonymous chunk of the authorship. Most of Kierkegaard's thinking about becoming a Christian is found in the Climacian authorship. Both Johannes and Anti paint a picture of how one becomes a Christian, one taking the view from above, and the other the view from below.[32] In the analysis we shall see that conversion/becoming a Christian is the movement through offense from despair to faith.

[32] See Chapter 5 of Louis Mackey's *Kierkegaard, a Kind of Poet*.

Chapter Two: Anti-Recollection: Kierkegaard's Rejection of the Speculative

He has a monopoly on wisdom and won't give me any.[33]

I suggested in the previous chapter that Kierkegaard may have moved from the term conversion to becoming a Christian because of a Danish Christendom that had effectively inoculated itself against Christianity. However, this cultural shift did not come out of a vacuum. Rather, it was the product of the Danish intelligentsia that had been influenced by German philosophy in particular. It is worth it then to draw out precisely what role philosophy played in this unhappy achievement. If Danish Christendom was driven, at least in part, by a kind of trickledown effect of modern philosophy's hold on the educated and elite Danes who ran the state church and its cultural institutions, then it stands to reason that Kierkegaard would set his sights on modern philosophy as well since it was by no means an innocent party. Simply put, if Hegelianism and its forebears were the root cause of the intellectual rot within Christendom, then Kierkegaard was going to expose it for what it was.

Kierkegaard's dislike for Hegel is no secret, but there are numerous other characters with important roles in this drama. In fact, of the first several pseudonymous books, several of them elucidate in general an indictment of modern philosophy from Descartes and Spinoza through to Hegel. *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* all have their own separate indictments of some aspect of modern philosophy. One could of course add here the unpublished *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est,* which parodies Descartes specifically. Not to mention, *Either/Or* is hardly without its own critiques of modern

[33] *Protagoras* 310d, in *Plato: Complete Works*, p749.

philosophy. However, the most pointed critique of modern philosophy is found in the pair of the *Fragments* and *Postscript.* The two together do not only indict modern philosophy of a Kantian and Hegelian bent but include speculative philosophy as a whole tradition which goes back to Socrates.

In what follows, I shall argue that Kierkegaard rejects the speculative tradition[34] because the problem of despair goes deeper than epistemic ignorance. Thus, through various pseudonyms he rejects the speculative tradition for two major reasons. First, as he sees it, the speculative tradition characterizes the key human problems as epistemic problems to be fixed with epistemic solutions.[35] Making this argument is the thrust of the *Fragments*. Second, if all our problems are merely epistemic problems, then there is no need for conversion driven by pathos, but rather something like maieutic teaching which leads to recollection. Yet, for Kierkegaard despair is our problem, and he is convinced the problem of despair goes deeper than epistemic ignorance. What is needed then is a kind of pathos to stir us up out of despair and motivate our will. By Kierkegaard's judgment epistemology is ill equipped for the task.

If good epistemology is the only panacea modern philosophy offers, then it offers no hope at all. If knowledge acquisition and pure rationality were the ideal, then religion would merely be a disposable step along the way of enlightenment as many modern thinkers rightly concluded. Even if it were a necessary step, all that would be needed is to mature beyond it and leave it

[34] Arne Grøn gives this helpful definition of speculation and its character: "Speculation is a form of abstract thought in the particular sense that there is an abstraction from the difficulty of existence and of the existing person." Simply put, speculation moves away from the existing individual towards abstract universal truths that are divorced from all particularity. Such thinking is common from Plato all the way through to Kant and Hegel in the philosophical tradition. See *Thinking With Kierkegaard* p26.

[35] In fact, this is one of the many presuppositions of Hegel's supposedly presuppositionless philosophy that Johannes mocks mercilessly in CUP.

behind like Wittgenstein's ladder.[36] If this were true then we would be forced to concede that Hegel and Kant were right in their estimations of the purpose(s) of religion. Yet, for Kierkegaard, conversion is a necessity precisely because despair comes from a lack or perhaps an error in our willing rather than in our knowing. Thus, it will fall to Johannes to lay out the difference between the religious and the speculative and to show how despair goes deeper than epistemic ignorance.

In the final portion of this chapter, I shall turn to Constantin Constantius to understand why repetition might be preferred to the speculative philosophy of recollection. In understanding both we shall see that what Kierkegaard was after was something that might stir up pathos rather than more knowledge, which might in turn lead us to coming face to face with the demand religion places upon us. The hope and the goal here is conversion rather than recollection.

2.1 Johannes's Rejection of the Speculative

Although Kierkegaard at different moments indicts the whole of the philosophical tradition, there are three figures who loom largest in the rejection of what Johannes calls the speculative tradition: Descartes, Hegel, and Plato. Descartes, whom Johannes de Silentio patronizingly refers to as a "venerable, humble, and honest thinker," (FT 5) is a man who never lost sight of faith. Descartes thought he was doing faith a great service by attempting to supplement it with the help of reason, as he explains in his letter to the Sorbonne at the beginning of the *Meditations*, his aim was to provide "demonstrative proofs…with the aid of philosophy rather than theology."[37] His goal then was to bolster faith, rather than lay the cornerstone to what would be its abandonment by later thinkers.

[36] R 138. "He no longer needed that ladder rung by which he had climbed."
[37] Descartes, Rene. *Meditations* p3.

Little did Descartes think that he would be opening the door for Enlightenment rationality to reach its zenith in Hegel and ultimately subsume faith as merely a stage of immaturity before reason comes into its own, casting faith as a stage in the process of maturity. Thus, Descartes began the project that with Hegel's finishing touches would undo the need for faith. Its role would be relegated to an immaturity to be moved beyond, rather than an essential component of human life. It may have been a necessity as a stage on the way of history, but not something needed anymore. This is why there had been much talk in Danish intellectual circles of moving beyond faith, which Johannes De Silentio feels is so audacious that he discusses it with much incredulity.

Descartes then represents a moment of importance for the strength of the speculative tradition that Kierkegaard stands athwart of. As has come to be pedagogical norm, Descartes was thought of as the father of modern philosophy in Kierkegaard's time as well. Thus, it shouldn't surprise us that his first attempt with Johannes Climacus is something of a parody of Descartes's own *Meditations*. Johannes Climacus in the unpublished *De omnibus dubitandum est* seeks to doubt everything only to find himself still in despair. However, this project is abandoned, or at the very least changed, in favor of the later *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

The former takes aim at Plato's so-called recollective tradition,[38] which he will come to equate with the speculative tradition as a whole in the latter work. The latter take has Hegel's

[38] Johannes seems to equate the recollective with Socrates, but at times he tends to keep Plato and Socrates separate in the way they conceive of recollection. His reasons for doing so have less to do with contemporary historic scholarship, and more to do with the character of Socratic questioning and humor versus the Platonic penchant for system building and softening the irony of Socrates (what he later calls infinite negativity). See for instance CUP p205-206. "Viewed Socratically, the eternal essential truth is not at all paradoxical in itself, but only by being related

influence and legacy, particularly upon the Danish intelligentsia of Kierkegaard's time, squarely in its sights for the majority of the text.[39] Hegel is of course *persona non grata* number one in typical Kierkegaard discussions, and what is of particular importance for this discussion is the way that Hegelian thought radically absorbs all other concerns of life up into the ever-increasing scope of rationality-as-spirit. The rational project of discerning spirit's own coming to be is something Kierkegaard through Johannes regularly ridicules as the highest folly. At least in part because it erases individuality which then reifies the despair of not wanting to be oneself as an individual.[40] That is, the individual with life's daily tasks which give life meaning and passion are subsumed into an amorphous "whole" of humanity and human history. One then feels one's

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to an existing person. This is expressed in another Socratic thesis: that all knowing is a recollecting. This thesis is an intimation of the beginning of speculative thought, but for that very reason Socrates does not pursue it; essentially it became Platonic. This is where the road swings off, and Socrates essentially emphasizes existing, whereas Plato, forgetting this, loses himself in speculative thought." I shall speak more of this in later chapters when I discuss Kierkegaard's changing use of irony. For this reason, I think we ought to attribute the recollective to Plato, because I think that's who was in his crosshairs.

[39] One might be tempted to push back on this along the lines of Jon Stewart's excellent *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*. However, one can easily push back against this as Merold Westphal has, "Emphasis has been on Hegel himself…This emphasis has been recently challenged by a two-pronged argument from Jon Stewart. Psychologically speaking, the argument goes, Kierkegaard's critique has the Danish Hegelians but not Hegel in mind; and philosophically speaking, that critique does not in any case make substantive contact with Hegel's own thought. But the double argument is doubly mistaken. The psychological argument, which is only of interest to intellectual biography, is a non sequitur. That Kierkegaard may have a particular Danish formulation of a Hegelian view in mind does not mean that he does not also have Hegel himself in mind. More importantly in terms of philosophical significance, even if in a given case Kierkegaard has only a Danish Hegelian in mind, it does not follow that the critique fails effectively to engage Hegel's own thought." Westphal, "Climacus on Subjectivity and the System." In Furtak, Rick Anthony. *Kierkegaard's 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript': A Critical Guide*. Cambridge Critical Guides. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

I might also add to Westphal's own rather devastating critique that Stewart's own thesis extends all the way to the 1840's before Hegelian citation drops off the map. In that case, PF and CUP are still safely on an anti-Hegelian trajectory.

[40] See *The Sickness Unto Death.* A deeper discussion of despair and an analysis of it will be done in the next chapter.

life to be meaningless and is driven to lethargy, boredom, and despair at the repetition in one's life that is merely spinning one's wheels until you die.

Kierkegaard has little patience for the Hegelian project. Its ultimate system is like the skyscraper in which the philosopher cannot include his own existence and so he's forced to live in a shack next door. Similarly, as Climacus shows us, reality cannot be a system for anyone except for God (CUP 118), because only God could see the entire thing from start to finish in time. Despite Hegelian reading of tea leaves into the past justification and future project of spirit's cunning, Kierkegaard remains unimpressed. For as we see through Climacus, all such world historical speculation is just a distraction from life's everyday existential tasks. If one had all the secrets of the universe, it would not bring one any closer to the demands of subjectivity and the pathos needed to meet those demands. In fact, empirically considered we often find that the more knowledge someone has the more paralyzed they are by not knowing how to act or what to do.[41] Thus, Kierkegaard doesn't think the moderns in Hegel or Descartes get us any closer to dealing with despair, but what about the ancients?

Socrates gets innumerable mentions in Kierkegaard's texts, and Kierkegaard is careful to keep Plato mostly separate.[42] Plato does not get as much attention in Kierkegaard's works as Socrates does. Nonetheless, there seems to be an indictment of Plato on two counts. First, Kierkegaard rejects Plato's Socrates in *The Concept of Irony*, and then again Kierkegaard rejects recollection as the exemplar of speculative philosophy in general in the *Fragments*. Although Johannes indicts Socrates for recollection, in general it seems that he's truly indicting Plato's Socrates in relation to recollection as launching a philosophical tradition focused on knowledge

[41] Such concerns Kierkegaard pays ample attention to in the early aphorisms of *Either/Or*.
[42] In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard prefers Aristophanes to Plato when it comes to depicting Socrates.

rather than existence which will of course culminate in Hegelianism. In fact, by the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* it is clear that his aim was to equate Hegelian philosophy with the speculative philosophy of recollection. This tradition's inception is in Plato, and thus he is the target. To make sense of this, it is perhaps best then to turn to the rejection of recollection in the *Fragments*.

Let me elucidate what Climacus takes issue with in the *Fragments*. Climacus takes issue with what he calls "the Socratic" way of abstracting from the moment to the universal/eternal. Climacus begins with the same question that drives Socrates in the *Meno* (and the *Phaedo* to some extent). He seeks to answer the question of whether the truth can be learned. For Plato's Socrates, the answer was that the soul was immortal and thus already had all essential knowledge but had forgotten it. Thus, all truth is merely being reminded or recollecting. From this is extrapolated the famous theory of recollection. In light of this theory, Socrates is seen in the Platonic dialogues and self-describes[43] as a midwife because his job is to remind people of these truths by his questioning. Climacus then declares, "He [Socrates] perceived that this relation is the highest relation a human being can have to another." (PF 10) However, this isn't to say this is the highest possible relation. As the text proceeds, Johannes will offer a subtle suggestion as to a higher relation.

On this view Socrates sees himself not as teacher, but as someone who helps remind people of the important unchanging truths which they have forgotten that they know. However, Climacus wants to complicate this picture and propose an alternative theory. Although Socrates is a midwife, he is unable to give birth because "giving birth indeed belongs to the god." (PF 11) That is, Socrates is full of wisdom but is unable to bring forth anything new from this wisdom.

[43] See Plato *Theaetetus* 150 b-d. from *Plato: Complete Works*, p167.

Instead, his job is to help people to recollect what their soul already knows. On such an account, truth is eternal and temporal concerns are irrelevant and can be cast aside as mere accidents. Climacus states, “The temporal point of departure is a nothing, because in the same moment I discover that I have known the truth from eternity without knowing it, in the same instant that moment is hidden in the eternal.” (PF 13) Here he is explaining that for Socrates the most important truths are ones we already know and are irrespective of the moment we live in or any other details which are non-necessary accidents of history or the moment. The important truths are eternal and don’t require any temporal concerns for their revelation. So, what then is the job of the teacher?

The teacher is not really a teacher but rather an aid to one′s own discovery on this understanding of truth. Climacus comments that “the teacher is only an occasion, whoever he may be.” (PF 14) Here Climacus begins to provide an alternate account to Socrates within the requirements laid out by recollection. If we take this account of recollection at its word, truth has been forgotten and so the learner is always in a state of untruth or unknowing. The learner must then be given not only the occasion to understand this, but also the condition for understanding this and the truth that one is to recollect. Climacus argues that since we are all in the same position as learners/recollectors, then no human could do this for any other so he concludes, “The teacher, then, is the god himself.” (PF 15) That is, even if Socrates is the first to discover this, then the process must have started with someone who was in a state of knowing. The identity of who is in a state of knowing is of central concern for Climacus. Lee Barrett makes precisely this point in his commentary on Climacus as pseudonym. He states, “The role and

identity of the teacher would therefore be decisive for the learner's coming to the truth."[44] Thus, could someone else be teaching Socrates? Climacus will take this as a necessary point of departure from the recollective tradition.

In this case more than likely the god/daimon that Socrates regularly speaks of as guiding his decisions. Highlighting the problem of inception is important for Climacus because from this point forward he begins to lay out an account of knowledge acquisition within the parameters of Socratic recollection which sounds suspiciously like the Christian faith. At the same time he subtly critiques Socratic recollection and any account which places eternal truth within the individual because for Climacus, the experience of the individual and the moment are what is decisive for Christianity. The result will be an account of truth which guts recollection from the inside out.

For example, untruth becomes sin. (PF 15) The teacher who can move one out of this state of untruth is savior, deliverer, and judge. (PF 17-18) The teacher's work then is done in a specific moment where the learner finally understands that they are in untruth. Such a moment is a moment of conversion. (PF 18) He is now also beginning to present the paradox implicit within any Christian epistemology. To know that one is in untruth is the truth or vice/versa. Such paradoxes are essential to the life of faith for Climacus and he spends much of the text of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* highlighting them. Highlighting these paradoxes serves two purposes. First, to show that faith cannot be subsumed by reason/speculation without violence being done to either faith or reason/speculation. Second, the continuous theme begins to arise that despair is deeply deceptive, and it most of all makes us

[44] Barrett, Lee. "Johannes Climacus: Humorist, Dialectician and Gadly," in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms*. Edited by Katalin Nun and Jon Stewart. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016. p121.

want to flee from these paradoxes which demand our wrestling with them. Climacus from here focuses upon the significance of the moment and its distinction from Socratic thinking. That is, one can only begin to acquire knowledge by means of some external guidance or revelation which happens in a moment of conversion by discovering one's own untruth.

It is the importance of the moment for each individual that leads Climacus to reject the Socratic account of truth as recollection. Since the Socratic account makes the temporal moment unimportant, it would make Christianity impossible, or at the very least irrelevant, since its central beliefs are all decisive moments in history rather than abstract eternal truths. The issue then is that Christianity is characterized by various historical moments that can't be abstracted away from. The incarnation is a moment of God becoming a particular individual. Peter declares that individual the Christ and later that individual is crucified. These are all moments that can only be taught externally because they are discrete moments in time that could not be abstracted from. Thus, they are not eternal knowledge that can be recollected or taught since they are hidden away and only can be revealed by the god as teacher.

Attempts to subsume them into rational universal truths would be wrong-headed then because they would empty them of their particular context. Nonetheless, in the search for universal truths few thinkers of modernity had been able to resist this temptation. Simply put, the pull of the recollective/speculative tradition is too strong. If it empties particular revelations or faiths of their particularity, so much the worse for those particular things. The thinking by which one would see Christianity as merely a chrysalis for the moral law or some other such move had a strong pull on modern thinkers. Thus, Kierkegaard through Johannes would model it as a kind of seduction, which brings us right back to Socrates.

But why reject recollection as a kind of human seduction? Sylviane Agacinski summarizes this well in her text *Aparte*:

> The writer chooses seduction, while the Christian chooses passion. *Philosophical Fragments* develops the theme of divine seduction (a veritable rapture), which it is necessary to distinguish from the simply human seduction of Socrates. Sent on a mission of divine inspiration, 'a midwife subject to examination by the God himself,' Socrates represents only an 'occasion' for the disciple to discover his ignorance in a relationship 'between man and man.' But the God will not permit Socrates to beget: 'Heaven has debarred me,' he says, 'from giving birth.' He who begets, for Kierkegaard, can only be the God himself. But this God, what does he do if not 'teach' man all over again that he is a man, that is, a non-truth, and that the unknown something colliding with the passion of his reason is the God? By which, according to this teaching, God is master.*[45]

All this is simply to say that the Socratic seduction may be able to reveal the truth to someone, but without the importance of the moment it cannot inspire the passion which Christianity requires. Christianity does not reveal eternal abstract principles, but truths about your own relationship to the God which is meant to inspire you to live in full responsibility to that as an individual. Put even more simply in the terms of this project, recollection will not inspire the pathos that leads to conversion. Socratic recollection is mastery of seduction by means of getting someone to discover what one wants them to (as Socrates does with the slave in *Meno*). Yet, mathematical knowledge or even knowledge of universal truths will not beget the kind of passion that coming in contact with the god will. Further, recollection will not ever get one to see that one is in untruth. Christianly understood then, recollection is a kind of deception and such psychological self-deception is evidence that despair is ever-present even if one could attain all possible knowledge since one would refuse to acknowledge what they are.

In *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes pits what he calls the "speculative tradition" as a whole against the problem of sin. The speculative tradition is marked by recollection and a general thrust within philosophy to see eternal truths as a kind of panacea for human ills. Johannes sets out to show how this measures up to the claims of Christianity. As C. Stephen

[45] Agacinski, Sylviane. *Aparte: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*. Translated by Kevin Newmark. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1988. p52.

Evans puts it, "*Philosophical Fragments*, among other things, is a book about the relationship of Christianity to philosophy."[46] Another way of saying this is that the thrust of the text is to set Christianity side-by-side with philosophy and see which gets at our deepest existential concerns. Johannes himself explains it this way, "*Philosophical Fragments* stressed or set forth the issue (in relation to which the highest knowledge is only an approximation)…and yet *qua* historical…it proposes to have decisive significance for a person's eternal happiness." (CUP 24) Simply put, philosophy cannot achieve eternal happiness through speculation since the best it can do is approximation concerned objectively, and so it will leave one in despair since eternal happiness is of subjective concern. Yet, it is not in service of apologetics, but rather as a kind of seeing to what extent philosophy can diagnose the problem(s) inherent in existence.

For Johannes, modernity treats everything, even Christianity itself, as merely an epistemic problem to be overcome by knowledge. Whether this is fair or not to modernity, it is an accurate description of Johannes's position.[47] As Rick Furtak expertly puts it, "The alleged failure of modern philosophy to do what it claims to be doing is simultaneously a failure to do something that needs to be done. Johannes Climacus is not trying to change the subject, but he *is* trying to change the nature of the conversation."[48] The nature of the conversation being epistemology, Johannes is sneakily pivoting to the problem of despair which is neither encompassed nor solved by doubting. He does this by introducing theological terms to the debate to show the futility of modernity in relation to the problem of despair. This problem was there in *De omnibus dubitandum est* and is followed through in the *Fragments.*

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[46] C. Stephen Evans. *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*. p 12
[47] Rick Furtak takes to task whether Climacus is shadowboxing in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide* p98-99.
[48] Ibid p92.

Thus, Christianity is not merely a part of the intellectual life but is a matter of life and death itself since it concerns eternal happiness. This is of utmost concern for the individual in a way that objective knowledge is not. Another way of saying this is that Christianity is deeply personal, whereas epistemology is entirely impersonal. The latter must make recourse to the system, abstraction, and epistemology, but the former cannot. So, Christianity cannot be stapled onto one's existence as a badge to be worn such as one's nationality, fandom, or even most beliefs. Rather, Christianity is the very condition of existence itself because it is the answer to despair for Johannes. If it truly does concern eternal happiness, then it would be absurd to treat it as a trifle or sentimentality. In the famous terminology of Paul Tillich, it is of "ultimate concern,"[49] which colors everything else about one's existence. If this is the case, it demands a response in the form of action. For Johannes, the dangers of skepticism from Descartes on manifest in confusing the requirement to act with the requirement of having objective certainty, but the best we have is approximation which will not get us any closer to subjective responsibility and dealing with despair. Quite the opposite, it might cause us to ignore despair or treat it as an emotional concern not worthy of the attention we pay to objective knowledge.

To take such a thing lightly is amusing for Johannes, and is symptomatic of the despair which undergirds modern life.[50] Unfortunately, the problem of sin and despair goes deeper than the problems that the speculative tradition can heal. Thus, recollection cannot get us to come face

[49] Tillich, Paul. *Dynamics of Faith*.

[50] I might also add here something of importance for our contemporary moment. Part of Kierkegaard's frustration is indicative of modern feuds concerning religion in public life. Those who see religion merely as something to be stapled onto life rather than as a condition of existence are going to be regularly frustrated by why religious believers think and behave the way they do in public life. This is partially because of unexamined norms in our own society that religion is a private matter of opinion rather than something of ultimate concern. In this way, Kierkegaard has his finger squarely on a thorny problem of contemporary political life. Part of untangling this problem may require coming to see how one can communicate with someone not occupying this space and vice/versa.

to face with the deepest realities and responsibilities of subjectivity for Johannes. A way of putting this theologically is that we can work backwards through recollection to eternal truths, but we cannot work forwards to eternal hope. The only way forward is through repetition, which demands action and personal passion. The key thrust then of *Philosophical Fragments* is that despair is seen as a merely epistemological problem with an epistemological solution. Such has been the failure of modernity and speculative tradition in general.

Originally, it seems that Kierkegaard saw this as a distinct problem of modern philosophy, thus his concern "everything needs to be doubted" is a parody of what it is like to be in despair. In *De omnibus dubitandum est,* Johannes never achieves the goal he sets out to achieve in doubting everything in order to obtain certainty and thus ends in despair. However, by the time of the *Fragments*, it seems that he saw this as a problem for what he calls "speculative philosophy" in general which encompasses the entire tradition. Thus, Johannes masterfully sneaks key terms of Christian theology (e.g. sin, conversion, salvation, savior, redeemer, etc.) into the philosophical discussion in order to highlight despair. Modernity's solution to despair, if it is even aware of despair, is marked by Socratic Recollection in thinking that our problems can be solved by knowledge, but the highest that epistemology can attain is recollection via Socratic maieusis.[51] Since the highest that a human can attain is only to know that he is in untruth, one takes offense and is tempted to despair without hope, faith, and love.[52] In order to move beyond

[51] It is important not to read too much into this comment as though Johannes is dismissing the Socratic entirely. We can complicate such a claim for two major reasons. First, Johannes will later return to the Socratic in its service of religion in the *Postscript*. Second, in *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard rejects the Socrates of Plato in favor of Aristophanes. Thus, the tradition of Socratic Recollection is more a rejection of abstract speculative philosophy than it is of Socrates. Nonetheless, it is important to see that epistemology doesn't go deep enough in dealing with despair for Climacus.

[52] Anti will later take up this exact dialectic in *Practice in Christianity* which I shall discuss there.

this, God must intervene and set off the process of change by which we can move from untruth towards freedom. Thus, what is needed is the move of conversion (PF 18).

Such is the problem which animates much, if not all, of Kierkegaard's rhetorical and authorial strategies. Even Socrates is a testament to this because his whole mission is launched by his contact with the god and the proclamation of the oracle that Socrates is the "wisest man in Athens."[53] It is this divine seduction which leads both Socrates to search for knowledge and the Christian to reorient one's life around eternal happiness.[54] So then Socratic recollection considered in itself requires divine seduction to get off the ground and further Climacus thinks that what is most decisive are those moments in existence which inspire passion.

Thus, Platonic recollection goes in a different direction than Christian truth by its moving us away from pathos towards controlled rational eternal truths. That is, unless one thinks that controlled rationality is the most surefire way to bring about change, then conversion would merely be a matter of getting people to believe the right sorts of things. But if conversion is about moving out of despair towards a truth which is meaningful to me in my particular context and individuality, then a deep pathos would need to be kindled and another approach would be necessary.

I think here we have an important central feature of the recollective tradition which gives us a clue as to why Kierkegaard's pseudonyms tend to find it interchangeable with the speculative. The recollective tradition sees the problems of human existence epistemologically. In this,

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[53] Plato. *Apology.* 21a-c. See *Plato: Complete Works* p21.

[54] Perhaps the two movements are not that different for Kierkegaard. In *The Point of View* he remarks about Socrates that, "He was no Christian, that I know, although I also definitely remain convinced that he has become one." p54. Although it may be wishful thinking on account of his hero, there is some reason to think that by a kind of dialectical stretch Kierkegaard thinks Socrates mission was a Christian one in the same way he thinks there are Christian pagans and pagan Christians.

Climacus is surely being sloppy, or at least generalizing in the largest possible way, because who he really has in his sights are the moderns such as Descartes and Hegel. Merold Westphal nicely explains the connection between the two traditions. He explains, "Speculation, whether Platonic or Hegelian, is a mode of objectivity in which the finitude of the subject is stripped away for the sake of an objective, universal, timeless apprehension of truth."[55] That is, whether we call it recollection or speculation, it amounts to a privileging of the objective content of reason over and against the subjective demands of everyday life.[56]

This move makes it easy to collapse all subjective concern into unimportant sentiment not needed for maturity which was perhaps the inevitable endpoint of modern philosophy. Again, here Hegel was right to see himself as the crowning achievement of idealist philosophy, but Kierkegaard is unimpressed with its achievement, even if its logic is fine. What Hegel and others might see as unimportant, Kierkegaard views as most essential and his takedown of the speculative and recollective tradition indexes his own suspicions of the sufficiency of epistemology to deal with despair. As Johannes asks, "What does logical thinking have in common with the most pathos-filled issue of all (the question of eternal happiness)? (CUP 362) His early pseudonymous texts demonstrate this theme over and over.

