

2009

# Kierkegaard's Case for the Irrelevance of Philosophy

Antony Aumann

*Northern Michigan University*, [aaumann@nmu.edu](mailto:aaumann@nmu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.nmu.edu/facwork>



Part of the [Continental Philosophy Commons](#), and the [History of Philosophy Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Antony Aumann, "Kierkegaard's Case for the Irrelevance of Philosophy," *Continental Philosophy Review* 42:2 (2009) 221-248. DOI: 10.1007/s11007-009-9104-2

This Conference Paper in Published Proceedings is brought to you for free and open access by The Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of The Commons. For more information, please contact [kclumpne@nmu.edu](mailto:kclumpne@nmu.edu), [kmcdonou@nmu.edu](mailto:kmcdonou@nmu.edu), [mburgmei@nmu.edu](mailto:mburgmei@nmu.edu), [bsarjean@nmu.edu](mailto:bsarjean@nmu.edu).

## Kierkegaard's Case for the Irrelevance of Philosophy

Antony Aumann  
The Ohio State University

Department of Philosophy  
350 University Hall  
230 North Oval Mall  
Columbus, OH 43210-1340

E-mail: [aumann.3@osu.edu](mailto:aumann.3@osu.edu)  
Phone: (614)320-9108

**Abstract:** This paper provides an account of Kierkegaard's central criticism of the Danish Hegelians. Contrary to recent scholarship, it is argued that this criticism has a substantive theoretical basis and is not merely personal or *ad hominem* in nature. In particular, Kierkegaard is seen as criticizing the Hegelians for endorsing an unacceptable form of intellectual elitism, one that gives them pride of place in the realm of religion by dint of their philosophical knowledge. A problem arises, however, because this criticism threatens to apply to Kierkegaard himself. It is shown that Kierkegaard manages to escape this problem by virtue of the humorous aspect of his work.

**Keywords:** Kierkegaard, Hegel, Hegelianism, faith, reason, equality

Over the past few years, there has been a significant shift in opinion regarding Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel. The old view, popularized by Niels Thulstrup among others, saw Kierkegaard as a bitter adversary of Hegel.<sup>1</sup> It understood the two as having substantive theoretical disagreements concerning a number of important issues. Thulstrup even went so far as to say, "Hegel and Kierkegaard have in the main nothing in common as thinkers, neither as regards object, purpose, or method, nor as regards what each considered to be indisputable principles."<sup>2</sup>

In a recent influential book, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Jon Stewart takes issue with this interpretation. He rejects wholesale the idea that Kierkegaard was an adversary of Hegel. He maintains that Kierkegaard was "strongly and positively influenced by Hegel".<sup>3</sup> He adds that any criticisms Kierkegaard appears to direct at Hegel have little if anything to do with Hegel. On the contrary, they have to do with a number of Danish thinkers who adopted a form of Hegelianism.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Stewart argues that Kierkegaard's dispute with these Danish Hegelians was *personal* rather than *theoretical*. That is to say, Kierkegaard did not offer substantive criticisms of their views, only attacks on their character or how they lived their lives.<sup>5</sup>

The goal of the first half of my paper (§§1-4) is to argue for an intermediate position between the old view and Stewart's more recent view. Against the old view, I will embrace the

---

<sup>1</sup> Stewart (2003, pp. 3-27).

<sup>2</sup> Thulstrup (1980, p. 12).

<sup>3</sup> Stewart (2003, p. 33).

<sup>4</sup> Stewart (2003, pp. 33-34, 605-612; 2004a, pp. 184-207).

<sup>5</sup> Stewart (2003, pp. 487-488).

idea that Kierkegaard primarily intends to attack the Danish Hegelians and not Hegel.<sup>6</sup> Against Stewart's more recent view, I will argue that Kierkegaard's criticisms of the Danish Hegelians are not just *ad hominem* attacks. I will show that Kierkegaard has a substantive theoretical objection to level against them as well. In particular, he criticizes the Hegelians for endorsing an unacceptable form of intellectual elitism, one that gives them pride of place in the realm of religion by dint of their philosophical knowledge.

The goal of the second half of my paper (§§5-8) is to address the problems that arises for my interpretation. The most important problem will be that, if my interpretation holds, Kierkegaard's attack on intellectual elitism threatens to become incoherent. On the one hand, he appears to be telling the Hegelians that philosophical knowledge *is not* important in the realm of religion. On the other hand, this very message seems to constitute a piece of philosophical knowledge that *is* important in the realm of religion. That is to say, Kierkegaard's position seems to reduce to something like the following paradox:

Here is a bit of philosophical knowledge that *is* important in the sphere of religion:

‘Philosophical knowledge *is not* important in the sphere of religion.’

