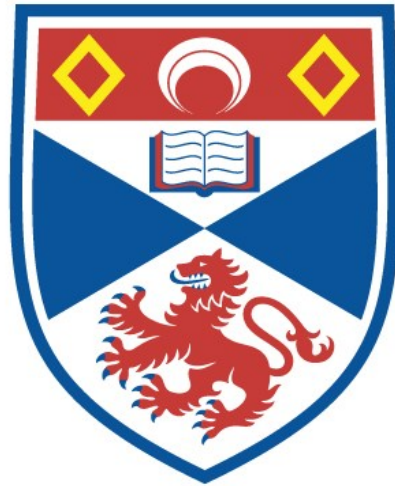


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The research of which this thesis is a record began upon my admission as a research student at the University of Saint Andrews in October 1978.

CANDIDATE

The conditions of the Resolution and Regulations governing the degree of Master of Letters in Arts have been fulfilled.

SUPERVISOR

JOHANNES CLIMACUS ON TRUTH

(an abstract)

This thesis is concerned with a definition of truth, and more precisely with that definition of truth central to the philosophical position of the Kierkegaardian pseudonym, Johannes Climacus. The essence of this definition achieves cursory expression in the slogan 'truth is subjectivity'.

In the introduction we defend our practice of attributing the views under consideration to Climacus rather than to Kierkegaard. The importance of the role the notion of truth plays in the Climacean corpus is emphasized.

In Chapter Two a distinction is drawn between what Climacus calls 'essential' knowledge or truth and what might be called indifferent knowledge. This distinction is made in preparation for a clear demarcation of the proper sphere of application of the definition of truth eventually put forward.

In Chapter Three we turn to the definition as it is put forward on page 182 of Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Several ambiguities in the formulation are pointed out and discussed and attempts are made to supply a reformulation which is both faithful to the original and more perspicuous.

Chapter Four takes up the peirastic version put forward in Three and attempts more fully to explore just what is contained in the

definiendum. The insight is arrived at that it is not truth in general but the truth of an individual subject's relationship to his own existence which is being defined. The chapter concludes with a new reformulation designed to exhibit this matter more clearly.

Chapter Five follows the procedure found in Four, applying it in this instance to the two subsections of the definiens. (1) "Objective uncertainty" with respect to one's existence is found to mean the impossibility in principle of proving the truth of that existence, and (2) most passionately to hold that truth is explained as willingness to accept any sacrifice in order to maintain one's existence unaltered. The reformulated definition (Df.5) which concludes this chapter incorporates these insights and is the final product of this process of repeated refinement.

In Chapter Six interpretations and criticisms of the notion of subjective truth put forward by other writers on the topic are discussed in the light of Df.5. Special pains are taken to exhibit the falsity of the claim that Climacus' position is logically self-refuting. Charges of irrationalism and solipsism are also rebutted.

Finally, Chapter Seven concludes the thesis with a nod at the positive reasons one might urge for accepting Df.5 as an accurate description of reality.

two's agreement not validatory

...acquaintance. Reaction: ... it is made of parts, w/ ...

Homology / Analogy / Opposition:

"collective representation" of native
reflected by customs non-consciousness

Criteria of falsification of analysis? "Party game"!

subtly of } Selecting data
lyst } rendering data meaningful by relations between them

!! "Customs ordered by symbolic derivatives"? (eg cooking / grading not symbolic)
by some customs "symbolically informed" - not technical ones (technical / expressive dichotomy)

... a priori imputation of symbolic system

Customs is external to natives to the analyst - reference to "operators"

Assumption: ... custom of ...

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JOHANNES CLIMACUS ON THE TRUTH

To me, Socrates, as perhaps to you also, it seems either impossible or very difficult to know the truth about these matters in this life: but he would be a poor-spirited creature indeed who would not examine in every possible way what is said about them, refusing to give up till his search on every side leaves him completely exhausted. For we must in these questions do one of two things-- either learn from another or discover the truth for ourselves, or, if these methods are impossible, take at least the best and most irrefutable of human theories, and embarking on this as upon a raft sail through life with all its attendant dangers, unless we can make our voyage with greater safety and security upon some more trustworthy vessel, some revelation of god.

Simmius to Socrates

Phaedo 85c-d

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Truth, its nature and the criteria by which our claims to possess it are accorded validity, constitute the central concern of all philosophizing. For this reason any author who purports to explain these matters and who, furthermore, does so with originality and power deserves the notice of all those who call themselves philosophers. It is our belief that Soren Kierkegaard is such an author. In the following essay we attempt to make sense of, and to assess the success of, his work on this topic. Or rather we should say that we believe his pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, is such an author, and that it is Climacus' work that we intend to evaluate. For in "A First and Last Declaration"¹ Kierkegaard describes his role in the production of the pseudonymous works as that of "the author of the authors." He created the author and that author created the book. Our first inclination is to smile and pass over such a claim without comment, but it can be seen to make sense. We take him to mean something like the following: in order to exhibit with maximum clarity certain principles at work within the character of the pseudonym, he imagined a personality such as only the poetic realm could hold, a personality whose lack of regard for the moral limitations of the real world was complete and who seemed free from the mixture of motivations and emotions that characterize actual people. His pseudonyms are thus poetical embodiments of completely unalloyed personality types from whom Kierkegaard extracts a definite view of things consistent with their type, in a manner analogous to that

¹ appended to Postscript but in smaller typeface and without pagination as per Kierkegaard's instructions.

in which a mathematician might adduce a body of theorems from a set of axioms and definitions. If one had a sufficiently realistic view of mathematics, one would think of the definitions and axioms as dictating what theorems were possible, as compelling one to certain conclusions. Similarly, if one had a realist view of mind, one might think that the definition of a given 'intentional system' together with a body of logical and psychological laws would dictate what psychological movements that system was capable of. On this view, if an individual could clearly conceive of an intentional system of this sort, he could adduce from his conception everything it would believe about a given topic. If the individual gave a name to the intentional system of which he had conceived, say e.g. Johannes Climacus, and he wrote down in a book the 'theorems' which that system produced, then it would seem quite appropriate for him to say that he had created Climacus and Climacus wrote the book. This is what we take Kierkegaard's view to be.

We make reference to this odd notion because in this essay we are concerned almost exclusively with two books written under the name of Johannes Climacus, i.e. Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript, and in accordance with Kierkegaard's express wish¹ we ascribe all views drawn from these texts to Climacus. Most commentators do not do this, and some of the quotations in what follows will make reference to Kierkegaard. We hope this will not cause the reader any confusion. It is our belief that the remarks which we quote from these commentators are directed primarily if not wholly at the views contained in the books upon which we are focussing.

We note that explaining Kierkegaard's relation to his pseudonym

¹"A First and Last Declaration", middle of second paragraph.

does not explain the relationship between Kierkegaard's opinions and those of his pseudonyms. The question of how we are to relate Climacus (who denies being a Christian and who claims to be a humorous author) and Kierkegaard (who does claim to be a Christian and also a religious author) is not one to which we ever directly address ourself. The function which will allow us to map Climacus onto Kierkegaard is an important subject. But the goal of this paper is the modest one of arriving at an adequate description of the domain which is Climacus' view of things. The attainment of this latter goal should facilitate immensely the attainment of the former.

We also note that there is a question whether Climacus' theory can really be explained at all. For example, Climacus writes that his hope above all others is "that the tragi-comic predicament may be averted from him and his book, that some deeply earnest seer or jesting wag takes it upon himself to persuade the public that there is something in it..."¹ Now, of course, that "there is something in it" is just what the essayist is convinced of, and communication of this conviction to others, perhaps also attempting to give a rational ground for it, is an important telos of his work. The suggestion that we are not going to get hold of Climacus' ideas in any straightforward manner echoes throughout Postscript. "The subjective problem is not something about an objective issue, but is the subjectivity itself."² In other words, any fixed definition of the problem will of necessity fail adequately to capture it. Again, it appears that the term 'truth' is capable of clear conceptual determination. A definition is given, but... "it must include an

¹ Preface, Postscript p.6

² Postscript p.115

expression for the antithesis to objectivity, a memento of the fork in the road where the way swings off." He adds a bit later: "and where this is cannot be specified objectively."¹ A complete definition would of course require such a specification and so it appears that this idea, too, is in principle incapable of being wholly expressed in concept. A final example: we find that "the difficulty that inheres in existence..." (Great! This is something we should very much like to know more about.), "never really comes to expression in the language of abstract thought."² If by abstract thought here Climacus means any thinking directed at laying out the meaning of a term conceptually, then once again we come to a central idea of his work that is theoretically veiled from clear understanding. Thus the question arises whether Climacus can be approached analytically without hopelessly distorting his message. Can we extract a philosophical kernel from the poetic husk or would this be to 'force him unwilling into the paragraph-parade'? Is Climacus simply positing the existence of an area into which thought may not venture (in which case his claim would be of limited interest to the thinker), or is he describing difficulties whose solution requires somewhat different techniques? It is this latter which we find to be the case. It seems to us that he is citing a class of problems (viz. ethical and religious ones) which can be properly approached only by thinking in a certain manner. Both Fragments and Postscript are intended to be a delineation of what this certain manner is.

The impossibility of communicating directly the sense of those important notions cited above as well as the final account of the

¹ Postscript p.182

² ibid., p.267; see also p.279

way in which one is capable intellectually of laying hold of them is bound up with Climacus' conception of truth. Concern to get clear about the notion of truth is the animus behind both elements of the Climacean corpus. Fragments opens with the question "How far does the Truth admit of being learned?" It is with a view toward providing an answer to this ultra-fundamental question that the curiosities of this little book are framed. And the same could be said of the multifarious complexities of its much larger sequel. Climacus takes his cue from the analogous problem concerning virtue treated of in the Meno. This is not the result of accident or arbitrary whim, for by beginning with Socrates and Greek Idealism Climacus is obeying the demand for intellectual honesty which is so prominent a feature of his poetically consistent personality. The problem's locus classicus is the only proper starting-place for someone determined genuinely to think the problem through. It is this concern for truth which entitles Climacus to membership in that elite body of women and men the world honors with the title 'philosopher'.

o/ Of course it is precisely because of things he has to say about truth that many phil~~s~~ophers want to deny him a place among them. A sampling of some of Climacus' more succinct pronouncements on the topic shows why. (A) "An objective uncertainty held fast in an approximation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual." (B) "The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite." (C) "Subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth." (D) "the truth consists in nothing else than the self-activity of personal appropriation..." (E) "the mode of apprehension of the truth is precisely the truth." (F) "And why is God elusive? Precisely because He is the truth..." (A) is put

forward as a definition and it is around this statement that the whole of this essay revolves.¹ The bulk of what follows is an attempt simply to get clear about what this could possibly mean. Then we consider various objections brought against it by other philosophers which in the light of our understanding of it appear to be mistaken. And finally we consider briefly what positive reasons exist for adopting such a view of truth and whether there are any decisive arguments for not so doing.

¹ All the quotations are from Postscript, (A) p.182; (B) p.182; (C) p.183; (D) p.217; (E) p.287; (F) p.218.

CHAPTER TWO

DISTINCTIONS

Two distinctions between types or categories of knowledge are fundamental to the Climacean position. We must distinguish (1) between essential and indifferent knowledge or truth, and we must distinguish (2) between subjective and objective knowledge or truth. Climacus' explication of distinction (1) is characteristically laconic and hence difficult to grasp. It is a necessary condition (and apparently a sufficient one as well) of essential knowledge that it "has an essential relationship to existence."¹ Now all knowledge might be essential by this criterion if one were (for example) a follower of Hegel, and postulated the identity of thought and being. But 'being' conceived abstractly and the 'existence' to which Climacus conceives all essential knowledge as being related are very different things. If one accepts this, one might still think that at least any empirical knowledge would be essential in this sense because such knowledge 'corresponds to something existent as its object'. But still, the existence Climacus has in mind is something different, something more restricted. The existence to which all essential knowledge is related is the existence of the knower himself. All knowledge which from the standpoint of the knower is not so related is for him what Climacus calls accidental knowledge. Since for Climacus "only ethical and ethico-religious knowledge has an essential relationship to the existence of the knower"², essential knowledge is ipso fact limited to this sphere

¹ Postscript p.176

² ibid. p.177

as well. Distinction (2) parallels the first. Subjective knowledge is knowledge which has its existence within an individual subject. It is knowledge which is 'for consciousness'. Objective knowledge is knowledge conceived as existing independently of any knower. It is knowledge which is an 'in itself'. Thus distinctions (1) and (2) are made in order to express differences in the relationship between knowledge and knower. They parallel or overlay each other in that they divide the same subject matter (and, it turns out, in the same place) but they differ in that they draw the distinction on two separate levels. (1) makes its discrimination from the standpoint of the individual knower, a standpoint roughly corresponding to the phenomenological in Hegel's methodology. The division here is between truths about the knower and truths about other things. On the other hand, (2) is drawn at what corresponds to the level of philosophical insight, from the perspective of knowledge itself. Here the division is between truth conceived of as a property of the individual knower and truth conceived of from a realist point of view as simply having being, i.e. inherent in the object itself, there to be brought to light.

Now Climacus writes: "it is precisely for the sake of clarifying it (essential truth) as inwardness or as subjectivity that this contrast (between raising the question of truth objectively and raising it subjectively) is drawn."¹ The subjective nature of essential truth is emphasized by demonstrating that objectivity and essential truth are incompatible. In other words, an essential truth cannot be objectively true. Objective truth inheres in the object isolate^d from any knowing subject. On the other hand, it is by definition the case that essential truth inheres in the subject

¹ Postscript p.178 fn.; the bits in parentheses are ours.

alone. Abstracted from the subject it is nothing at all. It has no 'in itself' divorced from the existence of the subject in which the property of objective truth could inhere. Since (at least some) ethical and ethico-religious truths are essential in this sense, this is potentially a very controversial stance to take.

Now in what sense is it that essential knowledge lacks an object? By definition essential knowledge must be related to existence. This means knowledge really related to actual existence, not knowledge related to knowledge of existence or to the concept of existence. The thinker must in thought relate his knowledge to something real. For someone like Hegel this presents no problem at all. Thought is apotheosized in his doctrine of the actuality of the rational and the rationality of the actual. Thought and reality are seen not only as a perfect fit in the sense that thought is capable of apprehending any given reality, but moreover, they are a perfect fit in the much grander sense that ^{thought} confers reality upon its notions. From the Climacean standpoint, however, thought does not encompass all that is actual. In fact, in his eyes it fails to grasp the actuality of anything whatsoever. Possibilities are the coin in which all thinking transacts its business. Knowledge of an object x is awareness of x's defining characteristics, an awareness which by its very nature is wholly divorced from the actual empirical existence of x. In thinking it, the existence of the object has been transformed into possibility. "The aesthetic and intellectual principle is that no reality is thought or understood until its esse has been resolved into its posse."¹

Now this is fundamental to the Climacean view of things. "All

¹ Postscript p.288

knowledge about reality is possibility."¹ There is, however, one important exception. "The only reality to which an existing individual may have a relation that is more than cognitive, is his own reality, the fact that he exists."² The intuition underlying this claim is perhaps that we see ourselves directly in the actions we perform. The existing subject and his existence are so essentially bound together that not only is thought not needed as a link between them, but furthermore, there is not even a sufficiently large separation between them to provide the possibility for thought ever to interpose. This view is implied by Climacus' attitude toward the Cartesian "Cogito ergo sum." According to Climacus, if the Cogito is taken to be the claim of an individual human being, and not of a pure ego (or some such thing), then it constitutes a most unamazing inference. For if "I am thinking" is true, then what wonder that "I am" is also true? No advance is made, for the first proposition says even more than the second. At the same time, however, it is inconceivable that the thinker should ever succeed in wholly abstracting from herself. Her act of abstracting would always be ultimately self-refuting. Therefore, the relation which the existing individual has to her own existence is more than cognitive. Thought is not its basis, is not the ground from which it is inferred, and thought cannot annul it.

This being the case, it appears as if an individual's own self is the only possible object of essential knowledge. Eo ipso, then, it is the only possible object of essential knowledge in which the property of objective truth could inhere. In fact, however, not even this final possibility is open to us. For objectively speaking,

¹ Postscript p.280

² ibid. p.280

truth is indifferent to the existence of its object. The approach to objective truth is made through ever more complete abstraction from matters of concrete existence. And it is the Ding-an-sich itself which is objectively true. Here we must bring in a plank of Climacus' metaphysical platform, i.e. that man is a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal in existence. On this view, existence is part of man's essence. To abstract him from his existence, then, in an attempt to apprehend his essence is in principle misguided. The abstract thing which the attempt would succeed in laying hold of would remain quite distinct from that which constitutes the reality of any man. Therefore, with respect to the existence of any human being, there is no such thing as objective truth. And therefore, since this was the last possible object of essential knowledge in which objective truth might inhere, there is no such object.

The claim that all knowledge about reality is possibility deserves some unpacking. The clearest statement of this doctrine is found in the following passage from Postscript¹:

Abstract thought considers both possibility and reality, but its concept of reality is a false reflection, since the medium within which the concept is thought is not reality, but possibility. Abstract thought can get hold of reality only by nullifying it, and this nullification of reality consists in transforming it into possibility. All that is said about reality in the language of abstraction and within the sphere of abstract thought, is really said within the sphere of the possible. The entire realm of abstract thought, speaking in the language of reality, sustains the relation of possibility to the realm of reality; but this latter reality is not one which is included within abstract thought and the realm of the possible.