Johannes, in a most Hegelian tone, describes the speculative relation to Christianity in that it, "conceives of Christianity as a historical phenomenon; the question of its truth therefore becomes a matter of permeating it with thought in such a way that finally Christianity itself is the eternal thought." (CUP 50) Simply put, if Christianity is the eternal truth of thought, then it is

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[55] Westphal. "Kierkegaard and Hegel" in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, p111.
[56] Here we see a major point for Kierkegaard that must be acknowledged now. Kierkegaard sees that Christianity and Speculation go in opposite directions. Much of the *Fragments* and *Postscript* are dedicated to this point. Since Christianity concerns subjective truth and eternal happiness, it cares about pathos whereas the recollective wants to move away from the subjective towards objective eternal truths which do not pay attention to individual pathos and existence.

merely a vehicle of the much more broad category of reason rather than a particular truth which is relevant to particular individuals. Christianity then serves only as a chrysalis for fully formed rationality. However, Johannes thinks this cannot be the case. Johannes continues a few pages later, "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." (CUP 53) Johannes gives us two opposed options without answering, but rather poses the question: What if our relationship to Christianity is all wrong? If so, what if the entire relationship of Christianity to philosophy and the west obscures rather than enlightens the subjective demands of what it means to become a Christian? On this last question, Johannes states that "speculative thought does not permit the issue to arise at all, and thus all of its response is only a mystification." (CUP 57) This could nicely summarize the entirety of what Johannes was doing in the *Fragments*.

In fact, this is how Johannes eventually comes to describe the issue at stake in *Fragments*. He says that he began with Paganism, read: recollection, to show how Christianity goes in a different direction only to have speculative thought return us to Paganism, read: Hegel. As he states, "Modern speculative thought seems almost to have performed the feat of going *beyond* Christianity *on the other side* or of having gone so far in understanding Christianity that it has returned almost to paganism." (CUP 361) But *Fragments* is only an introduction to the issue that "there is no direct transition to becoming a Christian." (CUP 381) This is because the most pathos-filled issue of all concerns our eternal happiness, and this is a concern for subjectivity. This means that it requires more than mere intellectual assent or a moment of commitment. It is something that requires life-long commitment.

So, we cannot directly become a Christian simply by acknowledging or assenting. He explains, "if it is the highest good, then it is better that I definitely know that I do not possess it, so that I can aspire to it with all my might, than to be entranced in illusion and to imagine that I possess it and consequently do not even consider aspiring." (CUP 381) Simply put, for Johannes an earnest striving in faith (objectively uncertain) is better than objective certainty without striving. Thus, he is unimpressed by any attempts to reduce Christianity, the most pathos-demanding and inspiring thing of all because of its concern for eternal happiness, to a mere vehicle for epistemic truths that will cause one to move beyond Christianity.[57] This is why he rejects the speculative tradition's appraisal and considerations of Christianity. In this, they have gotten us no further than the Socratic which he rejects in the *Fragments* so perhaps, contrary to Hegel, Christianity wasn't needed at all. Its role was simply that of an unimportant middleman.

On this last point Johannes understands why one might prefer paganism to Christianity,[58] but he is vehemently against the conflation of the two. As he explains, "That someone prefers paganism to Christianity is not at all confusing, but to make paganism out to be the highest within Christianity is an injustice both to Christianity…and to paganism." (CUP 361) Thus, to use a Hegelian term, his issue is with the mediation between paganism and Christianity which he sees modern speculative thought achieving in its tracing recollection through Christianity and

[57] There is a brilliant irony here because Johannes *understands* cognitively what it is to be a Christian. Yet, he is not one himself. He more than anyone demonstrates the gap between despair and knowledge because he has all possible necessary knowledge pertaining to eternal happiness, but no achievement of it.

[58] The idea here is that paganism does not cause the tension that Christianity does. Because Christianity is fundamentally paradoxical, it invites conflict, turmoil, and tension. However, paganism, or a system which can make Christianity and paganism fit together nicely as part of a bigger puzzle, may be immune to such strife. Although a seemingly laudable move, it is this that Johannes finds so absurd. He thinks if the two could fit together, why would you need the one that causes so much strife and tension, we should skip over it altogether rather than doing the rehabilitative work that many 18th and 19th century thinkers did to try to make it fit nicely as some vehicle of universal rationality.

culminating in Hegelian mediation. This has led to a delusion about not only what it is to be a Christian, but also what it means to not be a Christian. Not only has becoming a Christian been made easier, but even not being a Christian has been made easier. "Courage and energy will be required to give up being Christian—whereas it requires only thoughtlessness to be that now." (CUP 365) There has been a move away from the demands of pathos, which inspire repentance and action, to a focus on cognitive content which only requires mere assent, as simply as putting on one's socks. (PC 35)

Thus, he equates recollection with the speculative moderns in order to indict the entirety of the philosophical tradition under its delusion about the sufficiency of knowledge for bringing about change. We may be tempted to call this out as sloppy, but I think we can recognize this trend in the history of western philosophy since its inception. Again, Westphal summarizes this nicely, "It is easy to recognize in this aspiration to objectivity not merely a modern awe of physical science but an ancient awe of mathematics that goes back to Pythagoras and Plato. When this awe gives place to envy and this envy in turn gives rise to the quest for the metaphysical comfort that comes from metaphysical certainty, we have a dominant tendency in Western philosophy."[59] Fair or not, this is the critique that Climacus offers and I shall follow him on it for the purposes of discussing conversion and irony.

Thus, the speculative/recollective tradition has an inherent faith in the sufficiency of knowledge to bring about desired change or it is indifferent to change other than in our acquisition of knowledge. Perhaps it places faith in the subjective individual, but perhaps not. What matters is the continual progress towards universal knowledge through history, here especially there are echoes of Hegel. Conversion then may not be an interesting nor even desired

[59] Westphal. "Kierkegaard and Hegel" in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, p113.

outcome. The only thing that needs to be done in communication is either to remind them of this knowledge or to give them access to some kind of eternal and indubitable truth.

Such an approach assumes that enlightenment and conversion are inevitable[60] if one has all knowledge, and it is this that Kierkegaard through Climacus utterly repudiates. In her excellent work on Kierkegaard's concept of freedom, Michelle Kosch makes this same point. She argues that "Kierkegaard's most vivid statements…are criticisms of those who portray the life of genuine *religiousness* as somehow inevitable."[61] If religious maturity is inevitable via time, history, or some other means, then it would not be free. Kierkegaard reacted strongly to this implication in modern philosophy. If it were true that we could not help but comply with the truth when we see it, not only would Christianity be lost because there could not be sin which is willfully being in untruth, but we would expect education to solve all of our social ills, which seems empirically false.[62] Here, Kierkegaard is keeping company with Augustine, Luther, and many others who thought the problem of sin to be deeper than the problem of mere epistemic ignorance. This is how he characterizes the ignorance of the entirety of the speculative tradition

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[60] Perhaps the strongest example of this is in Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" essay in which he thinks of maturity (the move beyond superstition and hierarchical authority based thinking) as an inevitability.

[61] Kosch, Michelle. *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and* Kierkegaard, p176.

[62] An extended discussion could be made here but it would take us afield of the argument being advanced. The basic point is that for Christianity seeing the truth may be a necessary, but is not a sufficient condition for conversion. There are many stories in the Bible and the church fathers where someone comes to see the truth, but out of stubbornness of will refuses to believe it. E.g. Pharaoh, Job's friends, Pontius Pilate, Judas, and more.

As to why it seems empirically false, this is because we live in a world where we regularly see, without searching too hard, people given all necessary information only to choose to believe whatever most aligns with their previous biases and overarching narrative. So, presenting someone with the truth is clearly not sufficient to make conversion inevitable if you don't teach them how to have an encounter with that truth.

in fact. Johannes is set on showing that despair goes deeper than ignorance, and so correcting ignorance cannot be what is essential.

It is here in the wholesale rejection of both the speculative and recollective traditions that we can begin to make sense of the work of Johannes Climacus and I would also add Johannes de Silentio. If all that is needed is further knowledge, then faith is nothing but a stepping stone along the way. Something to be moved beyond. It is merely a cocoon for reason to come to be in its full beauty. One can pick from a plethora of modern thinkers to find such moves. Spinoza, Locke, Montaigne, and more. Yet, Hegel and Kant are probably the most immediate to Kierkegaard's context.

Kant had called religious faith immaturity in contrast with enlightenment in his "What is Enlightenment?" essay, and Hegel referred to faith as one of the tools, admittedly a most important one, of spirit's self-actualization. Although both gave some deference to faith, they thought of it as somehow lower or less important. It serves only some practical purpose but has no inherent value in itself.[63] Such statements will naturally give rise to a view of history which sees humanity and rationality as progressing towards perfection and in the process away from

[63] For instance, Kant in the preface to *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason* pp. 57-60 states that "On its own behalf morality in no way needs religion…Although morality on its own does not need the representation of an end…It is one of the inescapable limitations of human beings and of their practical faculty of reason…to be concerned in every action with its result, seeking something in it that might serve them as an end…in this end human beings seek something that they can love…since human capacity does not suffice to effect happiness in the world proportionate to the worthiness to be happy, an omnipotent moral being must be assumed…i.e. morality leads inevitably to religion." All of this is simply one of many examples from Kant where religion's purpose is merely practical. On the practical point he is in agreement with Kierkegaard's desire for action, but on the "merely" part not so much. For Kant, religion is a kind of psychological tool to get us to obey the moral law, and he hopes that we will reach a day where we mature beyond the need for it. For Kierkegaard, it is religiously motivated pathos that is the only thing that can get us out of despair and no maturing beyond it will help us to do so.

religion. Yet, Johannes de Silentio is flabbergasted by the possibility of going beyond faith and Johannes Climacus is amused to the point of finding the whole thing comical.

Kierkegaard, in his earliest writings wanted to find an alternative to the speculative and backward-looking recollection. Thus, he comes up with repetition which he takes as a monumental discovery. "As Constantin tells us at the beginning of *Repetition,* "Just as they [the Greeks] taught that all knowing is a recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that all life is a repetition. (R131) That is, repetition is offered as an alternative to recollection. It is important to note that recollection is about knowledge/knowing while repetition is about life/living.[64] This contrast then is important and will give us a clue as to how he will contrast the two. Thus, we shall now discuss why Kierkegaard's *Repetition* and its description of the need for our own ethical repetition to be motivated by pathos rather than episteme.

2.2 What Repetition Is

It would seem that Kierkegaard, standing against much of the tradition of inevitable enlightenment and progress, thinks of history as repetitive rather than an indefatigable march towards maturity and progress. We see this littered throughout the authorship as in the lament of the aesthete about how boring history is, the essay on the rotation of crops in *Either/Or*, or Johannes's own disregard for the importance of the historical in comparison with life's everyday existential concerns. Similarly, Vigilius Haufniensis explains that the moment is equivalent with eternity:

> If there is no moment, the eternal appears behind as the past…The pivotal concept in Christianity, that which made all things new, is the fullness of time, but the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past. If attention is not paid to this, not a single concept can be

[64] This is because there is no necessary connection between the two. In fact, Roy Martinez in his book *Kierkegaard and the Art of Irony*, argues that following Socrates Kierkegaard thinks that "there is a diastasis or ontological cleavage between being and knowing." p46. Thus, much of the work of Johannes Climacus will be precisely in demonstrating this cleavage. Contrary to Martinez though, Kierkegaard's pseudonyms will make Socrates their target rather than an ally.

> saved from a heretical and treasonable admixture that annihilates the concept. One does not get the past by itself but in a simple continuity with the future the future is not by itself but in simple continuity with the present. (CA 90)

This is all to say that the moment, the present moment we exist in, is the defining moment of time. It is not eternal truths of the past nor some future achievement which structure history. Rather, it is the moment as we see it, and in that moment one can falter. History is made up of such moments.

If this is the case, then what is required is to constantly remind us of the basic existential and ethical tasks anew rather than to constantly be moving the ball up the field towards enlightenment. Similarly, as we have already seen, we cannot retrieve some eternal truth from the past by recollecting. Another way of saying this is that what is needed is repetition rather than recollection. Repetition is choosing in the present moment to repeat one's existential commitments. But this is not aesthetic repetition, which we shall see is impossible, rather it is ethical repetition which commits itself anew to life's daily tasks thus transforming life into something entirely new and unique to the individual. Faith is the highest form of this commitment because it has no guarantee of its outcome and cannot know objectively about the "correctness" any of its decisions and commitments.

The clearest picture of this is perhaps given to us through the small text of *Repetition*. Like many of Kierkegaard's works, it is a puzzle not easily put together. Its author, Constantin Constantius, is having correspondence with a young man who has fallen helplessly in love with a young girl. Constantin supposedly counsels the boy through his passionate ordeal and ultimately the boy ends up not marrying his love. In the text we see the young man go through a transformation while Constantin, true to his name, remains steadfastly the same. Through this correspondence we are given three different understandings of repetition.

First, mere aesthetic repetition, which is simply the desire to repeat a pleasurable experience. Constantin shows us the impossibility of repetition from an aesthetic standpoint because you never can repeat that first experience. For instance, you can never repeat the feeling you had the first time you saw your favorite movie and it captured your attention, or the excitement of a first love, etc. Trying to repeat the experiences will have diminishing returns or they have to be experienced in an entirely new way.

Aesthetic repetition thus fears the boredom associated with repeating experiences and ends up fearing repetition. So, the person stuck in aesthetic repetition avoids repetition at all costs. Such is part of the despair of aesthetic life and why it constantly looks for novel experiences.[65] Constantin regularly chides the young boy because of his naivety in the face of love. However, his comments reveal that he is stuck in the aesthetic mode and is thus unable to see what love in a higher form of repetition might look like. In fact, being stuck in the aesthetic he purposely distances himself from the ability to experience love because he fears its disappointment.

For a great contemporary example, the poet Christian Wiman in his book *My Bright Abyss*, dedicates some time to reflecting on the relationship of poetry to personal spirituality. He states that, "The fact is, art can compromise, even in some way neutralize, the very experience on which it depends."[66] It does so by distancing itself from the very pathos that inspired it. That is, the artist must in some way divorce himself from the emotions which inspire his art. Constantin's blindness to the possibility of true love and the demands of the ethical and religious betray his

[65] Perhaps the greatest example of this is Johannes the seducer from *Either/Or* and "The Seducer's Diary." He has grown so bored with conventional love and eros that he only finds joy by destroying the innocence of young women and their ability to believe in anything like love. In this he deceives himself into thinking he's doing a great service while being unaware of the despair manifested by his lifestyle.
[66] Wiman, Christian. *My Bright Abyss,* p44.

own leanings and that he is trapped between aesthetics and the second understanding of repetition which is that of repetition understood through freedom as sagacity. (R 301)

In this second understanding, repetition is just a kind of Stoic wisdom about the way of the world. It is practical know-how. This is a kind of Stoic detachment because it resigns itself to understanding the repetitive nature of the world and absents oneself from any agency regarding one's freedom. This is characterized in the rotation of crops essay from *Either/Or*, but it also shows up in characters like Judge Wilhelm and Constantin himself, who constantly chides the young boy to beware the enticement of his beloved—wrongly thinking his own aged wisdom sees the shallowness of their romance for what it is. Neither of these forms of repetition can attain the highest understanding of freedom and repetition in its transcendent form. As Rick Furtak writes in his analysis of Kierkegaard and Stoicism, "Whatever *repetition* is, it is not a weak and sentimental sneaking out of the world…rather, it must involve allowing one's historical perspective to be shaped, and continually transformed, by the force of emotion."[67] Thus, to truly experience repetition in its highest form it involves embracing emotion rather than quenching it. This final and highest form of repetition is freedom itself choosing repetition in religious passion.

This highest form—interestingly channeling the etymology of conversion in using the language of reversal or an about face—reverses the movement started by the aesthete. Instead of repetition being avoided or acquiesced to, it is chosen willingly and happily. Instead of running away from repetitive experiences, one seeks repetition in order to invest each moment with eternal significance in its repetition. The continuous example here is that of marriage. Long after romance and the excitement of early love have faded, one must figure out how to continually

[67] Furtak. *Wisdom in Love*, p127

love the person one has chosen to spend their life with. This daily commitment to this requires both feeling and action which is driven by pathos. Otherwise, it will revert to practical know-how that is a kind of going through the motions based on duty. I might also add here that choosing not to marry and to commit to the life of a writer rather than marriage for example is also an example of this highest form.

In one of his papers, Kierkegaard explains these three movements. In a most Heideggerian sounding passage he explains the third and his goal in the text:

> When stoicism has stepped aside, only the religious movement remains as the true expression for repetition and with the passionate eloquence of concerned freedom proclaims its presence in the conflict. What is developed under [the third form of repetition] was what I wanted to set forth in *Repetition*, but not in a scientific-scholarly way…I wanted to depict and make visible in psychologically and esthetically; in the Greek sense, I wanted to let the concept come into being in the individuality and the situation, working itself forward through all sorts of misunderstandings." (R 302)

Simply put, we will not get an understanding of the movement of repetition by systematic exegesis. The three understandings of repetition are set in conflict with one another through Constantin's correspondence with the young man and so we must pay attention to their clash and the result of this clash. It is also important to see that the three ways of understanding repetition are additionally broken into two forms.

Throughout the text these three understandings are sorted into two forms. Repetition can be either immanent, which characterizes modern philosophy, or it can be transcendent, which is the ideal of K's authorship. Additionally, these forms are contrasted with recollection as it was characterized by Climacus. The first two understandings of repetition (desire and sagacity) are immanent, and the highest understanding is said to be transcendent in form. Whereas immanent repetition looks to some specific idealized moment in the past or future, transcendent repetition looks to the moment. However, this moment is the present moment continually made anew for eternity. Another way of saying this is that transcendent repetition makes each moment anew because of its commitment to some ideal, whereas the others see each moment as something to

be gotten through or endured. Thus, each moment is of eternal significance for transcendent repetition, so repetition can be done immanently to idealize one's current moment as the highest achievement as the recollecter does, or transcendently so as to make every moment one is given of eternal significance for one's life. In transcendent repetition, there is no past or future moment to be retrieved, but each moment one is given must be taken up with significance. This kind of repetition is another description of the life of faith.

Sorting repetition into this hierarchy is part of Kierkegaard's turning the modern view of faith on its head. Contrary to what moderns like Kant and Hegel did, he set philosophy firmly below religious commitment. In the argument, or perhaps more fittingly the structure, of *Repetition*, philosophy is put beneath Job just as in *Fear and Trembling* philosophy as ethics is put beneath Abraham. In both works there is a reversal, because he is turning the trajectory of speculative philosophy on its head. Instead of religion being a vehicle through which maturity will eventually emerge, it is made the highest ideal that the speculative can never attain without some external intervention.

2.3 Why Repetition is Better Than Recollection

How then, is repetition superior, in Kierkegaard's eyes, to recollection? Why is it capable of dealing with the problems that recollection cannot? The picture we get in *Repetition* is that recollection makes everything simple by placing the eternal ideal in some lost edenic moment of the past just as in aesthetic repetition (e.g first love, the innocence of childhood, etc.). All that would be needed then would be to recover that lost moment through recollection. Similarly, but also opposite-headed, modern philosophy looks at some idealized future in which humanity

achieves enlightenment through hard won progress. As Constantin explains, "Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions."[68] (R 131)

All that needs to be done in either case is to retrieve and/or achieve the moment one sets as the ideal, but then the recollector is in the same conundrum of the aesthete who cannot have that magical first experience of the theater or a wonderful cup of coffee or first romantic love ever again. In both cases it paralyzes them to inaction rather than stirring up action because they cannot attain what they seek. Constantin explains this when thinking of the young man's fear of committing to the girl he loves:

> The issue that brings him to a halt is nothing more nor less than repetition. He is right not to seek clarification in philosophy, either Greek or modern, for the Greeks make the opposite movement, and here a Greek would choose to recollect without tormenting his conscience. Modern philosophy makes no movement; as a rule it makes only a commotion, and if it makes any movement at all, it is always within immanence, whereas repetition is and remains a repetition. (R 186)

Simply put, philosophy's highest achievement (recollection and repetition in immanence) will not in the slightest help the young man make a decision. It will paralyze him in indolence either because he will be stuck in reflection or fear losing what he might attain before he even attains it. Thus, it will not inspire in him the pathos to make the movement to choose the decision he will make and to repeat that choice. So instead of the Greeks, the young man is wise to ignore philosophy and instead looks to Job and the transformation he underwent after losing everything.

Here we can glean two important points for this project. First, the achievement of transcendent repetition is a kind of conversion. In fact, much like the turbulent etymology of *conversare*, Constantin speaks of repetition as a kind of distinct tension and struggle in contrast to Hegel's *aufhebung.* Kierkegaard himself in the quote on p19 above called it a *reversal*. Second, the young man's letters at the end speak of Job, and in them we get a picture of a man

[68] It is important to note here that Constantin here is only speaking of immanent repetition, because he cannot understand transcendent repetition.

who has moved beyond Constantin Constantius, who cannot move from his immanent moment. If Constantin represents the immanent kind of repetition, then the young man represents the qualitative movement from recollection through immanent to transcendent repetition. Such repetition achieves something special. Repetition, when done "right," gains the whole world all over again like Job did by choosing one's circumstances wholeheartedly and becoming who you are.

Yet, this is not the 20th century existential authenticity of being more of yourself. No, this is paradoxically becoming who you are by becoming something you currently are not. Job and the young man Constantin corresponds with both had to undergo an ordeal, and although their circumstances returned to what they were before the ordeal, their inward relation to them was entirely transformed. Simply put, they had become a new person. You then become who you are first by becoming something you previously were not. It isn't by merely doubling down on what you are but rather letting go of the world and losing it completely only to regain it. The transformation then is within oneself rather than forcing the world to try to bend to your will. This movement is the movement we see in Abraham in his relation to Isaac as well.

What becomes clear here is that for Kierkegaard, and perhaps here the pseudonyms represent a harmony if not univocity, the change required for conversion won't come about by mere epistemic achievement. The pathos required to spur one on in repetition day in and day out goes deeper than epistemology. The problem then also goes deeper than epistemology because the problem will have to do with despair and how to move out of it. Repetition is the daily

movement out of despair by inches, and choosing to become what one is by relating to things in an entirely new and pathos driven way.[69]

If this is his view, then of course he will stand athwart the speculative tradition which unflaggingly marches on towards the future and has no interest in the basic existential tasks. Hegel had little interest for ethics and morality—something which irked Kierkegaard—except as specimens of history for exactly this reason. If history is repetitive, as on Kierkegaard's view, rather than the forward march of progress, then the problem we face is psychological rather than epistemological. That is, our problem isn't lack of knowledge, truth, or the attainment of some past or future ideal, rather it is the willful ignorance of what we could possibly know to be true and what such truth might demand of us in our lives right now. That is, our subjective relation to that truth is of highest importance but we shirk that responsibility when we focus on the universals since, "one thinks the universal not with passion but with a comfortable superficiality." (R 227) We are offended at the demand of that truth and so we hide from it or seek some other ideal that is farther from our everyday lives. The young man learns this throughout *Repetition*, while Constantin does not.

Both are a repetition, but Constantin's is that of being stuck in the same place and spinning his wheels, while the young man is the one who like Job has passionately made a choice. This is why after his ordeal he writes, "I am myself again. Here I have repetition; I understand everything, and life seems more beautiful to me than ever. It did indeed come like a thunderstorm." (R 220) In this repetition the young man has gained the world all over again like Job did through his ordeal. In both the young man and Job's lives everything returned to how it

[69] More discussion of this will take place in chapter 3. As one chooses to become what one is through recollection, one moves out of despair which is not willing to be what one is. Since despair is the natural state for all according to Kierkegaard, it stands to reason that the movement away from despair represents the move towards becoming a Christian.

was before the ordeal, but what had changed was the individual's relation to those things. In choosing his circumstances wholeheartedly he has reversed the flow of agency by refusing to be subject to the whims of his desires and rather freely takes ownership of his existence. He has become who he is by becoming someone new by an entirely inward and subjective change in his relations. One who cannot do this remains in despair, stuck in immanence and recollection.

This is the situation of the one in sin and in need of conversion from Johannes's—and I might add Haufniensis's—view. If, as Johannes argues, it is possible to will untruth and to will to be untruth, then no Socratic maieutia will ever get one to change what one wills or doesn't will. So, some other strategy will be needed to accomplish the desired outcome. What is needed then is to reignite people's striving towards becoming a Christian, that is to inspire them to repent and experience conversion, the task of becoming a Christian. We shall turn now to what it means to become a Christian.

Chapter Three: The Dialectic of Becoming a Christian: From Despair to Faith

Doubt is not conquered by the system, but by faith.[70]

Having seen that Kierkegaard eschews the term conversion in favor of the task of becoming a Christian and having gotten clear on what his issues are with the speculative tradition in relation to conversion, it remains to be seen precisely what the process of becoming a Christian entails. I shall elucidate the process of becoming a Christian by focusing on the Climacus pseudonyms. We shall see that from these texts emerges a dialectic of becoming a Christian which involves the movement from despair to faith through the category of offense.[71] I shall start by arguing why I think this effort is rewarded by paying close attention to the Climacus texts. Then, I shall give a general overview of each of the pseudonyms and what they accomplish through their texts. Finally, I shall tease out the dialectic of becoming a Christian which emerges from the interrelation of their texts.

It is important here to note what is meant by dialectic since it is a term of ubiquitous use in 19th century northern European philosophy. Dialectic is the interchange between two concepts or persons. Arne Grøn puts it this way, "Dialectics must concern the relation between two parties that enter into dialogue with each other and can actively disagree with each other."[72] That is, it is about two things in some sort of relationship to each other which are either pulling towards each

[70] See Introduction to *Philosophical Fragments.*
[71] It has been the typical practice to speak of becoming a Christian in terms of the transversal of the existence spheres, but I prefer the dialectic of the movement from despair to faith. I am indebted to Stephen Dunning for this dialectical picture. See Dunning, Stephen. "The Illusory Grandeur of Doubt" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary* vol 7.
[72] Grøn, Arne. *Thinking With Kierkegaard, p34.*

other or away from each other. However, this relation of pulling apart isn't always between two entirely distinct things. As we see in *The Sickness Unto* Death, the self is able to relate to itself in various ways leading to despair or faith. So dialectical relations can exist in numerous different ways.

When Kierkegaard speaks of maintaining dialectical tension, he wants to keep alive the opposition between two concepts (for instance human/divine in the incarnation of Jesus). As we have already begun to discuss in the previous chapters, Kierkegaard's concern with Hegelian influenced philosophy is that it tries to exhaust dialectical tension by mediating two opposed concepts into a new third mediated one that has no tension until it enters into a new dialectical relationship.[73] Kierkegaard seems to think there is something important about maintaining these dialectical relationships and their tension without exhausting them because something about the human condition must maintain itself in tension. We are pulled in many different directions (existing/abstraction) but must be able to live in the space which holds them in tension. Thus, we shall see in this chapter that faith is dialectical in its opposition to despair.

3.1 Why Climacus?

As we saw in chapter 1, Kierkegaard thought the task of becoming a Christian was the concern of his whole authorship. However, it is talked about and developed most directly in the Climacus texts. Although the other texts will come up in elucidating a picture of conversion as

[73] Here we have another important understanding of Kierkegaard's writing. In insisting on the *Either/Or* relationship of concepts, he is not insisting that we must choose one or the other, but that two opposed concepts may be so opposed that they are unable to be mediated without losing what they are altogether. So, when faith is subsumed under rationality, faith is lost altogether for Kierkegaard. If the two must be set in opposition, then so be it and we must live in the tension of that. Thus, he rejects both a rational apologetics as an embarrassment in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, but he also rejects what would be called pure *fideism* as what he often refers to derogatorily as "enthusiasm", because it would make the equal but opposite mistake.

becoming a Christian, my focus will stay on Climacus. My reasons for finding the essential account of Kierkegaardian conversion in the authorship of the two Climacuses are threefold.