I will argue, however, that this problem is a pseudo-problem. A careful inspection of Kierkegaard's position reveals that it does not amount to the forgoing paradox. Thus, my interpretation does not render his position incoherent after all.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, as we will see in §3, the relevant positions set forth by the Danish Hegelians have parallels in Hegel's own writings. Thus Kierkegaard's objections to the Danish Hegelians will apply to Hegel himself to some degree, even though Kierkegaard did not primarily intend them to do so.

<sup>7</sup> Earlier versions of the paper were presented to the Philosophy Colloquia at Indiana University (2 November 2007) and Colgate University (13 June 2008), the Midsouth Philosophy Conference (23 February, 2008),

## 1. The Two Sides to Kierkegaard's Critique of Hegelianism

Kierkegaard's critical assessment of the Danish Hegelians can be found in a number of different texts. But perhaps the most famous critique, and the one I will focus on in this paper, comes from the pseudonymously published *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments"*.<sup>8</sup> The fictional author of this work, Johannes Climacus, presents us with what he calls "the misunderstanding between speculative thought [a catchphrase referring to the Danish Hegelians] and Christianity":

But primarily I sought through my own reflection to pick up a clue to the ultimate misunderstanding. I need not report my many mistakes, but it finally became clear to me that the deviation of speculative thought... might not be something accidental, might be located far deeper in the orientation of the whole age—most likely in this, that because of much knowledge people have entirely forgotten what it means to *exist* and what *inwardness* is.<sup>9</sup>

---

and the Søren Kierkegaard Society Group at the Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association (18 April 2008). I am grateful to those who attended for their comments, especially Noel Adams.

<sup>8</sup> I will respect Kierkegaard's request in "A First and Last Explanation" that we not attribute passages found in his pseudonymously published works to him (Kierkegaard 1992, p. 627). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the criticism Climacus levels against the Hegelians, viz. that they are weighed down by "too much knowledge", can be found in texts published under Kierkegaard's own name (Kierkegaard 1993a, pp. 22, 36; 1993b, p. 153). Moreover, the theoretical basis for this criticism, viz. Climacus' egalitarian conception of Christianity, can also be found in Kierkegaard's signed works. (I will refer to the relevant passages here as the paper proceeds.) Thus it is very likely that Climacus speaks for Kierkegaard regarding the matter at hand.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard (1992, pp. 241-242). Hereafter 'CUP'.

The problem mentioned in the final clause of this passage—that excessive knowledge has led the speculative thinkers to forget what it means to exist—becomes something of a mantra for Climacus. He brings it up repeatedly throughout *Postscript*, almost always using the same wording (CUP, pp. 120, 215, 249-250, 263, 264, 269, 274n, 280, 571). Thus there can be little doubt it stands at the center of his assessment of the Danish Hegelians.

Many recent scholars interpret Climacus' mantra as picking out an unhealthy psychological disposition.<sup>10</sup> According to this view, the speculative thinkers have gotten caught up in their speculative thought and the knowledge it promises to provide. The unfortunate result is that they have missed out on, ignored, or “forgotten” what really matters: actually living out their own lives (CUP, p. 344). To use Climacus' religious language, they have spent all their time reflecting on Christianity instead of engaging in the everyday tasks of becoming and being Christians (CUP, p. 606). Simply put, their speculative thought has become a distraction.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Conant (1995, p. 311n35); Lippitt (2000a, pp. 13-18); Muench (2003, p. 140); Stewart (2003, p. 486).

<sup>11</sup> Stewart (2003, p. 486); Roberts (1980, p. 88). Notice how, on this interpretation, the speculative thinkers do not literally possess “too much knowledge.” Rather, they get caught up in the activity of acquiring knowledge. A more literal approach to Climacus' description of their problem is possible and makes some sense. For example, Climacus often talks about how the Hegelians have acquired knowledge of Persia and China, French and Italian, water works inspection and geography, even astronomy and veterinary science (CUP, pp. 164, 259, 307n, 351, 464, 469, 498). The problem with this great knowledge, he says, is that it makes knowledge of everyday existence seem trivial by comparison. (After all, of what importance is the life of one individual human being compared with all of world history?) Because the Hegelians see knowledge of everyday existence as trivial, they do not pay any attention to it. However, Climacus thinks it is precisely knowledge of everyday existence that is important for authentic existence. Thus we can see how the actual possession of great knowledge leads the Hegelians astray. That being said, I do not think much hangs on the details of how we cash out the problem. Everything I say about the less literal interpretation will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the more literal interpretation.