Descartes provides the paradigm for the sort of abstract thought

¹ Postscript p.279

Climacus has in mind here. In his treatment of the piece of wax in the second of the Meditations he sets out to find that which really belongs to the wax, what the wax really is, as opposed to variable and inessential aspects by which we might pick it out. He points out that certain properties change (e.g. its shape, color and smell) and yet the same wax (or so we judge) remains. From this he concludes that these properties cannot be elements of what the wax really is. His strategy, then, is to eliminate all such properties and see what remains. And what does he find? Just this: "Certainly nothing remains excepting a certain extended thing which is flexible and movable." Therefore, the reality of this particular bit of wax consists in flexibility and movability. Climacus' claim is that we have failed by means of this process to get hold of the particular given bit of wax at all. Perhaps we have attained some notion of wax-in-general, some idea of the properties that any possible piece of wax must possess. But certainly in this process of abstraction this particular bit of wax has been done away with completely. It is from precisely those properties which individuate it that it has been abstracted.

t/ Descartes draws another moral from his story of the bit of wax which from the Climacean standpoint is even more regrettable, i.e. that ~~is~~ is through the understanding and only the understanding that a man can come (properly speaking) to perceive even such things as physical bodies. Perceiving the wax "is neither an act of vision, nor of touch, nor of imagination, and has never been such although it may have appeared formerly to be so, but only an intuition of the mind..." Feelings, it seems, exist only in being known and never are simply 'felt'. The same is true of imagination. And the distinction found in common speech between 'seeing' and

'thinking one sees' collapses completely. All the sensitive powers of man are assimilated into one, i.e. thought. The reality of things is found in the mind, is seen to be thought-constituted. A fortiori, the reality of man, the thinker, is found to be so constituted as well. And as in the case of the wax, the abstract technique cuts away the inessential only to find that the essential man exists as 'thinking'. But where, asks Climacus, is the individual about whose reality we were inquiring? Clearly he has been culled out with the merely apparent. And if the individual was the object of the inquiry, it looks as if inquiring in the mode of abstraction was in principle a mistake. It amounts to searching for an entity (an individual) in a realm (of the possible) where that entity necessarily cannot be.

r/ The Climacean treatment of the Ontological Argument provides another example of the way in which he finds abstract thought to involve a false reflection of reality within the sphere of possibility. The argument purports to prove God's actual existence. God necessarily has all perfections. Existence is a perfection. Therefore, God exists. Climacus' view is that the only way God's existence can be grasped conceptually, just like the existence of anything else, is as a hypothesis, i.e. as a possibility. His argument is as follows: either (1) you assert in the premisses that God exists, or (2) you do not so assert it. If (1), then there is no argument. If (2), then either (a) you deny God's existence, or (b) you make God's existence hypothetical. If (a), then the argument is

- 1) God (who does not exist) has all perfections.
- 2) Existence is a perfection.
- 3) God (who does not exist) exists.

If (b), then the argument is

- n/
- 1) If God exists, the/She has all perfections.
 - 2) Existence is a perfection.
 - 3) If God exists, then God exists.

In case (a) the conclusion is impossible; and in case (b), as the initial premiss is hypothetical, so is the conclusion. The advance that the Ontological Argument supposedly makes from the God-concept to God's actual existence is effected only by forgetting this fact: what began as a hypothesis must end as one, too. Our false reflection stems from forgetting to carry the little word 'if' right on through the proof to the conclusion.

Climacus' pronouncements on the value of abstract thought seem to boil down to this: all statements significant within an abstract system are either tautologies or contradictions. The position with which he allies himself here is a standard empiricist one. Statements which are determinately either true or false are so either (1) purely in virtue of meaning, i.e. analytically, or (2) because experiential evidence either confirms or refutes them.¹ But precisely what abstract thought abstracts from is that which is experienced, the phenomena, 'the colorful show of the sensuous here-and-now'. Therefore, the evidence of experience plays no part in the abstract system. And whatever truth-value the abstract thinker's propositions have is given them by the meanings of his terms alone. To give another example of this, truth is defined by Hegel as the conformity of thought and being. And being itself is understood by him in an abstract sense.² It is not a concrete

¹ The relation of experience and subjective truth is explored below.

² cf. Hegel Logic, p.125 fn.: "The indeterminate, as we here have it, is the blank we begin with, not a featurelessness reached by abstraction, not the elimination of all character, but the original featurelessness which precedes all definite character and is the very first of all. And this we call Being. It is not to be felt, or perceived by sense, or pictured in imagination: it is only and merely thought, and as such it forms the beginning."

empirical being he refers to. But, to quote Climacus, "if being is understood in this manner, the formula becomes a tautology. Thought and being mean one and the same thing, and the correspondence spoken of is merely an abstract self-identity."¹ The same occurs when abstract thought applies itself to the problem of the immortality of the soul. The problem dissolves into uninteresting analyticity. "It explains immortality in general, and all goes quite smoothly, in that immortality is identified with eternity, with the eternity which is essentially the medium of all thought."² Or again, when abstract thought takes up the subject of Christianity it defines itself, it defines Christianity, it demonstrates there to be a confrontation between the two and finally a mediation. But mediation is a speculative category and Christianity in being mediated is subsumed under speculation's categories. It is not acknowledged as an independent given but is taken up into the system. And the truths which abstract thought utters, believing them to be about Christianity, are nothing more than truths about abstract thought. Finally, Climacus' interpretation of the Cogito also provides a good example of his attitude toward the products of abstract thought. The banality of Descartes' inference once the subject has been interpreted to be a particular existing human being has been mentioned above. On the other hand, if the subject is thought of as some sort of pure ego, then the inference becomes analytic. "But this pure ego cannot very well have any other than a purely conceptual existence; what then does the ergo mean? There is no conclusion here, for the proposition is a tautology."³ "I am"

¹ Postscript p.170

² ibid. p.268

³ ibid. p.281

becomes "I think", and the whole proposition becomes "I think therefore I think."

Of Comte, Isaiah Berlin has said that "Above all he grasped the central issue of all philosophy-- the distinction between words (or thoughts) that are about words and words (or thoughts) that are about things." Now one might dispute that this is the central issue of philosophy or that Comte was faithful to this distinction. But we find this passage to be worth quoting because it seems lucidly to encapsulate a distinction which Johannes Climacus understood most fully, and which was indeed a 'central issue' of his philosophizing. The tautologous truths of abstract thought are words about words, wisdom about wisdom ~~about wisdom~~. They constitute a sphere of knowledge coherent, complete, and self-contained-- but a sphere which in Climacus' eyes transcends entirely that of human existence. They give shape to a changeless world of ideal being, but they cannot enform the world of factual being. They are, for example, inappropriate as a guide to how one ought to live. The highest perfection of an abstract thought is to have validity, and a valid thought is a possibility. For reality one must look elsewhere. The importance of this distinction does not, properly speaking, lie within the sphere of abstract thought. Climacus is not proposing a technical revision of Hegel's Logic, for example. He is willing to concede to the System entire validity. It is existence he wishes to deny it. For existence is always the existence of some particular thing. An abstraction does not exist. (Here again Climacus strikes an empiricist note.) And so "it is a misunderstanding to confound discourse by even raising the question of existence, or of reality in the sense of existence, in

connection with the abstract."¹ The kernel of the Climacean position is that abstract thinking, in attempting to pass judgment on questions of existence, is answering questions which cannot arise in the sphere of the answer.² Thoughts about words are pretending to be thoughts about things.

¹ Postscript p.294

² see *ibid.* pp.288 and 293

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEFINITION

We turn to the definition of truth found on Postscript page 182: "An objective uncertainty held fast in the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual." Just what is Climacus up to here? For a start, how are we to construe the meaning and import of this final rider? An ambiguity is introduced into the definition by this clause the clarification of which might significantly augment our understanding of the whole. The ambiguity is this: by appending to his definition of the truth the qualification that what it defines is more precisely "the highest truth attainable for an existing individual" Climacus could be interpreted as suggesting that one of the following states of affairs is the case. (1) He could be suggesting that there is another 'truth' which occupies a higher position in some hierarchy of truths, which the definition does not fit, and which it is impossible for an existing individual to attain. If this is his meaning, then the interesting question becomes what sort of truth is this ^{higher truth} and what is the principle at work which debars an existing individual from attaining it? On the other hand, he might intend to suggest that (2) there is no other sort of truth which is 'higher' than that defined above. The possibility that there are other sorts of truth presumably is left open, but if it turned out that they exist, they would occupy a lower position in the hierarchy of truths. While an existing individual could attain these other truths as well as subjective truth (as defined above), subjective truth would constitute the individual's goal and highest achievement. This interpretation

might

raises a number of difficult questions, the nature of which is emphasized if we ignore the possibility of lower-order truths and make subjectivity the sole criterion of truth. In both interpretations the ranking of truths and the hierarchy within which it takes place requires elucidation.

Now Climacus himself never finally resolves this ambiguity. Indeed, it seems that at different times both meanings were intended by him. He suggests the former line of thought when he talks directly about God. "And why is God elusive? Precisely because He is the truth..."¹ But he also tells us that "God does not exist, He is eternal"² while man is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, a being which can never be wholly one or the other. So the picture one gets is of a universe with God, the immutable instantiation of all that is (objectively) true on the one hand, and man, a creature always in process of growth or decay, a creature who can grasp this objective truth only fleetingly and in his subjectivity on the other. The truth which is God is higher than the truth which is subjectivity because the latter depends upon it for existence and is guaranteed by it. And man is prevented from ever attaining perfect truth by this peculiar fact of his ontology: his existence of necessity combines elements both of the eternal and the temporal. This is the first interpretation suggested above. But Climacus also provides ammunition for those who would argue in favor of the second. This can be seen in such passages as "The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite"³ and "the truth consists in nothing else than the self-activity of personal appropriation."⁴ These assertions point

¹ Postscript p.218

² ibid. p.296

³ ibid. p.182

⁴ ibid. p.217

directly toward the second reconstruction of Climacus' meaning, indeed toward its most extreme formulation, i.e. the one in which the possibility of lower-order truths is ignored and subjectivity is made the sole criterion of truth. Such is the force of phrases like "is precisely" and "consists in nothing else than."

There are three reasons why we must reject the latter view. The first is that it puts Climacus in the position of denying that there are such things as mathematical truths and truths of natural science. Nowhere in either Fragment or Postscript is there evidence to justify the assertion that Climacus held such a view. The second is that the interpretation we are considering seems to be inconsistent with the belief that God is the truth, a belief expressed in a passage already quoted above. The third reason why we must reject it is that it cannot be reconciled with Climacus' view of philosophy. For example, at the end of Postscript Book One he writes: "All honor to philosophy, all praise to everyone who brings a genuine devotion to its service. To deny the value of speculation would be, in my opinion, to prostitute oneself. It would be particularly stupid in one whose energies are for the most part devoted to its service; especially stupid in one who admires the Greeks."¹ But the philosopher endeavors to be entirely objective. What value could speculation possibly have if only the endeavour to be entirely subjective could produce truth? Or rather, if that were all that were required? These three reasons are decisive, then. The view under consideration must be abandoned. Loose ends remain, however, namely the passages quoted to support it, and the others throughout Postscript like them. Our final account of Climacus' definition of truth must be able to reconcile

¹ Postscripts p.54

these anomalies.

The ambiguity is now resolved in favor of the first reconstruction of Climacus' intention in using the phrase "the highest truth attainable for an existing individual." But this only brings to light the fact that Climacus' thought is afflicted with a further, and deeper, ambiguity. We have opted for a view of the definition of truth which allows for the existence of truths commonly called objective, i.e. things which are said to be true not because someone passionately believes them to be so, but because the world really is that way. The ambiguity rests in the fact that Climacus often (and in crucial passages) does not make it clear in which sense it is that he is using the word 'truth'. Take, for example, the dictum that "the mode of apprehension of the truth is precisely the truth". Unless "the truth" is taken in a different sense in each of its occurrences, we fall into a dialectic with the appearance of unbreakable circularity. For in that case, on the one hand, there can be no truth until there is apprehension of the truth, while on the other hand, there can be no apprehension of the truth until there is truth to apprehend. Is Climacus trying to tell us that truth is impossible? Impossible. His meaning here must be that the mode of apprehension of the objective truth is precisely the subjective truth. In this way the problem of the circle of presuppositions never arises. Subjective truth, in this case, comes into being with the apprehension (in the proper mode) of an objective truth which is already existent.

The question arises-- could not Climacus just as well have said that the mode of apprehension of objective falsehood is precisely subjective truth? Apparently, the answer is that he could have.

The sections where he seems to be arguing just this are notorious; as in, for example, the following: "When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true."¹ Our concern in the paragraph above was not to show that this is not possible, but merely to unfold an example from the text wherein Climacus had failed to make clear the distinct senses in which he was making use of the term 'truth'. Furthermore, it should be noted that even in the case where 'falsehood' is substituted for 'truth' the adjective 'objective' is still required in order for the pronouncement to have any definite meaning.

There is more to be said about the role objective truth must play in Climacus' view of things, but let us return for a moment to his definition of the truth as "an objective uncertainty held fast in the most passionate inwardness." It might be thought that the truth-value is being assigned here to the "objective uncertainty" and that, accordingly, the definition takes the form "p is true for S = df..." where p is some proposition and S is the subject entertaining it. Now by our lights any interpretation built upon this claim is in serious error. First of all, it contradicts the letter of the texts. In the passage just quoted, for example, it is especially emphasized that "reflection is directed subjectively to the individual's relationship" and that the whole concern is with the nature of the relationship. Secondly, it contradicts the spirit of the Climacus opus which is first, last, and always ethical, if not religious. Climacus' quarry is not a systematic epistemology,

¹ Postscript p.178; the entire passage is in italics as published.

but how one ought to live and to think about his life. Thirdly, this view makes use of a modern, language-oriented conception of truth which sees truth as a property solely of linguistic entities such as propositions and declarative sentences. Of course it does not require this conception, but it has that air about it, and that is a view much too narrow to support the uses to which 'truth' is being put by Climacus.

If these arguments are sound (and we think they are), then they show that a very popular interpretation of the 'truth is subjectivity' thesis is untenable. It should not be thought that Climacus is claiming whatever proposition the subjective thinker comes most passionately to believe is therefore true because of his most passionate belief. We must look for truth in the relationship to what is believed and not in what is believed itself. This is the crux of 'truth is subjectivity'. Furthermore, we ought not construe this maxim as an epistemological theorem, but more along the lines of a normative ethical concept. And we ought to visualize truth, at least for the moment, as something more than simply a property of sentences. Exactly these objections serve to demolish another popular interpretation as well, i.e. that if S most passionately believes that p, then p is therefore subjectively true. This view not only ignores the focus upon the relationship between knower and known, but moreover, it is so beguiled by a theory of knowledge model as to take Climacus as positing the existence of a special kind of truth apprehensible only by a special mode of knowing. As congenial as this seems to some passages in Postscript it must be false.

Taking the above considerations into account, the correct interpretation of Climacus' definition of truth we put forward

peirastically as the following:

DF. 1) S's attitude toward p is true= df (1) p is objectively uncertain for S, and (2) p is most passionately held by S to be true (objectively).

This where p is some proposition and S is a knowing subject. The definition so formulated has the following advantages. First of all, it avoids the shortcomings adumbrated above. Justice is done to the focus on the individual's relationship to what he takes to be the truth which was called for in the last quotation from Postscript. Room is left for the ethical aspect of this truth to be developed. And the richer 19th Century conception of truth with which Climacus is working is given purchase. More will be said on all of these points later. Secondly, Df.1 brings Climacus more into accord with common sense. The notion that personal conviction alone makes a proposition true is just obviously false. And that it might be a mode of apprehending a new sort of knowledge, subjective knowledge, is a highly speculative claim quite divorced from normal usage. Thirdly, Df.1 gives us a way of making sense of the prima facie strange locution "in the truth" in a very straightforward manner. A person is said to be 'in good mood' when he is so related to his surroundings that they seem to him to be good, and 'in a bad mood' when they seem to be bad. Similar expressions are quite common when it is a relationship to others, or an attitude, that is being described: e.g. "S is in a rage", "S is in a careless frame of mind", "S is in debt" and so on. Everyone is familiar with such a manner of speaking and should not be unduly cramped by it. A person may be said to be 'in the truth' when he is so related to some proposition that while this proposition is objectively uncertain for him, he still believes with the utmost passion in its truth. It is this which will constitute a

true attitude toward p. Fourthly, reading Climacus' definition as Df.1 does helps to dispel the air of paradox which surrounds passages like "the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true", and the notorious parable of the Christian pagan and the pagan true believer.¹ On the two popular interpretations of the 'truth is subjectivity' thesis one is committed to the view either that the objectively false p suddenly becomes objectively true for a given individual, or that the objectively false p is found to contain something which is subjectively true for him. On the view we are putting forward the truth of p (either subjective or objective) never comes into question.

n/ For these reasons we think Df.1 is a step in the right direction. But it is clear that to do justice to Climacus' account a narrower definition of p thatⁿ just "some proposition" is required. The last passage quoted from Postscript is footnoted as follows: "The reader will observe that the question here is about essential truth, or about the truth which is essentially related to existence, and that it is precisely for the sake of clarifying it as inwardness or as subjectivity that this contrast is drawn." This footnote is to remind us that it is a very carefully circumscribed category of knowledge to which the definition of truth as subjectivity is intended to apply. This is the category of knowledge "which is essentially related to existence". We tried earlier briefly to indicate what sort of thing essential knowledge is, and to sketch a distinction between it and what might be called "accidental" knowledge. The following are examples of topics about which knowledge would be "essential" in the sense: (1) 'What is

¹ Postscript pp.179-180

the meaning of my own death for me?'; (2) 'What does it mean for me to become immortal?'; (3) 'What does it mean that I am to thank God for the good He bestows upon me?'; (4) 'What does it mean for me to get married?'.¹ It is a fundamental aspect of these questions that each one must be framed in the first person singular. Each one concerns the questioner alone. Each one is senseless considered apart from his existence, i.e. each one is conceptually tied to the fact of the questioner's existence. To a third party the answers cannot be given.

The answers to these questions will differ from the abstract propositions of philosophy and rational theology in that they will uniquely indicate a questioner. They will 'be about him' in a way that no abstract sentence can be. For abstract propositions are framed in universals while the questioner himself is no universal but a particular existent human being. "All men are mortal", for example, posits a connection between humanity and immortality but says nothing about any particular individual. Brand Blanshard has disputed this Climacean interpretation of the relation between universals and particulars in his book Reason and Belief.² According to him "there is no good ground for this strange interpretation. The statement is about me, for if it is true, I shall die, and if I do not, that will render the statement false." But this is obvious sophistry since Climacus could with equal justice point out that that I shall die does not entail that "All men are mortal" is true, nor does that "All men are mortal" is false entail that I am immortal. On a different tack, it is a question whether the answer to e.g. "What does it mean for me that my current-account is overdrawn?" might be a genuine bit of essential knowledge in

¹ From Postscript pp.147-161

² Blanshard Reason and Belief (Unwin 1958) p.228

this sense. We can only hint here that questions of this sort do not touch upon man's spiritual reality in the way that the four above do and that it is along these lines that an argument to exclude them from the realm of essential knowledge would proceed. To those who would contend that it is economic conditions which determine spiritual conditions we can only say that Climacus and he share insufficient common ground even to have an argument.