First, it is important to focus on the Climacian authorship because both conversion, and the phrase "becoming a Christian," are discussed in more depth there than in any other portion of the authorship. Nowhere else in the authorship will you find such a sustained and focused development of what it means to become a Christian. In fact, the pseudonym of Climacus was (somewhat)[74] created with this purpose in mind because the problem of despair goes deeper than the problem of epistemology, which Kierkegaard takes to be the obsession of modern philosophy. For Kierkegaard, only faith could dispel despair, and so he had to paint a picture of what it is to become a Christian in contrast to what he called "the speculative" tradition's answer.

Anti Climacus later highlights this problem in *Practice in Christianity,* "In the works of some pseudonymous writers it has been pointed out that in modern philosophy there is a confused discussion of doubt where the discussion should have been about despair…Instead of deterring and calling people to order by speaking of being despairing and being offended, it has waved to them and invited them to become conceited by doubting and having doubted." (PC 81) That is, for Anti just like Johannes the focus on doubt and doubting in modernity has made all our problems a matter of the right epistemological orientation rather than existential concern. This has in turn obscured the existence of despair from ever coming to light so long because we are distracted by epistemology and not getting to the root of the problem. In the pseudonyms, only Anti seems to have the solution. As Stephen Dunning points out, "The one Kierkegaardian pseudonym for whom it might be claimed that he actually achieves closure with regard to doubt

[74] I say somewhat only because the original writing of Johannes Climacus is written as a parody of Cartesian thinking. Although I think the purposes here are the same, even Kierkegaard wasn't entirely sure how he would use Climacus until he wrote the *Philosophical Fragments*.

is Anti-Climacus."[75] Thus, if we are to have a clear picture of how despair is a deeper problem than doubt, we will have to pay close attention to Johannes and Anti.

Kierkegaard himself thought of the work of Climacus as a seminal moment in his authorship. As Rick Furtak explains, "The *Postscript* was regarded by Kierkegaard as a culminating work—although he later came to view it as more of a turning point in his authorship."[76] In fact, Kierkegaard initially intended to end his work as an author with the *Postcript*, and so he "reveals"[77] himself as the owner of all the pseudonyms at its conclusion. Yet, several ensuing controversies and changes in Copenhagen forced him to take back up his pen. In *The Point of View* he refers to the *Postscript* as an exact midpoint, and the text that poses the issue which is the central point of "the whole authorship: *becoming a Christian."* (POV 8). Thus, in Kierkegaard's own estimation, the central gravitation of the whole authorship seems to revolve around the Climacus texts.

The second reason for limiting myself to the Climacian texts has to do with what has already been done in secondary scholarship. It is established custom in secondary scholarship[78] to stick to the Climacian texts when discussing becoming a Christian and/or conversion. This is likely because of the reasons just discussed. Climacus is central, and becoming a Christian is typically taken as interchangeable with conversion. One important caveat is that the accounts of

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[75] Dunning. "The Illusory Grandeur of Doubt." P204.
[76] Furtaak. *Concluding Unscientific a Critical Guide*, p1.
[77] This is in quotes because it is well attested that many in Copenhagen knew Kierkegaard to be the author of the pseudonymous works from the time of *Either/Or* onward.
[78] Ingolf Dalferth, Jamie Ferreira, and Noreen Khawaja have done this in their excellent work on conversion. Additionally, Iacovetti and Kemp's most recent book on conversion also puts emphasis on the Climacian account. Even Wietzke's rather impoverished account also places particular emphasis on Climacus. Andrew Torrance also pays closest attention to the Climacus texts in his chapters on conversion. I have shared Noreen Khawaja's experience of finding little written about conversion, and what little scholarship has been done already pays particular attention to the Climacian texts even if it doesn't limit itself to those texts. Although I depart from all their accounts in some way, we share a focus on Climacus.

conversion have typically emphasized speaking about becoming a Christian in terms of the existence spheres, which in turn has led most to pay very little attention to Anti Climacus. On this point, I depart from the common strategy in the scholarship because I think we must move beyond the existence spheres to understand what it means to become a Christian. I shall discuss this more below. Regardless, I am in good company in my focus on Climacus.

The third reason is more complex, but of most importance. Following Roger Poole's instructions on how to read Kierkegaard, it is important not to find continuity throughout the pseudonymous authors as though they were all saying the same thing.[79] That is, Poole thinks that even if one can draw a cohesive thread through the pseudonymous texts, we should be hesitant to do so. Poole provides repeated textual evidence that Kierkegaard wanted them to be kept apart, and so Poole argues they weren't merely different aspects of a single project, but entirely different projects. In Poole's words, the pseudonyms inhabit entirely distinct "thought-worlds."[80]

I agree with Poole to the extent that we shouldn't try to force the pseudonyms to say the exact same things, nor should they be mouthpieces for Kierkegaard's own views. Nonetheless, there's no reason not to put them in dialog with one another. Poole argues that they inhabit entirely different thought worlds, but this is clearly not true since the various pseudonyms at times cite one another and Magister Kierkegaard himself. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, there is an entire section in which Johannes exegetes Kierkegaard's entire authorship up to that point. Additionally, in *Stages on Life's Way* several of the pseudonyms gather together in the

[79] Poole. "My Wish, My Prayer. Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart" in *Kierkegaard Revisited : Proceedings from the Conference Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Meaning It* : Copenhagen, May 5-9, 1996. *Kierkegaard Studies. Monograph Series* ; 1. Berlin ; Walter de Gruyter, 1997. p159.
[80] Ibid.

same room in a symposium like dialogue. Not to mention Kierkegaard's own journals often develop ideas side by side from various pseudonymous texts.[81]

Poole thinks that there is no consistency in the use and deployment of terms between pseudonyms, and to his credit cites several examples where the same terms are used in inconsistent ways. In response I argue that it need not keep us from trying to find places of overlap and continuity because Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are rarely consistent with terminology even within their own texts. Simply put, I agree with Poole to the extent that we must avoid seeing through the various pseudonyms to the text as distinct pieces to be put together in a cohesive picture in some kind of pre-given puzzle or riddle. However, neither should we assume that none of the pieces could possibly fit together given some "dialectical intrepidity." (CUP 11) It would seem the best way to think of them is trying to get at various, shared, central questions from a variety of perspectives and methodologies towards a common goal or goals. This is the picture Kierkegaard himself gives us in *The Point of View*.[82] If this is the case, then the picture we get will be closer to crossing intentionalities which can be put in dialog rather than vacuum sealed thought worlds. We would have to reject Kierkegaard's own view of his work to go all the way with Poole.[83]

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[81] For instance, Kierkegaard muses on anxiety from Vigilius Haufniensis and despair from the Climacuses side by side in his journals on multiple occasions. It would seem this would put at least these texts in dialog with one another.

[82] See POV 55 "And what does all this mean when the reader now gathers together the elements developed in the various sections? It means: this is the authorship of which the total thought is the task of becoming a Christian. But it is an authorship that from the beginning has understood, with dialectical consistency has pursued, what the implications of this are that the situation is Christendom, which is the category of reflection, and therefore has cast all the Christian relationships into reflection."

[83] Poole in *The Indirect Communication* has a nuanced and careful reading of *The Point of View* which takes its claims seriously while also emphasizing the way the authorship changed in the post-*Postscript* era of his authorship.

Certainly, we should not equivocate their terminology without explanation. On this I am in full agreement with Poole, but nothing keeps us from seeing the places where the various pseudonyms might be grasping at describing the same phenomena from different perspectives. Such is the position of Louis Pojman and a host of others as regards Kierkegaard's relation to Climacus.[84] It seems to me that this is precisely part of the charity inherent in Kierkegaard's perspectival views. So long as we are diligent in showing how there is continuity rather than complete and utter difference, I see no reason why we shouldn't try to find these spots where things come together.[85]

Poole's rules about interpreting Kierkegaard seem to me overly scrupulous then. One can easily be faithful to the Kierkegaardian corpus while still providing appropriate distance between him and the pseudonyms while also putting them in dialog with one another. Thus, we should try to triangulate our understanding of what he discusses based on the various intentional gazes of these authors. There is good reason to do so regarding Climacus because of the direct dialectical connection between Kierkegaard, Johannes, and Anti. For both Climacuses share the same

[84] It could be argued that this view is one of the most common. See for instance. Pojman, Louis. *The Logic of Subjectivity p90*. Or Lowrie Kierkegaard: A Biography. And Again Iacovetti and Kemp. Finally, Westphal, *Becoming a Self*. C. Stephen Evans.

[85] To be fair to Poole, he was writing in the 1990's when Kierkegaard scholarship was much less concerned with the importance of the pseudonyms. It was quite common for notable scholars of a theological persuasion such as Scheler, Barth, and Lowrie, or those who had only read Kierkegaard only in translation to take the points of *Either/Or* and other works as authoritatively the voice of Kierkegaard. Similarly, all kinds of weird ideas had been read backwards into Kierkegaard through the German and French existentialist reception of Kierkegaard. So, anyone who has read Poole can sympathize with his strong claims, but perhaps they are an overcorrection. Nonetheless, I shall do my best to follow the practice of contemporary Kierkegaard scholarship, partially indebted to Poole, to cite the pseudonyms following Kierkegaard's own wishes, and to cite Kierkegaard only when he attached his name as the author of a published text. The list here is too long to enumerate. There are many sins throughout the tradition of the last century against reading Kierkegaard well. Some of the biggest names on both sides of the so-called analytic/continental divide: Heidegger, MacIntyre, Sartre, Plantinga, and more; read Kierkegaard extremely poorly or at the very least attributed views to him that were not his own for the sake of their own thought projects.

surname for contrasting the two explicitly, and Kierkegaard attaches his own name as editor to each of their works. He did not do this with any other pseudonym. Further, it could be argued that the end of the *Postscript* is the only place in the authorship until its end in *The Point of View*, where Kierkegaard directly addresses the audience with his own voice.[86]

It is worth considering then that Kierkegaard's own thoughts on becoming a Christian will be found in the dialectical interplay of these specific pseudonymous texts apart from the others. We must then keep the three in dialog with one another. To sum up this point, it will be important for me to limit myself to the Climacian texts to keep these obviously related texts within their own thought worlds. Doing so will honor Kierkegaard's and Poole's wishes, but not so much that I cannot put the Climacuses in dialogue both with Kierkegaard himself and the other pseudonyms. In doing so, I will avoid both the errors of assuming there is a radical break where there clearly isn't one, but conversely of assuming some radical consistency between all of the texts that clearly isn't there. Additionally, we are not without further evidence to focus on these texts. As I shall show over the next few sections, Kierkegaard had a close and special relationship with these particular pseudonyms.

3.2 Johannes

So, then we must ask who the Climacuses are. Let us first consider Johannes Climacus, an early invention of Kierkegaard and, on my reading, by far the most enigmatic of his pseudonyms. The first glimpses of this name take place around 1841 when he began work on *De omnibus*

[86] This could be debated on the grounds of the edifying discourses to which Kierkegaard attaches his name. However, there is much debate about this. Roger Poole, Michael Strawser, and several others also think that the edifying discourses, though they bear Kierkegaard's name, are a kind of pseudonymous production that still create ironic distance between himself and the audience. All this is to say, the instance at the end of the *Postscript* where he takes credit for the pseudonymous authorship is the only account where Kierkegaard is clearly speaking to his audience as himself. See Poole, *The Indirect Communication* or Strawser *Both/And*.

dubitandum est, which didn't originally have a pseudonymous author intended, and 1842 when Kierkegaard returned from his trip to Berlin. Yet this work would never be published[87] and Johannes Climacus would make his first appearance in Copenhagen with the publication of *Philosophical Fragments* in 1844. It is generally accepted that Johannes Climacus is named after the 6th century monk, John the Climber. St John Climacus was named this because of his famous text *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* in which an account of ascendancy in the spiritual life can be found.

According to various legends, John Climacus was a hermit who lived at the foot of a mountain, and regardless of its historical veracity, this picture should be kept in our minds because ascendance is a central feature of the dialectic of becoming a Christian. St. John's ladder was about ascending in virtue while shedding vice. For each rung of the ladder one climbed, one left behind vice, and for each rung descended, one left behind virtue and took on vice. Such is the struggle of the Christian life for St. John of the ladder. Similarly, Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus would both deny building up to Christianity through the system, while also giving a dialectical account of our ascent to becoming a Christian. The dual nature of this is part of the humor of Johannes.

Kierkegaard's Johannes is indeed also a hermit and sitting at the foot of great heights. This has been interpreted by Lee Barrett and others to mean that Johannes takes on this name because in *De omnibus dubitandum est* he is looking to build a system from the ground up, but ultimately fails. There is some merit to this as Kierkegaard proclaims that Hegel is a kind of Johannes Climacus in his journals (JP 1575 II A 335). The Johannes of *Fragments* and *Postscript* will

[87] There is a masterful analysis of this early pseudonym and text that were unpublished in Stephen Dunning's "The Illusory Grandeur of Doubt" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary.*

laugh at all such attempts to build an absolute presuppositionless system from the ground up, so it seems that a humorous doubt about the system itself was always connected with Climacus.

Since this journal entry is from January 1839, a full five years before the publication of *Philosophical Fragments*, it seems that Johannes was on Kierkegaard's mind from the beginning of his authorship. Interestingly, the name Johannes will appear several times (The seducer in the Seducer's Diary, Johannes de Silentio, and Johannes the seducer returns for *Stages on Life's Way)* before Kierkegaard uses *Climacus* again. But by the time Kierkegaard did anything with Johannes Climacus, his aims for the pseudonym had changed. Both C. Stephen Evans and Paul Muench have warned us against equating the first iteration of Johannes with the one of *Fragments*.[88] However, their warning only goes so far as to say that we have no reason to assume the two are the same character other than that they have the same name. Nonetheless, we could state the opposite and argue that we have no reason *not* to assume they are the same or at least connected since they do share the same name. Even if they are not to same, there is no reason not to look for continuity where it may be found in the two iterations of Johannes.

Lee Barrett helpfully lays out four general ways in which scholarship has understood Johannes Climacus in relation to Kierkegaard. First, there is a tradition that thinks that Johannes is merely a thin veil for Kierkegaard's own views. Second, Johannes is merely a humorist entirely distinct from Kierkegaard and in no way connected to Kierkegaard's own views. Third, some have understood Johannes as a kind of buffer figure trying to create an open space for the reader to be able to experience edification. Fourth, that Climacus exists as a kind of negation who shows us what an existing individual ought not to do. To my mind, the first and fourth traditions can be dismissed outright. Kierkegaard had no reason to hide his views, and it is

[88] See C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason,* p9. And Paul Muench, "Kierkegaard's Socratic Pseudonym," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, p31-32.

widely known that Kierkegaard was known to be the author of the pseudonymous works in Copenhagen before he revealed himself at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. As has been noted by Mackey, "A Kierkegaardian pseudonym is a persona, an imaginary person created by the author for artistic purposes, not a nom de plume, a fictitious name used to protect his personal identity from the threats and embarrassments of publicity."[89] Simply put, the pseudonyms are not meant to hide the "real" author from harm or some other such issue. Kierkegaard's contemporaries in Copenhagen were just as much as us left to unravel the riddle of what is meant by the name and character of each pseudonym and what it tells us about how to read the work. This is part of the goal of pseudonymity, because each person is meant to approach these texts as a subjective individual without standing on the shoulders of others. In this sense, we all start from the same place while approaching these texts.

I have already discussed above why I think the second tradition, most represented by Roger Poole, has some merit but overstates its case. Of course it is important to not equate the pseudonyms with Kierkegaard or with each other, but it is also important to see what happens when you put them in conversation with each other. I think the best way to understand Johannes is some combination of the second and third tradition. We understand Johannes best as a kind of humorist, but one who is in dialectical tension with Kierkegaard himself. So, what kind of humorist is he?

Johannes uses humor[90] as a means of distancing himself and operating from the spaces between the stages of existence. As Climacus says, "irony is the *confinium* between the esthetic

[89] Mackey. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* p247.
[90] This is a term with significant technical meaning. I shall discuss this more in chapters 4 and 5. For now, it is important to note that humor here is a means of ironic distance. He is humorous because he has all the objective knowledge, and sees what it is to become a Christian, but he remains aloof and will not make the leap to commit to it. This distance is essential for one of the

and the ethical; humor is the *confinium* between the ethical and the religious." (CUP 501-502) Thus, humor is perhaps higher than irony, but it functions on several levels for Johannes. Humor is an understanding of living in incongruity, even embracing it. Humor makes no pretense about smoothing out the wrinkles of the absurdity which existence in the world presents us with. What would be humorous is pretending we could do otherwise.

Johannes also exhibits humor in his understanding what it means to become a Christian without participating himself, thus creating a distance between himself and his knowledge. In fact, Johannes is so humorously detached from Christianity that he spends his Sundays sitting in a cafe and smoking a cigar (CUP 185), something frowned upon by 19th century Danish society.[91] He also understands the absolute paradox that reason wills its own undoing by reaching for that which it cannot know. Thus, our desire for the infinite[92] is precisely what leads us to despair because we cannot attain it.

There is another feature of humor hinted at by Kierkegaard as early as his dissertation. After a long-winded meandering discussion of irony, Kierkegaard concludes with a discussion of humor and its superiority to irony because it is both more detached than irony but also capable of positivity, whereas irony can only ever be negative. Humor is more detached because it has the same light touch and distance, but it is capable of pointing us towards some specific purpose

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main points of the *Fragments* and *Postscript*, namely that when it comes to becoming a Christian, the objective is less important than the subjective.

[91] See Paul Muench, "Kierkegaard's Socratic Pseudonym," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide* p34 "There was a law of Sunday observance…set the closing times of stores and forbade loud, noisy activities, especially during times when Church services were being held."

[92] There is some longer discussion of this in the *Postscript*. The main point I'm invoking here is the paradox of knowing. Rationality wants to know everything, but precisely that it does not know is what keeps it striving. Were it ever to attain its infinite knowledge, it would no longer want to know. Thus, the paradox is that it is precisely what reason does not know that keeps it going. Johannes sees this and finds it humorous and chooses instead to sit and smoke a cigar.

rather than only negating things. Humor "does not find repose in making man human, but in making man God-man." (CI 342) Kierkegaard is claiming that irony is not appropriate for eternal things because irony cannot make sense of sin. However, humor does have a sense of the eternal because it understands sin[93] and how it makes one understand the world is absurd rather than rational (*credo quia absurdum*).

The contrast in anthropology (making man human) and theanthropology (making man God-man), as the Hong's put it, then is about how humor can attain something that irony can't. Johannes represents the culmination of this and Kierkegaard had already begun working on him as a character as far back as 1841 the same year that he defended this dissertation. Johannes then is precisely set up as a kind of Socrates within Christendom, something well-attested in reflections on this pseudonym.[94] That is, he is a Socrates who can talk about things of eternal significance, something irony is not always fit to do since it only works by negation.

However, humor does have its limits. Climacus explains that humor can only ever look backward (CUP 507) and that it can never attain what is higher than it (CUP 519). However, it can help clear a path towards the higher things. It doesn't attain what becoming a Christian is because becoming a Christian is a forward-looking task. It requires faith, hope, and love which are future oriented and beyond what humor can grasp. This forward living is opposite to rearward looking humor. Johannes never moves beyond humor in his two books, but he understands the problem from the point of view of humor.

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[93] Sin here can be understood in many ways, but in relation to irony it is the idea that human beings can willingly and knowingly do wrong. Irony cannot make sense of this because the disconnect it relies upon is rational order, whereas humor delights in and embraces the absurdity that sin is.

[94] Pretty much every entry in the excellent *Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide* compares Johannes to Socrates.

First, he tries to tackle this problem in the *Fragments* by showing the impossibility of recollection to get to the problem of despair. I have already explained this in the previous chapter, but this sets us up for to discuss Johannes's second attempt at simultaneously taking out the epistemic/speculative/systematic remedy by showing the uselessness of objectivity for faith found in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. What Postscript lays out is both a takedown of the former and an emphasis on the extreme demands of becoming a Christian. This is something Johannes thinks certain contemporary Danish literary writers (AKA the pseudonyms along with Magister Kierkegaard) have helped us understand. The position Johannes is taking aim at here (a la Kant, Hegel, and the Danish Hegelians) is that faith cannot raise itself to the level of objective knowledge and is thus somehow inferior. Johannes turns this entire dialectic on its head by showing that objectivity is not what is most important. In fact, only about 40 of the nearly 600 pages are dedicated to dispatching with the objective historical concerns of faith. In demonstrating how most of modernity has not yet achieved faith as the highest thing, Johannes puts objective knowledge in the lowly place. Faith may be low when considered from the lens of epistemology, but this is not decisive. Johannes shows us that epistemology may be even lower when considered from the lens of existential concern.

This *Postscript*, inherent in its name means that he needed to add something to his previous attempt. Humorously, the postscript is several times longer than the original work. But this postscript is not an overstuffed sequel, it is rather a deepening and development of the previous text. They could be read as one long work, but at the very least the *Fragments* "could not be allowed to stand as it was."[95] Indeed, Johannes in the preface and introduction goes to great pains to explain that the *Postscript* has no beginning and/or conclusion and is not a systematic.

[95] Ferreira, Jamie. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide,* p6.

To have this kind of treatise takes some solid grounds or must avoid presuppositions, both of which Johannes purposely and happily ignores (CUP 13). It simply starts somewhere and keeps going until it is over, like existence.

In the large and purposely disorganized postscript, Johannes sets his aim(s) on those who might simplify faith down to mere cognitive objective content. Johannes has all knowledge of what it is to become a Christian, yet he himself cannot make the ascent. So, perhaps we can infer that something more must be necessary to become a Christian. Such is the humor of his position, something else besides knowledge is required, but this is precisely all Johannes has to offer. Louis Mackey puts this very succinctly, "The whole message of the *Postscript* is that Christianity does not become a live option until every human alternative has been tried and rejected. At that point it becomes a life necessity."[96] As we shall see below, on Johannes's ladder faith is the highest rung rather than the bottom rung there merely to be transcended to reach objective knowledge.

Yet, Johannes lays all this out not as someone who has faith, but as someone who looks upon it and sees its demand. His reverence for and distance from faith is something that makes him a humorous interlocutor. He stands side by side with those philosophers whom he dismisses as one who has not yet achieved faith, but also mocks the hubris of worldly wisdom because it cannot achieve what subjectivity demands. As Andrew Torrance claims, Johannes was able to, "speak to the rationalists on their own terms."[97] Though not in a way that, "translates *the truth* of Christianity into the language of the rationalists."[98] His detachment from faith was the same as theirs, but he lacked faith in their project as much as he did in Christianity. He realized his

[96] Mackey. *Kierkegaard a Kind of Poet*. p205.
[97] Torrance. *Freedom to Become a Christian*. p6.
[98] Ibid p7.

position at the bottom of the ladder, rather than pretending to call down from the heights for people to ascend to his level.

For both Climacus brothers then,[99] the problem with which they start is the problem of despair. This is seen as early as *De omnibus dubitandum est*, which chronicles the adventures of a man who wants to solve all his problems by doubting everything but ultimately fails. This is encapsulated by the quote, "Doubt is not conquered by the system, but by faith." (JP I 891 IV B) However, he quickly realizes that the problem is neither doubt nor modern philosophy. What lies beneath all this is the problem of despair which goes deeper and further than doubt or modern philosophy. Perhaps this is why the original project of *De omnibus dubitandum est* is eventually scrapped and reconstituted in the form of the *Fragments* and expanded in the *Postscript*.

Thus, the overall picture we get from Johannes Climacus is that modern philosophy, and the speculative tradition which it inherits is in despair. It is in despair because it cannot achieve the demands of subjectivity, of becoming a self, of achieving faith precisely because of what it thinks is its highest achievement: impersonal objective universal knowledge. Conceiving of existence as a merely epistemic problem has it not only in despair, but completely unaware of its despair which is both more humorous and more precarious because it cannot even diagnose, let alone deal with, the problem. This is the sad humor of the modern condition of which Johannes is acutely aware, and it is from this predicament that Anti Climacus picks up and teaches us what it looks like to be on the other side of despair. Thus, we shall turn to Anti Climacus and his works.

[99] Anti and Johannes are not necessarily brothers. Their relationship is unclear other than in relation to Christianity. I call them brothers just for the sake of not having to keep using the terms "Climacuses" "Climacian" and other weird neologisms.

3.3 Anti Climacus

Anti Climacus stands in direct relation to Johannes as the higher of the two, but he is also related to the rest of the pseudonyms with most emphasis on Vigilius Haufniensis.[100] Anti here doesn't necessarily mean against. There are at least two ways to take it. First, the Hongs claim that it is an old form of *ante*, which means before. They state, "It does not mean 'against.' It is an old form of 'ante' (before)…denotes a relation of rank, as in…the First Commandment."[101] (SUD xxii) This is the most likely because this would be closest to the Latin, from which the term Climacus is also derived. However, the second way one could understand it comes from the Greek (*ante*). This would mean above or beyond[102] like the Greek meta which would put Anti on a different level. Both meanings I think are potentially at play and point to the fact that Anti is somehow set apart or beyond the other pseudonyms.

Anti then is anti because he goes beyond, or before, what any of the other pseudonyms—and Johannes in particular—can. Specifically, he stands against their failures to become Christians. Thus, Anti is the one who has attained what the other pseudonyms, and even Kierkegaard himself have not. He is anti then in that he is not a humorist who takes back what he says nor is he in some way silenced or distanced from his work. No, he has lived and practiced what he preaches. Thus, his anti is not a negation in the sense of rejection of thought, but rather it is that he comes from the opposite side of things, he makes apologies about being a Christian or its demands. He sees, like Johannes, what is involved in becoming a Christian, but he has also lived it.

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[100] Marek. "Anti Climacus" in *Pseudonymous* Works p39. One way to think about *The Concept of Anxiety* through to *Practice in Christianity* is to think of them as a trilogy about despair and overcoming it.

[101] However, in their historical introduction to *The Point of View*, they say it means "above Climacus." (POV xvii)

[102] Again, the Hongs also point to this understanding in (POV xvii)

However, we should not understand this as hubris. He is humbly the essentially Christian who both knows what it is to become a Christian and has done so but does not brag about it. This is why he compares himself to a doctor with someone on their sickbed (SUD 5). His viewpoint is not an arrogant looking down upon those who haven't achieved what he has, but as a servant who goes before them to lead them out of sickness. Thus, he views Christianity, using Louis Mackey's terms once again, "from above." As Jakub Marek puts it, "Anti-Climacus repeats much of what Johannes Climacus and other pseudonyms already tried to convey in their works, but from a decisively Christian standpoint."[103] His word is the distinctly Christian diagnosis and guide to the problem of despair and becoming a Christian. If we are to get a clear understanding of what it means to become a Christian, it will be in the interplay between the works of Johannes and Anti along with their creator Kierkegaard.[104]

The works of Anti Climacus receive especially effusive praise in Kierkegaard's own estimation of them. He mentions that his work produced in 1848 "in the context of Christian truth it is certainly the highest that has been granted to me."[105] (JP VI 6501) Of these works, which include the entirety of Anti Climacus's authorship, *Practice in Christianity* receives the highest praise. He lauds it stating, "Without a doubt it is the most perfect and the truest thing I have written."[106] (JP VI 6501) Lest we confuse Anti's position with Kierkegaard's own views

[103] Marek. "Anti Climacus" in *Pseudonymous Works* p40.
[104] Of course the other pseudonyms will come into play, but these three are the main concern of this dialectic.
[105] An interesting note here is that this also includes his short "On My Work as an Author." This work is often dismissed by Kierkegaard scholars because he did not publish the larger and more worked out *The Point of View*. Of course Kierkegaard did have some reticence about publishing this piece. Nonetheless, upon reflection he seems to have some particular fondness for it.
[106] This could also be referring to *The Sickness Unto Death*, but both the Hongs and Lowrie seem to think that it refers to *Practice in Christianity*.

finally being put on display, this strong endorsement is immediately followed by self-deprecation.