It is necessary more narrowly to delimit p, then, in order to reflect this powerful constraint upon what p's may be chosen for substitution into Df.1. We will not take up this task immediately. For the present we will alter Df.1 only in such a way as to remind us that more needs to be said about what sort of proposition with respect to which it is possible to be 'in the truth':

Df.2) S's attitude toward p (where p is a proposition essentially related to the existence of S) =
df (as in Df.1).

This amendment has the beneficial effect of removing the natural sciences, mathematics, et. al., as a possible sphere of application for the definition of truth as subjectivity. We count this as beneficial because it seem^s ridiculous to talk of a person having a true relation toward a false empirical generalization or a false mathematical axiom. This seems ridiculous in a way in which it does not seem ridiculous to talk about a person having a 'true' belief in a false god. But this is only another way of pointing out that Climacus is concerned here not with epistemology but with ethics and how one ought to live.

Now the question arises, if Climacus is interested only in the ethics of S's attitude, why does he not speak more honestly about the goodness or badness of the attitude rather than its truth

or lack thereof? And why not "S is good" or "S is bad" instead of "S is in the truth"? To modern ears this talk of truth or falsity within the sphere of the ethical may sound entirely misleading. Such usage, however, is commonplace in authors influenced by Hegel and it is with reference to Hegel that it is to be explained. Hegel considered his conception of truth to be a straightforward extension of the common man's understanding of that idea. He held that commonly truth is viewed as "the agreement of an object with our conception of it",¹ but that this sort of correspondance could more properly be called 'correctness'. While the individual 'knows how something is' and therefore is said to be in possession of the truth, the truth he has is truth "only in reference to consciousness", i.e. is a purely formal truth. That it is a formal, rather than a substantive, truth is shown by the fact that he may form a representation which is true in this sense (of being correct) but which is nevertheless a representation of something false. He may, for example, correctly grasp the meaning of a speaker who is telling him a lie. Hegel proposes to reserve the designation 'true' for those things in which essence and existence correspond. Accordingly, that thing is untrue in which an inconsistency subsists between its actual, concrete instantiation and its essence, or concept. And, to quote Hegel: "It is in this deeper sense of truth that we speak of a true state, or of a true work of art. These objects are true if they are as they ought to be, i.e. if their reality corresponds to their notion. When thus viewed, to be untrue means much the same as to be bad. A bad man is an untrue man, a man who does not

¹ Hegel Logic p.41

behave as his notion or vocation requires."¹ Two points previously touched upon with respect to Climacus are in this passage set in bold relief. (1) The domain of things to which it is possible to assign a truth-value is far greater than the domain of propositions or sentences. In fact, it is coextensive with the class of things which in any sense are. (2) The question concerning the value of a thing is identical to a question concerning its truth, which in turn amounts to a question concerning its mode of existence. Specifically, when it is a human being that is under consideration, to ask if he is a true human being is to ask for an ethical evaluation, i.e. is he living as he ought to live. And the answer will be found by comparing his essence (ideal being) with his actual way of life (factual being). Our claim is that it is this (or a very similar) notion of truth which is operative in Climacus' discussion of the subject.² This is 'the richer 19th Century conception of truth' we referred to earlier. This is the truth which is to be found in subjectivity.

It is interesting that though Climacus devotes much of his effort to polemic directed against Hegel, and indeed feels he has put forward "neither more nor less than the most decisive protest possible against the inverse procedure of the Method",³ he is content to give the same basic sense to this fundamental term. For surely Hegel's analysis of truth is not wholly divorceable from the rationalist metaphysic of which it is (an integral?) part. And the question arises how much of that metaphysic entered the Climacean framework when the gate was opened to this particular

¹ Hegel Logic p.276; the emphasis throughout is ours

² cf. R.Schacht "Kierkegaard and 'Truth Is Subjectivity'" Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 2 (March 1973) p.302

³ Postscript p.96

Hegelian insight? One might expect this importation to produce a considerable tension in the Climacean scheme. More will be said on this topic later.¹

We are not claiming, of course, that this area of agreement between Hegel and Climacus is extensive. In the case of human beings, for example, (and this is the only case of interest to Climacus) Hegel and Climacus are diametrically opposed when it comes to specifying what it is that constitutes their truth. Our point is that this disagreement does not stem from any variance in the basic sense they give to 'truth', but that instead its source is to be found in the two authors' radically divergent conceptions of human nature. In Hegel's view, history manifests God's progress through the world. It is, so to speak, God embodying Himself in the world to see what He is like. The goal of Spirit (and God is Absolute Spirit) is to produce itself as an object for itself, to become self-conscious. Man is the Spirit-engendered vehicle for this self-consciousness. This means that man's essential nature is to be Spirit. But Spirit has as its essential properties universality and objectivity. Therefore, the existence which accords with man's essence is that in which he obtains complete objectivity and universality. This is partially achieved in man's existence as citizen of a state. It is realized further in his existence as artist and as religious believer. And it is ultimately accomplished in man as philosopher, as possessor of the system of Reason, as Absolute Knower. It should be noted that as an explication of human nature Hegel's account is entirely derivative. What he really offers us is an account of the nature of Spirit. Man's nature, as a by-product of the activity

¹ see Regis Jolivet Introduction to Kierkegaard (Muller 1950) 227ff.

of Spirit, follows as a corollary. In fact, once one has gotten hold of the nature of Spirit, that of man is really no very interesting problem at all, and one Hegel himself seldom explicitly touches upon. His views are framed in terms of "the immanent movement of Reason", "the unfolding of the Concept", "Spirit's necessary progression toward self-consciousness", and so forth.

The situation with respect to Climacus is very different. The need for a clear conception of human nature is of the utmost importance to him. In the preface to his Treatise of Human Nature David Hume wrote the following: "There is no question of importance, whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science." Though Hume's use of the term 'science' is perhaps uncongenial to the Climacean way of thinking, he presents in this passage a thesis which we think Climacus would in substance agree with, viz. we need to know what we are if we are to know anything at all. "That the knowing spirit is an existing individual spirit, and that every human being is such an entity existing for himself, is a truth I cannot too often repeat; for the fantastic neglect of this is responsible for much confusion."¹ This is one important point of departure for Climacus' assault upon the Hegelian thought-edifice. Since Reason is immanent in the Hegelian world and is there to be discovered within past events, much like a fossil is there to be found within its bed of clay, his speculation can give to Hegel insight only into that which is over and done with. The Method is not in any sense predictive. Nor is it in any real sense normative. As Hegel himself points out, "the owl of Minerva flies only with the falling of the

¹ Postscript p.169

dusk." Since a living person is certainly not over and done with, "it is therefore impossible for a Hegelian to understand himself by means of his philosophy."¹ His comprehension of the grand sweep of world history is, in Climacus' eyes, no compensation. "When a man cannot understand himself, his understanding of China and Persia and the rest must surely be of a very peculiar kind."²

The notion at work here is illuminated by drawing an analogy with the empirical sciences. Suppose that a scientist, in a given experiment, made use of an instrument which it was possible for him to manipulate in such a way that it always yielded systematic results. But suppose further that the actual relation of his 'black box' to the phenomena upon which it was turned and its mode of interacting with them was a complete mystery to him. In this case, the question might fairly be put (bitingly, rhetorically, with the intent of reducing him to silence) to this scientist, by what right was it that he felt himself entitled to propound a general theory based upon results obtained in this manner. The point of analogy with the Climacean view is that, for Climacus, in engaging in (e.g.) speculative philosophy, the speculating individual is himself just such a black box. Man is capable of bringing his intellect to bear upon the world in such a way that he (very often) achieves coherent results. The phenomena fall into various categories, in their interaction they obey a host of logical rules, and it is possible to adduce physical principles by which their behavior can be explained and (perhaps even) predicted. It is possible for man to interpret his experience systematically. The problem is that without a thorough understanding

¹ Postscript p.272fn.; the emphasis is ours.

² ibid.

of how this instrument, his intellect, stands related to the world to which it applies itself, it is impossible fully to justify any particular interpretation of the results it yields. Hume was keen to relate man's reason to the world the empiricist in him said was 'out there', to the natural and cultural environment of the thinker. He accomplished this with his demonstration that "the far greatest part of our reasoning, with all our actions and passions, can be deriv'd from nothing but custom and habit." Climacus, on the other hand, wishes to show how reason and reason's truths are related (if indeed they are) to the truth of the individual in his concrete empirical existence. His attack on this problem focusses initially on whether (and to what extent) the attainment of truth is a human possibility. But eventually, as we have seen, this becomes a question of ethical import: "How can reason aid (or at least not hinder) the individual in living as he ought?" The broad outlines of how he ought to live are dictated by his nature. Therefore an answer to this question will presuppose a definite account of what man's nature is. This notion will come into play quite strikingly in what follows.

CHAPTER FOUR

ESSENTIAL TRUTH: The Definiendum

In the preceding section, we argued for a reformulation of Climacus' definition of truth as follows:

Df.2) S's attitude toward p (where p is a proposition essentially related to the existence of S) is true= df (1) S is objectively uncertain whether p is true or not, and (2) S most passionately holds p to be (objectively) true.

It is our intention in this section to explore more fully the notion of a type of knowledge which is 'essentially related to existence'.

As an introduction to the explication of what it is, it is helpful to note what other sorts of truth it is that 'truth which is essentially related to existence' is to be distinguished from, i.e. what it is not. First of all, it is clearly not the mathematical. Mathematics, according to Climacus, "has no relationship at all either to or from existence, but simply has objectivity."¹ Climacus surely includes under the rubric of mathematics all of the departments of the abstract science of quantity, e.g. geometry, algebra, arithmetic, and the like. What he would do with those sciences involving geometrical reasoning, such as astronomy and optics is less clear. How he would explain something like Snell's Law, for example, without conceding it some sort of relationship to existence is hard to see. On the other hand, to deny that it is mathematical seems untenable. But in whatever manner Climacus may resolve this dilemma, such sciences are ruled out by other considerations to be mentioned shortly. Secondly, essential truth

¹ Postscript p.101

will not be found in any logical system. In Climacus' own words:
"Nothing must then be incorporated in a logical system that has
any relation to existence, that is not indifferent to existence."¹
He does not clarify precisely what he means by 'logical system'
but given the references to Aristotle and the Greeks we suspect
the notion intended here is a classical one, viz. any system con-
cerned with the forms of thinking in general. It is because
existence involves movement, involves coming-into-being and passing
away, while the categories of the logician are seen as fixed, final,
complete and eternally valid, that the two spheres are held to be
incompatible. Climacus remarks² cryptically that "the logical is
negatively related to existence" in a way that mathematics is not,
namely, it appears, logical validity signifies actual empirical
possibility where mathematical correctness does not. This is hard
to see, and those who consider mathematics to be a branch of logic
will want to disagree. We will not undertake to establish this
distinction for Climacus. But we do wish to note this 'negative
relation' to existence for this will loom large in discussion below.
The introduction of the notion of possibility provides a transition
to and convenient link with the third category of truths from which
essential truth must be distinguished, i.e. abstract truth.

Abstract truth is distinct from logical truth in that its
concern is not with the forms of thinking in general but with the
form of things in general. (Of course this will not serve to
separate them in all cases since, for example, in Hegel's rationalist
system the forms of thinking and of things ultimately ~~is~~ identified.)

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¹ Postscript p.100

² ibid. p.101

But it shares with logical truth the property of being able to deal solely with possibilities. What does it mean to say the language of abstraction deals only with possibilities? This is a question we have attempted to answer above. We will only summarize our findings here. Briefly, we take it to mean that the implicit form of all propositions expressing an abstract truth is the form of a hypothetical conditional. For example, when Descartes put forward the abstract truth (a) "A bit of wax, properly speaking, is simply something extended, flexible and changeable," what he is really saying is (b) "If there is a concretely existent bit of wax, then it is something extended, flexible and changeable." And, on Climacus' view, whether "there is a concretely existent bit of wax" is true or not, is not of interest to abstract thought properly understood. It is related to existence only as a possibility, not essentially, and therefore no truth which is abstract is also essential.

The fourth category of truths not to be termed essential is that of historical truth. It falls prey to precisely the same axe as the logical and the abstract: For the knower cannot know an historical reality until he has resolved it into a possibility."¹ Is there a problem here? If we give the same sense to the notion of a thinker resolving historical reality into intellectual possibility that we gave to the notion of an abstract thinker so resolving the reality which was the object of his thought, we get an odd picture indeed. For what do we get if we put a proposition expressing a putative historical fact in the form of a hypothetical conditional? The historian says "Pearl Harbor was attacked on 7 December 1941." Climacus seems to be claiming that all the historian is entitled to assert is "If there was a Pearl Harbor, if there was an attack upon it,

¹ Postscript p.280

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if there was a 7 December 1941, if all the evidence we have amassed does indeed link the attack to this date and is ^(it)itself accurate, and so forth, the 'Pearly Harbor was attacked on 7 December 1941' is true." In other words, the historian does not straightforwardly apprehend the truth of a given historical proposition p. What he does apprehend is an abstract hypothetical statement of the form "If the putative facts upon which our conclusion p depends actually obtain, then p is the case." But is this really so odd? It seems to us that it might be conceded by any extremely careful historian. However, it might justifiably be objected that it is precisely the historian's task to make certain that it is actual fact upon which his conclusion is based and that until he has done so he ought to withhold making statements on the matter. Certainly concrete facts about past states of the world are the avowed goal of the historian. But Climacus does not see this goal as an attainable one. If it were an attainable goal, then the hypothetical form of historical statement would be a safe-hold for the hasty or the lazy merely. In reality, however, it exceeds the powers of man to provide a final and indubitable description of facts about the past, and historical statements in the hypothetical form provide the only knowledge possible of such facts. Why does it surpass man's powers, this finality? It is because all men, including the historian, exist and existence entails movement and movement excludes finality.¹ The honest inquirer finds that there is no point at which he can forbid all further questioning. Rational doubt always finds new toe-holds. "The years pass, but the situation remains unchanged. One generation after another departs from the scene, new difficulties arise and are overcome, and new difficulties arise again."²

¹ Postscript p.273 bottom.

² ibid. p.28

All right, fine. But why is it that we can never call the product of this sort of dialectic 'knowledge'? For surely a point is reached eventually when the difficulties that remain are quite trivial and to all but the most fastidious quite uninteresting, and when a conclusion is certainly justified? This question forces us to take notice of the fact that it must be an extraordinary sense in which knowledge is being spoken of here. When Climacus tells us "the knower cannot know an historical reality until he has resolved it into a possibility", he cannot mean for 'know' to be taken in its more ferial sense of 'warranted assertability' or the like. For if this construction is put on it, his claim about the means of knowing an historical reality is patently false. If we are to understand his assertion in a manner in which it is afforded at least some measure of plausibility, then we must take 'know' here as synonymous with 'be certain about' or 'be incapable of doubting'. So construed, Climacus' view amounts to this: historically, all we can be certain about is that if the putative facts upon which our conclusion p is founded actually obtain, then p is the case. This view combines two distinct aspects of Climacus' thought: (a) we can be certain that the 'if-then' statement is true because we can show that the conclusion can be inferred deductively from the premisses, i.e. we can demonstrate its truth to be analytic. But (b) we cannot be certain of p itself because the concrete existence (in the past) of the putative facts upon which it is based cannot itself be inferred (either inductively or deductively) from anything. It is upon empirical evidence alone that the assertion of a fact can be based and it is of the nature of such evidence that it is never all in. It is also true that the conclusions which we draw from empirical evidence, the particular interpretation which we put upon it, is never above imputation. This takes us into the next category of

in asserting

truth which we must distinguish from the essential one.

Fifthly, essential truth will not be found to be a property of any of the propositions of the empirical sciences, or even those of ordinary discourse, that are based upon observations of physical entities. The topic of the validity of sensations as a source of knowledge is addressed a number of times in Postscript.¹ Each time it is pushed aside in two curt sentences. The following is characteristic: "The apparent trustworthiness of sense is an illusion. This was shown adequately as early as in Greek scepticism, and modern idealism has likewise demonstrated it."² We will not take up the question whether the exposition of Greek scepticism on this head truly is "adequate". Obviously, it would take us too far afield. Nevertheless, it is helpful to note that rightly or wrongly this view is one to which Climacus wholeheartedly subscribes. This particular epistemological presupposition springs from the same ontological axioms which we claim enform all of his ethics and meta-ethics, theology and meta-theology. We note that Climacus is not claiming that our senses are defective. "Immediate sensation and immediate cognition cannot deceive."³ The information provided by the senses becomes open to doubt at a (logically if not temporally) later stage, the stage at which the knower places a certain construction upon it. Climacus writes, "The Greek sceptic did not deny the validity of sensation or immediate cognition; error... comes from the conclusions that I draw. If I can only refrain from drawing conclusion, I will never be deceived."⁴ And Sextus

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¹ pp.38, 75, and 280

² Postscript p.280; for an amplification of what Climacus understood the Sceptical arguments to be, see Fragments pp.101-105.

³ Fragments p.101

⁴ ibid. p.102

w/ Empiricus corroborates this reading: "we do not overthrow the affective sense-impressions (phantasian pathetikei) which induce our assent involuntarily; and these impressions are 'the appearances' (ta phainomena). And when we question whether the underlying object is such as it appears, we grant the fact that it appears, and our doubt does not concern the appearance itself but the account given of that appearance."¹ The conclusion toward which Climacus seems to be leading us is that while the phenomena are not to be impugned, the inference from these to the actual existence of the states of affairs we interpret the phenomena as indicating is not strictly justified. And therefore, the evidence of our senses becomes hypothetical in precisely the manner in which historical truths did.

Now we have seen in the preceding where "essential" truth is not to be found. The relevant characteristic barring logic, abstract speculation, empirical truths, and so forth from being "essentially" true is that their relation to some actually existent object is hypothetical, i.e. one of possibility. Apprehending the logical truth, for example, of an actual state of affairs consists in translating the reality of that state of affairs into a possibility. Logical truths themselves are statements of what is possible or not possible in the sphere of reality. (Reality here meaning factual existence, as distinct from only conceptual or ideal existence.) Nothing need actually exist for them to be true. Were all reality annihilated, their conceptual validity would remain, logic would stand essentially unchanged. Thus on Climacus' view logical truth is not essentially related to reality. (This observation may be taken as applying to objective truth generally. If the list we have enumerated above is

¹ Sextus Empiricus Outlines of Pyrrhonism trans. R. Bury (Loeb Library) Book One, section 19.

not exhaustive, it is assumed that any other categories of truth that arise will manifest this characteristic, too.) And to the extent that the truth of something is related to the existence of that thing merely as possibility, that thing is essentially untrue, or at least from the standpoint of essential truth it is irrelevant.

But (1) "Thought (the act of thinking) takes existence away from the real and thinks it by abrogating its actuality, by translating it into the sphere of the possible."¹ (We have dealt with this at length above.) Therefore, (2) no object or state of affairs the existence of which can be apprehended only by being thought can ever be essentially true. But (3), from the standpoint of the existing individual (call him S) the reality of all x's (with one exception) can be grasped by S only by S's being related to x cognitively, i.e. by thinking it. Therefore (4), only this exception can manifest itself as essentially true for S. (5) This exception occurs only when $x=S$, that is, when it is S's own existence which is the reality in question. Therefore, only S's own reality can be essentially true for S. Or in Climacus' words, "The only reality that exists for an existing individual is his own ethical reality."² He restates this maxim in a hyperbolic and misleading fashion later as "the ethical reality of the individual is the only reality."³

Here we have finally located the ground where "essential" truth is to be found. However, it cannot be counted a satisfactory answer until we have understood why it is that the individual has this privileged access to his own reality. Climacus' account is

¹ Postscript p.281

² ibid. p.280 bottom

³ ibid. p.291

far from clear on this point, dealing with it as it does only very briefly. The key is to be found in two small passages of Postscript. First: "That the content of my thought exists in the conceptual sense needs no proof, or needs no argument to prove it, since it is proved by my thinking it. But as soon as I proceed to impose a teleology upon my thought, and bring it into relation with something else, interest begins to play a role in the matter. The instant this happens the ethical is present."¹ The part we find most interesting about this is the notion of imposing a teleology, which we take to mean setting oneself a goal, directing one's thought toward the bringing about of some future state of affairs, establishing for oneself a project. And the relevant aspect of this notion is that in formulating a project one's thought is directed toward bringing something real into existence. One is concerned, and what one is concerned with is the realization of the project. The man who has set himself a goal is no longer indifferent (after the manner of abstract thought) to the reality of the object he contemplates. He has in effect committed himself to doing something and it then becomes germaine to ask if what he is doing is what he ought to do. That is to say, "the ethical is present." How this bears upon the question of the individual's unique relation to his own reality becomes clearer in the light of the second passage: "This ethical reality is the only reality which does not become a mere possibility through being known, and which can be known (not) only through being thought; for it is the individual's own reality. Before it became a reality it was known by him in the form of a conceived reality, and hence as a possibility. But in the case of another person's reality he could have no knowledge about it until he conceived it in coming to

¹ Postscript p.282; my emphasis.

know it, which means that he transformed it from a reality into a possibility."¹ The primary difference, Climacus seems to be indicating here, between forming a conception of the reality of someone or something else and forming a conception of one's own reality resides in the direction in which thinking moves between possibility and reality. In disinterested intellectual contemplation of the sort we have discussed at length above thinking the reality of an x consists in transforming the reality of that x into a possibility. The direction of the movement is from reality to possibility. On the other hand, in the interested formulation of a project the movement of an individual's thought is from the possibility of bringing into existence the "conceived reality" of his project to the reality of his decision to act upon his conception. In short, the direction of the transformation which thought effects upon the objects which it takes up is diametrically opposed in the two cases.

How does this notion apply to the question of the individual's privileged non-cognitive access to his own reality? We have seen
s/ how contemplation transforms it | object into a hypothesis with respect to its actual empirical existence, and that the closest such contemplation can approach to certainty on the question of the actual existence of its object is an approximation. Why is it that precisely this situation does not arise in the case of self-contemplation? Is Climacus really saying no more than that because my perceptions of my own thoughts are direct and indefeasible, I directly and indefeasibly perceive my own concrete existence? No,

p.284 |
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¹ The word "not" included in parentheses is not in the Princeton edition of Postscript. Whether this is a mistake by the printer or by Swenson we cannot say but it is surely on | or the other. In the context of Climacus' exposition the need for "not" is obvious. And it is in the Samlede Skrifter version of the passage. See v.VII p.308.

this is the answer Descartes provides with his Cogito. And though a consistent position perhaps for an abstract thinker like Descartes, such a position is clearly unsatisfactory for Climacus. For him the reality of an individual consists of much more than thinking merely. And it does not account for the characterization of an individual's own reality as one "which can be known not only through being thought." No, ethical contemplation does not finish with the transformation of its object into a possibility. It begins with possibility and moves toward realization. The transformation then culminates not in thought (a possibility) but in the changed life of the individual. The consideration of possibilities is brought to an end by the decision to act.¹ For a human being existing² consists in acting. To decide to act is to manifest interest in action, is to desire existence, i.e. reality.³ The reality of a human being consists in his desire for reality. Action is the mark of that desire.

s/ A few words about what Climacus understands by action are in order. "The real action is not the external act, but an internal decision in which the individual put an end to mere possibility and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it. This is the action."⁴ Climacus adduces several examples in which the internal action and the real action are easily differentiated. Suppose we amend the parable of the good Samaritan so that it reads like this: the Levite returns for the injured wayfarer, repentant of his earlier callousness and intent on saving the poor man at any cost to himself. Suppose further that the good Samaritan in the time between the passing of the Levite and his

¹ Postscript p.304fn.

² In the relevant sense. See *ibid.*p.276

³ *ibid.* p.304

⁴ *ibid.* p.302

return spirits the injured man away to safety. Thus the Levite has no opportunity to do (in an external sense) anything. Nevertheless, says Climacus, he acted.¹ To improve on the example we might even remove the external aspect of the Levite's decision constituted by his turning around. Suppose that at the moment he had decided to return, he had been set upon by the robbers himself, bound, gagged and carried away to Ethiopia. Presumably, he had still acted. Or a better example, a case of what Climacus calls "an act sensu eminenti": "The external element in Luther's action consists in his appearance before the Diet of Worms; but from the moment he had committed himself with entire subjective passion, so that every mere relationship of possibility to this action was interpreted by him as a temptation-- from that moment he had acted."² This is an excellent example for Climacus because while it clearly makes the point that the external is not the criterion of an action, it also makes a further point of some importance, viz. that the thought of acting alone is not enough either.

In the Levite parable it seemed that Climacus was coming out in favor of Kant and the sufficiency of a good will, and against Hegel with his demand that a will, to be good, must produce good results.³ When he discusses the world-historical perspective and its relation to the ethical, he seems to take this line as well. Non-ethical factors such as the play of physical forces or simple accidents essentially modify the doer's deed "so as to transform it into something that does not directly belong to him."⁴ But ethically speaking his actions do directly belong to him. Therefore,

¹ Postscript p.304 top.

² ibid. p.304 bottom.

³ see R. Solomon "Kierkegaard and Subjective Truth" PhilToday 21 (Fall 1977) 209, for just such an interpretation.

⁴ Postscript p.120

to his decision /

OH /

the external deed cannot constitute the agent's action (in a sense of that term that is ethically relevant). The action in this sense is constituted by the agent's willing to bring about some external state of affairs. In evaluating his action regard for the outcome actually produced in the world will play no decisive role. There is, however, an important difference between Climacus and Kant on this point which is brought out in the reference to Luther. For Kant, an agent's willing is 'good' or has moral value provided that the subjective principle in accordance with which his decision was made is rational, i.e. could serve as a universal law. Thus it is because what he wills is abstractly universalizable that his willing is good in Kant's eyes. Insofar as what is willed cannot without self-contradiction be willed universally it is amoral or perhaps even evil. On Climacus view, however, the standard by which we evaluate the ethical merit of an individual's decision is not a particular quality of the maxim upon which the decision was based, but instead a quality of the individual's decision itself. The important question is has the subject committed himself "with entire subjective passion? If he has, then he is essentially in the truth.

Still, the point of analogy between Kant and Climacus is intact. Both philosophers put forward what might be called a 'purely formal' criterion for the ethical evaluation of an action. Thus Climacus can write: "Between the action as represented in thought on the one hand, and the real action on the other, between the possibility and the reality, there may in respect of content be no difference at all. But in respect of form, the difference is essential. Reality is the interest in action, in existence."¹ And thus Kant is able to preserve the radical autonomy of the moral will from the dictates of natural law: "If a rational being is to think of his maxims as

¹ Postscript p.304

practical universal laws, he must think of them as determining the will, not by their matter, but simply by their form."¹ This analogy with Kant recalls a criticism of Climacus which we touched upon much earlier and which we have had in the back of our mind throughout the discussion of essential truth, viz. that to equate truth with subjectivity is to count as true absolutely anything whatsoever. For Kant has often (and rightly, we think) been criticized for propounding a rather vacuous formalism. He gives the following example of a maxim which is not universalizable and which therefore cannot be the maxim of a moral action:²

Suppose, for instance, that my maxim is to make as much money as I can. A man at his death has left in my hands property in trust for others, but he has not left in writing anything to show that I received the money. Can I interpret my maxim in this way, that everyone may deny having received a deposit, if there is nothing to show that he has received it? It is at once obvious, that such a principle, the moment it is stated in the form of a law, becomes self-contradictory; for if it were a universal principle of action, no one would ever leave his money in trust.

Hegel, for example, responds to this quite trenchantly.³ The apparent contradiction to which Kant refers never arises, argues Hegel, if one only generalizes the subjective maxim of his action as follows: 'always steal deposits when you can'. That eventually the practice of stealing them will bring an end to the practice of leaving them and that sooner or later one will for that reason not be able to steal deposits in no way shows that this principle is self-contradictory. Rather all that it demonstrates is that universal embezzlement of deposits and the practice of leaving them are incompatible.

¹ Kant Selections ed. Watson (Maclehose, Glasgow 1908) p.265; taken from the Critique of Practical Reason.

² ibid. p.265-66

³ We base this on Taylor Hegel (Cambridge 1975) p.371ff.

But this is a tautology which by itself gives us no reason for preferring one to the other. In short, the requirement of universalizability for the maxims upon which one has acted cannot distinguish between stealing and depositing, and on the basis of this requirement alone almost any action whatsoever might be justified. To put the problem in modern terms, it seems that even if we admit that Kant's requirement is a necessary condition of a moral action, he has not shown it to be a sufficient one. Hegel contends that it is a condition met by many clearly immoral actions as well, for example the worst excesses of the French Revolution. William Frankena makes the milder point that the universalizability requirement is met in a number of clearly amoral cases.¹ 'When alone in the dark, whistle' and 'Tie your left shoe-string first', for example, seem to be maxims one could will to be universal law. These considerations seem clearly to establish that a purely formal criterion for a moral action like the possibility of willing the maxim upon which it is based to be universal law is just not enough.

But is not Climacus open to a very similar line of attack? How would he have us decide whether the stealing of the deposit is (in his terms) a real action or not? Presumably we have only to look to the formal criterion which he has given us. If the individual has committed himself with entire subjective passion to the theft, then his action is a true action and if not, not. This will also be the case, it seems, with whistling in the dark, tying the left shoe-lace first, and even with killing one's only son. Any passing fancy whatever that the individual might entertain will constitute a true action provided only that the individual is related to it in

¹ W. Frankena Ethics (Prentice-Hall 1963) p.27.

the requisite manner, i.e. is totally committed to it. This does indeed sound far-fetched and even dangerous. But again we must remind ourselves that the action which is passionate commitment is not realizing or making true that to which the commitment is made. What is being realized is the truth of the individual who commits himself, his own subjectivity. The question is how is it that commitment to a false ideal can produce a true subjectivity? We can only sketch an answer here. It is given in its entirety in the doctrine of the life-stages. If we may have recourse briefly to a different pseudonym, Judge William addresses himself to our question in the following passage:¹

If you will understand me aright, I should like to say that in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses. Thereby the personality announces its inner infinity, and thereby, in turn, the personality is consolidated. Therefore, even if a man were to choose the wrong, he will nevertheless discover, precisely by reason of the energy with which he chose, that he had chosen wrong.

The aesthetic and metaphysical ideals, the ethical and the pagan-religious are all examples of commitments to objects which are limited and therefore to some extent false. The suggestion is that if one commits himself to one or the other of these thoughtlessly or half-heartedly, he may lead his life completely unaware or only vaguely conscious of the limitations of the commitment he has undertaken. Thus he may never be moved to transcend them. On the other hand, if the individual commits himself with entire subjective passion to e.g. the pursuit of beauty or pleasure, he will be moved to despair by the inevitable discovery that the pursuit of this ideal cannot give to his existence the permanence which it requires. And this

¹ Either/Or, v.II, p.171 (Doubleday-Anchor); the emphasis is ours.

despair will move him to redirect his passion, perhaps to the ethical. If he is single-minded in his pursuit of duty, he will discover its shortcoming, too. The religious and finally the Christian religious will follow in order. The point is this: subjective passion is self-correcting. If followed faithfully, it will lead one in time to a commitment which is a commitment to something objectively valid. By pursuing life with an absolutely solipsistic focus on his own subjectivity, the individual finds his own conceits eventually coincide with complete objectivity. The limitless passion of the entirely committed individual will never find rest or satisfaction in any limited object. In time it will come to fix itself to the only object to which it can with satisfaction be committed, to the only limitless one, i.e. to God. Thus it seems that what appeared to be a purely formal condition for a true action is also an implicit specification of the possible content of such an action. In this way the Climacean theory is saved from the revealed vacuity of Kant's doctrine.

We return to the track upon which we set out in this section. It has been shown that the only bearer of essential truth is the concrete individual, and that each such individual can be essentially true for himself alone. The existence of another is for him a matter of objective knowledge (and therefore a possibility) and so for that other is the existence of the first. For this reason it is fair to say that truth in this sense is completely egocentric. Furthermore, Climacus' concerns are always very pragmatic, always concerned with the relationship of truth to reality, to actual existence.¹ Since our own reality is the only reality we can actually

¹ In De Omnibus the interest was in "the relationship usually assumed between the sentence (De omnibus dubitandum est) and becoming a philosopher." (p.116); in Fragments, "How far does Truth admit of being

grasp (qua reality), it is proper from the pragmatic point of view to conclude that "the ethical reality of ^{the} individual is the only reality." This pronouncement is proper from the standpoint of edification, too, if as Climacus says "it is unethical even to ask at all about another person's ethical inwardness, in so far as such inquiry constitutes a diversion of attention."¹ For these reasons the notion of essential truth as Climacus has delineated it carries with it the implication of (what is at least a methodological) acosmism.² One other property of essential truth quite different from these is that it requires reduplication in existence.³ As we have seen, the truth which is essential with respect to a given individual is such because the individual has realized it, has in action modified his own existence so as to accord with it. A truth which the subject cannot bring into relation with his own reality in this manner can never be a truth of this sort. The difference between abstract truth and essential truth on this point might be likened to the difference between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. Neither one is a necessary condition for the other. S may know that the breaststroke consists of motions x,y, and z executed in a certain order. But if, when placed in the water he must be thrown a life-preserver to save him from drowning, then he cannot claim to know how to swim. Conversely, an individual who is demonstrably able (knows how) to swim need not be aware (know that) his skill consists in executing motions x,y, and z in a certain order. If he also knows

learned?" (p.11); in Postscript it was "how I may establish a proper relationship to this doctrine (i.e. Christianity)." (p.19). The emphasis is in each case ours.

¹ Postscript p.287

² ibid. p.305

³ ibid. pp.69, 152n., 171, 297

this, then well and good for the two are incompatible only to the extent that contemplating the motions prevents S from ever entering the water. In these three cases the differences between the abstract thinker, the simple wise man, and the subjective thinker respectively are explained. The abstract thinker has a speculative understanding of what he ought to do but proves to be incapable of real action. The simple wise man lacks any speculative understanding of how he ought to live but nevertheless in passion really acts. The subjective thinker has grasped at once the potential infinity of dialectical difficulties which stand between a man and speculative understanding of his existence and so he has broken off the deliberations in which he sought such an understanding and in passion has really acted.¹ And thus it is explained why Climacus is wont to call the difference between the simple wise man and the learned wise man a "vanishing little distinction".² In practice, in the reduplication in existence of what they understand, the difference between them does indeed completely vanish. Finally, there is one further trait of essential truth which merits special mention, i.e. the need for repetition. Since one is in the truth, or possesses essential truth, only by reduplicating it in one's life and since that reduplication is an event which like any other event occurs at a certain time before which and after which it has no real existence, therefore if one is to remain in the truth one must be prepared to repeat at every moment the reduplication of that truth in existence. It is for this reason that Climacus quotes with approval Lessing's view on the lifelong pursuit of truth,³ and why

¹ There is a problem with this 'knowing how' analogy perhaps. It is generally thought that such knowing could exist entirely dispositionally, and the relation between action as defined by Climacus and dispositions as understood by modern thinkers is not entirely clear.

² Postscript p.143; cf. pp.161, 204-7, 316.

³ *ibid.* p.97

he says himself that "the ideal of a persistent striving is the only view of life which does not carry with it an inevitable disillusionment. Even if a man has attained to the highest, the repetition by which life receives content will again constitute a persistent striving; because here again finality is moved further on and postponed."¹

Ethically and psychologically the notion that one is never finished with the task of acquiring the truth has great consequences. It also provides Climacus with the tools with which to defuse the following trenchant criticism. Professor A.E. Murphy has argued² that Climacus' view here is self-defeating, because "If 'the truth' is subjectivity then the believer runs no risk when he leaps; he has it, or rather is it, in the very act of leaping. For the truth here in question is 'eternal truth', the truth related to man's existence, and Kierkegaard claims to have shown that it is subjectivity. But if this is the case then eternal truth is not a transcendent goal but a present possession..." And yet according to Climacus, argues Murphy, the object which the individual who is in the truth has appropriated with most passionate inwardness must by definition be objectively uncertain for him. That is to say, he must not be in possession of the eternal truth. The problem then is that on the one hand the individual can be in the truth only if he does not possess the truth, while on the other hand if he is in the truth, he ipso facto possesses it. Murphy's conclusion: "if truth is inwardness, the man of faith is not in the truth precisely in virtue of being in the truth."