Kierkegaard makes clear that he is not the author nor is he anywhere near having achieved the perfect Christianity that Anti Climacus has. He refers to Anti as "higher than my personal existence…the expression for the limits of my nature." (JP VI 6501) Kierkegaard also states that "I would place myself higher than Johannes Climacus, lower than Anti-Climacus." (JP VI 6433) Simply put, Kierkegaard has come farther than Johannes towards becoming a Christian, but has not achieved what Anti has. So, we should not put either the words of Johannes nor Anti in Kierkegaard's mouth as has been a temptation many have been unable to resist. Rather, there is a dialectical relationship between Kierkegaard and the two Climacus brothers. The three are in direct triangulation of one another which allows us to get a picture of what the general landscape of thinking about becoming a Christian is and involves.[107]

What is it that was so important that Anti disclosed? Kierkegaard himself says that crucial categories related to Christianity are disclosed in Anti's works. (JP 6361 X A 147) Marek explains, "the two crucial categories of Anti-Climacus's take on the problem of Christianity are sin and offense."[108] However, I think Marek is wrong on his terminology here. Marek himself in a footnote points out the place where Johannes states that, "To become a Christian then…is a matter of winning faith through *despair* and *offense* (the Cerberus pair who guard the entry to becoming a Christian)." (CUP 372 italics added by me) The crucial categories are *despair* and

[107] See JP 6532. Kierkegaard writes, "There is something inexplicably felicitous in the antithesis: Climacus—Anti-Climacus, I recognize so much of myself and my nature in it that if someone else had invented it I would believe that he had secretly observed my inner being.—The merit is not mine, for I did not originally think of it." That is, Kierkegaard himself thinks his own inner thoughts are best exemplified in the synthesis of the two thinkers Johannes and Anti. Thus, he should not be equated with either on their own, but bringing them together culd be enlightening.
[108] Marek. "Anti Climacus" in *Pseudonymous Works*. p40.

offense rather than *sin* and *offense*. One could make the argument that sin and despair are interchangeable as Anti equates them in the final chapters of *Sickness Unto Death*, but this would only point to their interchangeability. It would be an overstatement to say that sin is a more fundamental category to Anti since despair is the central concern especially of *The Sickness Unto Death,*[109] but also of *Practice in Christianity* albeit thinking of its relationship to offense. Further, as we have seen, despair is a key concern for Johannes, and as we shall see, it has its precursor in the anxiety spoken about by Vigilius Haufniensis.

There are two major problems to be overcome in the process of becoming a Christian and to attain what it is to have faith. First is the problematic of despair, while the other is of offense. The former is covered in *The Sickness Unto Death* while the latter is the focus of *Practice in Christianity.* In *The Sickness Unto Death,* Anti sets out to describe precisely the conditions of despair and gives us a taxonomy of its forms and manifestations. If Johannes diagnosed the despair that modern man finds himself in, Anti will give us both a clear picture of what it is and how to get beyond it through becoming a self that rests in faith. He can see what getting on the other side of despair looks like not from below, as one who has not attained, but as someone who lives it out in his existence. He begins the text by saying that everyone everywhere is in despair whether they know it or not. Even if one doesn't seem to be in despair, if one ever feels despair, then this is proof that the despair was there all along (SUD 22).

In *Practice*, Anti takes up the problem of offense. His goal is to re-emphasize the inherent offense of the Christian faith since Christianity is counter to basic natural sensibilities. He wants to reintroduce the category of offense to make Christianity radically new to Danish ears, and he

[109] In fact, Anti both speaks of sin as the deepest kind of despair, but also says that all despair is a kind of sin, so it is unclear at best whether either is more prominent. It would seem that interchangeable is a safe bet.

does so by showing all the strategies typically used to avoid offense. After making clear that offense is necessary, he shows its use in bringing us face to face with Christ, something he calls contemporaneity. This is a specific subjective experience not mediated by history, tradition, apologetical arguments, or natural reason. Rather, it is meant to be a direct encounter with Christ and all the weirdness surrounding him in order to figure how we would respond. He ends by speaking of how offense functions as a means to unsettle us from our despair so that we can make the move to faith and to rest. He concludes with a prayer that all may be converted so.

Both Climacuses then are concerned with the nature of despair, and its ubiquity amongst contemporary Danes. They both reject world historical answers as well as merely epistemological answers at helping us conquer the problems of existence. They both think the answer to the problem is the process of becoming a Christian and attaining faith. They both have Magister Kierkegaard attached as editor of their works. Thus, what remains is to tease out the dialectical picture of what it is to become a Christian.

One might be tempted, and it has been the tradition in secondary scholarship to do, to simply think of conversion as the transversal of the existence spheres.[110] Although this is an understandable temptation, and without a doubt Kierkegaard kept the existence spheres central to his authorship, I don't think we should equate the mere transversal of the existence spheres with the process that is becoming a Christian. They at most are a necessary, but not sufficient condition for understanding conversion. There are three major reasons why I argue this is the case. First, the Climacian authorship which speaks most about becoming a Christian, heavily modifies the existence spheres even if it doesn't dispense with them altogether. Second,

[110] There are numerous examples of this. I have highlighted some of the major ones in Chapter 5. p163 Footnote 225.

Johannes makes the most use of them as part of his overall picture of what it is to become a Christian in the final sections of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Yet, this same picture which includes the existence spheres is what he in the end takes back as a humorist because they are not sufficient to get him to the point of becoming a Christian. That is, they are part of the knowledge which is insufficient to bring about conversion. In this case, they at best represent a kind of Wittgensteinean ladder. Third, in the texts of Anti, through whom Kierkegaard discloses the most important categories of Christianity, makes almost no use of them except to show that one can be in the religious sphere and still in despair. Thus, my argument is that we need a different dialectic to understand what it is to become a Christian.

For Anti Climacus to discuss the demands of becoming a Christian, he modifies the dialectic of the existence spheres. That is, he creates a whole extra distinct dimension within the category of the religious. This implies that there's something incomplete about their original construal in the first place. Becoming a Christian will involve more than what is possible in the existence spheres as they are characterized from *Either/Or* up through the *Stages*. Ingolf Dalferth points this out in his excellent essay on what it is to become a Christian.

> Becoming a Christian is to exist in a mode that is not a possibility of our human existence. So the decisive break that needs to be understood when we try to make sense of what it is to become a Christian is not between aesthetic, ethical and religious existence but between all of them on the one hand, and Christianity or religiousness B on the other. There are 'Three Stages and yet one Either/Or'. And it is this Either/Or on which everything else depends.[111]

That is to say, Religiousness B is something set apart or a decisive break with the existence spheres not achievable by merely traversing the boundaries between them. Lee Barrett makes a similar point, "In his description of Religiousness B, Climacus insists that Christian pathos does not naturally evolve out of ordinary emotional dynamics of the human spirit; it is not immanent

[111] Dalferth, Ingolf. "Becoming a Christian According to the *Postscript*." p262-263

in human nature. Christian passions are dependent on a certain network of unique concepts."[112] Barrett here is explaining that what it is to be specifically Christian will involve an entirely different set of concepts than is possible from a pure standpoint of human existence. This is a qualitative leap beyond what can be done without external help, as Johannes explained in the *Fragments*. What is required is something not inherent nor immediately available via the spheres as categorized before the works of Johannes came about.

However, there is some disagreement about this point. Jamie Ferreira goes along with this view up to the point of thinking that Religiousness A, which is a general orientation towards religiousness without the subjective commitment attached, is essential to get to Religiousness B, which is supposed to be the highest form of religion as subjectively taking ownership of existence.[113] She thinks that there is no decisive break. Instead, she thinks Religiousness B is just a sharpening or deepening of Religiousness A citing the "sharpened pathos" Johannes speaks about (CUP 581). To imagine this, we must think of Religiousness A as a kind of sensitivity or commitment to the religious, while Religiousness B will be an individual sharpening and concretion of that more generalized pathos towards distinctly personal and Christian content. It is not clear how the transition/sharpening from one to the other is made or even if there is any leap from one to the other. Even Ferreira admits, "The maintenance of Religiousness A within Religiousness B…is not easy to imagine."[114] Nonetheless, for Ferreira it is essential that the two be held together lest Christian pathos be turned into an anti-material and anti-worldly Platonic longing rather than displaying the immanence required for faith. Such concerns are valid, but do seem to go against what both the *Postscript* and Kierkegaard's later works will emphasize.

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[112] KRSRR 15.5 p219
[113] Her entire argument can be found in "The Socratic Secret," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide.*
[114] Ibid p23.

Kierkegaard becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the concerns of this world, and prefers to talk about the spiritual by the end of his life without committing to a full-blown anti-materialist Platonism.

There is some kind of decisive break then, or at least the connection between the two and how one moves from A to B apart from another qualitative leap is ambiguous at best. From the very beginning of *Fragments* through to the end of the *Postscript*, Johannes seems intent on arguing for the uniqueness of Christian pathos as *sui generis* from what is offered by the speculative tradition. It would seem this commitment is why he felt the need to modify the spheres in the first place, because as originally conceived they could not capture what is distinct in becoming a Christian while one moves through the existence spheres. A deepening of existential concern will not necessarily get you to the point of Christian faith, this is why there must be some external impetus as argued for in the *Fragments*. Simply put, my argument is that although they are close in name, there is a wide chasm between Religiousness A and B.

Something else should be considered here. Johannes knows what it is to become a Christian. He has all possible knowledge including the spheres, yet he is unable to become a Christian. So, if transversal of the spheres will not get us to the point of Christian pathos, perhaps they simply represent a kind of Wittgensteinian ladder.[115] Johannes as humorist takes back everything he says (CUP 521-522), so perhaps his invoking of the existence spheres only to immediately modify them is precisely to show their insufficiency in getting one to become a Christian. Unfortunately, there is no decisive evidence that could suggest one way or another of understanding this.

[115] This comparison has been made before. For a development of this point, see Genia Schönbaumsfeld. *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion.*

However, this revocation might be for several reasons. It may be the revocation and not the text that is superfluous. His revocation of the book might simply be an admission that he himself cannot live up to its demands. Alistair Hanny makes the important point that, "Revocation is not the same as not writing the book."[116] Johannes both explains everything and takes it all back. It is true that he washes his hands of it, but this is not the same as saying there is nothing to be found of value in the book. Hannay makes a comparative reference to the Catholic Church's *imprimatur*. That is, the stamp of *imprimatur* means that the church doesn't endorse the book, but simply allows it because it finds nothing wrong with it pertaining to doctrine or heresy. It is not a positive endorsement, but rather a claim of negation about anything objectionable. So, one way of understanding this is that Johannes is saying the book itself isn't superfluous or wrong, but neither is it doctrinally necessary for understanding what it means to become a Christian. At the very least it may be something he himself keeps humorous distance from because he does not attain it just as he keeps a humorous distance from what he sees as the deceptions of modern philosophy.

One further way of understanding the revocation returns to the idea of Wittgenstein's ladder. John the Climber has given us a text which includes the necessary condition(s) for becoming a Christian, but true to form the book's knowledge will not necessarily make one a Christian. It is merely a text we must wade through to clear the path for becoming a Christian. It means anything found within it is only authoritative to the extent that the subjective individual has an encounter with what is required of them, but not because of the text itself, but because of the

[116] Hannay, Alistair. "Johannes Climacus' Revocation," in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, p46.

encounter with the text. That is, the revocation makes the text forever the reader's text.[117] If the text is about progress towards becoming a Christian, then it cannot be finished or concluded. It can only be offered to the reader as a kind of negation of what is thought to be necessary. Simply put, the whole thing is a negative dialectic which gives us information on what and how not to do things, hence the emetic analogy referenced above. Hannay explains this function for the subjective individual: "new light will be thrown on it [what Johannes revokes] by placing it in any perspective other than its own."[118] That is, the text only becomes complete in the hands of the individual reader. As such, the text is only an occasion, but perhaps a necessary one, rather than a how-to guide.

Considering the existence spheres in Johannes's work then puts us in a quandary. Not only would the existence spheres be insufficient to get us to Christian pathos, but even Religiousness B as a necessary modification would also in some sense need to be revoked as well.[119] It would be part of the Wittgensteinian ladder that would need to be tossed aside for the subjective individual to become a Christian. Johannes never wrote any other texts, but there is a continuation of this dialectic in the works of Anti Climacus. Thus, we shall turn to Anti for an important development of these themes.

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[117] Hannay in *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, p51. "The ideas it develops must be left behind. Seen in this light, the revocation is a progressive step."
[118] Ibid p60.
[119] This is similar to Michael Olesen's point in "The Climacean Alphabet: Reflections on Religiousness A and B from the Perspective of the Edifying." Olesen argues that Johannes's views are out of step with both the edifying works and those of Anti Climacus because of the way Religiousness B, as the distinctly Christian form of the religious sphere, is characterized. Ingolf Dalferth also offers a theological critique of Johannes in his "Becoming a Christian According to the Postscript." For Dalferth, Johannes creates such an extreme pathological requirement for becoming a Christian that it makes the entire Lutheran approach to grace seem impossible.

Anti makes scant mention of the existence spheres. He speaks only of the religious sphere throughout his works. Even then, as Lee Barrett points out,[120] the invoking of the term religious is wildly inconsistent. Sometimes it seems to be a massive category under which Christianity is only a subset, while at other times it represents becoming a Christian itself or the more specific sphere of existence. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti compares the religious sphere to an intoxication and a fantasy which makes one unable to become a self and leaves one in despair (SUD 32) Again, he says that the ethico-religious category can diagnose despair as spiritlessness (SUD 45). He also describes the poet with religious longing as someone who is still in despair. "A poet like that…loves God above all…and yet he loves the anguish and will not give it up…there in despair he does not will to be himself." (SUD 77) These quotes show us that Anti doesn't conceive of the category of the religious, nor the sphere of existence, as something that is free from despair. Thus, it is different from attaining faith which fends off despair. Anti makes no distinction between Religiousness A and B in the *Sickness,* but possibly makes an unclear reference to Religiousness B in *Practice*.[121]

In relation to the works of Anti, Kierkegaard makes one mention of religiousness in his journals around 1850. In it he explains:

> Secular prudence finds it very advantageous to have the religious represented solely by the Sunday ceremony…the category of the sermon-lecture—and secular prudence fills up the rest of life and tolerates the Sunday ceremony because it has the least likelihood of becoming actuality. That is why the comic has to be used to show the incongruity between this Sunday ceremony and daily life…if this secular prudence circumspectly takes on the form of religiousness, it is neither more nor less than Sunday ceremony. (JP 6694)

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[120] KRSRR 15.5

[121] The Hong translations equate "the Second Place" which Anti speaks about once in *Practice in Christianity* to Religiousness B. See *Practice in Christianity* p386 footnote 34. For my part, following the argument and citations of the Hongs, I can't make heads or tails of why these two would be equivalent other than a cross-reference with a journal entry that speaks of two ways of understanding what it is to be religious.

What is being talked about here sounds like Religiousness A, but no such distinction is given. This religiousness is something Kierkegaard thinks needs to be destabilized by the comic. Johannes told us that the comic cannot attain what true religiousness demands. So, there is some sense in which the category of the religious, as the highest or deepest existence sphere, will not get us to the point of becoming a Christian. After the works of Johannes, the existence spheres seem to have little to no import for Christian life. Yet Anti is responsible for the truest and best thing Kierkegaard ever wrote, and his work discloses the two most important categories of becoming a Christian (offense and despair/sin). Additionally, Anti already is a Christian and knows what it is to be one, so he has gone further than both Johannes and Kierkegaard. Thus, his not invoking the existence spheres at all is suspect for their importance for what it means to become a Christian. A complete picture of becoming a Christian will require another dialectic than the existence spheres, as suggested by Stephen Dunning, it will be following the dialectical process of moving from despair to faith.

3.4 Despair

We have already seen that according to Anti each and every person is in despair (*fortvivelse)* whether they know it or not (SUD 22). Thus, it is important to highlight the features of this despair and what Kierkegaard thinks are the possible options of moving beyond despair. Interestingly, the Danish term for despair contains the word for doubt (*tvivl)*. However, William McDonald explains etymologically it is much stronger than doubt. Rather, "One meaning of the Danish prefix *for* is that the action of the verb to which it is appended is intensified to a ruinous extreme…*fortvivle* would be a ruinous doubting, or double-mindedness."[122] This would then fit Kierkegaard's own love of play with the Danish language by making despair connected to but

[122] McDonald, William. KRSRR 15.2, p159

much more serious than doubt. Modern philosophy fails to understand how desperate a problem doubting can be, so he comes up with despair to emphasize the seriousness of the problem (PC 81). Additionally, the problem of doubt as double-mindedness fits well with Kierkegaard's favorite biblical book (James 1:8 and 4:8) which speaks of the dangers of being double-minded.

Despair manifests itself as a kind of desynchronization of self. Although despair as a condition is the main thrust of *The Sickness Unto Death,* one of the best pictures of this actually comes from Vigilius Haufniensis's *The Concept of Anxiety:*

> Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit. In innocence, man is not merely animal, for if he were at any moment of his life merely animal, he would never become man. So spirit is present, but as immediate, as dreaming. Inasmuch as it is now present, it is in a sense a hostile power, for it constantly disturbs the relation between soul and body, a relation that indeed has persistence and yet does not have endurance, inasmuch as it first receives the latter by the spirit. On the other hand, spirit is a friendly power, since it is precisely that which constitutes the relation. What, then, is man's relation to this ambiguous power? It relates itself as anxiety (CA 43-44).

This point is echoed in a journal entry from 1848 where he compares despair to dizziness just like the language of anxiety, "in all despair there is an interplay of finitude and infinitude, of the divine and the human, of freedom and necessity." (JP 748 VIII B 168) Anxiety and despair are similar in the feelings they produce, and the concepts are intimately related. As William McDonald makes their connection clear when he states, "It is no accident that anxiety, which is a cognate notion to despair, is associated with inherited sin."[123] These quotes get across an important point: man is a synthesis of the finite (physical) and infinite (psychical) and he conceives of himself as free in relation to himself, but this relation has the ability to go wrong in anxiety which leads to despair.

Thus, one's relation to the self as free manifests in anxiety because it is easier to do nothing than take the risk of misusing our freedom or being wrong. The uncertainty of one's place in this

[123] Ibid, p159

world and the impingement the world makes upon the human experience gives rise to all sorts of problems because man is not quite infinite or finite. He can neither overcome by a godly strength nor by a Stoic fatalism about death. The synthesis of the finite and infinite in a human is held together by spirit, and it is this spirit that must move forward in faith. But, since one is neither fully free nor entirely bound by necessity the two pull against each other constantly and sometimes the synthesis frays. To use the favorite language of 19th century philosophy, a human being is a synthesis in dialectical tension in which the tension is always in danger of being paralyzed by anxiety and exhausted by despair.

We feel the pull in opposite directions as possibility and relate to ourselves as discombobulated and disintegrating, yet also tangled up inside ourselves. Anxiety then is this state of being all tangled up in oneself, but without working as a synthesis. Such entanglement leads to a paralysis that comes upon us and remains stagnant. This wallowing in paralysis is despair. We may be unaware of how to deal with it, which leads to another kind of or even a doubling of despair. As he states in the same journal entry from above:

> If the person who despairs is…aware of his despair, he no longer speaks senselessly about it as something which happens to him, and now with all his might he will fight against it, but if he is not aware that the sickness lies still deeper, that the misrelation in him also reflects itself infinitely in the misrelation to the power which established him as a relation—then he is still in the despair, and with all his supposed labor he only works himself into an even deeper despair; he loses himself in despair and is again guilty and responsible for it. (JP 748 VIII B 168)

Thus, we can be in despair and know it and still fight against it, but without any ability to overcome it. Such is the despair most embodied by his feelings of modernity and its trying to solve the problem of despair epistemologically. The feeling of this, the suffering it causes, and

the inability to will oneself out of it are all manifestations of despair. Yet, there is another kind of despair.[124]

This is the despair which manifests as the category of sin. This is despair which willingly refuses to believe in faith to take the option that will liberate us from despair. But what does this mean? This is simply our inability to see ourselves as lovable and beloved, and to be offended at any attempt to be redeemed. This is the deepest kind of despair and manifests as defiance (SUD 49). This despair turns good news into bad news because it refuses to believe it or doesn't want to. "That which really is the occasion for offense is the infinite passion with which eternal happiness is comprehended." (PC 111) But why is this offensive? "The natural man does not have and does not want such a conception of eternal happiness." (PC 111) Throughout the works of Anti and Johannes you will see this idea repeated. Christianity as good news is terrifying to us because it also places a demand upon us. As something possible it leads to anxiety, and as something that demands a response it can lead us further into despair rather than out of it. This can manifest in outright rejection. Another form of rejection though might be mediating the offense to make Christianity easy as in the case of Christendom.

Anti repeatedly quotes Matthew 11, "blessed are they who are not offended by me." In this passage the disciples of John the Baptist come to see Jesus and ask what they should report to John. Jesus says two seemingly contradictory things. First, he speaks of the healing of the sick, blind, deaf, and lame. Then, he pronounces the blessing regarding offense. For Anti, we should think of miraculous healing as good news, yet Jesus knows they will offend the sensibilities of

[124] Anti Climacus actually gives a thorough taxonomy of multiple forms of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*. For my purposes it is not important to elucidate each form. The purpose of the taxonomy for Anti is at least in part to show that every human is in despair whether they admit it or not. If any form of despair rings true to your experience, it is proof that you have always been in despair.

many because they go against the expected order of things. Similarly, Anti Climacus is trying to show that offense isn't solely about rationality, but an unwillingness to accept that love, mercy, and forgiveness of sin could really come from God towards us.

Thus, each individual human lives with the tension of the inherent synthesis between the finite and the infinite and inevitably there is slippage in this synthesis in that they do not live in harmony with one another. The possibility of this slippage is what allows for freedom, but as we have seen it also gives rise to anxiety. For Haufniensis, anxiety is the presupposition for sin because it is the state of freedom being entangled up within itself and reaching a stalemate.[125] The synthesis of the self then gets entangled, and we dial back on our humanity in despair. At this point it is easy to be carried along by the crowd or sink into the mire of paralysis brought on by infinite possibility. Such a state is also what leads to despair and why despair is a "negativity." (SUD 44) Despair is a kind of willingness to be unwilling to commit to a course of action or to orient oneself towards anything definite. As he says many times, an "unwillingness to be oneself." (SUD 77) Thus, it is a negativity.

Since it is a result of freedom, this means that one is also morally culpable for it because we are the source of it. Thus, despair is something that comes from us and must be overcome by orienting ourselves in faith towards something else. I must be clear here though that the synthesis itself is not bad in and of itself, but the possibility of its going haywire is problematic. The entanglement of the synthesis within itself and disrelationship along this slippage can lead to despair, but the possibility of despai is the key point of how the Christian is aware of the eternal. Thus, despair is essential and even a kind of good or at least points to a kind of good about our

[125] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p49. "Anxiety is neither a category of necessity nor a category of freedom; it is entangled freedom, where freedom is not free in itself but entangled, not by necessity, but in itself."

nature. Another way of thinking of this is Saint Augustine's "happy fall" by which he is grateful even for his sin because it led him to God.

The conditions which make despair a possibility (freedom and the human synthesis) are also what allow us to reach heights other creatures cannot. If death were suffered passively and as necessity as it is by every other creature, then man could not despair because the despair itself (as well as anxiety and sin) would not arise out of his own freedom,[126] but would be imposed on him as by some external force. If the psychical did not go beyond death, then despair would not manifest because death would truly have the final word.[127]

Another way of saying this is that for Climacus and Haufniensis, if death were the final condition of humanity then despair would not be possible. It would be an acceptable end and even to be expected and hoped for as a liberation from anxiety and the possibility of despair. Despair for Anti then is proof of man's existential sickness in relation to what lies on the other side of death. Since man does despair, then "Christianly understood, however, death is by no means the last of all, and, humanly speaking…it is only a minor event within that which is all, an eternal life." (SUD 7) This is because man despairs because death is not the end and what one does in life matters because one cannot escape despair through death. Anxiety is thus heightened because there is no putting off the demands of subjectivity and no guarantee we won't make

[126] CA 155 "If a human being were a beast or an angel, he could not be in anxiety. Because he is a synthesis, he can be in anxiety."

[127] Hong 15-16. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1941. p273. "Despair is the disrelationship in a relation which relates itself to itself. But the synthesis is not the disrelationship, it is merely the possibility, or, in the synthesis is latent the possibility of the disrelationship. If the synthesis were the disrelationship, there would be no such thing as despair, for despair would then be something inherent in human nature as such, that is, it would not be despair, it would be something that befell a man, something he suffered passively, like an illness into which a man falls, or like death which is the lot of all."

wrong decisions. Death might provide some closure if it were the end because possibility would not go on, but for Anti it has eternal significance.

This sickness is not death, but the fact that death is not the end and will not fix the slippage that occurs within one's own self as a synthesis is disturbing.[128] Since despair is the feature of the internal synthesis getting desynchronized, only faith will heal it. This is because faith as the complete rooting out of despair is "[the self] relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it." (SUD 14) Anti here gives us a most puzzling way of expressing that the self comes into synchronization by resting in God and becoming oneself as God sees each self (i.e. as infinitely beloved)[129]. Such gives us the ability to move forward in freedom without paralysis even if we still hold onto the possibility of being wrong.

The opposite of despair is freedom gone right. This could be one way of defining faith for Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's journal entry from around this time echoes a clearer version of this same point: "If a man in relating himself to himself relates himself absolutely to God, there is no despair at all; but at every moment when this is not the case, there is also some despair. Consequently when a man in relating himself to himself absolutely relates himself to God, then all despair is annihilated." (JP 748 VIII B 168) This is an essential point because becoming a Christian then is about bringing the self back into harmony in its relation to itself. That is, part of

[128] For proof here, Kierkegaard turns to Lazarus, who died but then was resurrected yet not fixed. Something further is required.

[129] There are several passages one could point out that relate to this point. "The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air" sermon muses about this. Kierkegaard has a long essay about self-love and external love in the opening section of *Works of Love.* Additionally, one will find this idea as a refrain throughout the upbuilding discourses. Christianity is liberating because it shows us to be more beloved than we think ourselves to be. Such might also be the explanation for the puzzling passage at the end of *The Concept of Anxiety* in which one only finds rest from anxiety and guilt in the Atonement. p162.

becoming a Christian is moving back towards synchronization.[130] This is what the aesthetic and ethical cannot do since they do not concern the self as self, and why they still leave us in despair. One other way of thinking of this is that despair leads us towards existential paralysis, while faith leads us towards existential movement because we are free to move when not tangled up in ourselves.