¹ Postscript p.110; for an interesting parallel cf. Sextus Empiricus, op. cit. I, XII, 27-28.

² A.E. Murphy "On Kierkegaard's Claim That 'Truth is Subjectivity'" in Reason and the Common Good (Prentice-Hall 1963) pp.175-76.

First of all, we should state that we find Murphy's argument to be somewhat at odds with the text. It is true, as Murphy claims, that Climacus "uses 'the truth' to mean both the eternal truth at which the believer aims... and the subjective condition of the believer in his agonizing separation from this truth when he groundlessly affirms it."¹ But this former is comparatively rare and usually set off by its context from application of 'the truth' as subjectivity. It is doubtful that Climacus intends to identify these two senses of that phrase. The passage from Postscript which Murphy marshalls to the support of his contention that this is Climacus' intention is plainly misquoted. His putative quotation reads "The reader will observe that the question here is about eternal truth, or about the truth that is essentially related to existence."² The part of this sentence following 'about' was reproduced by him in the first passage of his quoted above. Our copy of Postscript, however, reads "the question here is about essential truth"³ and the Danish text⁴ bears out this reading. With this emendation Murphy's argument is prevented from ever getting off the ground. For the truth in question when truth is defined as subjectivity need not be eternal truth at all. And while essential truth in subjectivity becomes a present possession, the eternal truth might remain the transcendent goal that inwardness requires. Thus we agree with Murphy that the Catch-22 he evokes from the Climacean notion of subjective truth "arises through a failure to make some elementary distinctions."⁵ But perhaps it is not Climacus who has

¹ Murphy op. cit. p.176.

² ibid. p.174; our emphasis

³ Postscript p.178; our emphasis.

⁴ Samlede Skrifter p.185

⁵ Murphy ibid. p.176

failed to make them.

Now there are passages upon which Murphy plausibly could have based his case. For example, Climacus writes that on Socrates' view of thing "The eternal and essential truth, the truth which has an essential relationship to an existing individual because it pertains essentially to existence... is a paradox..."¹ Twice in this passage the qualifications 'eternal' and 'essential' are applied to the same truth. There are several other cases of this.² If essential truth is simply the same as eternal truth, and essential truth is subjectivity, then Murphy's conclusion follows and his argument is valid. That Climacus holds the latter of these conditions to be the case is beyond dispute, therefore, if the argument is to be countered the former must be denied. A distinction between eternal truth and essential truth must be drawn. But in order to conform with the passages referred to above, this distinction must be drawn in such a way that it is still possible simultaneously to apply them both as adjectives to the same truth. It must be possible for one and the same truth to be both essential and eternal.

It would be helpful if we could characterize eternal truth more explicitly. Climacus never spells it out. It can be gathered from the context that it is, or is compatible with, a Socratic notion of eternal truth. Thus eternal truths seem to correspond to the changeless eidei of Plato's heaven, the realm of true being. They are the archetypes after which God patterned the world. The eternal truth (singular) then will be the intelligible reality of all that is. As such it is to be conceived of as largely transcendent.

¹ Postscript p. 183

² see Postscript pp.184, 187, 196, 197

Even the man of faith is in existence "half God-forsaken" and eternal certainty can never be his.¹ Eternal truth might also be likened to Hegel's Absolute, the system of all truth embodied in God. (In itself, it will be distinct from abstract truth, however, because God does not think eternal truth, He creates it.² His 'knowing' it converts it, not into a possibility in the way that the abstract thinker's does but, into reality.) This is a hazy picture but it is Climacus' central claim that eternal truth is something not merely in fact but even in principle beyond man's understanding. Therefore it would be unreasonable of us to demand that he spend much time in clarifying it conceptually. Now it is our idea that at least some elements of eternal truth thus understood will simply in virtue of their being play an ethically normative role in the lives of men. As the Idea of the Good is for Plato manifest even in the realm of becoming as the causal determinant of all values, so there is an element of Climacean eternal truth which will determine what is essentially human and therefore how a man ought to live. (For a man ought to be a true man and truth is the unity of essence and existence-- in this case his own essence and his own existence.) Thus Climacus speaks of "the ideal man whose relationship to every individual man is that of requirement."³ And for this reason it is the case that "The task of the subjective thinker is to transform himself into an instrument that clearly and definitely expresses in existence whatever is essentially human."⁴ Thus the eternal

¹ Postscript p.203

² ibid. p.296

³ ibid. p.321

⁴ ibid. p.318

truths which constitute the truth of human existence (human nature) direct the individual's existence as its final cause. Such truths, linked essentially with the existence of the individual in this manner, are what we take Climacus to be referring to when he makes use of the terms "essential" and "eternal essential" truth. Thus essential or eternal essential truth is a proper subset of eternal truth. It is distinguished from non-essential or "accidental" eternal truth by its special reference (viz. to human reality).

If the above account is accurate, then Climacus' surprising use of the locution "eternal essential truth" and our claim (contra Murphy) that eternal truth must be distinguishable from essential truth are quite compatible. The possible textual support for Murphy's argument has been taken away from him. So too has one of its premisses. For he argues that if one is subjectively in the truth one eo ipso possesses eternal truth, and we have shown that this is not strictly speaking true. What one possesses when 'in the truth' is more limited, it is essential truth. Now essential truth has the property that it is apprehended only in its repeated reduplication in the existence of the individual. Thus as Climacus says, "even if a man has attained to the highest" he remains objectively uncertain that it is his, objectively uncertain that he can and will remain there in the future. Real human existence, in Climacus' view, like love in Socrates'¹ is a constant striving because one must continue to be what one is (and that requires renewed passion), one must continue to desire what one already possesses. Thus another premiss of Murphy's argument collapses, too, viz. that passionate inwardness and

¹ see Postscript p.85 where this analogy with Socrates is suggested.

and being in the truth are incompatible. But this notion forms one horn of the dilemma with which his reductio concludes. Therefore his argument fails.

Professor Murphy is right when he says "it is precisely because the believer is infinitely concerned with a truth that is not subjectivity and with its infinite transcendence that he is in the truth in his tortured affirmation of it."¹ Where he goes wrong is in thinking that this constitutes a fact that Climacus must deny. Such an insight is in complete accord with the interpretation of the definition of subjective truth we have put forward above.

To return to the original problem of this section, we see that our conception of essential truth has been considerably transformed since Df.2 was first tentatively advanced. So much so, in fact, that it is obvious that Df.2 is in need of emendation. For now it is clear that not only is subjective truth not a property of propositions but of relationships of persons to something else, but furthermore, this something else is not (as we first suggested) simply a proposition either. The 'truth is subjectivity' thesis is intended to apply to essential truth only. Subjective truth is a property of the relationship between an individual and what is for him essential truth. From what we took to be examples of areas within which essential truth would be found, and from the manner in which Climacus adduced these examples (e.g. with copious use of the words 'understand' and 'know') it seemed plausible to suggest that essential truth (though not subjective truth) was propositional. It was also comforting to retain this link with modern philosophy and its wholly propositional

¹ Murphy op. cit. p.176

? | account of truth. However, this is not strictly the case and this notion must now be amended. Essential truth is related essentially (could we read "conceptually") to the existence of the individual. This means that such truth can be grasped immediately by him in its relation to existence. It does not, like any other sort of truth which the individual may grasp, undergo an automatic transformation into a possibility. But the only reality which is related in this manner to the individual's existence is the reality of his own actions defined as intensely passionate decisions to act. Therefore, essential truth will be a property of the individual's actions, and again, not of propositions. It may be that the individual makes his decision in accordance with a proposition (e.g. "I am going to do x."). Then again, he may not. His resolve might spring from heart or arm quite unspoken. Deciding need not be 'deciding that'. But even in the cases where it is, the proposition will be the unimportant element. It is the resolve itself that is critical. "If a man does not become what he understands, then he does not understand it either."¹ Action is the decisive requirement for the apprehension of one's resolve. Finally, since it is also the case for Climacus that a man's existence is completely definable in terms of his actions (or lack thereof), therefore we can restate Df.2 in the following way:

Df.3) S's attitude toward his own existence is true= df (1) S is objectively uncertain whether his own existence is true or not, and (2) S most passionately holds his existence to be (objectively) true.

¹ Kierkegaard Journals and Papers ed. Hong (Indiana UP) v.VII, 4540.

CHAPTER FIVE

OBJECTIVE UNCERTAINTY/SUBJECTIVE PASSION: The Definiens

In the preceding section we have sought to bring the definiendum of the Climacean definition of truth into sharper focus. In this section we will turn our attention to the definiens. Climacus formulates it as follows: "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness."¹ In our restatement we made explicit what we say to be the two separate conditions contained in this formula, viz. (1) objective uncertainty, and (2) passionate belief. We will attempt to treat of each in turn though our discussion will demonstrate that they are not everywhere and always clearly separable. In fact, it will be seen in what follows that (1) is a necessary condition of (2).

Our discussion of essential truth began with a cursory adumbration of the forms of inessential or accidental truth. There we showed how these truths are really statements averring the possibility that some given thing exists or that some state of affairs obtains, and how with respect to the concrete existence of these things or the actual obtaining of the states of affairs which these truths supposedly are about, these truths are always hypothetical and to some degree uncertain, i.e. objectively uncertain. This notion of uncertainty wants filling out. There is something strange about the phrase "objective uncertainty". The faint redolence of an oxymoron lingers about it. There are two senses in which one might speak of 'an uncertainty'. Take

¹ Postscript p.182

the sentence "Socrates is uncertain whether man has an *eidos*". Here 'uncertain' denotes the property of being in doubt, a property which is always the property of a rational subject, in this case Socrates. The property inheres in Socrates and without Socrates there is no such uncertainty. It is a particular fact of his psychological constitution. This is the first sense. On the other hand, consider the sentence "It is uncertain whether man has an *eidos*." We take 'uncertain' in this sense to mean 'not having been established as fact or truth'. In this sense it is no longer a psychological property of persons, but rather a logical property of the proposition "man has an *eidos*" (or alternatively, of the state of affairs 'man having an *eidos*'). It has this property by virtue of the fact that it has not been soundly demonstrated to be the case. Though the whole world believed it to be true, it might for all of that remain an uncertainty.

Now the oxymoronic feel of the phrase "objective uncertainty" clearly resides in the taking of 'uncertain' in the first sense mentioned above. For, on the one hand, an uncertainty of this sort is something someone has, something subjective like a pain or a joy, while on the other, the objective standpoint is one that is arrived at only when subjectivity has been entirely eliminated. Taking uncertainty in this sense then seems to put 'objective uncertainty' in the same class of things as the round square. Thus it appears that to give any clear sense to that portion of Climacus' definition we are considering here we must take the second sense of 'uncertain' described above to be the one intended. Unlike the first, this uncertainty requires no subjectivity in which to inhere and therefore is entirely compatible with the notion of objectivity. A proposition is an uncertainty if (it) lacks a valid demonstration of its truth. Now the question arises whether the

qualification 'objective' is intended to accomplish anything more than this decision between the two senses of uncertainty. It seems it is, in the following way: Climacus views the objective mode of reflection as requiring abstraction from any data which is the product of the individual's particular^{ly} make-up and situation. The objective thinker wants to see the universe without the limitations of occupying a certain perspective. He seems to have a notion of reality much like that which Dummett finds in McTaggart:¹

reality must be something of which there exists in principle a complete description. I can make drawings of a rock from various angles, but if I am asked to say what the real shape of the rock is, I can give a description of it as in three-dimensional space which is independent of the angle from which it is looked at. The description of what is really there, as it really is, must be independent of any particular point of view.

Therefore, to qualify any x as objectively ϕ is to say that in a complete description of reality, one independent of individual viewpoints, x will actually be ϕ . More specifically, to say of some p that it is an objective uncertainty is not to say that no one has proven it yet, that thus far it lacks a demonstration, rather it is to say that reality is such that p cannot be proven to be the case. Hence it represents a significant strengthening of the claim of uncertainty.

In this light it appears that clause (1) of our newly propounded Df.3 is in need of further revision. Our tentative initial proposal "S is objectively uncertain whether..." is making use of uncertainty in the sense that we have rejected. We suggest the following amendment to bring the definition into

¹ M.A.E. Dummett "A Defence of McTaggart's Proof of the Unreality of Time" in Truth and Other Enigmas (Duckworth, London 1978), final page.

accord with this insight:

Df.4) S's attitude toward his own existence is true= df (1) it is in principle impossible to demonstrate that S's existence is (objectively) true, and (2) S most passionately holds that his existence is objectively true.

When we say "in principle indemonstrable" we mean "objectively" and therefore "demonstrably indemonstrable". Thus is it made clear that however S acquires essential truth, however he realizes his nature, he will not do so by reasoning himself into it. Some sort of 'leap' beyond what he can prove will be required.

The question arises as to how it is possible to demonstrate that the truth of an individual's existence is indemonstrable. That it might be difficult to demonstrate such a truth is obvious. But many political and moral philosophers (e.g. Platonists, Kantians, Hegelians, Marxists, et.al.) have claimed to possess in their theories the means of doing so. How would one proceed to show in a given case that such a proof is not only difficult but actually impossible? In our eyes Climacus' treatment of what he calls "the objective problem concerning the truth of Christianity"¹ is an attempt to show just that. Christianity is an "existential communication"². It puts itself forward as a requirement for anyone who would fully realize his essential humanity. The ultimate interest of true man is in his life in eternity. This earthly existence is a temporary stage, a period of decision, upon which it is an egregious error to focus too much attention, as if it were all there is. Eternal life awaits one and the task is to acquire the life which is eternal happiness rather than its opposite.

¹ Postscript Book One.

² see *ibid.* pp.332, 501, 497.

This one does by establishing the proper relationship to Christianity, viz. by becoming a Christian. Being a Christian, realizing Christ's teaching in one's own existence, in this case constitutes the essential truth of the individual. Now it is not in question whether Christianity is correct or not in making this claim for itself. This would be an inquiry outside the bounds of Climacus' experimental 'thought-project'. We are to assume for the sake of the argument that Christianity is indeed eternal essential truth. The proper question first of all is can the individual prove that he has established a proper relationship to Christianity, that it is really Christianity to which he has related himself. Secondly, if he cannot prove it, is this because he is too stupid, because he has not thought about it, because he has not completed his research yet, because of some other contingent fact; or is it because such a thing is indemonstrable in principle? To these questions Book One of Postscript provides a closely argued answer.

Climacus discerns two ways in which people have tried to prove objectively that it is indeed Christianity which they have got hold of. The first is that of historical inquiry. The investigation in this form takes as its task a complete examination of the physical evidence available in order to corroborate those propositions asserting the existence of persons and those describing the occurrence of events (together with their orthodox explanation) upon which faith supposedly is founded. Its ultimate goal is a fixed and indefeasible doctrine, the final answer to the question "What is Christianity?" This form is the province of biblical scholars and theologians. The second form that an objective investigation into Christianity may take is that of philosophical inquiry. Such an inquiry presupposes the first, taking up the historical results as raw material for its own undertaking. Here the task,

as conceived by its Hegelian proponents and characterized by Climacus, is to make explicit in the body of duly verified historical phenomena which scholarship has handed over to it the immanent workings of reason, and thus the eternal truth which these phenomena somewhat imperfectly express. In his treatment (a very apt metaphor) of these two attempts to provide rational assurances to those who would become Christians, Climacus provides answers to both questions asked above. It is established both that (a) the objective approach to Christianity fails to accomplish what it undertakes to do, viz. rationally to ground the faith of the individual, and (b) that it fails to do so of necessity.

We begin with the historical point of view. The argument here may be called the argument against historical research as a foundation for Christian faith. Its initial premiss is put forward in the second sentence of the first chapter of the first book of Postscript: "Nothing is more readily evident than that the greatest attainable certainty with respect to anything historical is merely an approximation."¹ Whether the object of the theologian's scrutiny is the canonicity, authenticity, proper interpretation, and so forth of the books of the Bible, or the 'living word' as embodied in the present existence of the church, no decisive conclusion is possible. From the objective standpoint there just is no point at which one can say, "Questioning stops here." Arguments from authority are of no account (says even Thomas Aquinas, citing Boethius as his authority). Nor can objectivity recognize divine inspiration. The objective truth of Christianity which the theologian seeks is entirely beyond the powers of man to attain. However it appears to God, it can be no more to man than an almost-

¹ Postscript p.25; the author's emphasis.

thing, never entirely determinate. Every place of rest he chooses in the continuous flow of argument and counter-argument is arbitrary, and every result is revisionable in the light of further research. That is to say, there is no result. What is attained is a mere approximation of what the theologian strives for, is a pale reflection of his ideal. This is because, as was shown above, the act of objectively knowing the past transforms that past into a hypothesis, a possibility the actual obtaining of which we may assert with perhaps good inductive evidence but never with deductive certainty.

e/ The second step of the argument against this objective approach to Christianity is a constant them~~e~~ of Postscript, cropping up again and again throughout the work. It appears initially in the introduction, where (referring to Christianity) Climacus writes, "it deals with the concern of the infinitely interested individual for his own relationship to such a doctrine."¹ And (referring to the same subject), "it proposes to bestow an eternal happiness upon the individual man, thus presuming an infinite interest in his eternal happiness as conditio sine qua non."² A necessary condition for what exactly? Well, a necessary condition for the individual actually to attain his eternal happiness. Climacus fleshes this out in the end by describing the infinite interest as a "sensitivity for" one's eternal happiness without which the enjoying of that happiness is an impossibility for the individual. It is necessary, then, that an individual who seeks to relate himself to Christianity be interested in his eternal happiness, and furthermore, that his interest be infinite.

¹ Postscript p.19

² ibid.; author's emphasis.

Climacus' third premiss is captured in the following slogan: an infinite interest and mere approximation are "incommensurable". This is a dark saying which wants much filling out. Now concerning the results of the historian, we have seen that they are in Climacus' eyes always merely approximate and thus never so certain that no doubt could disturb them. It is impossible for the historian to answer every question which his inquiry touches because each answer he provides itself gives rise to new questions. Opportunities for reflection appear to be unlimited. On the other hand, we have seen that the man who seeks after Christianity in order that he might take part in the good it promises him, if he is to have any hope of attaining it, must have an infinite interest in that good. The historian, then, is attempting an approximate reconstruction of Christianity's proposal concerning how an individual might attain his eternal happiness. But the man who seeks to establish a relationship to Christianity is infinitely interested in his eternal happiness. If the historian and this latter fellow were one and the same, we would have a very odd bird indeed. He would be a person infinitely interested in securing some object while at the same time content to inquire about how to do that in a manner which in principle could yield only a partial answer.

If our understanding of Climacus is correct here, he is claiming that the mixture of traits in the person described above is too highly volatile to subsist for long. This person presumably thinks that the question of how he is to attain his eternal happiness is to be answered via thorough historical scholarship. Consequently, he applies himself to the scholarly pursuit with infinite intensity. But what results? Either (i) he becomes

immersed in the scholarly pursuit and the contemplative attitude upon which it is predicated; or (ii) he arbitrarily seizes upon some mere moment in the objective inquiry as its fixed and absolute conclusion; or finally (iii) he despairs. But if (i), then his infinite interest is lost. If (ii), then he embraces a conclusion despotically and without justification. In effect, our exemplar becomes a narrow and superstitious fanatic. And if (iii), then he has let go of the objective inquiry altogether. With the aid of the spectacles of this infinite interest he has seen the futility of striving against such uncertainty. Now, that the result of any attempt to satisfy an infinite interest in one's eternal happiness by means of scholarly investigation and criticism (of texts and so forth) is limited to one of these three is an important part (if not the whole account) of what Climacus means by saying that infinite interest and approximate knowledge are "incommensurable". If we take this term in its more precise, geometrical sense of "having no common measure", the metaphor which results is very apt. Christianity, the proposal of how one is to acquire an eternal happiness, in which he is infinitely interested, becomes a line segment forming the diagonal of a square. The investigation of the scholar is one of the segments forming the side of that square. The scholar undertakes to add submultiples of his segment to itself until its endpoints (when his segment is laid upon the diagonal) coincide with those of Christianity. But no matter how he chooses his submultiple, he ends up short of his goal by some irrational fraction, or beyond it by the same. Within the metaphor, falling short would represent having doubts, or lack of faith. Going beyond would represent being exalted into the realm of rock-hard certainty

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which is the exclusive province of fanatics and other deranged persons. Only in despair could the line-segment be commensurable, but here precisely what has been despaired of is objective certainty. Only the one segment remains.

If our account of it is correct, then Climacus' argument thus far is as follows: (a) all historical knowledge merely approximates the truth; (b) if an individual is to have a relationship to Christianity, then he must have an infinite interest in his own eternal happiness; but (c) seeking knowledge re how to acquire x which is merely approximate is incommensurable with maintaining an interest in x which is infinite. Since (d) Christianity is just this, i.e. a proposal as to how the individual may attain his eternal happiness, it follows that (e) seeking approximate knowledge concerning Christianity is incommensurable with maintaining an infinite interest in one's eternal happiness. Ipso facto, (f) seeking historical knowledge concerning Christianity is incommensurable with maintaining an infinite interest in one's eternal happiness. And therefore (g) seeking historical knowledge of Christianity is incommensurable with an individual having a relationship to Christianity.

We turn then to the philosophical point of view. Here the question becomes 'Can the speculative philosopher qua philosopher and by means of his philosophizing acquire a relationship to Christianity?' The argument here is short and sweet, and the answer, as one might suspect by now, is a conclusive 'no'. Since Climacus views Christianity as presupposing that the individual seeking to establish a relation to it is infinitely interested in his personal eternal happiness, (i) the category of subjectivity comes to play an essential role in determining what Christianity is. But (ii) speculation requires complete objectivity. (Perhaps

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this sounds like a misstep to those trained in analytic philosophy. Speculative systems, they might say, are born of a thinker's tyrannous drive to find the idiosyncracies of his own personality to be constitutive of ultimate reality. Now, for the sort of speculation which is Climacus' target, Hegel of course is the paradigm. And perhaps Hegel, too, is guilty in this manner. However this may be, what Hegel claims to be evincing via his speculative method is the immanent workings of pure thought alone. The propositions of the smaller Logic, for example, are not put forward as musings of the man Hegel, but as the product of thought thinking itself. The speculative author is relegated to the status of ouija board for this deity. Clearly this is to require a maximum of objectivity of him.) To continue with the argument, then: (iii) where objectivity is complete, subjectivity is abolished. And therefore (iv) where speculation is, there Christianity cannot be. To strike up the chorus again: they are incommensurable.

In sum, the historical approach cannot accommodate the infinite interest of the individual who seeks to establish a relationship to Christianity. The philosophical approach cannot accommodate the individual either.¹ And yet it is a necessary pre-condition of successfully relating oneself to Christianity that the individual by himself possess this infinite interest. It is an interesting sidelight worthy of mention that the Climacean arch-nemesis, Hegel, doubtless the primary target of the philosophical portion of the argument against objective Christianity, also at least gives lip

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¹ Or to say the same thing in different words: the objective thinker cannot speak of the thing as it exists with certainty and he cannot speak of the subject at all.

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service to this principle. In that section of his introduction to Philosophy of Religion headed "The Historical Treatment of Dogmas"¹ Hegel takes the position that this approach regards the dogmas of religion as "convictions which belong to others" and which "do not concern the needs of our spirit." Of theologians of this school he writes, "They know as little of God as a blind man sees of a painting, even though he handles the frame." And he concludes the section with this dictum:

It is essential in philosophy and religion, however, that the spirit should itself enter with supreme interest into an inner relation, should not only occupy itself with a thing that is foreign to it, but should draw its content from that which is essential, and should regard itself as worthy of such knowledge. For here it is with the value of his own spirit that man is concerned, and he is not at liberty humbly to remain outside and to wander about at a distance.

Of course Hegel can maintain that religious man is concerned "with the value of his own spirit" only because that value is dependent upon the degree to which Absolute Spirit has attained realization in his person. It is primarily for Hegel in Absolute Spirit that all values are found, and the individual achieves them vicariously by identifying himself with that grander spiritual entity. Hence e.g. the Lutheran has made a spiritual advance on the Catholic because he draws his principles from the Absolute at a higher stage of its development. Nevertheless, these passages constitute an interesting anticipation of two Climacean notions we have touched upon above. The first is the idea that knowledge of his essence is presented to man as a requirement ("he is not at liberty to remain outside"). But secondly, and more importantly, there is the apparently epistemological claim (cf. the reference

¹ G.W.F. Hegel Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion E.B. Speirs trans. (Kegan Paul, London 1895) v.I pp.40-42.

to a blind man) that without the proper interest in or inner identification with the convictions one examines one simply will not be able to see what one is seeking. This concept forms the core of Climacus' arguments against the possibility of objectively grounded faith. It is upon this concept that we wish to turn our attention now. s/

What are we to make of the statement that it is necessary for an individual who seeks to relate himself to Christianity to be infinitely interested in his own eternal happiness? What first of all is the source and nature of this necessity? It appears to us to stem from what might be called a modulation requirement. In Postscript¹ Climacus cites what he calls "the old principle: quidquid cognoscitur, per modum cognoscentis cognoscitur", i.e. whatever is known is known in the mode of the knower. And, he notes that "in the case of a kind of observation where it is requisite that the observer should be in a specific condition, it naturally follows that if he is not in this condition, he will observe nothing."² More specifically, if an inquirer seeks to determine what Christianity is but does so without an infinite interest in his eternal happiness, he will never lay hold of the object of his inquiry in order to know it. Why? Because an infinite interestedness is the only mood in which an individual is capable of perceiving what it is his eternal happiness consists in. An approach to this notion in any other mood falsifies it in the process of apprehending it. But what Christianity is is a proposal to bestow upon the individual man eternal happiness. Therefore, if a person does not grasp this latter notion without the infinite interest, then eo ipso he does not grasp Christianity without it. c/

¹ Postscript p.51 ² ibid. p.51

Understood in this way, the infinite interest requirement seems to be an epistemological principle.

If we may bring in the work of a different pseudonym again, Virgilius Haufniensis, in the Concept of Dread, provides an excellent example of the way in which mood should be taken into consideration when treating of a concept. He does this with reference to the concept of sin.

Sin has its definite place, or rather it has no place, and that is what characterizes it. By treating it in a place other than its own, one distorts it, in that one subjects it to an unessential reflective refraction. Its concept is altered, and at the same time the mood which properly corresponds to the correct concept is confused.... Thus when sin is drawn into aesthetics the mood becomes either frivolous or melancholy.... The mood is therefore falsified, for the mood corresponding to sin is seriousness. Its concept is altered, for whether it becomes tragic or comic, it is either an enduring thing, or a thing which as unessential is aufgehoben, whereas properly its concept is, to be overcome.

If sin is dealt with in metaphysics, the mood is the dialectical indifference and disinterestedness which thinks sin through as something which cannot resist thought. The concept is altered, for it is true that sin has to be overcome, not however as that to which thought is unable to give life, but as that which exists and as such is everybody's concern.

If sin is dealt with in psychology, the mood becomes the persistence of observation, the dauntlessness of the spy, not the ardent flight of seriousness away from and out of sin. The concept becomes a different one, for sin becomes a state. But sin is not a state. Its Idea is that its concept is constantly annulled.

As soon therefore as one sees the problem of sin treated, it is possible at once to see from the mood whether the concept is the right one.¹

It seems clear from this that to some (at least) topics of discourse there corresponds a 'mood', a mood in which the would-be knower must be in order properly to apprehend that which he seeks. It is claimed that in the case where that which is sought is the notion

¹ Concept of Dread W. Lowrie trans. (Princeton 1957) pp.13-14.

of sin, the only appropriate mood is one of seriousness, and that if any other mood colors the inquirer's thinking, then what he sees is something other than the true notion of sin. The introduction of a mood not properly 'corresponding' to the notion sought, and the false appearance which the notion is given as a result, is that to which we take the phrase "unessential reflective refraction" to refer. Analogously, in the case where that which is sought is the notion of one's own eternal happiness the only appropriate mood is one of infinite interest.

This is only a brief hint at the role the notion of modalities plays in Climacus' thought. It is a theme taken up by several of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms and obviously is one that was very important to him. If the scope of the present essay permitted, Climacus' 'modal-thinking', its links with incommensurability, the comic, and central categories like despair and guilt might profitably be explored. We have suggested en passant that the requirement that certain sorts of mood accompany different sorts of inquiry has the appearance of being an epistemological doctrine. However, it could be argued that this requirement stems from concerns more closely akin to philosophy of language and theories of meaning (like those which inform the studies of anthropologists who contend that a sharing of life and world-view is a necessary pre-condition of coming to understand the concepts of an alien culture). This, too, might prove to be an interesting line of inquiry. All this will have to wait for some other occasion. The question we were pursuing when we introduced the consideration of modulation was about the source and nature of the necessity of being infinitely interested in Christianity in order to establish a relationship to it. The answer that we elicited from Climacus

or/ was that an investigation must be in the mood appropriate to his object if he is ever to apprehend it, and an infinite interest in the case where Christianity is what is sought is that mood. Now assuming that we buy into this theory of modality, the questions remain (a) why it is that an infinite interest is the one appropriate to Christianity and (b) what this queer phrase "infinite interest" can possibly mean. These questions arise naturally from the consideration of the first portion of the definiens undertaken above, but it also (be it noted) constitutes a transition to the second element of Climacus' definition of truth, viz. "an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness."

It is appropriate to consider (b) first. The phrase 'infinite interest' is far too picturesque to be useful without some unpacking. Can it be characterized in a more helpful and explicit manner? On the face of it it seems, like 'objective uncertainty' before it, to have an oxymoronic quality about it. "Infinite" is a term at home in the pure sciences of quantity, in speculative metaphysics, in theology. But it is one rarely heard in those quarters where the interests and desires of mere human beings are discussed. If we are to understand this phrase 'infinite interest', we must determine whether or not the application of so mathematical and absolute a term as 'infinite' in such a queer context involves more than mere rhetorical flourish. And if it does, to what extent it does so. Can we separate oratory from hard requirement? The difficulty of this task is compounded by what seems to us to be an unresolved ambiguity in the use to which Climacus puts the word 'infinite' in its adjectival and adverbial forms. The following is a list of some of the ways in which these qualifiers are applied:

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"infinitely interested passion", "infinite passionate interest";¹
"passionately and infinitely interested", "infinite, personal,
passionate interest", "infinite interest", "infinite need of a
decision", "infinitely decided";² "personal passion which is
infinitely interested";³ "infinitely indifferent";⁴ "infinite
passion of inwardness", "the decision so infinitely important",
"the infinite passion of his need";⁵ "passion of the infinite",
"infinite decisiveness", "the infinite difference between true
and false";⁶ "infinite decision".⁷ The ambiguity we see here is
most clearly evinced on Postscript p.182 where (i) "infinite
passion" (uendelige Lidenstab) and (ii) "passion of the infinite"
(Uendelighedens Lidenstab)⁸ occur alternately down the page.
Now it is obvious that these two phrases may be taken in very
different senses. For in (i), the most natural interpretation
of the qualifier 'infinite' is that it serves to specify the
degree or intensity of the passion. In (ii), because of the
richness of the preposition 'of', it could mean that 'the infinite'
is the origin, cause, agent, instrument, material, possession
or subject matter of the passion. In short, it would naturally
be taken as specifying (in one or more of these senses) the
object of the passion, viz. that from which, by means of which,
or toward which the passion is directed. As different as (i) and
(ii) seem to be, however, Climacus appears to use them inter-
changeably. For example: "Thus the subject merely has, objectively,

¹ Postscript p.32.

² *ibid.* p.33.

³ *ibid.* p.35.

⁴ *ibid.* p.139.

⁵ *ibid.* p.179.

⁶ *ibid.* pp.180-181

⁷ *ibid.* p.182.

⁸ *ibid.* p.182; cf. Samlede Skrifter pp.188-189. Swenson's trans-
lation is quite faithful in preserving this difference.

the uncertainty; it is this which precisely increases the tension of that infinite passion which constitutes his inwardness. The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite."¹ While it is possible to read (i) simply as an abbreviated form of (ii), just as "the British policy" for example means the same thing as "the policy of the British", nevertheless there is a great deal in the context surrounding these passages to suggest that (i) must be seen as referring to the intensity of the passion. For example, Climacus speaks of intensifying passion "to its highest pitch"² as the goal of Christianity, of an objective uncertainty being held in "the most passionate inwardness"³, of "the maximum degree of his passion"⁴, of "the utmost passion of subjectivity" and "the greatest possible passionateness"⁵ and so forth. The first problem then which must be solved if sense is to be made of the notion of an infinite interest is to interpret consistently the following apparently inconsistent triad. (A) Phrase (i) refers to the intensity of the passion. (B) Phrase (ii) refers to its object. (C) Phrases (i) and (ii) are used interchangeably.

The notion which comes to our rescue here is the same one by the aid of which we were able to disentangle the doctrine of subjective essential truth from the charge of complete vacuity, viz. the notion that subjective passion is self-correcting. This together with the notion of modalities provides us with the necessary tools to expose the inconsistency as merely apparent. From this latter doctrine it can be inferred that if one is to

¹ Our emphasis. ² Postscript p.117; our emphasis.

³ *ibid.* pp.182 and 454; our emphasis. ⁴ *ibid.* p.277.

⁵ *ibid.* pp.510-511; our emphasis.

have a passion which is truly "of the infinite" (we will interpret this peirastically as meaning "directed toward the infinite"), then it will be necessary for him to be in a properly corresponding mood, a passion which is itself infinite, i.e. in degree or depth. Any other mood would be incommensurable with the infinite object and the observer who sought it in such a mood would, in the very act of apprehending it, falsify it. Thus he would no longer have a passion which truly was "of the infinite". At the same time, from the former notion (of self-correcting passion or "the doctrine of the stages") we can conclude that an infinite passion would, however initially deployed, eventually come to choose the infinite as its object, viz. come to be "of the infinite". It is impossible, on Climacus' view, for a man to be a true seeker after God part-time and provisionally. But it is also impossible that a man should in reality desire God with his whole heart and fail to find Him. Therefore, we conclude that senses (i) and (ii) collapse into one another and situation (C), Climacus' interchanging application of them, is not a sign of inconsistency. An infinite passion is of necessity a passion of the infinite.

Now, having overcome this stumblingblock, we are still left with the task of unfolding the notion of an interest (or passion, for we intend to equate these two) which is infinite (or what we take to be the same, at its "highest pitch", at its "most passionate", at its "maximum degree", "the utmost" or "the greatest possible".) It has been suggested that an infinite passion is a passion such that "there is no sacrifice so great one will not make it, and no chance of success so small one will not act on it."¹

¹ Adams, Robert "Kierkegaard's Arguments Against Objective Reasoning in Religion" Monist 60 (1977) p.238.

This interpretation is very appealing. The paradigm of an infinite passion in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works is that of Abraham¹ who expressed such passion in his complete and unquestioning willingness to sacrifice his own son at God's command. And that which made Abraham's passion so remarkable in the eyes of Johannes de Silentio is admirably captured in Adams' analysis. It is impossible that more could have been asked of Abraham. Isaac was his only son, he and his wife were so advanced in years that even bearing Isaac had been a miracle, and in Isaac resided the last natural possibility of fulfillment for Abraham's God-promised dream of having descendants 'as numerous as the grains of sand on the shore of the sea'. At the same time it is inconceivable that this sacrifice could produce the desired result, viz. that it could actually please God. The Adams account of infinite passion also dovetails nicely with the Climacean description of Ethics as that "which teaches to venture everything for nothing"² and of the way in which infinite passion eventually finds expression: "Here, on the contrary, it is necessary to risk everything, to invest absolutely everything in the venture, to desire absolutely the highest telos; But it is also necessary to prevent this absolute passion from acquiring even the color of earning or deserving an eternal happiness."³ The latter requirement makes it clear that chances of success are not to enter into the reckoning at all. Thus our understanding can be shaped into the following definition: S desires x with infinite passion if and only if S is willing to sacrifice absolutely anything for x, regardless if his chances of attaining x. Now we know that

¹ In Fear and Trembling by Johannes de Silentio.

² Postscript p.133.

³ ibid. p.362.