Since everyone is in despair the key question is how we get out of despair. How does the self come to the point of faith and resting in God? Such a movement is not easy to make, and this is why Kierkegaard obsessed over it. For Kierkegaard and the Climacuses, becoming a Christian is a movement which concerns eternal happiness (CUP 15-17). Thus, it is a move of utmost importance and without which one cannot escape despair. To be in despair is to miss out on eternal happiness, thus it is to lose the eternal. As Kierkegaard remarks in a journal entry from 1848 about the man of immediacy, "…despair means something else entirely, that it means to lose the eternal, not to lose the earthly or anything earthly, that consequently, viewed in the light of truth, he lost infinitely much more." (JP 747 VIII B 154) In a very Pascalian sense, the wager has the highest stakes. Thus, what is needed is to bring someone face to face with this concern. Yet, everyone wants eternal happiness if such a thing is possible and it would be foolish to not desire it.

3.5 Offense

So, why is it not the case that everyone enthusiastically embraces this happiness? For Kierkegaard and the Climacuses, the thing which brings eternal happiness has become an all too familiar part of Danish thinking and culture, but it is a product which has been peddled without

[130] This emphasis on self-hood and synchronization is why many non-theologically minded scholars have found Kierkegaard's ruminations on the self-enlightening even when they are happy to jettison the religious content for its astute psychological insight.

showing the cost or the benefit. Additionally, due to the general decadence and boredom of the age, people have sought entertainment to deal with immediate concerns rather than with eternal happiness. Thus, Anti Climacus wants to remind us how revolutionary the thing which can give us this eternal happiness is. To do so, he needs to remind us that Christianity is offensive to our basic sensibilities. Thus enters the category of offense (*forargelse)*.

It is important to remember that offense is one of the two heads of Cerberus guarding the entryway to faith. So, despair and offense are intimately related to one another. They form a feedback loop out of which one escapes only by coming to faith. In fact, I think Kierkegaard would have been better off speaking of ouroboros rather than Cerberus. (CUP 372) The snake that is consuming its own tail infinitely is closer to the feedback loop of despair and offense. They feed one another and mutually transform into one another.

Although the term "offense" is a special category for the Climacus texts, it denotes something like what it does in ordinary English, "a reaction of disgust or a feeling of insult in the one who is offended."[131] However, there is a slightly stronger connotation to *forargelse* because it involves a kind of shock or scandal. So, it is closer to the way we might feel if someone approached us with an offensive comment or offer than it would be to smell an offensive odor such as a rotting carcass. That is, it inspires a response. The special way in which Anti uses it is meant to describe when one comes face to face with the beliefs and teachings of Christianity. They offend us for numerous reasons.

First, Christianity offends pure rationality. A religion which teaches the infinite becoming finite and taking on human flesh, virgins getting pregnant without a human lover, and the dead being raised back to life goes against basic rationality. Christianity rests in paradoxes and

[131] Sean Anthony Turchin. KRSRR 15.5, p7.

aporiae, and philosophy (particularly modernity) has no use for such things. Christianity is an offense to it, and this is why so many philosophers either rejected or significantly modified Christianity's teachings and claims. Second, it is offensive because it tells us something about ourselves that we do not like. That is, it tells us we are sinners and that we have no hope in bringing about our own redemption or salvation but also that we are beloved even when we feel the depths of guilt and despair.[132] Third, and finally it offends our sensibilities about autonomy because it makes a demand that we change (convert/repent) from what we might want to do or where we might be heading to attain this eternal happiness. Thus, Christianity operates almost solely under the category of offense to those who are in despair. The only question is how one will respond.

However, it isn't only Christianity, but its central figure Christ who is the absolute paradox (PF 47-48). The God-man who became a lowly human is of infinite puzzlement to Kierkegaard. His centrality to Christianity is the biggest paradox of all. How could the infinite eat, sleep, and defecate (something Kierkegaard noticeably spends ample time reflecting upon)? Further, Christ is offensive because of his incognito. The way he comes hidden as a man like any other, whom we are supposed to be contemporaneous with and calls us to follow him away from pride, riches, and success towards the road of suffering and love.[133] We expect God to show up in glory with power and miracles, but instead he comes as a baby in a manger and lives in poverty, squalor, and oppression. Rather than conquering, he is killed by the Roman authorities, and rather than seek revenge after coming back from the dead he forgives everyone.

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[132] We might feel this seems inoffensive, but it is important to remember that we often love when God loves us despite our sin, but are outraged when God loves others despite their sin.
[133] Contemporaneity is also important for subjectivity because it places God directly before you demanding a response. This is why Christianity cannot be a set of teachings or doctrines, otherwise it could be communicated directly.

This is pure offense to rational understanding of what a god should be like. As such, it demands a response, which is an existential weight. Thus, even rejection would be better than lukewarmness on this picture.[134] Johannes gives us a picture of this with the two men at the beginning of the *Postscript*.[135] The person who doesn't acknowledge you or rejects you makes your life easier, but the person who greets you places some kind of demand on you, even if you decide to be the one who ignores or rejects them. If this God-man is the key to eternal happiness and the way out of despair and tells you to come and follow him, then he places an even weightier demand upon you which has to be dealt with. For Anti, our options are either to remain in despair or follow him. Some version of this is what much of Kierkegaard's authorship is trying to bring back to the forefront. Christianity isn't something that can be easily hand waved away, but it had become so because it was relatively commonplace in Danish society. Anti puts this in rather strong language when he says, "it is blasphemy to have a thoughtless veneration for the one whom we must either believe or be offended at." (PC 40) According to Anti then, the God-man presents us with an either/or choice which is also offensive to our sensibilities.

The typical way out of this tension is to mediate ourselves out of it. Such is the frustration of Kierkegaard with the Hegelian heritage which buries a decision concerning eternal happiness under the weight of dialectic mediation. Anti in *Practice in Christianity*[136] lays out example after example of possible strategies of mediating the offense only to argue at the end that, "each individual…is to humble himself under what it means in the strictest sense to be a Christian…" which is, "only through the consciousness of sin." (PC 67-68) Such strategies might include de-

[134] Revelation 3:16
[135] CUP 7 "A passerby who laughs at you does not obligate you to do anything at all; on the contrary, he rather becomes indebted to you…Each one minds his own business without any disturbing or obligating reciprocity. An admirer, however, is not so easily dismissed."
[136] PC 40-59

emphasizing the seriousness of sin or how easy it is to fall into despair. These strategies are psychologically powerful to make us blind to the stark reality that faith presents to us for Anti Climacus. For Anti then, the offense forces us to come to terms with the fact that we are in sin and despair, and whether we desire it or not the God-man is the way out of it.

All intellectualizing of this truth is a kind of treason for Anti. It is mediating the offense which leads us right back to despair. It is being stuck in a kind of existential cul-de-sac. The sleight of hand happens when we use the intellectual and all we know as an excuse not to do anything about it, which then leads us right back to where we started but with a dismissive attitude towards it. This is what Climacus is worried about. At the end of the day, he thinks we are offended not, "because it is so dark and gloomy…because it is so rigorous etc., but it would be best of all to explain that the real reason that men are offended by Christianity is that it is too high, because its goal is not man's goal, because it wants to make man into something so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought." (SUD 83) That is, we truly can't know what we will become in anxiety, so we seek to trade it for an outcome we control even if it is an (eternally) unhappy one in despair.

For Anti, this offense is necessary (PC 97-98) due to its essential functions. First, it brings us up short the way a close brush with danger can interrupt our complacency. That is, like a record scratch it interrupts the typical goings on of day-to-day life and drops an analysis and demand of our life within it. The ball is then in our court as to how we will respond. This halt brings us to a crossroads (PC 81) and we can be offended and double back towards despair, be indifferent which is also despair, and/or we can intellectualize it into a way of remaining as we are which is the defiant despair known by Climacus as sin.

There are all kinds of possible ways of dealing with the offense, but all of them will simply leave us in despair. Thus, offense itself is a kind of despair, but it is a despair where the possibility is to remain as we are or make the move towards faith. Regardless of how we might try to wiggle our way out, Climacus has set the trap carefully that our only choices are faith and everything else which leads to despair. Thus, offense serves an essential function of opening up these possibilities and even making us aware of despair so as to move towards faith (PC 81). As he explains, "the halt is the condition for faith to be able to come into existence: you are halted by the possibility of offense." (PC 39) Faith and despair here are like flip sides of the same coin in relation to faith. Despair is wallowing in the offense at the paradox while faith is resting in it.[137] They are not so far apart and yet existentially in inwardness there is an ocean between them.

One last thing must be said about offense which concerns Kierkegaard's own task as a writer. Since offense is an essential category for faith, it stands to reason that any attempt to soften the offense is directly harming the possibility of faith. This is why Kierkegaard will react so strongly against the Danish church and the intellectual elites of Copenhagen. Even to the point of humiliation, sickness, and death Kierkegaard fought the cultural forces in his day. Sometimes he looked like a fool and other times it seems he truly was one, but understanding the centrality of offense for Kierkegaard's project is a key point in also making sense of his behavior. This is also of note because the category of offense could be said to have been there as early as 1844 with his writing of the *Fragments*, but his debate with the Corsair which humiliated him in the public, didn't begin until 1846 so we should not overinterpret offense as an outflow of his experience with the Corsair.

[137] WL 377, PC 17-18

So, despair and offense work as the two guards to becoming a Christian in faith. First, we must experience and become aware of them. Then, we must not shrink back from the demands of faith to continue on to becoming a Christian. This process is long, laborious, and challenging. It is one that happens inwardly in subjectivity but manifests outwardly in behavior. Thus, it is important to turn now to look at what faith is.

3.6 Faith

Faith (*tro*) is challenging to speak of succinctly for Kierkegaard, as it is ever-present in his works. At its highest is the achievement of becoming a Christian and at its lowest the mere subjective epistemic certainty or approximation about something (e.g. causality). Its importance is mentioned as early as *The Concept of Anxiety.*[138] It is spoken about most in *Fear and Trembling*, however the pseudonym that uses the term the most is Johannes Climacus throughout his two texts.[139] One will find the term even more so littered across the pages of Kierkegaard's journals and unsurprisingly in his sermons, upbuilding discourses, and devotional prayers. The ubiquity of the term means we have to parse its specialized use from his general use.

Like conversion, Kierkegaard initially uses it in conventional ways, but as the authorship proceeds it comes to take on a specialized meaning.[140] It is at its most specific in the works of Anti Climacus as a panacea to despair and offense. There it functions as a kind of albatross as both a cure for the sickness of despair, but also something that causes despair/offense when you don't have it because of its infinite demand. Of the pseudonyms, and Kierkegaard himself, only Anti has achieved the kind of faith that also can say that one has become a Christian, but this doesn't mean that only one who has perfectly become a Christian has faith. Faith is a passion for

[138] See *The Concept of Anxiety* p319. "Faith is victory over the world."
[139] See KRSRR 15.3 p67
[140] See PC 81, "the concept of 'faith' is an altogether distinctively Christian term, so in turn is 'offense' an altogether distinctively Christian term relating to faith."

the possible and the dialectical opposite of the twin Cerberus heads of sin and offense, thus anyone who passionately strives towards maintaining this dialectical tension can have faith.[141]

For an example of what faith looks like, we have already seen under the category of offense. The paradox of Christ incarnate gives us the double movement of faith albeit in a modified sense. Christ's being fully divine and fully human embodies the full eternal being of God and temporal becoming of a man. Thus, the double movement is gaining both the eternal and the temporal at the same time by faith. In the first movement we ascend to the heights of eternal happiness, and in the second we bring it back down to our daily existence.

Such is the miracle of the knight of faith. In this sense, Kierkegaard's view of the double movement of faith and its ideal in the incarnation hearkens back to the classical church dictum: *Ipse siquidem homo factus est, ut nos dii efficeremur* (Accordingly God himself was made man, just so that we could accomplish divinity). But Kierkegaard takes it one step further by also claiming that the individual has received the world again.[142] However, it is important to note that one gains it back in spirit. For the rest of his life after 1848 Kierkegaard will continue to emphasize spirit and the spiritual while downplaying the world and matters of everyday life.

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[141] See KRSRR 15.3 p67

[142] See Johannes de Silentio's tax collector as someone who has made this movement in *Fear and Trembling* p38-40. "The instant I first lay eyes on him, I set him apart at once…"he looks just like a tax collector!" But this is indeed the one. I move a little closer to him, watch the slightest movement to see if it reveals…the infinite…No! He is solid all the way through. His stance? It is vigorous, belongs entirely to finitude…He belongs entirely to the world…Nothing is detectable of that distant and aristocratic nature by which the knight of the infinite is recognized. He finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything, and every time one sees him…he does it with an assiduousness that marks the worldly man who is attached to such things…He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it, and no one ever suspects anything else."

This also bears remarkable similarity to the movement in *Recollection* that the young man undergoes and why he sees Job as his model. This has been discussed in some detail above in the second half of Chapter 2.

Faith transforms despair to hope and joy. The passionate and faithful self has expectancy that eternal happiness is theirs.

But such a thing is not easy. Faith requires not just thinking about the abstract teachings and doctrines of the church. Such a thing is easy to do in Christendom and assent to without much existential concern. No, like the way Johannes de Silentio brings us face to face with the agony of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, Anti Climacus emphasizes our need to have contemporaneity with Christ. This contemporaneity is to skip past all the apologetics of reason and history and the faith built upon that to directly seeing Christ as the apostles did (PC 103). As Anti explains, "If you cannot bear to see this sight in actuality, if you could not go out into the street—and see that it is the god in this dreadful procession and this your condition if you fell down and worshipped him—then you are not essentially Christian." (PC 65) Here he lays out the least sentimental version of personal responsibility before God.

To see Christ as he truly is requires being offended, and then moving past that to faith. This makes a demand on each individual that is purely the inward dynamics of spirit. No objective measures are helpful here because they will achieve something other than faith for Climacus. Part of contemporaneity is that we are just as likely to have been part of the mob calling for the crucifixion of Jesus as we are to have been one of his followers and imitators. Thus, contemporary also presents us with a choice and an opportunity for self-reflection and self-knowledge. Faith sees in Christ the absolute, rather than the rags and suffering of an ancient Mediterranean man. This would be easy to miss, "If the glory had been directly perceptible so that everyone could see it as a matter of course, then it is surely an untruth that Christ abased himself and took on the form of a servant." (PC 65) Christ remains indirect and incognito and so contemporaneity brings us face to face with the same dilemma as his followers and detractors.

Whether we choose to become imitators, admirers, or detractors this is never fully accomplished, but requires continual daily repetition.

Thus, it is important to emphasize that faith, like conversion/becoming a Christian, isn't a single moment where one comes to believe something. It is a daily passionate existence and a walking towards something. "Faith is not a cognitive response to a doctrinal claim, but a passion that must be constantly renewed. Its renewal occurs in the ongoing dialectical struggle the individual has with the possibility of offense. Each time faith conquers offense it maintains victory over worldliness and the vicissitudes of temporality."[143] As Anti Climacus tells us, "Faith conquers the world by conquering at every moment the enemy within one's own inner being, the possibility of offense." (PC 76) On the same note, one is never stuck in one state. One can stop the repetition of being merely an admirer or detractor and move towards faith as a new kind of repetition.

By extension here, the problem of despair is what faith overcomes by conquering offense. It gets us out of the feedback loop of offense and despair. Because faith is a passionate repetition it requires diligence and work. Thus, Kierkegaard will move away from the Lutheran emphasis on faith alone (FSE 15-24). Rather, like Kierkegaard's favorite epistle James, he will argue that the proof of faith is in striving (James 1:12, 22-27). As Anti also makes clear, "Fear and Trembling signify that we are in the process of becoming." (PC 88) Thus, we should not think of attaining faith or conversion as a once and for all achievement, but a continual striving marked by fear and trembling, but importantly not by despair and offense. It is a slow and laborious pace which Anti ends *Practice in Christianity* by praying for all who need it (PC 261-262).

[143] KRSRR 15.3 p69. Also see *The Concept of Anxiety* p319.

Despair and offense are both necessary to get to faith, but they are also the things that might keep one from attaining faith. Thus, they have a dialectical relationship that must be maintained (not exhausted) through willing to keep the tension alive. Mediation cheapens it as Johannes Climacus explains, "Mediation continually releases from the absolute relation to the absolute and lets this exhaust itself in fractional designations, in the same sense as a hundred-dollar bill is only so many ones." (CUP 540) Simply put, mediation takes eternal happiness conceived of as an absolute demand and turns it into a step in a larger process which puts no demand on us.

Since faith is passion, it requires will rather than mere feeling. It is a passionate trust whereas despair is its negation. Thus, in the realm of spirit despair and faith are opposed. This is why despair is the sickness unto death because it keeps us from attaining in passion an absolute relation to the absolute which can attain eternal happiness. That is, despair rejects the possibility of redemption, love, hope, etc., in favor of a kind of confidence one has in an intellectual belief in one's hopelessness. As Anti Climacus tells us, "Salvation is, humanly speaking, utterly impossible; but for God everything is possible! This is the battle of *faith*, battling, madly, if you will, for possibility, because possibility is the only salvation." (SUD 38) Faith is an endless battle to give up what we can know certainly for what we can only have existentially as a possible commitment and concern.

Thus, one final question remains. How are we to make the move from despair to faith? The answer is through repentance. However, repentance isn't a kind of positive activity. No, it is, "a negative movement inwards, not a doing but by oneself letting something happen to oneself." (SLW 476) That is, one comes to the point of willingly surrendering oneself over to faith. As Climacus explains, "Faith is a choice, certainly not direct reception—and the recipient is the one who is disclosed, whether he will believe or be offended." (PC 141) Simply put, faith is the

response we have to offense. Do we double down into despair and offense, or do we allow ourselves to believe?

In this sense, faith is more like opening floodgates to allow waters to go rushing to a previously unoccupied area than it is pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps as an act of will and grit. All talk of faith not being a choice is anathema to Kierkegaard,[144] but it would be an equal but opposite error to assume that faith is something we bring about by an act of pure willing. For him, freedom is not about external circumstances, but about inwardness. For example, as Christ lies beaten and bloodied before Pontius Pilate, he mocks the power of the Roman army. His freedom is manifested in the inability of evil and despair to overcome him even though he manifests no external power or freedom in the way we might expect a Hercules or other heroic character to do.

As Kierkegaard states, "dying to the world is the crisis in which one becomes spirit. For the natural man the most dreadful thing of all is to die; to die to the world is even more dreadful and agonizing, more agonizing than all other human misery and wretchedness…This is what it means to become a Christian according to the New Testament." (JP 4363) Dying to the world is giving up on the concerns and cares of the world as though they were ultimate. Anxiety lies in being crushed by these things, and faith allows us to plot a course once they have been put in their place. The double movement of faith is bringing these things into their eternal significance in an appropriate way. The knight of faith then walks a dialectical tightrope in keeping everything in its place without exhausting the tension.

There is a dialectic between faith, offense, and despair. Repentance keeps us resting in faith, but never exhausts the tension because the possibility of despair and offense are always there.

[144] See PC 160, "He wants to draw the human being to himself, but in order truly to draw him to himself he wants to draw him only as free being to himself, that is, through a choice."

Thus, it requires a daily repetition which is the opposite of recollection. This repetition in faith needs to be daily renewed by repentance[145] which itself is always in tension with offense and despair. This constant dialectic of tension is perhaps best exemplified in *Fear and Trembling's* discussion of Abraham. Abraham proceeds on faith to do the unthinkable in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. Although the biblical text offers little in the way of internal psychology, Johannes de Silentio obsesses over the anguish and dread the entire ordeal must have been. It isn't something merely tragic with some expected good or bad consequence on the other side as contrasted with Jepthah and Agamemnon. No, Abraham proceeds only on what God told him to do. If Abraham is wrong, he is a murderer for killing his only son. He ought to be despised for all time as the most despicable of all if he is wrong. This anxiety would paralyze most people into despair, but Abraham walks the tightrope without giving way to despair or offense. He doesn't try to rationalize it, but simply walks the path to the terrible mountain in faith. He knows only t through faith that in giving Isaac up he will get him back.

Having laid out the essential categories which make up the move of conversion/becoming a Christian, all that is left is to speak about their dialectical connection. There are two analogies I would like to use to represent this connection. The first is climbing a ladder while the second is trudging through a swamp. The ladder, if one likes, represents a vertical ascent from despair to faith. The existence spheres serve as a kind of launch pad. They would exist on a horizontal dimension upon which the ladder can be placed so one can ascend to faith. This picture is of course imperfect, but it gets at the humor implicit in Johannes and Anti's surname. The ascent from despair to faith also captures the dialectical tension, because the heights one climbs to in faith also means that one can fall from the heights. The possibility of a fall means despair is

[145] For further commentary of repentance see CUP p518-525.

never an impossibility. The movement from despair to faith is not linear, but involves peaks and valleys.

This picture of the ladder follows after Louis Mackey's thought.[146] He describes the two Climacuses as two differing vantage points on the same problem of becoming a Christian. Johannes views Christianity from below while Anti views it from above. Both have a sense of what Christianity is and what it demands, but the Johanine perspective is from one who has not attained, while Anti's view is from one who has already ascended and knows fully both in existence and observation what it is to become a Christian. This way of posing the Climacian authorship puts the two Climacuses in direct relation to one another and allows us to see this as one cohesive whole even if the two authors don't agree on everything. Kierkegaard himself lies somewhere on the ladder between the two Climacuses, as not having attained, but also having begun. Thus, these three perspectives together paint the fullest picture of what it is to become a Christian.

There is another benefit to looking at it from this ladder framework. That is, this viewpoint allows us to consider the other pseudonyms who also view Christianity from their various vantage points. Many of the pseudonyms, such as Johannes de Silentio, speak about not having attained faith. De Silentio was under imperative to remain silent about faith. Victor Eremita, that victorious hermit who reminds us that before God, the aesthetic and ethical are always in the wrong has some sense of what Johannes does. I could go on, but the point is that ladder analogy allows for a way of relating the pseudonymous texts dialectically to each other and the question of becoming a Christian.

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[146] Louis Mackey *Kierkegaard a Kind of Poet.* There is no singular citation which encapsulates this. Rather, this is an idea he runs with from about Chapter 5 on in the book as a way to think about the ladder pseudonyms to the earlier pseudonymous work.

The second analogy of traipsing through a swamp is also apt. Think of needing to traverse a swamp while being heavy laden with cargo. If one pauses too long (anxiety), one will sink into the swamp. The further one sinks, the more hopeless it is to get out and the more one will have to resign oneself to the hopelessness of their situation (despair). The annoyances of the swamp (offense) such as the odors, mosquitoes, creatures, and more offend us and inspire us to make a decision either to throw our hands up or trudge onward. Finally, if we want to get out of the swamp to a desirable location, we need to have a bearing which hopes there is a desirable destination on the other side (faith). Faith then gives us an orientation which allows us to rest in not being aimless. This bearing allows us to escape despair, but we are never far from the dangers of the swamp until we make our way our completely when the process of becoming a Christian is complete at the end of our lives. Offense and despair are essential to the process of becoming a Christian then. It is only from the depths of despair that faith becomes a live option, this is the lesson of Johannes and Anti Climacus. Such an analogy is imperfect, but it does paint a picture of the dialectical relation of the move from despair to faith.

The move from despair to faith is there in Kierkegaard's Climacian works. About that, there can be no doubt. However, this must be tempered with the realization (something he even admits in *The Point of View*) that he didn't have this all worked out in the beginning, and it occurred to him as he went along. Although there's nothing particularly suspicious about this, it is worth noting aspects of Kierkegaard's biography coincide with the emphasis on the categories of offense, despair, and faith. Despair comes up very early in Kierkegaard's works and faith is perennially present. However, the category of offense does seem to come much later. In fact, it coincides exactly with his simultaneous battles with the Danish state church and *The Corsair* along with its lackeys. Thus, it is worth noting that Kierkegaard may have been motivated by

biographical events to spiritualize his own internal agonies and isolation. All authors do this of course, and it would be dangerous to read too much into this, but it would be negligent not to acknowledge it.

Conversion then starts with the transition moment of resting in faith by dialectical inversion of offense from despair to faith. Ferreira speaks about the process of conversion as a gestalt switch in which we come to see something a different way via imagination.[147] Ferreira uses conversion, conceived of as a mixture of activity and passivity to highlight the importance of imagination for making the transition to faith. Perhaps this is the case and considered here despair and faith are just flip sides of the coin of offense. Both inspire you to act in a certain way. The way you act rather than what you say is evidence of the inward situation. So, becoming a Christian starts by seeing and orienting oneself correctly considering the experience of offense.

What is needed then to bring the reader face to face with this reality. If Kierkegaard eschewed the term conversion because he wanted to bring people face to face with what it meant to become a Christian, and he rejected the speculative tradition because of its inability to bring about conversion or acknowledge despair, then we have to ask what his strategy was. He sought a particular kind of communication which could become an occasion for the encounter with offense that might inspire someone down the path of faith and becoming a Christian. However, if this is a task for subjectivity, then he needed a method that neither coerced nor relied on his teaching/authority.

Nobody in faith stands on the shoulders of what came before because, "Each generation begins all over again," (FT 122) in regards to faith. This then leaves Kierkegaard with a puzzle or aporia. How do you get someone to will something which they do not currently will? Further,

[147] See Ferreira's *Transforming Vision. P34-36.*

how do you communicate it to them in such a way that it transforms the reader rather than transforming them into a student who has absorbed your teaching? This problem is what I call the aporia of conversion.

Now that we have understood the aporia of conversion, the movement from despair to faith, and the challenge presented to one who desires to bring this about to his audience, we can begin to start speaking about Kierkegaard's strategy. There is no shortage of scholarship on Kierkegaard and irony, however there is not much written on what led Kierkegaard to undertake this strategy apart from its use in the 19th century. Thus, I would like to consider the category of authorial style as a response to the particular problems presented by conversion. I shall now discuss Kierkegaard's use of irony, how it changed throughout his authorship to fit his needs, and how this changed irony was appropriate to the aporia of conversion.

Chapter Four: Transformed Irony: From Socrates to Johannes to Socrates

So now we have established four things. First, Kierkegaard preferred the term becoming a Christian over conversion. Second, the decadence of Danish Christendom in the 19th century didn't require new teaching and knowledge, but rather something that would inspire pathos. Third, Kierkegaard's problem with philosophy was that it emphasized an epistemological solution to ethical/religious/existential problems, but this would not address the problem of despair and inspire the pathos needed to make the change of becoming a Christian. Fourth, becoming a Christian is the inward dialectical movement from despair to faith. Given all of this, we are left to discuss the problem that motivated Kierkegaard's style as author in these remaining two chapters.

Additionally, it is important to understand that since conversion is an existential task for subjectivity that requires pathos and becoming, it then implies becoming something you once were not to become truly who you are. It is a task for inwardness that cannot be done for you by a teacher or with the mere addition of knowledge. We saw in the previous chapter that this is the move from despair to faith through the category of offense. This then leaves Kierkegaard with a problem as author.

The problem is twofold. First, since it requires subjectivity it must be done freely by the subjective individual. So, Kierkegaard cannot get others to convert simply by coercion or authority. Michael Strawser underscores the importance of freedom for subjectivity by simply naming the communication to subjective individuals "the dialectic of freedom," which,

"endeavors to permit readers to relate themselves to the truth freely, without violence or authoritative persuasion."[148] Giving them knowledge or becoming a teacher would then merely reify the problem he wanted to avoid by stripping away subjectivity in favor of some external knowledge or authority. Even if seemingly successful, either approach would lack the pathos that drives inwardness and existential commitment. So, how does he, as author, inspire that pathos without being its source as authority?