Climacus' central concern is with the passion of the individual for his own existence. We have also seen that an infinite passion is *pari passu* a passion directed toward the infinite. And so the only possible value for *x* in this definition is *S*'s own existence within the infinite, his life in eternity, i.e. his eternal happiness.

e| Question (a) seems to be answered in this way as well. An infinite passion is *pari passu* a passion of the infinite and vice-versa. Christianity claims to be a revelation as to how an individual can acquire his own eternal happiness. Thus to be interested in Christianity is to have an interest in the infinite. That interest which truly is directed at the infinite must be infinite in degree. Therefore, the only interest which one can have which is truly an interest in Christianity is one which is itself infinite, i.e. an infinite (in the sense described above) interest is the only mood appropriate to Christianity. We admit this notion is counter-intuitive. Many people claim to have 'established a relationship' to Christianity, viz. claim to be Christians, who would readily admit that their interest in eternal happiness is by no means infinite, however that adjective might be cashed out. Indeed, it is conceivable that a person should come to Christianity out of needs and desires wholly divorced from concern for eternal happiness. But this appeal to common sense and the accepted use of the terms "Christianity" and "Christian" is no chop with Climacus. He is offering a normative rather than a descriptive account of Christianity and the ethico-religious.

We have now reached an understanding of "most passionate inwardness" or "infinite interest" which allows us to reformulate Df.4, giving a more perspicuous rendering of the requirement expressed in its second clause. We do this as follows:

Df.5) S's attitude toward his own existence is true= df (i) S is aware that it is in principle impossible to demonstrate that his existence is true (objectively), and (ii) S holds his existence to be true (objectively) to the extent that there is nothing he will not sacrifice in order to avoid altering it.

CHAPTER SIX

OTHER INTERPRETATIONS

The greater portion of the secondary literature on the Climacus-works that we have perused seems to fall into two mutually exclusive but related categories. On the one hand, there are those authors who consider the notion of the subjectivity of truth to be intuitively clear and obviously true. On the other, there are those who accept the perspicuity of this idea but consider it to be obviously false. To our mind the deliberations of both parties are unsatisfactory. Part of our motivation in developing this essay was the opinion that Climacean subjectivism (if we may speak in the language of "isms" for a moment) was a philosophical position which was decidedly unclear and that no truth-value could with confidence be assigned to it. It was our goal in the preceding chapters to dispel some of the fog we felt obscured this notion so that a more honest assessment of its importance and the case that exists for it might be made. Our method consisted in nothing more than focusing upon the central definition of truth contained on Postscript page 182, analyzing each of its several parts, and by using as a standard the concepts and arguments contained in the rest of Climacus' work (and in a few instances, in that of other pseudonyms) resolving ambiguities and contradictions brought to light by that analysis. We then made use of these insights to recast the original definition in what we hoped was a more perspicuous form. We will now review the findings encapsulated in this definition.

First of all, it is not the truth of a proposition for which the Climacean definition specifies the criteria, but rather it is

concerned with the conditions under which a certain relationship or attitude of the thinker is true. Furthermore, this attitude is not itself one which is directed toward a proposition. Thus truth in the sense that Climacus unfolds is entirely isolated from linguistic entities such as propositions, the sole objects of its proper application so far as analytic philosophy is concerned. His use of 'truth', as we pointed out, has much in common with Hegel's. It has very little in common with truth as conceived, for example, by Frege, for whom "the only thing that raises the question of truth at all is the sense of sentences."¹ "Genuine" would not be an adequate synonym but it tends in the direction of Climacus' meaning. "Correspondance of essence and existence" is a formula which best conveys the intention in saying some given object is 'true'. "Being self-consistent or self-discordant" is another way Hegel and Climacus might describe something's truth or falsity. That something the truth of which is in question in Postscript is the attitude of an individual to his own existence. Such an attitude will be self-consistent only when it is consistent with the subject whose attitude it is. Its truth must be his truth. Thus this attitude must be the realization of the individual's nature, the unification of his essence and his existence. Climacus' definition of truth, therefore, is a vehicle for putting forward at least two significant claims: (1) that there is such an attitude, viz. one without which an individual cannot be said truly to exist, and (2) that this attitude is of the sort he specifies.

In our attempt to get clear about the defining character-

¹ Frege, G. Logical Investigations P. Geach ed. (Blackwell's 1977) p.4.

istics of this attitude we discovered that it involves in the first place an awareness on the part of the individual of the impossibility in principle of proving the truth of his existence. That it is in principle impossible to do so Climacus established in the following way. (a) Abstract thought, while it may achieve certainty in the form of validity, remains with respect to the real existence of anything a possibility merely. (b) An empirical proposition on the other hand can never attain to certainty. The objects with which an empirical inquiry concerns itself exist in time and can therefore be assumed constantly to be in process of changing (growth, decay, movement, detrition, etc). Moreover, the observer himself is just such a temporal entity and so he too is undergoing a constant mutation. On these grounds it is incorrect to assume that the possibility of needed revision in empirical results can ever be safely excluded. And thus it is incorrect to assume that an empirical inquiry can ever "get it exactly right". Its results are always approximate. (c) The synthetic a priori is an illusion. The attempt to derive propositions having both logical certainty (i.e. necessity) and empirical content either collapses in abstract contradictions or tautologies, or reaches the empirical by flagrant *petitio principii*, viz. they assume some crucial factor supposedly generated by the proof. Climacus' treatment of the Cogito, the Ontological Argument, and the Idealistic equation of truth and being are examples of his arguments for this view.

That the individual must in some sense be aware of this state of affairs is shown in the arguments concerning the objective grounding of Christianity. If he entertains any hope that proofs will be efficacious in this matter and provided that he takes the

fulfillment of his existence very seriously, then he will be moved ineluctably to seek those proofs. To do this requires an attitude quite the obverse from the one which will realize the individual's nature and so is to move in precisely the wrong direction. The reason for this is found in the nature of an infinite passion, the second aspect of Climacus' definition. Because as was pointed out above both observer and observed are in process of becoming there can be no objective certainty concerning matters of existence. The finality of proof is ever elusive-- provided of course that one has the determination to pursue every difficulty, which is precisely what an infinite passion embarked on such a course would amount to. Thus a passionate nature seeking proofs of its own reality would generate only greater uncertainty for itself. And what is the effect of this uncertainty on the passionately interested individual? An even greater passion, says Climacus, and this seems a natural enough reaction to the discovery of insuperable obstacles between oneself and an object infinitely desired. Kierkegaard echoes this theme quite clearly in one of the Edifying Discourses. Speaking of a man infinitely interested in eternal happiness, he writes: "In everything he finds out there will always be a residuum of uncertainty, and this uncertainty nourishes the concern, and the concern nourishes the uncertainty."¹ This is part of our meaning in saying above that while we can distinguish two elements in the definiens (objective uncertainty, and infinite passion) that the first is intimately connected with the second, indeed that it stands related to it as necessary pre-condition must be borne in mind.

¹ Kierkegaard "The Expectation of an Eternal Happiness" in Edifying Discourses: A Selection P. Holmer ed. (Fontana 1958) p.132.

Finally, in trying to give sense to this notion of a passion which is infinite we arrived at one very significant result, viz. that an infinite passion implies a passion of the infinite and vice-versa. A passion which is truly one of these is *pari passu* the other as well. This we linked with the idea of passion as self-correcting and the whole doctrine of 'the stages'. As we saw above and as we shall see again in what follows, this conception figures prominently in our evaluation of several common objections made to the Climacean treatment of this problem of truth.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to the assessment of the ability of our interpretation of Climacus' definition to cope with the battery of objections most often put forward in opposition to that definition. We consider objections which might be roughly grouped together into two categories: (i) objections made to the notion on the grounds that it is logically flawed or even self-contradictory; (ii) objections based on putative implications of his doctrine held to be distasteful. A third category consisting of objections to Climacus' insight will be considered in the final section. These rest on the fact that many of his insights are drawn from episodes in the private life of Soren Kierkegaard, viz. that his work has significance not as philosophy but as (auto)biography merely.

The idea which lies at the heart of all those arguments composing the first group is that there is a fundamental ambiguity in the sense given to the term 'truth' in Climacus' analysis and that his exposition makes its point by tacitly drawing on whichever of these senses suits the immediate purpose. We touched

upon this above when we dealt with an objection of Professor Murphy's. Part of his purpose in the vicious regress argument we adduced from his article was to establish this larger point. He writes: "while it ostensibly turns away from the issue of objective truth, Kierkegaard's procedure presupposes such truth at every step in its retreat into recessive inwardness. His subjectivity is parasitic for its 'existential' significance on the assumed objective truth of a doctrine about man and God whose right to claim such truth it strives at every point to discredit."¹ Similarly, Paul Edwards has contended that "Kierkegaard reverts and must revert from the new sense of 'true' in which to say that a belief is true means no more than that it is held sincerely and without reservations, to the old sense in which it means that is is in accordance with the facts or with reality."² As a final example of this line of attack no less distinguished an exponent than Brand Blanshard may be put forward. He finds the author of "truth is subjectivity", because of this ambiguity in his position, to be confronted with the following dilemma: "his philosophy terminates in a rejection of those very principles of logic on which he proceeded as a philosopher.... If the logic he assumes in his philosophy is valid, then the faith ('truth' would work equally well here) which stands at the summit of 'the stages on life's way' is meaningless. If that irrational faith is accepted, the principles on which reflection conducts itself are everywhere impugned. In that case, Kierkegaard... should remain silent."³

¹ Murphy op.cit. p.178.

² Edwards, Paul "Kierkegaard and the 'Truth' of Christianity" Philosophy XLVI (April 1971) p.97.

³ Blanshard, Brand "Kierkegaard on Faith" Personalist XLIX (1968) p.15; reprinted in Reason and Belief (Unwin 1973) p.242.

How do these remarks harmonize with the understanding of Climacus' definition of truth which we have evolved?

Up to the first full stop the quotation from Murphy contradicts us not at all, unless it be with the implication in the use of 'ostensible'. The man who is 'in the truth' in the Climacean sense does indeed 'turn away' from the issue of objective truth, not merely ostensibly but in fact, and with total decisiveness. And the procedure by means of which he accomplishes this is precisely 'to presuppose such truth at every step'. For example, finding God objectively, i.e. proving his existence, is not a concern of the subjective thinker because he seizes his certainty directly, before the proof can ever begin. He is satisfied to have at once a "militant certainty"¹ rather than wait for the completion of proofs and proofs of proofs to satisfy him. And he does not do this because he feels what he believes must be objectively false, but because he knows that the objective truth of what he believes cannot come to light in time. The distinction is huge. And this is where the second part of Murphy's statement goes astray. He sees Climacus as attempting to discredit e.g. the believer's right to claim that God has in fact existed. But what Climacus is really up to is showing us just exactly what that right consists in. Speaking of the subjective approach to God, Climacus remarks:

In this manner God certainly becomes a postulate, but not in the otiose manner in which this word is commonly understood. It becomes clear rather that the only way in which an existing individual comes into relation with God, is when the dialectical passion brings his passion to the point of despair.... Then the postulate is so far from being arbitrary that it is precisely a life-necessity. It is then not so much that God is a postulate, as that the individual's postulation of God is a necessity.²

¹ Postscript p.203.

² ibid. p.179fn.; our emphasis.

And infinite passion is of necessity a passion of the infinite. The believer's infinite need of God constitutes his right to claim that He exists. Climacus discredits certain putative rights to that claim but only in order to clear the stage for what he conceives to be the genuine article.

Now it is obvious in one sense that this infinite need does not bring God into being. But in another sense, a very pragmatic one, this is just what could be said to happen. William James has described the pragmatic method as "the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories', supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts."¹ And our conception of these effects, claims James, is "for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all."² Similarly, for Climacus the whole of our positive conception of God resides in the effects His being produces in our lives. God comes into the world for an individual when that individual acts (in the Climacean sense) by embracing with total passion the objective uncertainty of God's existence. In this light Murphy might have said with equal correctness that 'the assumed objective truth of a doctrine is parasitic for its significance on one's subjectivity.' In a nutshell then, our response to Murphy is this: Climacus does not deny that the believer holds his beliefs to be objectively true, this is not what his 'turning away from the question of objective truth' amounts to at all. Rather he is denying that the believer can claim to know that his beliefs are true, indeed he posits a

¹ James, William Pragmatism (Longman's, London 1907) p.54f.

² ibid. p.47.

clear understanding of the necessary uncertainty in this manner to be of primary importance for the believer. It is not so much that Climacus 'turns away' from objective truth as that he 'exalts it beyond'. And it is quite consistent that it remain in that 'beyond' a goad and a goal of man's subjectivity.

This retort seems to apply equally well to Edwards insofar as we understand the intent of his objection. However, there are special problems with his case that need to be mentioned. First of all, the implication in his remarks that Climacus is giving us a "new sense of 'true'" is, if our interpretation of Climacus is correct, entirely misleading. On our view, Climacus is using the term 'true' in his definition in the sense in which it was commonly employed by philosophers contemporary with him, viz. in a sense very similar to that of Hegel. He then employs this notion to define a very special subspecies of that truth, i.e. the truth of an existing individual. Thus on our view it is also misleading to talk of beliefs as being 'subjectively true' rather than the believer (the subject) being true (or 'in the truth'). Edwards is wont to talk about "Kierkegaard's handling of the word 'true'"¹ and this is the cause of his (and perhaps that of many other writers on the topic) confusion. Climacus is not providing a redefinition of "the word 'true'". Instead, he is laying out what the truth (as commonly understood) of the individual consists in. The result is not a new 'truth' which is to usurp the role of the old one, but an explication of the 'old truth' applied to a new object, i.e. the single existing individual. It is called by the appellation 'subjective truth' because

¹ Edwards op.cit. p.101.

ultimately the objective truth of the existing individual consists in his entire identification with his own subjectivity.

Blanshard seems to be making the same assumption, viz. that subjective truth is put forward as a replacement for objective truth, that the search for subjectivity requires 'a rejection of logic'. In fact, Climacus' point is that the two points of view are inextricably linked.¹ Blanshard's picture could not be more misleading. Climacus gives his reader, in the definition we have attempted to explicate, an account of the necessary and (presumably) sufficient conditions for an individual to be 'in the truth'. One of these conditions as we have explained it is dialectical insight into the impossibility in principle of attaining objective certainty concerning what is believed. Thus the subject who would be 'in the truth' rather than being required to reject logic is obligated to reach what is dialectically a quite sophisticated position with respect to his beliefs. "With all the strength of his mind, to the last thought, he must try to understand...and then despair of the understanding."² It is the attempt to understand which entitles him to despair, this latter without the former is unjustified, or to speak more accurately, impossible.

In Fragments,³ Climacus sketches a picture of the faculty of human reason in which a man's reason has the following property: "it is bent upon its own downfall."⁴ The motivation of all thought on Climacus' view is "to discover something that thought cannot think." By this we take him to mean that thought seeks to set

¹ cf. Auden, W.H. "A Preface to Kierkegaard" New Republic (15 May 1944) p.683; "He does not assert, as he is usually accused of asserting, the primacy of Will over Reason, but their inseparability."

² Postscript p.201. ³ See esp. c.III. ⁴ Fragments p.48.

limits to thought, to push out to that point beyond which it cannot go. But as another author has noted¹ it could recognize such a boundary only by transgressing it, by seeing it as it were from both sides. Thus to seek such a boundary is to seek the unknowable, it is in effect for reason 'to will its own undoing'. Climacus draws the following conclusion: "the Reason, in its paradoxical passion, precisely desires its own downfall. u/ But this is what the Paradox also desires, and thus they are at bottom linked in understanding."² This link is described later as a "union"³, a union which is effected in the infinite passion of faith. By these remarks alone we think substantial doubt is cast upon Blanshard's contention that faith entails "a rejection of logic." Indeed it appears that faith satisfies an intrinsic need of rationality that the reason alone cannot satisfy for itself, viz. a boundary, a limit, perhaps even a sense of completion.⁴

But furthermore, reason in the Climacean scheme provides an important service for faith as well. Partly due to the above it is the case that "the highest principles for all thought can be demonstrated only indirectly (negatively)."⁵ The last three words constitute an important qualification of 'demonstrated' but they by no means nullify it completely. The role of an indirect demonstration might still be very important indeed, as Climacus points out in the following: "For dialectics is in its

¹ Wittgenstein, L. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus 5.61.

² Fragments p.59.

³ ibid. p.73.

⁴ We are reminded of another passage from the Tractatus. This time at 6.45: "Feeling the world as a limited whole-- it is this that is mystical."

⁵ Postscript p.197.

truth a benevolent helper, which discovers and assists in finding where the absolute object of faith and worship is.... Dialectics itself does not see the absolute, but it leads, as it were, the individual up to it, and says: 'Here it must be, that I guarantee; when you worship here, you worship God.'"¹ It accomplishes all this 'only indirectly', of course, i.e. it makes clear what the absolute is not. So, for example, it tells us that neither God nor an eternal happiness is such that it can be pointed out, pictured, imagined, described poetically, and so forth. It reveals that true religiousness is not such that any outward show is demanded. It proves that the object of belief is not an object of speculation as well, and that it is not something subject to confirmation or disconfirmation by the results of historical inquiry. Thus the picture Climacus paints of the relationship between faith and reason is this: reason's task is carefully and deeply to ponder the matters of infinite importance to us, and diligently to apply the standard of consistency² to our conception of the matter and to the existential expression we have given it. If we adduce a conception and an expression for it which stands unfalsified by the dialectical scrutiny, then we are at a point where it is appropriate to believe our conception to be the right one. Now this is not to say that our belief has been rationally justified, because all these dialectical

¹ Postscript p.439; we will avoid the temptation to discuss at greater length Climacus' notion of dialectics. The primary sense of dialectic as 'the technique of critical examination of an idea' is adequate here. But the connection with Kant's dialectic and the means of detecting the necessary illusions of reason is an interesting topic of speculation.

² For a good discussion of Kierkegaard's use of the concept of consistency as a philosophic tool see Malantschuk Kierkegaard's Thought (Princeton UP 1974) ch.II.

b/ labors take place within the framework of our ~~f~~belief, i.e. our belief constitutes the unargued-for presupposition of the search for consistency. It is passion alone which motivates one initially to embrace a given framework. We might, for example, believe that pleasure is the ultimate goal of human existence and with this belief as datum dialectics might lead us to see that really to hold this we must become 'solipsists of the present moment'. But if we were motivated by an infinite passion, such a solipsism would not satisfy us, and so our passion would drive us to 'leap' beyond it into (say) the comfort of the ethical and its universality. At each stage dialectic, the critical use of our understanding, reveals to us the consistent formulation of an expression for what we believe, but this in no way justifies our adoption of that belief.¹ This is a task, as was shown above, for the passion itself. Thus we see Hegel and his followers damned on two counts: they are dialectically inconsistent and completely lacking in passion; while Zeno is praised for the consistency of his life and doctrine, but ultimately rejected because a way of deeper passion is possible.