Put another way, if his audience already has the pathos required to convert, then he serves no purpose and conversion has already begun. If the pathos is lacking, he has to find some way to stir it up while leaving it entirely up to his audience to have this experience. Put simply, conversion is aporetic in nature in that it leaves the writer with a paradox. If one wants to convert, then there is no need for conversion, and if one doesn't want to convert, how do you get them to willingly do something they don't want to do without coercion?[149]

This problem is doubled when deciding the role authorial communication plays since it is inserting oneself in the communication in some way, but that allows you to fade to the background. Thus, conversion is aporetic in nature, or perhaps paradoxical would be Kierkegaard's preferred term. The paradox of conversion is thus what might help us get a grip on his turning to irony. Put more simply, irony is the form appropriate to the paradox as content. As Arne Grøn puts it, "The form of the thought-project…sets the project itself off: to think

[148] Strawser. *Both/And*. P149.
[149]In K's authorship you see him playing with this at different times. So much attention, to the point of myopia, has been paid to Regina. But, you see his take on seduction, recollection, *maieutia*, Hegelian *aufhebung*, and more. Yet, despite all this he creates his own particular dialectic as solely sufficient for the task. By the end of his life he is convinced this is all guided by Providence. See POV 77. Kierkegaard explains in this entire section the part of Governance in his authorship.

something we cannot think of. The form is paradoxical – due to the project itself."[150] The paradox in this case is also twofold. First, Christianity and the demand it makes upon us as subjective individuals because of the offense it causes to reason is a roadblock. Second, as author this paradox is doubled when one wants one's audience to come to terms with that subjectively on their own decision and willing.

Two intertwined questions now face us then. First, to what extent is irony up to the task of the relationship between communication and conversion and the problems it presents, and the second is nested within the first. The second question is to what extent does Kierkegaardian irony follow Socratic irony? As I shall argue in this chapter, we see throughout his authorship a subtle tweaking of irony to accomplish his own task. A move away from Socratic irony is important especially as Kierkegaard repeatedly declares that he "calmly sticks to Socrates," but only the Socrates whom he is convinced "became a Christian." (POV 54)

So, Kierkegaardian irony represents a metamorphosis of Socratic irony. But this isn't just a question of simple metamorphosis, as though Kierkegaard were merely baptized Socrates in the same way Aquinas is often referred to as baptized Aristotle. No, what is being considered here is whether there is departure or complete reconstruction of Socratic irony because of its inability to accomplish what Kierkegaard wants. Due to its tendency towards negation in conjunction with Kierkegaard's aim of the outcome of conversion, he will need to change his use of Socratic irony and maieutic method. Here again, Strawser is helpful. He explains, "The readers' freedom is inseparable from their responsibility…The point of Kierkegaard's employment of ironic maieutics is not to force readers to notice the truth…but, more modestly, to make them aware of

[150] Grøn, Arne. *Thinking With Kierkegaard*. P287.

their personal responsibility."[151] So mere negation will not cut it if he wants to also emphasize subjective responsibility towards some truth. What Kierkegaard will do to deal with this is to change Socratic irony's self-conception to the point that Socrates is taken up into the dialectic of faith through mastered irony.

In order to address the problem presented by the relationship of communication to conversion, Kierkegaard may have had to move away from merely Socratic maieutia, to a different type of irony that would move him away from the role held solely by Socrates (the ironic teacher) in classical irony to something else (the existential and spiritual goad). Thus, to answer the first question about irony being up to the task of conversion, I first have to answer the question of how much Kierkegaard departs from or changes Socratic irony. In understanding this, we shall see that irony of a particular sort was the only thing up to the dialectical task he had set before himself as an author.

I shall begin by examining Kierkegaard's own discussion of irony in his dissertation, followed by Johannes's discussion in CUP, and then finally I will discuss Kierkegaard's consideration of irony, maieutia, and indirect communication in the POV. In this, we shall see that Kierkegaard's understanding of irony is subtlely tweaked throughout his authorship which causes him to also alter his understanding of Socrates to one who became a Christian.[152] In demonstrating this and thus clarifying Kierkegaardian irony, I shall then be able to return to the appropriateness of irony to the task of communication and conversion.

[151] Strawser, *Both/And*, p149.
[152] I shall organize this into three stages, which are of course as arbitrary as all heuristic devices, but what is important is seeing the transition from Socratic irony to a Christian irony.

4.1 Irony in Kierkegaard's Dissertation

Kierkegaard's initial discussion of irony takes place in his dissertation *The Concept of Irony With Constant Reference to Socrates*. The entire dissertation could in itself be understood as an ironic and humorous work itself meant only to mock the pretentious nature of the academy in Golden Age Denmark.[153] Nonetheless, within it we find several essential features of irony which are important not just in themselves, but also for how Kierkegaard will later depart from them because Socratic irony was unable to accomplish what he had set out for himself as an author.

Let us begin by discussing Kierkegaard's earliest understanding of irony in his dissertation *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*.[154] I should however note something at the outset. What will be discussed here is merely irony as a communicative strategy in written communication. There are at least two other levels at which Kierkegaard deploys irony. First, with his own authorial strategy with is a reduplication of the irony implicit in the speech written on the page. Second, there is a further irony in Kierkegaard's life in which his external and somewhat famous persona in Copenhagen is at odds with the inward life which he only disclosed in his journals and letters to be revealed after his death.[155] I shall focus solely on the level of irony as written communication for the purposes of this project and its reduplication in his authorial style.

Kierkegaard begins his dissertation with a lengthy exploration of different conceptions of Socrates. All of this is in part meant to highlight the first feature of irony. Irony lies in the

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[153] See for instance Roger Poole's discussion of the work in *The Indirect Communication*, or Kirmmse's, or Garff's. Kierkegaard is known to have written and published the work partially to annoy his committee and partially to mock the university system of Copenhagen.
[154] Sometimes Continual is translated rather as Constant.
[155] For perhaps the best book on this, see Roger Poole, *The Indirect Communication*, which elucidates the stages of irony in both Kierkegaard's written work, but also in his day-to-day life in Copenhagen and how that was taken from him by his fallout with the writers of the *Corsair*.

disconnect, contradiction, and even outright opposition between concept and phenomena, between the inward essence and the outward features of something.[156] This is most exemplified in Socrates because "He was not like a philosopher lecturing upon his views…on the contrary, what Socrates said meant something 'other'. The outer and the inner did not form a harmonious unity, for the outer was in opposition to the inner, and only through this refracted angle is he to be apprehended."[157] (CI 50) Here, Kierkegaard is explaining that Socrates is not known by what he says, but rather we must look elsewhere to find his meaning. That is, we have to look at how he interacts with people and how his words may be at odds with who he is and how he related to his interlocutors. Most famously is Socrates claiming to know nothing while continually teaching others how much they don't know.

We can thus immediately understand why Kierkegaard will reject Xenophon's Socrates who possesses no inward existence at all thus doing away with the possibility of irony since nothing of his is hidden. As Kierkegaard explains, "The Socratic approach is first to portray an area inaccessible to human ken; and afterwards to indicate those things which mankind is still able to accomplish…when the mind has come to rest in this security, then suddenly to stir it up again…in order to do this we must not be without irony, for this is what wrests from them their former security. Yet this is exactly what is missing in Xenophon."[158] (CI 57) Xenophon's Socrates has no hidden interior life and remains a straightforward teacher, abolishing the possibility of irony. Kierkegaard's tone throughout his dissertation is playful and irreverent, and it is on full display in his assessment of Xenophon's Socrates. Kierkegaard's is irreverent towards Xenophon at least because all the high concepts hidden beneath Socrates's speech are

[156] "Irony oscillates between the ideal self and the empirical self; the one would make of Socrates a philosopher, the other a Sophist." (CI 158)
[157] Hong p12.
[158] Hong p20.

transformed into bland utilitarian ideas. They are reduced to their most basic empirical realities with nothing lying behind or beneath the idea itself.

Alternatively, the Platonic Socrates who manifests mostly as teacher is also rejected. Kierkegaard goes through each of Plato's works and demonstrates the irony within and why it works against their being understood in the way Plato wants them to be used. For Kierkegaard, the problem is that rather than Socrates who knew nothing and showed how others knew nothing, instead Plato uses the dialog form to demonstrate the unity of thought. (CI 74)[159] So, for Plato the dialog presents an opportunity to pass on a teaching that undergirds Socratic dialogue. The form is meant to allow us to uncover doctrines of recollection, the immortality of the soul, and more. Another way of saying this is that Socratic irony is infinite negativity in that it accomplishes nothing, but Plato's Socrates tries to posit the unity of thought and allows him to do what even the gods had forbidden, to give birth to his thought.

In explaining Socrates's speech in the *Apology*, Kierkegaard makes clear that, "Irony requires sharp oppositions and would completely pale away such stultifying comradeship as argumentation."[160] (CI 124) Such a remark probably has multiple targets. Certainly Xenophon and Plato are indicted here, but it wouldn't be a stretch to include Kierkegaard's teachers, the academy itself, and the Danish intellectuals of his day. All of them were written about rather unflatteringly in his journals at the time. Yet, Socratic irony is so strong that it cannot be done away with completely even if it is subjected to being used as argument. He explains, "irony must have acquired an exceedingly powerful influence over a poetic disposition like that of Plato, so it became exceedingly difficult for him to understand this influence, to reproduce irony in its

[159] Hong p36-37.
[160] Hong p90.

totality."[161] (CI 153) Simply put, although irony was mishandled by the Platonic dialogues, it was not stamped out. In his reproduction of Socrates, he inevitably came under the sway of irony even if he did not understand it. So, despite Plato's handling of Socrates, Socratic irony still appears in the Platonic dialogues. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard rejects both the Xenophonic and Platonic Socrates.

This then only leaves the option of Aristophanes's rather comical and absurd Socrates because at least it gets right the idea of Socrates's very existence as at odds with being a teacher. He explains, "Clouds describe perfectly the completely directionless movement of thought…resemble them, be it noted, not *are* them, for all this is no more than vapour or the obscure, self-moving, infinite possibility of becoming whatever it becomes."[162] (CI 163) The Clouds, the title of Aristophanes's play about Socrates, are to Kierkegaard a perfect description of the way Socratic thought proceeds. It is infinitely free, unchained from any commitments or presuppositions, and unsystematic and directionless. He explains further, "What remains when one allows the various shapes assumed by the clouds to disappear is nebulosity itself, which is an excellent description of the Socratic idea…the essential lies behind the shape."[163] (CI 166) The clouds are also appropriate because they float untethered and without direction.

Similarly, the ironist floats around his topic of discussion but never quite makes contact with it. The ironist is, "extremely lighthearted about the idea, in this respect he is completely free, since for him the absolute is nothingness."[164] (CI 174) The ironist is the master of infinite

[161] Hong p122.
[162] Hong p133. There is the wonderful phrase in the Hongs of "Utterly flabby thought process."
[163] Hong p137.
[164] Hong p145-146.

negativity, never committing to this or that point, but jumping wherever thought goes. Thus, in infinite absolute negativity[165] he is infinite possibility. In infinite possibility he is therefore free.

There is one further reason why Aristophanes is preferred. He contains within his conception whatever is of merit in the other two. (CI 181)[166] He has the empirical realities of Xenophon, but without tempering out the inwardness and contradictions of that portrayal. He also has the idea of Plato, but he conceives of that idea only through immersion in Socrates's own personality. Thus, the idea doesn't lead Socrates, but Socrates himself stumbles upon the idea by considering himself. As Kierkegaard explains, "The individual draws these exertions back into himself, terminates them in himself in personal satisfaction. Such is the standpoint of irony."[167] (CI 183) Thus, irony keeps Socrates forever separated from his idea. This is why he is portrayed as a midwife who is never able to give birth himself. The idea is something he neither controls nor teaches, and if he does, then he is no longer midwife but giving birth to it.

Whatever positive idea might be birthed out of Socrates, it is something that is entirely in the hands of the reader, but does not come from Socrates himself. As Kierkegaard explains,

> There is, to be sure, a deep positivity with much content in this constantly insinuated, at every moment both posited and recalled, negativity as soon as it is allowed to come to itself; but Socrates continually restrained this as a possibility which never became actuality. This conclusion may be reached through an attentive reading of Plato's *Apology*, which is so pregnant in its portrayal of Socratic ignorance that the reader need only be silent and listen when he speaks…When subjectivity with its negative power has broken the spell in which human life reposed under the form of substantiality…The gods flee away taking with them all content, and man is left standing as the form, as that which is to receive content into itself. In the sphere of knowledge such a condition is correctly apprehended as ignorance. (CI 197)[168]

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[165] This is a phrase Kierkegaard adopts from Hegel, and seemingly one of the places where they are in agreement on something.
[166] Hong p153. It is also important to note that Aristophanes is not without critique. Kierkegaard accuses his portrayal of Socrates as slanderous even though it may capture something essential of the spirit of Socrates's irony. Thus, in the end, even Aristophanes is unable to capture the elusive nature of Socratic irony.
[167] Hong p154.
[168] Hong p170-171.

Socrates then represents an infinite negativity in which irony keeps him separate from the idea. He cannot hand it over to us as it were, but only provide a kind of condition for it to show itself. To accomplish these conditions requires a negative dialectic which would seek to deprive the interlocutor (and the reader) of whatever resources they might currently have. Thus, Kierkegaard explains, "He brought the individual under the force of his dialectical vacuum pump, deprived him of the atmospheric air in which he was accustomed to breathe, and abandoned him."[169] (CI 203) That is, Socrates's entire dialectic proceeds by negation.

The way of Socratic negation works this way. First, he strips himself of all knowledge by being one who stands in ignorance, and by the end of each encounter he has shown his interlocutors to be no better off than him.[170] Thus, Socrates did not "aim to establish a systematic philosophy. Socrates supplied a new direction…He approached every man individually in order to assure himself that he was correctly orientated."[171] (CI 199) Socrates then became the one who was absolutely subjective because he emptied himself of all possible external influence and in turn provided the conditions for others to experience the same. This subjectivity then represents itself in absolute freedom. But there is a limit to this, which Johannes Climacus later highlights in the *Fragments*. Only the God could then teach us anything, so infinite negativity gets us nowhere. Michael Strawser summarizes this nicely in *Both/And* when he states, "The God is able to create something out of nothing, whereas the ironist cannot. The ironist establishes nothing; he or she cannot even put forward a thesis."[172] That is, the ironist is completely without any resources to show us what it is to become a Christian. The ironist only has negation in its toolkit

[169] Hong p178.
[170] *Apology* 22e, from *Plato Complete Works*, p22.
[171] Hong p175.
[172] Strawser, *Both/And* p30.

so they will not be able to put forth any idea of their own. If one makes of the ironist a teacher, it is a tragedy then.

What Socrates represents appropriately then is a kind of starting point. "To know that one is ignorant is the beginning of wisdom, but if one knows no more than this it is only a beginning. It is this knowledge which holds Socrates "ironically aloft."[173] (CI 286) This infinite negativity is needed in order to allow the truth to show itself uninhibited by those who would subject it to their own whims. Socrates departs from others by offering no teaching of his own, he only offers his own ignorance (a contradiction in terms to offer something negative). This is the starting point of Socratic irony in which the disconnect between inward and outer is fully present. Had he done otherwise he would be no different than the Sophists, whom he despised.

Kierkegaard explains, "Truth demanded a silence before again lifting up its voice, and it was Socrates who should occasion this silence. Thus, he was exclusively negative."[174] (CI 232) Socrates represents a clearing of the air so that truth could be heard rather than drowned out amongst the din of competing voices. So long as someone had a teaching to offer, or refused to admit to the limits of their thinking, Socrates would show up to put their own ignorance and limits on display. This gives rise to that annoying, and somewhat ridiculous figure, of Socrates who never ceases to question even seemingly obvious things. Such questioning is the negativity which represents the freedom of Socrates since he is beholden to no one and no teaching. "What we see in Socrates is the infinitely exhuberant freedom of subjectivity, that is, irony."[175] (CI 233) It is also true that in Socrates, "Irony is the incitement to subjectivity."[176] (CI 234) This is

[173] Hong p169.
[174] Hong p210.
[175] Hong p211.
[176] Hong p211.

because when Socrates takes everything away from his interlocutor, he forces them to reckon with their own subjectivity without appealing to any external resources.[177]

Kierkegaard will then turn to say that although Socrates is of world-historical importance—in Hegel's sense as a teacher who moved forward the cause of spirit—his irony sweeps away every such importance. This sweeping away shields Socrates from being a purveyor of systematic teaching and destroys his world-historical importance because it stalls out rather than furthers the cause of spirit. In this, Kierkegaard offers a double assault both on Hegel and his Danish disciples. Even further, Kierkegaard argues that Socratic irony "finally swept away even Socrates himself."[178] (CI 240) That is, there is a way in which Socratic irony keeps Socrates always at a distance from us and makes it nearly impossible to say anything definite about him at all. Kierkegaard's own dissertation would then perhaps be an indictment against itself and this too is ironic. The infinite negativity of irony proved to be too much for any meaningful analysis of Socrates. Thus, the entire first half of the dissertation along with contemporary philosophizing about the ironic is thrown under the bus in one fell swoop. It is no wonder then that the dissertation was a cause of controversy amongst Danish academics and further involved the king himself.[179]

Despite sweeping even Socrates himself away, Kierkegaard is not done with irony yet. The question simply changes to "whether the concept of irony is absolutely exhausted in him [Socrates], or whether there are not other forms of appearance which must also be taken into

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[177] This is not unlike Descartes, except doubt has only to do with the epistemological, while irony has to do with the existential. Kierkegaard himself draws this connection. See CI 338/Hone 326.

[178] Hong p218. Here we can see that even Aristophanes is not to be fully trusted. It is not a matter of one historical take versus another, but rather a kind of light touch with relation to the spirit of Socratic irony.

[179] I refer here to Kierkegaard's special petition to the king for permission to publish his dissertation in Danish rather than in the normal Latin or German of his day.

account before we can say that the concept is adequately conceived."[180] (CI 259) Thus, Kierkegaard will discuss different forms of romantic irony in order to discover more about irony. He returns to the most important and basic understanding of irony, "the phenomenon is not the essence, but the opposite of the essence."[181] (CI 264) So, when we say the opposite of what we mean, or when Socrates shows himself to be wise by being ignorant and his would-be teachers show themselves to be ignorant by pretending to be wise. This again is freedom because it means I am free "both in relation to others and in relation to myself,"[182] (CI 265) because there is no direct and necessary relationship in speaking to what is my inward life because I can say something entirely different from who and what I am. Speaking in this way can proceed in any direction when it is not connected directly to my inwardness. Thus, it need not proceed in any particular way or direction and is entirely free to drift like Aristophanes's clouds.

Irony then sets up a dialectical tension. In the opposition of one thing and another, it leaves a riddle behind to be untangled by the subject who stumbles upon such a riddle. Thus, it is up to the one who stumbles upon the riddle of recollection to decide whether they will ignore, believe, or reject it. This encounter with the riddle will be essential for Kierkegaard. He will want to keep dialectical tension alive at all costs and not artificially cut through it for his audience via mediation of concepts. For Kierkegaard, such mediation leads to losing both the phenomenon and the communication because both are shown to be an empty contradiction to be moved beyond. It deflates the importance of some phenomenon and allows it to be moved beyond without ever giving it its due.[183] Kierkegaard thinks that irony lives in this tension and even

[180] Hong p241.
[181] Hong p247.
[182] Hong p248.
[183] Such would not be bad on certain accounts and many philosophers have made their careers off of such deflationary thinking. The issue for Kierkegaard is that what tends to get deflated

delights in mocking the wise through the most simple and foolish human pursuits (CI 268)[184] Here, he is invoking 1 Corinthians 1:27 in which God chooses the foolish things of this world to bring shame to the wise. Thus, it is unsurprising that Hegel would have no patience for irony, an "abomination in his sight,"[185] (CI 282) because it resists mediation through a kind of dialectical gymnastics. It keeps mediation of the concept always slightly out of reach in the same way that Socrates remains out of reach of historical glimpses or systematic philosophy.

Yet, for all the discussion of Socrates as the ironic ideal and the beginning point of irony, Kierkegaard will not end his dissertation with the Socratic as the zenith of irony. The Socratic will rather become an inception point to which there are higher levels to aspire towards. Rather than absolute negativity, he wants to show the relationship of irony to the truth. He spends the final and brief chapter of his dissertation arguing in very theologically loaded language for the importance of irony for an authentic human existence. The highest level of irony, that of mastered irony, is about orienting oneself to the truth. (CI 338)[186] He explains, "when irony has first been mastered it undertakes a movement directly opposed to that wherein it proclaimed its life as unmastered."[187] (CI 338) That is, irony continues its contradictory nature in motivating us to move out of ignorance towards the truth by demonstrating what is false from what is true by calling everything into question.

This is not the same as methodical doubt, which he explicitly contrasts it with. This is because "doubt is for philosophy what irony is for the personal life."[188] (CI 338) So, if doubt can

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(particularly by Hegelian philosophy) are those things which are most essential to human life and cannot be so easily moved beyond: faith, morality, love, etc.

[184] Hong p251.
[185] Hong p265.
[186] Hong p326.
[187] Hong p326.
[188] Hong p326.

help us to get our epistemic lives in order, irony shows us the limits of our own personal inward lives. Thus, its lightness lifts us in the opposite direction of our entropy towards despair in its many forms.[189]

Irony can of course seduce us and lead us to infinite negativity, but it need not do so. He states, "if one must warn against irony as a seducer, one must also praise it as a guide."[190] (CI 339) He later will, using the words of Jesus in the gospel of John, state that irony is the way, but not the truth or the life. (CI 340)[191] The way of irony is about discerning what is of actual value. Irony then, is like a tapping of the idols to listen and hear them as hollow. He explains, "a mastered moment exhibits itself in its truth precisely by the fact that it teaches us to actualize actuality."[192] (CI 340) It sorts what is of actual value and truth from that which is merely a possibility in reflection and abstraction. Because of its dialectical freedom and deftness, it is capable of revealing that which is fragile and inauthentic. It gets such things to take off their masks of importance, thus in a certain sense it reveals the inward by trivializing the outward.

Kierkegaard then concludes his dissertation with two odd and underexplored thoughts which will not be taken up again until his later *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. First, after he has spoken of the relationship of truth and mastered irony, he admits that humor goes deeper and further than irony can. Irony may or may not be of eternal significance, and it may or not be able to deal with sin. Yet, humor seems to touch on both of those. Further, humor contains a "much deeper positivity than irony, for it does not move itself in humanistic determinations but in the anthropic determinations; it does not find repose in making man human, but in making man God-

[189] I have done some extended analysis of this in the third chapter. For further understanding, Anti Climacus gives a complete taxonomy of the forms of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*.
[190] Hong p327.
[191] Hong p327.
[192] Hong p327.

Man."[193] (CI 342) Put another way, humor has some positive content, it is not merely infinite negativity. Additionally, humor does not merely make the subjective existence of the human more authentically human, rather it deifies him. It makes man a God-Man. Such language perhaps invokes the incarnation, but also the process by which an individual transcends the despair they are mired in due to sin. He says no more on this claiming it "lies outside the limits of this investigation."[194] (CI 342) His dissertation was, "as it turned out, far from his last word on the subject…the subject recurs as a topic of discussion throughout his authorship."[195] He picks this discussion back up in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* which I shall discuss below.

There is one other point here that is essential for understanding irony. Although Kierkegaard goes to great lengths to discuss irony in terms of written communication, we should not miss the language of orientation that he constantly uses.[196] Irony is as much about where and how one stands as it is about its content. Irony requires a light touch, a hovering above the thing. It is orienting oneself towards the other in a certain distance and in a relationship that is often ambiguous but open to the new. I draw attention to these, and there are many more statements like this, because it is indicative of the centrality of love for the later Kierkegaard. Love itself also primarily manifests as an orientation to God, the world, and the neighbor rather than its being filled with certain kinds of conceptual content. This again reminds us that for Kierkegaard our problems will not be solved by epistemology, but rather require a pathos filled reorientation

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[193] Hong p329.
[194] Hong p329.
[195] Cross, Andrew. Neither either nor or: The perils of reflexive irony. In *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard. p125*
[196] I would also like to briefly draw attention to the way that irony is equated with air. It floats, drifts, remains aloof, hovers, and more. To practice irony is to be like an acrobat or gymnast requiring deftness and acuity. All of this language gives us a picture of Kierkegaard's own authorship as slightly hovering separately from his work always looking on with a Socratic smile.

towards ourselves, God, the world, and the neighbor. This reorientation is the movement of becoming a Christian. But the question remains of how to get someone to subjectively bridge this gap and make this move.

4.2 Irony and Humor

So why did Kierkegaard end his dissertation by lifting humor up above irony? Andrew Cross provides a nice explanation, "So long as irony is seen as (to use the formula Kierkegaard appropriated from Hegel) 'infinite absolute negativity'— as a purely and unconditionally negative orientation toward all human existence—it is inherently unstable."[197] That is, despite his hedging that irony bears some relationship to the truth and that infinite negativity is only a beginning, Kierkegaard realized very quickly that irony is inherently unstable. It is a kind of communicative napalm likely to engulf everything in its path whether it be good, bad, friend, foe, etc. Not that Kierkegaard wanted more control, but what he wanted was something that could be put to ethical—or better yet edifying—use, yet without encroaching upon the subjectivity of his audience. In his book, *Between Irony and* Witness, Joel Rasmussen points out Kierkegaard's need to distance himself from romantic irony because of this danger. He explains, "Kierkegaard thinks that irony…needs to be recontextualized in terms of a religious life-view. In such recontextualization, irony is mastered by being applied in the service of a higher ethical earnestness, rather than providing mere idle diversions."[198] This ethical earnestness is the purpose, ironically, that humor will better serve for him than mere ironic negation.

Let us first discuss the topography of the ironic in relation to existence Johannes lays out for us towards the very end of the *Postscript.* He explains, "There are three existence-spheres: the

[197] Cross. The Perils of Reflexive Irony in Cambridge Companion p140.
[198] Joel D.S. Rasmussen. *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard's Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love.* P23.

esthetic, the ethical, and the religious. To these there is a respectively corresponding *confinium* [border territory]: irony is the *confinium* between the esthetic and the ethical; humor is the *confinium* between the ethical and the religious." (CUP 502) This word *confinium* is important to understand here. He describes it in *The Concept of Irony* as "a transitional element, a *confinium*, that actually belongs neither to the one nor to the other."[199] (CI 151) Thus it is not part of nor equivalent with any of the stages of existence. As a border territory or borderland it rests between the existence spheres. It is important to recall that there is no direct transition between the spheres, but they can only be crossed via a qualitative leap. That is, one doesn't move from one to the other by simply following along because the transition requires a choice and willful action driven by pathos. Yet, the space between them (*confinium*) is where irony and humor lie.

We have already discussed the infinite negativity of irony, but what is being offered here is a further limit to irony as negation. Irony as negation exists between the aesthetic and the ethical and it serves merely as an incognito for one who has moved to the ethical. For Climacus, Irony exists as the incognito of the ethical stage because "he comprehends the contradiction between the mode in which he exists in his inner being and his not expressing it in his outer appearance." (CUP 504) That is, it is the means by which the ethicist hides inwardness through outward appearances and discussions.

The incognito of irony in this case is that there is a disconnect between the inward and outward appearance. The inward is oriented towards the infinite demands of the ethical life, while the outward is directed towards the finite and changing circumstances of day to day life which can appear aimless or detached in an aesthetic sense. This is in itself somewhat tragic because the ethicist cannot bring the ethical and the aesthetic together except by excusing

[199] Hong p121.

himself from the concerns of finite existence. Climacus explains, "Now the comedy starts, because people's opinion of a person like that will always be: for him, nothing is important." (CUP 505) That is, his commitment to the ethical will make it seem as though he is completely detached from daily concerns because of his commitment to an ethical ideal.

Here, we have a picture of something that sounds a lot like the Socrates of *The Clouds* even though there is an ethical commitment. For example, Judge Wilhelm's own detachment as regards marriage can seem as though (channeling Kant) marriage is great to the extent that one removes all aspects about it that make it enjoyable and focuses solely upon one's ethical obligations and commitments. Although he is ethically committed to the ideal of marriage and the demands it makes upon one, he tends very little to his own relationship with his spouse.[200] There is a comedic tragedy in this, and Willhelm lies without resource to unite his pathos driven love for his spouse with the infinite ethical demand placed upon him, so he chooses to appear detached. This is what Johannes sees as the comedic tragedy of irony as the incognito of the ethical. He thinks it covers over a gap between the ethical and its ideal which masks a tragic and comedic element. So, the higher will be humor which is without the tragic element of irony.

Similar to irony being the incognito of the ethical man, so is humor the incognito of the religious in its border with the ethical. However, it is a different kind of incognito than the ironist. Rather than tragic comedy, it is simply comic in nature. The incognito of the religious is that the religious person does what the ethicist cannot. He, "joins the conception of God together with everything and sees the contradiction, but in his innermost being he relates himself to

[200] Sharon Krishek captures this idea in *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, p42. "The Judge's self-deluded view blinds him to the possibility of loss. His depiction of love is too perfect, too brightly clear—but love is not like that. Love involves pain, and sacrifices, and anxieties. Love can be dark and complicated, and it definitely does not amount to only sheer joy: it hurts to love. Those aspects of love (not to mention its demons) are completely absent in the Judge's account of love."

God…[he] is the unity of absolute religious passion (inwardly deepened dialectically) and spiritual maturity." (CUP 506) That is, the religious person in humor is capable of uniting the inward and the external in such a way that they are not separate.

The religious person is able to hold onto both while keeping hidden the inward nature of his religious commitment. He "does not dare to express it in the outer world, because it is thereby secularized, he must continually discover the contradiction." (CUP 508) That is, the religious person sees the contradiction and lives in the dialectical tension as a form of comedy, but he will not let go of the concerns of daily life. "The religious does not dare ignore what occupies people's loves so very much, what continually comes up again every day in conversations." (CUP 513) Unlike the ethical, it doesn't take inwardness as permission to absent oneself from daily existence. It unites the two and it delights in their contradiction, or at least in the tension between them because they pull him in opposite directions. To communicate this to another would in itself sound comedic because of the seeming absurdity of it. It is this humor that is always its incognito and this is how existence is for Kirkegaard as a tension which manifests absurdity. To the onlooker, such a person will not appear detached as Judge Wilhelm. Rather, they will, like the Tax Collector in *Fear and Trembling*, appear caught up in daily existence to the extent that it would seem insane that there could be the eternal showing in their every concern. Nonetheless, the relation between the inward and outward rests in a paradoxical contradiction, and this is what makes it comedic. However, it differs from the religious in that it, like Johannes, cannot fully attain the goal that it can see.

So, what is the difference between the tragic and the comic? According to Johannes Climacus (via Aristotle), both are always present. He explains:

> The tragic and the comic are the same inasmuch as both are contradiction, but *the tragic is suffering contradiction, and the comic is painless contradiction...*The difference between the tragic and the comic consists in the relation of the contradiction to the idea. The comic interpretation produces the contradiction

> or allows it to become apparent by having *in mente* [in mind] the way out; therefore the contradiction is painless. The tragic interpretation sees the contradiction and despairs over the way out. (CUP 514-516)

That is the comic has within it the resources to live in the dialectical tension of the contradiction, whereas the tragic sinks into despair because it is paralyzed from its inability to deal with the contradiction inherent in its existence and sees no way out. But why?

Consider an example. Let us take a recent trend in which people are revisiting the much-reviled bands Creed and Nickelback and professing that they secretly loved them in their heyday even though it was gauche to admit. However, to like them ironically would be to do so for the sake of a trend without being able to appreciate the music or the bands themselves. Ironically liking it would be tragic because one would be liking them purely for aesthetic reasons having to do with going against the grain of society. There would be no way to deal with the absurdity of liking such bands other than in the fleeting joy one gets in standing athwart the crowd.

Alternatively, to like them and find it humorous is to live in the tension of knowing these bands are as close as is possible to being objectively awful but being able to enjoy them anyway. One delights in the absurdity because one sees the absurdity for what it is and is able to rest in the tension rather than being alienated and afflicted by it. Such a position is humorous to the outsider and the person themselves, but we all have these aspects of our existence. Food connoisseurs still like blue box Mac n Cheese and fast food hamburgers. Film critics also love mindless summer blockbusters and movies made for children. More examples can be found which are themselves absurd and humorous, but also understandable. To like such things ironically is tragic because it betrays mere negativity, it is merely resistance and instability living at odds with oneself. But humor allows us to acknowledge the absurdity of it all with a shrug and live in the tension and even enjoy it. Any attempt to explain it would result in comedy, and thus it becomes a kind of incognito for the self which cannot be explained to another self precisely.

The comic is thus what it is that allows one to hold these two things together in existence with some sort of stability. The comic then has a light touch, but is not completely aloof or infinitely negative like the Socrates of *The Clouds*.

Andrew Cross explains this well, "In this way, Climacus's ironist is able to achieve the transcendence of immediacy that Kierkegaard's ironist [from his dissertation] can only vainly struggle toward. Since he 'sees the way out' and knows that this way out is an option of which he can avail himself at any moment, his immediate existence, even his existence *qua* ironist, is seen by him, not as a set of inescapable constraints but as a home in which he chooses to dwell."[201] Put another way, the ironist of Climacus is more free and more subjective than the ironist of Kierkegaard's dissertation precisely because he rests even more in the dialectical tension rather than always being at risk of exhausting the tension due to its instability as infinite negativity. That is, Kierkegaard's ironist could always exhaust the tension by ignoring some aspect of existence or exposing some fatal flaw which mediates all tension out of the dialectic, whereas Climacus's ironist continually holds the two in tension and renews them at every moment knowing that he is not subject to the entropy of negativity.

In this way the ironist is tragically alienated from himself while the comedic ironist rests in this tension. The negative ironist, in his negation of everything could also negate the entire dialectic itself leaving only despair because there would be nothing left for him to relate to. The humorous ironist, on the other hand, sees everything for what it is and delights in the dialectic as it is without trying to force it to be something else. Although it appears comedic, he is in on the joke and does not succumb to despair. He sees the absurdity of the tension and delights in it with a wry smile and perhaps even a shrug. He knows he could exhaust the tension but refuses to, and

[201] Cross. The Perils of Reflexive Irony in Cambridge Companion p140.

even this possibility is humorous, but instead he holds the whole thing with a light touch like Socrates of *The Clouds*. But unlike Socrates of *The Clouds*, his seeing the way out is knowing that his commitments need not be infinitely negative. So, he opens up and sees the possibility of being passionately driven towards that which concerns eternal happiness and keeps the dialectical tension alive in this pursuit.

The humorist then sees neither an enemy in himself, God, nor the world because there is no competition there. He can laugh heartily at all of them and sees none of them as a threat to his own subjectivity so long as the right amount of detachment towards his subject matter is held to. Bringing back the language of orientation, he is oriented appropriately to his subjectivity. To use the language of Anti Climacus, his self has learned to relate to itself without despair. So, we now see that Kierkegaard has tweaked irony to move beyond Socratic irony. However, the movement is not done yet. There is one further stage I wish to discuss to which we shall now turn.

4.3 Socrates Became a Christian

It is now important to think of the third way that irony is conceived in Kierkegaard's authorship. We have seen how irony was first thought of as Socratic infinite negativity. However, because of the instability of this and its tendency towards despair he modified it both at the end of his dissertation and again under Johannes Climacus to prefer humorous irony over infinite negativity. This is certainly not the end of the story. Although Socrates and Socratic irony became the target of Johannes in the *Fragments* and *Postscript,* Socratic irony returns in *The Point of View*. Thus, although humor is higher than negative irony, there is an even better form of communication in which Socrates is brought back to the fore.

As a clue, I shall begin with a passage from *The Two Ages* in the Present Age section. He states, "Now humor, if it is to do a little good and not cause immeasurable harm, must be firmly

based upon a consistent ethical view of life…otherwise the cure will be infinitely worse than the disease…What, indeed, indeed is there for an age of reflection and thought to defy with humor?…But even if the vulgar laugh, life only mocks at the wit which knows no values. To be witty without possessing the riches of inwardness is like squandering money upon luxuries and dispensing with necessities."[202] (PA 11) The idea here is that humor in itself could potentially experience the same pitfalls of irony were it to be incorrectly oriented. Like unmastered irony, unmastered humor[203] will leave one jaded and subject to the entropy of despair. Put in the language of Climacus, seeing the way out and orienting oneself appropriately doesn't guarantee one will make the right decision, that is it still may not lead to conversion and may revert back to despair. Or to put it in the terms of *confinium*, one might be tempted to revert to the lower rather than the higher side of irony. Humor could become a coping mechanism which one uses to insulate oneself from taking seriously one's duties. Or put another way in the language of Andrew Cross, one could "see the way out," but still choose not to take it. Such is the comedic tragedy of Johannes himself. Kierkegaard throughout his authorship strove to find a method that would be appropriate to conversion and so he needs to account for this possibility. Thus, by the end of his authorship he takes both humor and Socratic irony up into his religious communication in order to free it from the inertia towards despair.

In the unpublished parts of *The Point of View* he has this puzzling statement, "I calmly stick to Socrates. True, he was no Christian, that I know, although I also definitely remain convinced that he has become one. But he was a dialectician and understood everything in reflection."

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[202] Hong edition of *Two Ages* p74. I have chosen the Dru translation here because I think his language more powerfully gets across the point.
[203] Unmastered humor, as I shall call it, is the idea of wielding humor in an infinitely negative way. It is using humor as a means to make a mockery of everything and distance oneself from any responsibility or commitment. This is why he thinks humor can do immeasurable harm.

(POV 54) What could such a strange proclamation mean? Setting aside the obvious historical problems of Socrates dying half a millennium before Christianity existed, it remains a problem how Socrates could have become a Christian given his understanding of Socrates as infinitely negative. In fact, Kierkegaard remarks about this in a journal entry from 1850 (about a year before the above passage would have been written):

> Socrates did not have the true ideal, neither the conception of sin nor that the salvation of man requires a crucified god. The watchword of his life therefore could never be: The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Therefore he maintained irony, which expresses only his elevation over the world's shabbiness. But for a Christian irony is insufficient; it can never come up to the dreadful fact that salvation means God crucified, although for a time irony can be used in Christendom for awakening. (JP 4279 X A 253)

Kierkegaard himself seems to think there is some distance between Socrates and Christianity even though he acknowledges its usefulness for awakening people to the demands of Christianity. I think this gives us some clue about how Kierkegaard will come to say Socrates became a Christian. Like conversion itself, the move will be dialectical. That is, if Socrates undertook the dialectical move from despair to faith, it would mean we need to change the initial understanding of Socratic irony offered in his dissertation.

That is, in saying Socrates became a Christian, Kierkegaard is noting something about mastered irony. There is something about irony which necessarily leads one to a paradoxical relationship with the truth, and into the dialectic of faith. That is, it would hint that irony and conversion have some kind of dialectical relationship just as despair and faith do. Irony and conversion are somehow linked, and must be kept in tension with one another without one absorbing the other into itself. I think we can see this is the case by how Kierkegaard reflects on his own authorship.

Further, Kierkegaard will begin to change his tone from 1850 onwards as he becomes increasingly disgusted with Christendom in his day. In 1852, he remarks that the Socratic has a

"developed philosophy of inversion,"[204] (JP 4289 X A 490) which itself is a key move perfected in Christianity. Kierkegaard will also remark in 1853, shortly before the public *Attack on Christendom*, is begun that Socrates is more Christian than Bernard of Clairvaux because he sought "to split up the crowd and to seek the single individual." (JP 4295 X A 133) Continuing along a similar line, Kierkegaard argues that Socrates is greater than all the Christian philosophers because they rely on numbers and authority, whereas Socrates speaks only to the individual. Kierkegaard then compares St Augustine to Socrates, stating that Socrates is superior as a philosopher because he refused to address anyone other than the individual.[205] (JP 4299 XI A 371)

Finally, shortly before his death Kierkegaard reflects on Socrates and poetry. He explains that Socrates unites existence and understanding in a way that nobody else could. He especially calls out the limits of the Socratic in Johannes. He states, "The poet…finds himself in the same situation as the orator Johannes Climacus tells about, who at the climax of his address confuses the direction and ascends from the higher to the lower, the poet pulls Socrates down." (JP 4301 XI A 430) That is, the poets problem is that they move backwards dialectically. Rather than the move from despair to faith, they hover in between and are still stuck in the entropy of despair.[206] He does this by "eliminating the separation between poetry and actuality." (JP 4301 XI A 430) So, Socrates puts actuality front and center and through mastered irony does not allow us to

[204] Notably playing with the language of orientation and also the etymology of repentance and conversion which both have to do with turning around/turning over.
[205] As an aside, Augustine may have agreed with Kierkegaard here to some extent. Augustine has no love for the now named Neo-Platonists, but does have a certain deference for Socrates and Plato.
[206] This should again remind us that Johannes Climacus is merely a ladder to be ascended beyond as explained in chapter 3. Johannes shows us what it is to become a Christian, but he himself cannot do it neither can he get us there. Only Socrates shows us a way forward of what it looks like to have become a Christian.

abstract away. Kierkegaard remarks that Socrates is the only one to have accomplished this outside of Christianity. According to Kierkegaard then, outside of Christianity only Socrates puts before us our own subjective responsibility. These points all give us some hints about what is meant by Socrates becoming a Christian, but what is it about emphasizing actuality and attending to the single individual that is so important?

Kierkegaard will explain further in *The Point of View*. He remarks that irony is "unconditionally unsocial." (POV 64) This is because irony cannot be understood by the crowd. If irony leaves each reader with a particular puzzle to solve by themselves, then it is something which cannot happen dialectically between a crowd and an author.[207] Thus, something about irony is fundamentally subjective in its very essence. So, if Kierkegaard wanted to address the individuals in the crowd, he needed to address them one by one subjectively where they are at rather than calling to them *en masse* with a general world-historical/ethical teaching.

As he explains, "If the crowd is the evil, if it is chaos that threatens, there is rescue in one thing only, in becoming the single individual." (POV 69) This category, the single individual, may be "regarded as eccentric and the invention of eccentricity, which it indeed was, for was not the person who in one sense was its inventor, Socrates, at the time called ατοπωτατοσ (the most eccentric of men)." (POV 68) That is, although Kierkegaard's authorship may be seen as eccentric and maybe excessively calculated, he felt this was necessary and again feels that he does no more than Socrates himself would have done. Socrates was a master of this and it brought him closer to the achievement of Christianity. This helps us understand why Kierkegaard would declare that Socrates became a Christian. But why offer such a dialectical knot rather than

[207] With the exception that the author can call the individual out of the crowd.

a clear communication? We already have some answer in the preceding chapters. Christendom provided such a massive roadblock to subjectivity that he could not do so.

If people worry that Kierkegaard's overly complicated way of writing is somehow obfuscatory to any religious purposes it might have served, he again has an answer. He states:

> He [Jesus] will see that the irony consisted in just this, that in this esthetic author and under this *Erscheinung* [appearance] of worldliness the religious author concealed himself, a religious author who at that very time and for his own upbuilding perhaps consumed as much religiousness as a whole household ordinarily does…For the essential ironist there is nothing else to do in an ironic age but to turn the whole relation around and himself become the object of the irony of everyone." (POV 70)

That is, rather than vanity, the whole project is about taking the contradictions of negative irony and reflecting back at them an irony that leads towards upbuilding. This is what was appropriate for the age. In this again he sees himself as only following the example of Socrates in his mastering of irony. Such outward looking concern is itself ironic because one serves another by focusing upon one's own subjectivity. But how did Socrates become a Christian?

Kierkegaard remains convinced that Socrates became a Christian because he is convinced that Socrates, in his own ironic movement, became a Christian in reflecting this same dialectical movement from despair to faith as outlined in Chapter 3. The dialectical move away from despair towards faith through irony (which can be another kind of offense since it brings us to a halt) and turning that same dialectic back towards his age is what made Socrates become a Christian. Socrates had learned to relate as a self to himself in faith rather than in despair. He was able to do this through mastered irony which took him beyond mere negativity and its instability to the humorous Socrates of *The Clouds*. Perhaps then Kierkegaard is convinced he became a Christian because there is a necessary connection between mastered irony and the paradox which faith represents. According to Carl S. Hughes, mastered irony is marked by "an ultimate loss of

control."[208] This is because it reorients our thinking away from ourselves towards the good of the other. This is a manifestation of mastered irony as faith which "rests transparently in the power that established it." (SUD 14) Thus, Socrates is not Christian, but he became one. (POV 54)

This is important because it displays a completion of the process of becoming, but only at the very end of his life. Socrates wasn't in the process of becoming a Christian, but rather became one. In Socrates you have the full display of mastered irony and the move from despair to faith. Thus, Socrates became a Christian is Kierkegaard retrospectively applying the dialectic of faith backwards to Socrates own mastered irony. That is, Socrates didn't become a Christian by converting to Christianity, but rather in his mastering of irony which freed him from the inertia towards despair, Socrates displayed the utmost faith in subjectivity and in the ability to pull the individual out of the crowd. In doing so, he neither succumbed to despair nor avoided it while displaying faith, which is why he became a Christian. Thus, there is something necessary in the relationship between mastered irony and freedom from despair.

So, we have seen three different understandings of irony. The movement is as follows. First, negativity, then humor, then Socratic irony is returned in a new and mastered form as an essential ingredient in what it means to become a Christian. Thus, whatever existence communication must be done, it must be done in such a way that avoids infinite negativity and instead is capable of bringing the person to reckon with the demands placed upon him by faith. Such mastered irony will become the strategy that Kierkegaard himself sought to apply in his own authorship as the strategy to accomplish his task as an author in Christendom. To this we shall now turn for the final chapter.

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[208] Carl S. Hughes, *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Rhetoric and Performance in a Theology of Eros*. p188.

Chapter Five: The Risk of Irony: Irony and Conversion

We have several pieces at play and I shall now tie them all together. We have seen that Kierkegaard wanted to bring Danish Christendom face to face with its responsibility to Christianity. He wanted to move them out of Christendom by means of trying to let them have an encounter with what is demanded of them each as subjective individuals who are called out of the crowd. His goal was to get them to come to terms with what was demanded in the process of becoming a Christian, which is the process of conversion. However, as we saw in chapter 2, Kierkegaard did not merely want to become a teacher. If he were simply one who was teaching or getting them to focus on some kind of knowledge, then he would simply recreate the problem he sought to avoid by becoming a teacher.

So, he wanted instead to inspire pathos in the way that the arts do, but while still essentially being a philosopher and religious thinker.[209] The arts often inspire us to pathos, but sometimes in an undirected way. Kierkegaard's use of irony is to try to be more directed without overplaying his hand. Thus, he sought an incognito way of doing things. In chapter 3 we saw that becoming a Christian was the dialectical move from despair to faith through our response to the experience of offense. Offense is one of the goads to action, and inspires a kind of pathos which makes one either move to faith or double back into despair. This left us with the puzzle of how as an author Kierkegaard could accomplish his goals of the conversion of his audience without becoming a teacher, or worse coercing them against their will. This puzzle I took as some clue to why he

[209] This is why Louis Mackey's "A Kind of Poet," is such a wonderful title for Kierkegaard.

turned to irony and how he had to tweak his understanding of irony in order to accomplish his goals as an author. Now, we are finally in a position to discuss precisely why irony is appropriate for the author with the goal of the conversion of his audience.

I shall begin by discussing Kierkegaard's own authorial strategy as he lays it out in portions of the *Postscript* and *The Point of View*. Then I shall tie the points made in previous chapters together to show how irony and conversion are linked in Kierkegaard's authorial strategy. Altogether, I shall argue that Kierkegaardian irony was developed because of its appropriateness for his authorial strategy and the problem presented by conversion.

5.1 His Strategy and His Task

It is important to distinguish here Kierkegaard's task from Kierkegaard's strategy. His task was to shake a sleepy Christendom awake to the demand staring right at it. However, this is distinct from his strategy. His strategy involves how he went about this in his authorship in order to accomplish his goals. There are two major places where Kierkegaard reflects on his authorship. First, throughout the pages of the *Postscript* and second in the *Point of View*. In chapter one we spoke about Kierkegaard's task, now I shall turn to discussing his strategy throughout those two major places.

Just before his glance at recent Danish literature in the *Postscript*, Johannes explains the task strategy of his authorship as indirect of necessity. He explains, "Thus I had fully realized that every direct communication with regard to truth as inwardness is a misunderstanding…" (CUP 249) The "thus" refers to the impossibility of making the inward known in any meaningful way, of which Socrates is the quintessential example. His inwardness is always obscured and hidden by his outward actions and speech. Maurice Blanchot puts this nicely in relation to Kierkegaard's authorship: "Without ceasing to speak of himself and to reflect on the events of his existence,

Kierkegaard is determined not to say anything important about it…He explains himself and he veils himself. He exposes himself and protects himself."[210] As we saw last chapter, this disconnect manifests an ironic tension which keeps the communicator always slightly aloof from any intended receiver of that communication.

So, Johannes would be unable to communicate directly that which the whole *Postscript* and *Fragments* are about, namely the subjective truth of Christianity and the demand it makes on each individual as individual. So, his method will be indirect-ironic. However, just because he has discovered the appropriate form for his authorship, doesn't mean he has yet achieved it. As he continues, "But just because I had become clear about the form of communication, it did not mean that I had something to communicate, although it was nevertheless entirely in order that the form first became clear to me, because the form is indeed the inwardness." (CUP 249) That is, he had to become clear on the form before he could come up with the strategy of how to put the form of his communication into practice.

He then explains to us a two-stage process of his authorship retro-engineered from the current state of things. Not only have people forgotten what it means to "exist religiously," but also this is a byproduct of their having forgotten what it means to "exist humanly," (CUP 249) which is that they have forgotten how to exist as subjective individuals. The problem he faced then was to communicate this without becoming a teacher, because, "if this is communicated as knowledge, the recipient is mistakenly induced to understand that he is gaining something to know, and then we are back in knowledge again." (CUP 249) That is, if he communicates it directly and it is assimilated as knowledge, it can bring one right back into speculative reflection, safe from making any demands upon my individuality simply because I have thought about it.

[210] Blanchot. *Faux Pas*, p18.

So, no response or action would be required, or at the very least no demand would be placed upon me by receiving this teaching. This communication then falls flat and the inward remains uncommunicated to altogether for Kierkegaard.

The issue is that Christianity's relation to the truth doesn't work like other propositional truths. Propositional truths, once discovered, can be immediately transmitted and learned by the next person to "move beyond." Anti was outraged at the thought of this. He exclaims, "One sees what a monstrous mistake it is, almost the greatest possible, to didacticize Christianity…through this continual didacticizing…now all the expressions are formed according to the idea that truth is cognition, knowledge…whereas in original Christianity all the expressions were formed according to the view that truth is a being." (PC 206) Anti goes on to say, "Here [where truth is knowledge] the way is significantly shortened for the successor; the pupil is always above the master…Not so where the truth is being, is *the way*...here no essential shortening can possibly take place from generation to generation." (PC 208-9)

The amount of time it took to discover truth according to the way of knowledge is entirely accidental/contingent and thus the necessity of knowing it is unrelated to the work and time. But for Christianity, it is the opposite according to Anti. We do not stand on the shoulders of others in our relation to Christ, who is the truth, the way (using the words of John 14:6). We only know Christ as being the truth, not as a bit of cognitive content. Those who go looking for this will miss Christ entirely, just as Pilate did when the truth stood before him and he asked "What is truth?" In fact, Johannes remarks that "the modern age, which has modernized Christianity, has also modernized Pilate's question." (CUP 195) It has done so precisely by making Christianity a matter of didactics. It has compared it to a scientific endeavor or mathematics which would make it another piece of knowledge expected of someone to get by in Danish intellectual circles, but

not worth building one's existence around.[211] As Louis Mackey explains, "Human existence has a unity, but it is not the unity of logic, and for that reason 'what it means to exist' cannot be said in the language of a world-view conceived and expressed in syllogistic terms."[212]

The issue here then is that the Kierkegaardian authorship wants to avoid didacticizing in a different direction and thus reifying the problem he wants to combat. He, through Johannes, is seeking to make an intervention rather than to give his audience another crumb of trivia, and "An intervention is accomplished only when what one person does will place another under obligation to do something." (CUP 6) Similar to an alcoholic, who may know they are an alcoholic, an intervention involves placing them under obligation to make a decision about going to rehab or remaining as they are and losing everything. Either way, they cannot continue as they were. Here, the either/or is clear, and for Kierkegaard an author must provide someone with that choice rather than the answer to that choice.

This aim at intervention is not merely the goal of Johannes, but of Kierkegaard's whole authorship. He will later reflect on this in the *Point of View*, "My entire work as an author revolves around: becoming a Christian in Christendom. And the expression for Governance's part in the authorship is this: that the author is himself the one who in this way has been brought up, but with a consciousness of it from the very beginning." (POV 90) That is, Kierkegaard's task throughout his authorship remained consistent. He did not have it worked out from the very beginning,[213] but merely had a consciousness of the task and strategy before him. The rest he left

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[211] This also helps us understand why Johannes and Kierkegaard are so hard on apologetics. Apologetics merely furthers the agenda of submitting existence to scientific endeavor, thus cheapening it and making it submit to a standard it ought not be required to meet.
[212] Mackey, *Kierkegaard A Kind of Poet*, p261.
[213] "I can now understand it and yet by no means dare to say that I understood it so accurately at the beginning—and yet I certainly am the one who has done it and with reflection has taken

up to providential guidance. However, just because he left the choice up to the subjective individual to make the choice doesn't mean there isn't a preferable option.

He explains the arc of his authorship along with its tone in this way, "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. The movement is **back** and even though it is all done *without authority*, there is still something in the tone that is reminiscent of a policeman when he says to a crowd: Move back! This is indeed why more than once of the pseudonymous writers calls himself a policeman, a street inspector." (POV 78) Thus, Kierkegaard's authorship is written without authority because he doesn't want to be a teacher, but it is not without authority in its tone and claims. Its tone is firm and clear, drawing people back towards the original problem: existing humanly, and then existing Christian-religiously (CUP 249). His being without authority refers instead to his being neither the owner of any didactic teaching nor of any system by which he will develop a following of "Kierkegaardians."