These remarks suffice to elucidate just how silly Blanshard's objection is, and how all such contentions that a radical and self-refuting inconsistency obtains in Climacus' theory between following one's passion and following the dictates of reason may be swept aside as wrong-headed. There are several objections closely related to these which can be disposed of in like manner. For instance, Alisdair MacIntyre has written:

¹ Climacus' remarks re the possibility of a Christian philosophy are enlightening on this score. See Postscript p.337f.

| If I hold that truth is subjectivity, what status am I to give to the denial of the proposition that truth is subjectivity? If I produce arguments to refute this denial I appear committed to the view that there are criteria by appeal to which the truth about truth can be vindicated. If I refuse to produce arguments, on the ground that there can be neither argument nor criteria in such a case, then I appear committed to the view that any view embraced with sufficient subjective passion is as warranted as any other in respect of truth, including the view that truth is not subjectivity. This inescapable dilemma is never faced by Kierkegaard and consequently he remains trapped by it.¹

Blanshard put forward his dilemma in the form: if the truth is as Climacus describes it, then all sentences are false, including those in which Climacus describes his truth. We answered this by demonstrating that subjectivity (or passion or faith) does not undermine logic in anything like the way in which Blanshard's point requires. MacIntyre puts forward his dilemma in the form: if the truth is as Climacus describes it, then all sentences are potentially true, including those contradictory to Climacus' account. This collapses for the same reason that Blanshard's did. Climacus' views do not entail a rejection of logic. Obviously Postscript is full of arguments intended to support its contentions. The question is how this can be so without that work being self-contradictory. If this is possible, it does indeed imply, as MacIntyre suggests, "that there are criteria by appeal to which the truth about truth can be vindicated." This, he argues, is impossible if truth is such as Climacus takes it to be. On our view, this implication is mistaken. Climacus, like all men if his theory is correct, is at a definite stage of life's way.²

¹ MacIntyre, A. "Existentialism" in Sartre M. Warnock ed. (Doubleday Anchor 1971) p.8.

² see Postscript pp.404, 417, and 495.

In passion he has grasped a distinctive body of presuppositions, and these presuppositions form the context within which all his thought takes place. If not only the context but also the entire content of his thought was drawn from the presuppositions of his stage, then MacIntyre's point would be well taken. But there is at least one meta-level from which an individual at any stage may criticize that stage without engendering any paradox of self-reference, viz. the dialectical level. It is on this level that much of Climacus' argumentation in support of his notion of truth takes place.

Now it is not the case that all of his polemic takes place on the strictly dialectical plane. For the situation is not quite so simple as all that. If it were, then no criticism other than dialectical would be possible of any particular stage. Once a position's passionate presuppositions had been dialectically clarified, there would be no intersubjectively valid criteria for preferring one to any other. And yet Climacus is quite obviously keen not only to clarify his point of view but to put it forward as being superior to most if not all others. The question is on what grounds does he do this. Perhaps this is the question MacIntyre is asking. The answer is that there is one "presupposition" which is common to every stage, and that is that the individual who occupies that stage is an existing individual. Therefore, if we are able at one stage to adduce what it means to be an existing human being in truth (and this is what we have claimed Climacus' definition of truth does), then we possess a notion which is at least implicitly contained in all others. And if we can show that the truth of e.g. the metaphysical sphere consistently followed contradicts this human truth, we can show (since the metaphysician is himself human) that eo ipso he

contradicts himself. We have in this 'fact' of existence an almost 'objective' (in the sense that it is necessarily and universally applicable) criteria by which the validity of any existential stage may be evaluated. This Climacus expresses definitely in this assertion: "Ethics and the ethical... have an infeasible claim upon every existing individual."¹

on /

Let so much suffice by way of reply to those who contend that Climacus' notion of truth is logically self-defeating. Their case relies on multiple confusions--a misunderstanding of the scope of Climacus' definition (it is the truth of an individual and not truth in general), of the role it assigns to 'objective truth', and of the relationship between thought and passion. We turn now to the supposed unacceptable consequences of this view. The attack which occurs with the greatest frequency in the literature is closely related to the arguments above in that it focusses on the relationship of truth as defined by Climacus to logic and the exercise of reason. It is the position that Climacus' view commits him to a thoroughgoing irrationalism.² We distinguish this position from the arguments already dealt with because presumably the demonstration merely of Climacus' lack of self-contradiction would not affect it. The proponents of this position might respond that though Climacus has committed no formal fallacy, nevertheless his view implies the truth of a philosophical doctrine which ought to be eschewed. Such irrationalism, they

¹ Postscript p.119.

² see Blanshard op.cit. esp. pp.14, 20; Edwards op.cit.; Murphy op.cit. esp. p.179; Paton, H.J. The Modern Predicament (Allen & Unwin 1955) p.186; Gottlieb, R.S. "A Critique of Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Subjectivity" Philosophical Forum v.IX n.4 (1979) p.493; Allison, H. "Christianity and Nonsense" Review of Metaphysics v.XX n.3 (March 1967) pp.432-460.

m/ might argue, puts unacceptable constraints upon free inquiry, allows all manner of intolerance and fanaticism, is incompatible with wide learning and an urbane temperament, or is simply a surrender to the darkness. What is the nature of this irrationalism and how is it that it springs from Climacus' theory? Paton¹ seems to find this implication of irrationalism in the notion that at the stage of the Christian-religious that which is believed is in itself paradoxical. And what it amounts to is a total rejection of reason. Like "faith" in one of Luther's more radical pronouncements, Climacean truth 'grips reason by the throat and strangles the beast!' We hope that we have given the reader grounds to doubt the imputation of such a view to Climacus. If instead the term 'irrationalism' is taken to refer to 'a system of belief or action that disregards or contradicts rational principles' the charge seems similarly to be without sound foundation. Finally, if 'irrationalism' is defined as the denial of 'rationalism' and this latter term is taken in the sense of the practice in theology of 'explaining in a manner agreeable to reason whatever is apparently supernatural in the records of sacred history' or of 'regarding reason as the chief or only guide in matters of religion', then it is applicable to Climacus' position. But this strikes us as an instance of applying to a rather unobjectionable idea an ugly word with the most disturbing connotations.

A very different sort of implication which some commentators detect in Climacus' treatment of the problem of truth is that rather than (or in addition to) being logically destructive, it undermines the position of any religion concerned with transcendent realities. As Regis Jolivet calmly puts it, "he (Kierkegaard) runs into the

¹ op.cit. pp.119-120.

danger... of making belief disappear in subjectivity and inwardness, and of deifying immanence and the self."¹ Similarly, Professor Murphy objects that "to make an existential virtue of the inflexible determination to retain a preconceived opinion at all costs is a danger not so much to reason as to faith itself. For when faith loses its concern for objective truth, it loses its transcendent reference and that means that it also loses its transcendent object."² And finally, Blanshard finds that the Climacean doctrine "implies that there are no common truths for Christians to accept, no common principles by which their lives may be guided, indeed no common Deity for them to contemplate and worship..."³ And therefore "there would be as many Christianities as there were persons to exercise their 'inwardness' and their passion."⁴

Now Murphy makes the same mistake here that he makes in the argument quoted from his work several chapters back. The pursuit of subjective truth does not mean the abandonment of all concern for objective truth. What it does mean is abandonment of all hope of attaining objective truth by means of objective thought alone. And precisely why it means this is because the concern for objective truth is 'infinite'. All objective thought falls into one of two categories. Either it is (i) historical (empirical) or (ii) philosophical (abstract). (i) can yield no certainty with regard to its object. Because the fit between the static, perfectly general concepts of which all objective thought is composed and the reality of changing concrete particulars to which it is applied can never be exact, empirical research can produce only an

¹ Jolivet, R. Introduction to Kierkegaard (Müller 1950)p.227.

² op.cit. p.179.

³ op.cit. p.15

⁴ op.cit. p.16

approximate description of that reality and is therefore always to some extent uncertain. (ii) adopts as a primary technique in its methodology the abstraction from all particularity and limitations of perspective. Thus the concrete reality of the thinker is eliminated because a potential source of bias. Therefore, where the concern is certainty regarding a given subject (oneself or God) objective thought is doubly deficient. But in (a) ethics and (b) Christianity the interest of the individual ultimately is focused on the relation of two subjects, viz. a man and the God. In (a) God is more or less objectively given in the universally-held laws and moral strictures of the community. Such precepts are conceived to be earthly manifestations of divine law. So for the ethicist the problem of finding and identifying the God is not so pressing. For him the problem is getting clear about the other element in the relationship, i.e. himself. His reflections most often take the form: "Here is the divine law. Is my every action in accord with it?" In (b) the ethicist-become-believer retains the uncertainty he has acquired concerning himself, but in addition he acquires a new uncertainty with respect to the God. The God is postulated as historical being and as infinite subject, which makes Him vulnerable, too, to objective thought's double doubtfulness. The believer cannot acquire certainty as to the historical existence of Jesus (an object of a certain sort), nor can he confirm that Jesus must have been God (a subject of a certain sort). But uncertainty is intolerable to the individual whose interest is indeed infinite. Therefore, he must eschew objective thinking at once and seize by act of will the certainty which he requires. What is the certainty he requires? That God in fact came into existence and that it is God that he worships. These propositions

the believer holds to be objectively true (actually the case, independent of any observer). What he denies is that they can be objectively thought through (proven). It is this distinction between objective truth and objective thought which collapses Murphy's case.

The fact that Climacus does insist that some things be held to be objectively true also serves to invalidate Blanshard's claims. It is not the case "that there are no common truths for Christians to accept". It is only that Climacus holds the number of such truths to be very small. As he writes in Fragments:

If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: 'We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died', it would be more than enough. The contemporary generation would have done all that was necessary; for this little advertisement, this nota bene on a page of universal history, would be sufficient to afford an occasion for a successor, and the most voluminous account can in all eternity do nothing more.¹

It is not the case that there are no common principles by which the believer's life may be guided. It is just that these principles are such that whether or not a given individual is actually living his life under their guidance is not common knowledge, not something others may hold with certainty. And finally it is not the case that there are as many Christianities as there are persons with passion. It is more accurate to say instead that for Climacus there is one Christianity (truth) whose conditions for admittance are very much more generally satisfiable than many would suspect. The conditions, he tells us, are tailored to each person's capacities. With respect to this last point, it seems to us that

¹ Fragment pp.130f.; 'the contemporary generation' means of course contemporary with Christ. Notice 'ressurrection' is not mentioned.

Climacus, the putative irrationalist and fanatic, may be putting forward a conception of Christianity more liberal and humane than anyone has hitherto conceded.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EPILOGUE

Throughout this essay we have conflated, or at least refrained from clearly distinguishing, the roles of the ethicist and of the believer. From the standpoint of the devoted Kierkegaard scholar this is perhaps inexcusable. We defend this move, however, on the grounds that our only interest is in the Climacean definition of the truth of an individual, which definition is clearly sufficiently general to embrace both ethicist and believer. The required objective uncertainty is amplified for the Christian, indeed it is taken to the second power by the introduction of an eternal truth which is itself paradoxical. Hence, also, the infinite passion ("infinite" in the sense that there is no sacrifice the individual will not make in order to attain the object of his passion) is intensified by the awareness that there is no sacrifice that he can make that will guarantee him the attainment of his goal. Furthermore, it is supposed that the interest of the ethicist in his own reality becomes in the believer an interest in the reality of Jesus. But the uncertainty and the passion (both infinite and of the infinite, since the ethicist too has as his goal the establishment of a relationship with God) belong to the ethicist as well, and he is also allowed to be in the truth. As for the focus on different realities, it is not clear to us why Climacus makes such a point of this.¹ For while the ethicist is certainly concerned with the propriety of his own existence, it

¹ Postscript p.290 for example.

is also true that this is done with the ultimate goal in mind of establishing a proper relationship to God.¹ At the same time, the ethical "constitutes even in solitude the reconciling fellowship with all men."² This inclines us to the opinion that the egoism of the ethical has been somewhat overpitched. Furthermore, while the believer is certainly concerned with the reality of Christ as the God-in-Time, this concern arises in the course of his pursuit of his own eternal happiness. It is not to be forgotten that Christianity presupposes the would-be believer has an infinite interest in his own eternal happiness. The other-directedness of his passion is only partial and should not be emphasized to the exclusion of this other vital presupposition. In sum, the distinction between ethicist and believer while perhaps important to the larger aims of the pseudonym's creator seems largely irrelevant to our discussion. Even at the stage of religiousness B the individual who is in the truth will be such because of his concern for his own existence. And even the ethicist's passion must truly be 'of the infinite. Thus Df.5 seems entirely adequate to Climacus' conception.

But is Climacus' conception adequate to the truth? It is, we think, given the truth of this maxim: that "man is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal" in the way that Climacus posits him to be. For in this doctrine is contained both (a) the transcendental realism which posits a realm of eternal truth imposing upon the individual an obligation to exist in a certain way, and

¹ cf. Postscript pp.138, "the ethical is his complicity with God"; 141, "all ethical development consists in becoming apparent before God." etc.

² ibid. p.136.

(b) the existential anti-realism which eschews all speculation about knowledge sub specie aeterni and concerns itself solely with the certainty which it is possible for a human being to attain. From the juxtaposition of (a) and (b) comes the notion that a passionate mode of existence is the one to which all are obligated. For (b) denies that empirical certainty is ever ours. Like the later Wittgenstein, Climacus thinks that certainty which ostensibly results from some indubitable revelation of the way things are, is in reality a product of the language-game in which the propositions held to be certain are moves. Because of (a), however, he cannot like Wittgenstein simply shut his eyes to the problem of a transcendental or extra-linguistic justification of these propositions. For even if we can never be certain that e.g. God exists, it is absolutely vital to us that ~~He~~ does, we need it to be the case that He exists, we are bound to affirm it. Therefore, uncertain about that of which he must be certain, the subjective thinker is moved to passion. His passion serves to 'justify' his affirmation of that which is objectively uncertain because it as it were 'brings down into existence' the eternal truth (insofar as that is possible), serving as "an anticipation of the eternal in existence."¹ All this is necessary because without some element of the eternal in the individual's life providing a "factor of continuity",¹ movement, the essential element of his temporal existence, is impossible. "The unmoved is... a constituent of the motion as its measure and its end."¹ Remove the unmoved then, and movement vanishes, and with movement goes the possibility of genuinely temporal existence. Life becomes a static, meaningless 'solipsism

¹ Postscript p.277.

of the present moment'.²

All this follows from Climacus' dualistic postulate about the nature of man. Should we concede the truth of this idea to him? What would count as evidence for the truth of "man is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal"? of course, it might be pointed out that some form of this notion can be found in most of the classics of Western philosophy. Indeed, if one accepts Cartesian dualism as a form, then it may well be the dominant doctrine in modern philosophy of mind. But Climacus marshalls support for this dogma from an entirely different quarter, not from history but from his own heart, the heart he received from Kierkegaard. At this point we must revert to talk about Kierkegaard for on this score the views of his pseudonym differ not a whit from his own, and clearly are informed by experiences in his own life. Kierkegaard suffered as only a man who was such a synthesis could suffer. Chained to the temporal, he never felt at home there. Yearning for the eternal, he could never be certain what he would find there. Thus his own existence was testimony for the truth of "man is a synthesis". Nowhere in the pseudonyms is this notion explicitly argued for. It was for Kierkegaard something glaringly self-evident. He experienced its truth every day of his life. This sort of argument (if you care to call it that), however, recalls the third set of objections to Climacus-cum-Kierkegaard philosophizing mentioned in Chapter Six, viz. that this is the stuff autobiographies are made of and not serious works of philosophy. This criticism is common in the secondary literature. Even a relatively sympathetic reader like Regis Jolivet feels that "the event which convulsed him (Kierkegaard) so profoundly bears the marks of an event which was

¹ cf. Wittgenstein Tractatus 6.4311.

both personal and accidental."¹ And Professor Murphy writes:
"Rarely has a man been more persuasive in projecting his private ailments as 'existential' profundities."² Perhaps this is to be deplored in an author with systematic pretensions, though this is far from clear. Kant is only one example among many of a philosopher who claims to have acquired by introspection alone insights of universal applicability. But we need not go so far as to defend this, for neither Climacus nor Kierkegaard have any systematic pretensions at all. Thus they seem even less deserving of rebuke on this score than Kant. Like their common hero, Socrates, they see no higher stance for the human teacher than that of midwife. The direct proclamation of essential truths to other men is impossible. And so they communicate indirectly, asking questions, making suppositions, protesting ignorance. Principles are put forward as the product of personal musings and it is left open for others to decide whether it is so with them. This personal slant is not the offspring of overweening egotism or blind bias as his detractors suggest. It is a necessary corollary of the principle "truth is subjectivity". For this reason Climacus writes a revocation of his book and pleads "let no one take the pains to appeal to it as an authority; for he who thus appeals to it has eo ipso misunderstood it."³ And for this reason, Kierkegaard revokes his relationship to the pseudonyms.⁴ If we look within

¹ Jolivet op.cit. p.225.

² op.cit. p.177; see also Blanshard p.16, and Paton p.120. McClean, E. "Kierkegaard and Subjectivity" International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion 8 (1977) pp.217, 230f. and Holmer, P. "Kierkegaard and Religious Propositions" Journal of Religion XXXV n.3 (July 1955) p.136 oppose this view.

³ Postscript p.546.

⁴ in "A First and Last Declaration".

ourselves and find there the truth of what they say, then we have no need of their authority. And if we do not find it within ourselves, there is no other authority that can give it to us. So what these objectors ask of Kierkegaard/Climacus is something he has taken pains to explain to them no one can supply. As Wittgenstein is reported to have said: "At the end of my lecture on ethics, I spoke in the first person. I believe that is quite essential. Here nothing more can be established, I can only appear as a person speaking for myself."¹ However, such confessions may, for all that, have great value.

¹ in "Remarks to Waismann" Philosophical Review LXXIV (January 1965) p.16.

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