5.2 The Aporia of Communication

Here, the problem which I have argued up to now launched the whole authorship comes into focus. The problem of communication and conversion is paradoxical. Kierkegaard doesn't want to coerce his audience as a teacher or any other authoritative role, but he also doesn't want them to simply remain as they are. This is a challenge. In an important section Johannes explains this problem:

> Indirect communication makes communicating an art in a sense different from what one ordinarily assumes it to be in supposing that the communicator has to present the communication to a knower, so that he can judge it, or to a nonknower, so that he can acquire something to know. But no one cares about the next thing, *the very thing that makes communication so difficult dialectically: that the receiver is an existing person*, and that this is essential. 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

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every step…It is governance that has brought me up, and the upbringing is reflected in the writing process." (POV 77)

> delaying the other, without wanting to induce him to go the same way, but just urging him to go his own way—and such is the relation between an existing person and an existing person when the communication pertains to the truth as existence-inwardness. (CUP 277 italics mine)

This rich text lays out the essential problem of communication and conversion. If you want a certain outcome but not the outcome that is yours or the same for everyone, you are left with a problem. Since each person exists as an individual always in a process of becoming something then you cannot guarantee any outcome. However, if you also desire the communication to demonstrate the commitment to life's existential tasks, then it requires a special kind of light touch that isn't infinite detached ironic negativity. It has to have a telos and an ethical commitment, otherwise why would it matter whether one was coercive or not? Why communicate anything at all without recourse to recollection? Thus, Kierkegaard found himself in a place where he had to invent an entirely new authorial strategy, developed from Socrates. His goal would be to approach each existing individual in their particular circumstances as individual. This is why he says his task is entirely new.[214]

There is, to use the Greek word, an aporia regarding communication and conversion facing Kierkegaard as author. If someone wants to convert, then they are not in need of conversion, but if someone doesn't want to convert, you can't make them do so by coercive means. So how does one get someone to willingly do something they don't currently want to do? Additionally, how does one as an author achieve some sort of outcome like this without doing the work for them or having their conversion be dependent on your authority? To put it in the language of the above passage, how do you get someone to continue on their own way but doing so in faith rather than in despair?

Kierkegaard himself answers this in the *Point of View.* For him, "What was needed, among other things, was a godly satire." (POV 17) What would this godly satire do? The goal is this:

[214] See JP 6872 XI A 136.

"*The single individual* must personally relate himself to the unconditional. This is what I to the best of my ability and with maximum effort and much sacrifice have fought for…I believed, and as I do believe, that this is Christianity and love for "the neighbor." (POV 20) That is, the godly satire would be in order to deconstruct the idol of a Christendom in service of the neighbor. This was a Christendom of conditions and abstracted from daily living founded on illusions and untruth (CUP 201, 475, POV 59). In deconstructing that idol, it would open up the space for the single individual to come to terms with what is left in the vacuum, namely despair or faith. Kierkegaard's entire authorship is an attempt to open up this space and then goad people towards faith without making the decision for them. But how does irony accomplish this?

According to Kierkegaard, "it is not truth that rules the world, but illusions." (POV 59) This is why he referred to his task as having something of an emetic purpose. (CUP 187) One has to remove the illusion rather than replace it with another one. But, "an illusion can never be removed directly…" This is because, "By a direct attack he only strengthens a person in the illusion and also infuriates him. Generally speaking, there is nothing that requires as gentle a treatment as the removal of an illusion. If one in any way causes the one ensnared to be antagonized, then all I lost." (POV 43) What Kierkegaard is trying to do is much more like a delicate surgical procedure than violent emergency amputation. He continues, "The point is to introduce the religious neither too speedily nor too slowly…If it comes too swiftly, the effect is not strong enough." (POV 44) Such meticulous preparation in his authorship demonstrates this delicacy and care. Although he does come on strong and attack vehemently later in life, earning him the name of the "Danish firebrand," he does so all in the service of disentangling the illusion one is wrapped within.

This delicacy is "Achieved by the indirect method, which in the service of the love of truth dialectically arranges everything for the one ensnared and then, modest as love always is, avoids being witness to the confession that he makes alone before God, the confession that he has been living in an illusion." (POV 44) Thus, Kierkegaard is doing all of this from a place of love for the neighbor, a service of love for which he without authority is only an occasion for the person to have an encounter that might, dare I say ought, result in faith. We are left again with the question of how this is accomplished in irony.

The first payoff to irony then manifests in Kierkegaard's taking on the esthetic as an incognito through his pseudonymous authors.[215] He explains, "to be a teacher is truly to be the learner. Instruction begins with this, that you, the teacher, learn from the learner, place yourself in what he has understood…let him examine you." (POV 46) Here there is an ironic distance between who Kierkegaard is as religious author, and what he displays as an author of aesthetic production. Since Kierkegaard does not put on display his own beliefs, but rather the beliefs of one who would inhabit the character of the pseudonyms, he is distancing himself from becoming the model. This creates a space for the author to enter into relation with the text rather than imbibing the author's teaching. This was not without purpose, in taking on the aesthetic he is maintaining an ironic distance between where he is and where his audience is and helping them to bridge that distance without expecting them to start where he is simply by giving them knowledge.[216] He explains as much himself, "In Christendom the religious author, whose total

[215] Later he will reflect that this model follow Christ's own taking on flesh in the incarnation. See POV pp84-90.

[216] Once again, Kierkegaard's authorship mirrors Christian incarnational soteriology because he takes on an incognito that does not put his true nature on display. He walks amongst the people even while he does not share their same understanding. He does all this to guide his readers from despair to faith. Conversion is a task for subjectivity. Thus, "the subjective existing thinker is aware of the dialectic of communication." (CUP 76) That is, the thinker is aware of the nature of

thought is what it means to become a Christian, properly starts out with being an esthetic author." (POV 47) The whole deception of the aesthetic authorship then is done in the service of love and ironically of the love of truth since it seeks to get the reader to have an encounter with that truth by means of a deception.

This word deception should not be taken overly negative. Kierkegaard is aware of how this sounds, and defends its use, "The esthetic writing is a deception, and herein is the deeper significance of the *pseudonymity*. But a deception, that is indeed something rather ugly. To that I would answer: Do not be deceived by the word deception."[217] (POV 53) But why? Well, because deception can be used of course to trick a person out of the truth, but Kierkegaard thinks to use deception to trick someone into the truth is nothing other than Socratic irony. He continues, "To recall old Socrates—one can deceive a person into what is true. Yes, in only this way can a deluded person actually be brought into what is true—by deceiving him." (POV 53) Why is this the case? When the delusion is so thick, no amount of truth will get someone to see the truth other than to have them glimpse it for themselves or to become aware of their delusion.

This is nothing more than the allegory of the cave brought into the problem of Danish Christendom. That is, the riddle is how to get someone to abandon the shadows on the cave wall without coercion or alienating them from the possibility of ever leaving them. Thus, "here a delusion is an obstacle. That means a corrosive must first be used, but this corrosive is the

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their communication needing to be that of the incognito, the indirect, a clandestine agent. What concerns inwardness, and religiosity being the most inward thing, must be dealt with in the appropriate strategy of communication. Since it is a task for subjectivity, it cannot be the mere exchange of information. It has to force people to have an encounter with the truth in such a way that they appropriate it and experience it as their own. Thus, truth becomes subjectivity.

[217] It's worth bringing up the point here that this section of the text has the heading: "Even though a Person Refuses to Go Along to the Place to Which One Is Endeavoring to Lead Him, There Is Still One Thing That Can Be Done for Him: Compel Him to Become Aware." This also nicely sums up the points he is making in regard to the strategy of his authorship.

negative, but the negative in connection with communicating is precisely to be deceived." (POV 54) Here, you have irony as saying something other than what one means and intending something other than what is said as outlined in *The Concept of Irony*. In this way, "the communicator is in the background, helping negatively, since whether he succeeds in helping someone is indeed something else." (POV 56) That is, the communicator ceases to be important, and even the communication only succeeds in a kind of incognito to the extent that it achieves its purposes. The purpose for Kierkegaard was removing the illusion blocking someone's progress towards becoming a Christian so that they might begin to make the steps towards conversion on their own. Success in this endeavor is not guaranteed and is risky. Yet, doing all this knowing the risk that it may not succeed is evidence of the faith displayed by Kierkegaard's authorship.

Kierkegaard then wants to sink to the background as much as possible. His deception is not for nefarious purposes any more than is the appearance of Socrates as ignorant teacher or Christ as a penniless servant. He explains that it was a deception built from "using all my familiarity with people and their weaknesses and their obtusities—not in order to profit from them but in order to annihilate myself, to weaken the impression of myself." (POV 58) This is his goal from beginning to end, to disappear as nothing more than an occasion for someone to have an encounter with the truth after being freed from their delusions. So, in his making his exit he is not the reason for the decision. As Maruice Blanchot puts it, he has "pushed his silence far enough to remain silent, even in communication."[218] He is like the father who walks the bride down the aisle to give her to the bridegroom only to take his seat among the spectators throughout the proceedings of the wedding.

[218] Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, p21.

Also, like a father, he is a kind of guide. This is why—as we saw last chapter—he moved away from Socratic irony as infinite negativity towards a modified irony that still aimed at truth, beauty, goodness since he did desire a specific outcome for his reader. (CI 197) The word Kierkegaard comes up with for this is the term "witness." He explains:

> **Witnessing** is still the form of communication that strikes the truest mean between direct and indirect communication. Witnessing is direct communication, but nevertheless it does not make one's contemporaries the *authority*. While the witness's *communication* addresses itself to the contemporaries the *witness* himself addresses God and makes him the authority. (JP I 670 X A 235)

Thus, the witness is someone who points to another authority beyond his own. Rather than infinite negation, he cedes ground for the true authority to appear as authority. He serves then a teleological end, but needs to do so with a light touch lest he make himself the center of attention. This requires once again a surgeon's precision.

So, part of why this irony is appropriate to the task of conversion is because it maintains the dialectical tension inherent in the relationship of communication to conversion. It creates a space for someone to have an encounter and be freed from their delusion without the author becoming the source, or quite literally the authority in the situation. The author is sent to sit back and watch as merely an occasion and not in control of how it ends up once his audience has its encounter with the communication. Fred Craddock nicely explains this, "dialectic, however, disturbs the listener towards a kind of conversion…but it proceeds at its own expense. As it effects an experience in the listener, the presentation itself is used up…as those words did their work, they died."[219] The language of Craddock here mirrors the language of Jesus in Matthew 13 both in its emphasis on seeds dying to come to life and in its emphasis on the listener. Communication itself then becomes a kind of incognito that is less important than the effect it has on the listener.

[219] Craddock. *Overhearing the Gospel* p130.

Yet, there is another importance to irony. Irony approaches each individual as individual. We have already seen Kierkegaard's dislike for speculative and abstract thought in chapter 2. Johannes worries that speculative thought leads us away from existence (*ab esse ad posse* CUP 325) and thus drains the pathos from all issues because in it all individuality is lost. This is because speculative thinking leads in the direction of universals and wants to be free of the contingent particularities of an individual's life. However, for Kierkegaard it is only those particularities which make life meaningful and thought worth thinking. Taking account of particularity and individuality is essential when considering conversion. As Lee Barrett observed, Kierkegaard understood that "the journey of reorientation is not a straight line."[220] That is, the road to conversion is rarely a straight line, but involves dead ends, moving in reverse, and paths not taken. Taking account of this would also require a light touch. If it were a straight line, then perhaps speculative knowledge would be sufficient.

Irony helps in this situation because it provides a buffer which makes mediation or universal thinking impossible in such a sense. Not that it makes speculation impossible altogether, rather it deflates the move towards mediation and keeps one's existence in tension with such universal thinking to the point that one cannot entirely squeeze the other out. This is because irony always keeps the subjectivity of both the communicator and the audience front and center. This striving and tension is the tension of becoming in existence which Kierkegaard has so repeatedly emphasized. This dialectical tension is the same as that between despair and faith and I suggest it may be called the dialectics of faith. It keeps us in dialectical tension and refuses the luxury of mediation as a cop out of the demands of existence. So, "What is the opposite of mediation? It is the absolute paradox?" (CUP 379)

[220] Barrett, Lee. *Eros and Self-Emptying*, p122.

The central absolute paradox has already been explained as the infinite taking on the finite in the incarnation. Because this is a starting point for Christian faith. This is an absolute paradox. Johannes thinks this is easy enough to understand objectively, but to relate oneself to it is a matter of great difficulty. Nonetheless, it is important because of its connection to pathos as eternal happiness which is the major question that launches the *Postscript*, and here Johannes tells us that "a thinker without a paradox is like a lover without passion." (CUP 15-16). This again brings us back to irony. Johannes explains, "In every enthusiasm-inspired project, the individual still has something external, but in relation to eternal happiness the individual has only himself to deal with in inwardness." (CUP 386) Thus, irony allows this individual to stir up this inwardness while still maintaining appropriate distance and detachment.

So, how to get one to deal with himself in inwardness when the communication necessarily comes from outside? Johannes had already explained this on the previous page. "To relate oneself to an eternal happiness is, in the sphere of reflection, plain and simple pathos. The dialectical consists in this, that the eternal happiness to which the individual is assumed to relate himself with proper pathos is itself made dialectical by additional qualifications, which in turn work as an incitement that brings passion to its extreme." (CUP 385) The extreme passion here is going to be the commitment to walk in faith, without the certainty of speculation nor the detached nature of negative irony or skepticism, towards a hoped for end in anticipation. Arne Grøn explains that for Kierkegaard, "Anticipation is a fundamental openness or confidence towards the future, but at the same time an anticipation of something specific."[221] Thus, it is an appropriate orientation towards the future. Rather than a resignation about the future or a belief

[221] Grøn, Arne, *Thinking With Kierkegaard*, p 118.

in some ultimate fulfillment, it is instead a belief in an eternal happiness which plays out in one's day to day striving.

Such walking is itself a tension and betrays the fact that it cannot be summed up in any systematic treatise because it relates to each individual and will take an entire lifetime to complete. Johannes thinks this is the purpose of religious discourse. He explains, "The religious discourse is the path to the good, that is, it copies the path, which is just as long as life; it copies the path that the religious person describes, not in the sense in which the planet describes its course or the mathematician describes a circle…The merit of the religious discourse is in making the way difficult, because the way is the decisive thing." (CUP 428) All of this is to say that the point of the religious discourse is not like an instruction manual or a mathematical proof, but rather it is about laying bare the difficulty that awaits the person who embarks on becoming a Christian.

Again, Johannes explains that the religious address, "always deals with the totality-category, not scientifically (then the particular is disregarded) but existentially, and therefore is involved in bringing the single individual…within the totality, not so he disappears in it but in order to join him together with it." (CUP 538) The religious discourse then is a means of uniting one's inwardness with existence in the world. In bringing the two together, it forces the individual to work out his relationship to them because one cannot absent oneself from this task. It is a feature of being finite.

Such a difficulty does not, and ought not, subside by having objective certainty. Any would be communicator must take pains then to make sure they do not give people a formula which is a shortcut through existing. That is, the dialectical tension between faith and despair must be kept as a live option at all times. Johannes tells us, "If the dialectical is skipped, then the whole of

Christianity becomes an easy notion, becomes nothing but superstition…the most dangerous form of superstition, because it is a superstitious belief in the truth." (CUP 430) That is, just as the thinker requires a paradox to continue striving to know something that they don't know, so does faith require an absolute paradox to continue to strive for the achievement of one's hope and remain in anticipation. Johannes tells us near the end, "Faith *must not be satisfied* with incomprehensibility, because the very relation to or the repulsion from the incomprehensible, the absurd, is the expression for the passion of faith." (CUP 611) Here Johannes is telling us that faith is not a superstitious church lady fideism that takes comfort in platitudes. As he makes clear, "religiousness is not thoughtlessness." (CUP 463) Rather, it is constantly striving towards self-understanding in existence.

As such, the content of the paradox will be of infinite interest precisely because it relates to one's eternal happiness. One will not be satisfied with a kind of indifference to the challenge that such a faith provides both to one's self-understanding (e.g. as sinner or not) and to one's understanding of others (e.g. God, the neighbor, etc.). Rather, one will strive to incorporate such truths into one's being in such a way that one's existing makes sense of it. Another way of saying this is that the indifference of cold logic would be inappropriate for the task. To attempt to would be indifference and superstition that would exhaust the tension.

Another way of saying this, is that the intellectual seriousness of the paradox of Christianity will manifest in one's existence rather than in the accumulation of indifferent speculative knowledge. Both will strive to make sense of the incomprehensibility of the paradox, but only one will incite one to pathos. Merold Westphal puts this nicely while explaining Johannes's concept of double reflection, "To explain and establish some propositional truth is not to lead one's hearer or reader…to personal appropriation…If the aim of one's communication is to

inspire double reflection, culminating in inward, personal appropriation, the communication will have to be indirect."[222] Thus, the distinction Johannes is making is not between the indifferent speculative thinker and the nice church lady with naive and simple fideism because neither would be laudable on Johannes's account. Rather, there are two types of striving which move in opposite directions existentially and can be taken up by any existing individual. One moves towards exhausting the tension while the other makes their home living in the tension.[223]

So, once again we are left with the question, why is irony—as Kierkegaard developed it—able to achieve this purpose? As I see it, it achieves four things. First, it preserves the distance between Kierkegaard as author, and that single individual to whom he writes. Rather than a relationship of teacher to student, they exist as equals and the communication is free to be received however it is whether or not it is desired by the receiver. Second, on that note, it isn't coercive in that it leaves it up to the individual how they will respond. Yet, neither is it infinitely negative because it has an ethical telos and desired outcome, but it doesn't force that outcome. Third, and similar to the previous two, it lacks authority. That is, Kierkegaard himself as ironist also has to come to terms with the message. This is why he declares himself as "a reader of the books, not as the author." (POV 12) Thus, people who read Kierkegaard's works ought not

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[222] Westphal. *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, p200. Double reflection here for Westphal is combining both subjectivity and objectivity which leads to personal appropriation of the truth, rather than merely some arbitrary belief.

[223] Such a person would appear outwardly to live without tension as the Knight of Faith does, but they are always striving even in rest. Consider Abraham, whose faith was exemplary yet secret. Neither his son nor his wife knew of his command from God, and if Derrida and Kierkegaard are to be believed, they never did. The Knight of Faith is separate from the Knight of Infinite Resignation and the tragic hero precisely to the degree that their inwardness must remain a secret. Such inwardness remains a secret that cannot be communicated directly and externally. To the extent that it can be, it appears as folly, tragedy, or absurdity. This is the case with Abraham and with Kierkegaard's own public perception in his handling of the situation of his engagement to Regina. So what is the author to do who seeks to stoke the fires of the inwardness of others without being able to make their own inwardness known? This cannot simply be done. The tension is irony, and the irony is the strategic answer.

become Kierkegaardians, because he is simply redirecting us to something that he feels is not his own.[224]

Fourth and finally, it acts as a goad to action. From the earliest authorship, Kierkegaard leaves his reader with the decision as to how they will repond. Though literary genius and various categories (offense, the aesthetic, despair, the ethical, etc.), we as readers are meant to be goaded and incited to some kind of pathos even if it merely goads us to escape the paradoxical tension Kierkegaard puts before us. Kierkegaard's desired outcome is that of the conversion of his readers, and he tries to goad them towards that, or at the very least from speculative to existing individuals for whom becoming a Christian becomes a task rather than mere possibility.

One thing we have to come to terms with is the tightrope Kierkegaard walks as an author. He neither wants to be Socrates in infinite negativity nor does he want to do the underhanded seduction which attempts to "offer readers the truth with the right hand or to show them the way to the truth with the left."[225] Kierkegaard is committed to a desired outcome, that of the reader's taking subjective responsibility for life's daily demands and becoming a Christian through the movement away from despair towards faith. Yet, he doesn't want to accomplish this by any coercive means or by convincing someone by his own authority (as author, pastor, or anything else). Thus, he is forced to take up a dialectical authorship which is itself a demonstration of what it is to become a Christian. That is, his authorship itself is an act of faith which leaves open the possibility of despair. Since it leaves open this possibility and the dialectical tension remains, his authorship does not only communicate, but actually participates in the dialectics of faith.

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[224] Roger Poole has gone some way towards calling attention to this in his excellent text *The Indirect Commnication*. However, as John Caputo points out, "The point Poole himself blunts is that this [the call to becoming a Christian] also holds for Kierkegaard himself as a reader, as one charging himself with the task of becoming a Christian." See *How to Read Kierkegaard*, p73.
[225] Strawser, *Both/And* p149.

There is objective uncertainty in the outcome but subjective certainty in the effectiveness of the message. Here, he demonstrates what it is not by arguing for it, at least not merely by arguing for it, but in the example set by the authorship itself. Perhaps here, he was more right than even he realized to declare the entire authorship, "regarded as a *totality*, is religious from first to last." (POV 6)

Kierkegaard's authorship is fascinating then precisely because it refuses to exhaust the dialectical tension. It tries to avoid the strategies of recollection or mediation and instead prefers to live in the liminal space which involves a constant striving. Some authors have critiqued Kierkegaard on this point because they think his use of irony and his account of conversion will not be comforting to the believer. Both Ingolf Dalferth and Walter Wietzke argue on Lutheran grounds. Dalferth has already been discussed back in Chapter 3.[226] Wietzke argues that to "become a Christian is philosophically uninteresting,"[227] unless there is some way to achieve it. But, wouldn't it be Kierkegaard's own style to leave us in a dialectical tension, one that cannot be mediated or resolved on this side of eternity. Always in the process of converting but never attaining. Always in the process of becoming a Christian seems to be right where Kierkegaard would have us, so long as it is in pathos, movement, and decision through repetition.

Irony then is risk. But this shouldn't surprise us. It seems entirely in line with Kierkegaard's entire body of thought that his strategy would in itself be risky, since risk is such an essential category of any meaningful existence. It would be unsurprising then, that Kierkegaard's strategy, meticulous and calculating though it is, would put risk as an essential feature of achieving what he wanted. This too is faith, and Kierkegaard's own authorship was an act of faith that his task might be achieved even if only to one single individual. Thus, his final prayer in *Practice in*

[226] See p78 Footnote 99.
[227] Wietzke, Walter. "Irony and the Conversion Experience." P387.

Christianity is for those who need conversion, that progress will be made. Such an end to his book reveals this was the purpose of this authorship all along.

5.3 The Dialectics of Faith

Thus, with everything it now follows to conclude by connecting all the dots. The argument put forth in this project is that the problem of conversion led Kierkegaard to take up a particular form of irony. Using the words of Arne Grøn, I have suggested that we can see irony as form is appropriate to the paradox as content. The paradox in this case has been the problem of conversion on the one hand, and the nature of Christian faith (as subjective and offensive) on the other. Thus, to re-present Christianity within Christendom, Kierkegaard needed to take up an appropriate form of irony to avoid the pitfalls of what he saw in modern philosophy and its relation to religion.

In chapter one, I showed that Kierkegaard eschewed the term conversion in favor of becoming a Christian. After suggesting some reasons why, I also outlined his authorial task in Christendom. This left me with two major concerns. First, what does it mean to become a Christian? Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to this question. Second, what kind of authorship would be appropriate to communicating the task of becoming a Christian? Chapters 4 and 5 sought to answer this question.

In chapter two I outlined Kierkegaard's indictment of the speculative tradition, and of modern philosophy in particular, because it was unable to inspire the pathos needed to free oneself from the soporific qualities of Christendom and the problem of despair so ubiquitous in modern life. I argued this is why he developed the concept of repetition as preferable over recollection in how it orients one's life towards particularity. Then, in chapter three I undertook the task of outlining precisely what it means to become a Christian. In sticking to the works of

the different Climacus pseudonyms, I argued that a consistent dialectic emerges which marks the movement from despair to faith, while always keeping the possibility of both alive. The question left then was how to communicate this without it merely becoming another piece of speculative knowledge. How does one communicate a dialectic that allows the reader to experience it?

To answer this, I dedicated chapter four to outlining Kierkegaard's evolution in understanding of irony throughout his authorship. There, I argued that his understanding of irony changes as Kierkegaard becomes more aware of his task as author and seeks to find the best strategy to accomplish this task. Thus, irony is transformed from mere irony into a specifically mastered form that marks even Socrates as having become a Christian. In chapter five, I sought to outline further how this irony is put into practice as his strategy for accomplishing his task. Mastered irony is most appropriate to the task of accomplishing conversion in Christendom without resorting to coercion or becoming a didactic crutch. Instead, mastered irony is best because it entirely leaves the task open to subjectivity, but it also provides safeguards from not achieving Kierkegaard's task. Nonetheless, a specific outcome is not guaranteed, and this risk must always remain a possibility to the dialectics of faith. Thus, Kierkegaard keeps that possibility open while preferring that we orient ourselves correctly and accomplish the lifelong task of becoming a Christian.

In doing so, I have added to the scholarship in the following ways. First, the scholarship, as noted by Noreen Khawaja, has largely ignored an explication of conversion as it plays out through Kierkegaard's work. Many take the account of becoming a Christian as laid out in the *Postscript* as the equivalent of Kierkegaard's account of conversion, or they equate conversion

with the traversal of the existence spheres.[228] As I have shown, especially in chapters two and three, a full account of conversion requires considering the entirety of the Climacian works along with considerations raised from the early pseudonymous works which are tackled by Johannes and Anti. What I have sought to demonstrate is that a full account of conversion, and how it motivates Kierkegaard's authorship, requires that we move beyond thinking in terms of the existence spheres to the dialectical relationship between faith, despair, and offense.

Second, I have shown that Kierkegaard's use of irony is not merely a 19th century literary fashion, nor is it merely trying to recreate Plato's dialogues. Rather, I have shown that Kierkegaard constantly teases out irony in order to achieve his purposes. What results from considering Kierkegaard's use of irony is a distinct form of irony which Kierkegaard shaped for his task and strategy to reintroduce Christianity to Christendom. Further work can be done on how Kierkegaard's use of irony departs from some of his contemporaries and forebears. Much has been written on Kierkegaard's taking up Socratic irony, but more could be said about not just his place in 19th century literature, but also his distinction from them vis a vis irony.

The payoff to both beyond Kierkegaard scholarship involves thinking of alternative ways to be rhetorically effective without appealing to epistemic authority or coercive force. Kierkegaard's entire authorship demonstrates an effective way of communicating to an audience

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[228] For an example of the former, see Kemp and Iacovetti *Reason and Conversion in Kierkegaard and the German Idealists*. Ingolf Dalferth also takes this approach somewhat, although his has the merit of only attempting to do so in light of Johannes, rather than equating it with Kierkegaard. Nonetheless, in his critique of Johannes's account, he indicts Kierkegaard for making conversion impossible to achieve. Wietzke also makes a similar critique and makes no distinction between Johannes and Kierkegaard. This seems to be a common approach.

On the latter example, Merold Westphal is perhaps the most famous, but he takes this from Walter Lowrie and others who think conversion merely a matter of existential transversal of the spheres. It is unclear to me what conversion is for Jamie Ferreira because she is more interested in how conversion happens (via the affected imagination) than what it entails for Kierkegaard.

that forces them to subjectively come to terms with what is put before them without being handed the answers. In contemporary life there is so much information available, but so rarely is the communication of that information effective unless it is taken up into an appropriate rhetorical strategy. Thus, Kierkegaard teaches us how to communicate effectively in the modern world in a way that riskily leaves the outcome up to the subjective individual. Doing so involves being confident in the truth to do its own work so long as you prepare the way for it. In doing so, Kierkegaard is like a modern-day John the Baptist who shows us what it is like to have faith and to truly undergo conversion which puts the onus upon us to make a decision about what we will do.

This is the dialectics of faith which motivate his authorship and demonstrate the appropriateness of his strategy to accomplish his task as an author in Christendom. Thus, Kierkegaard's prayer for our conversion may be seen as a call that "He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 11:15) The ultimate anticipation and hope of Kierkegaard's work for his readers is that of unconditional joy, that which concerns eternal happiness. This is the transition to becoming a Christian culminated in the "transition from time to eternity," which "even if it were to take place through the destruction of everything, you are in paradise *this very day*, because from a Christian standpoint, you *abide in God.*"[229] Even if he had to destroy everything in modern Christendom to get us to the point of transition, such a transgression against the modern order would be mission accomplished.

[229] *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* p89-90. This is the Kirmmse translation.

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