If we stop here, it seems as though Climacus does not have any objections to level against speculative *thought*. He seems rather to have personal quarrels with particular speculative *thinkers*. His problem, in other words, is not with *Hegelianism* per se but rather with particular *Hegelians*. In fact, this is the conclusion that Stewart draws in *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*.<sup>12</sup>

Contrary to Stewart, I do not think we should stop here. While I agree Climacus refers to an unhealthy psychological disposition when he talks about “knowing too much,” I do not think that is the end of the story. I think there is something else going on between Climacus and the speculative thinkers besides an attack on their character. Underlying Climacus’ *ad hominem* attacks, I detect a substantive theoretical objection. Let me explain.

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

Now if Climacus’ objection were merely personal and not theoretical, he would agree with this position. He would acknowledge that speculative thinking is an essential Christian task. (A refusal to acknowledge this point would amount to a theoretical disagreement with the Hegelians and *eo ipso* move his objection beyond the domain of the merely personal.) But, as I will show in section four, Climacus does *not* acknowledge this point. He denies that speculative thinking is an essential Christian task. In fact, he claims that speculative thought plays no role whatsoever in Christian existence (CUP, p. 571). Therefore, Climacus’ objection is not merely

---

<sup>12</sup> Stewart (2003, pp. 486-488).

personal. It is not simply that the Danish Hegelians engage in too much thinking. He is also criticizing them for believing that thinking is important in the first place. And that is a theoretical point, not just a psychological or personal one.

## 2. The Speculative Project

To get a better handle on this dispute, we must take a closer look at the speculative position. One helpful place to start is with a debate that occurred during Kierkegaard's student days between one of the Danish Hegelians, Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884), and some of the other Danish luminaries of the time. Recent scholarship has shown that Kierkegaard was well acquainted with this debate and that much of what he says about speculative thought was a response to it.<sup>13</sup> Thus the debate serves as a particularly appropriate backdrop for our discussion.

It is actually Martensen's dissertation that indirectly sets off the debate.<sup>14</sup> A reviewer of the dissertation, Johann Alfred Bornemann (1813-1890), declared that Martensen had attempted to identify and move beyond two theological positions on the relationship between faith and reason: (i) rationalism and (ii) supernaturalism.<sup>15</sup> According to Bornemann, Martensen thought these positions were "antiquated standpoints that belonged to a lost time".<sup>16</sup> In order to make progress in theology, it was necessary, in good Hegelian fashion, to "mediate" between them.

---

<sup>13</sup> Stewart (2003, pp. 184-195, 339-355; 2004a, pp. 184-207); Waaler and Tolstrup (2004, pp. 208-234)

<sup>14</sup> The dissertation was originally published in 1837 in Latin under the title *De autonomia conscientiae sui humanae in theologiam dogmaticam nostri temporis introducta* before being translated into Danish four years later under the title *Den menneskelige Selvbevidstheds Autonomie* (Koch 2004, p. 274n1). It has also been translated into English as "The Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology" (see Martensen 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Bornemann (1839).

<sup>16</sup> Koch (2004, p. 242n4) (my trans.).

That is to say, Martensen thought it was necessary to find a synthesis of the two positions that embraced the good parts of each and left the bad parts behind.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of synthesizing rationalism and supernaturalism struck some members of the Danish intellectual community as wrong-headed. J.P. Mynster (1775-1854), for example, insisted that rationalism and supernaturalism were contradictory positions.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, by virtue of the law of non-contradiction, it was impossible to synthesize them. In addition, by virtue of the law of excluded middle, it was impossible to find some third way to go. Mynster acknowledged that Hegel and others thought they could disprove or “sublate” these laws. But he remained unconvinced, citing Aristotle’s point that a rejection of the law of non-contradiction implicitly appealed to the law of non-contradiction (cf. CUP, pp. 304-305).<sup>19</sup> He insisted that Martensen had to embrace either rationalism or supernaturalism but not both and not some middle ground between them.<sup>20</sup>

Martensen’s actual contribution to the debate, his 1839 article entitled “Rationalism, Supernaturalism, and the *principium exclusi medii*,” is a direct response to Mynster’s attack. His goal in responding is two-fold. Primarily, he aims to explain how a synthesis of rationalism and supernaturalism is possible. But in addition he aims to explain why he rejects the laws of excluded middle and non-contradiction within the domain of Christianity. (It is worth noting that

---

<sup>17</sup> Stewart (2003, pp. 189-191; 2004b, pp. 565-566; 2004c, p. 584); Koch (2004, p. 242n4).

<sup>18</sup> The relevant article by Mynster was written in 1839 and entitled “Rationalism, Supernaturalism.” Mynster was an important figure in Kierkegaard’s life. He served as the pastor of Kierkegaard’s father’s church and later became the primate of Denmark. Mynster’s death also occasioned Kierkegaard’s attack on the state Church, the deterioration of which Kierkegaard attributed to Mynster and Martensen.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart (2004b, pp. 567-568).

<sup>20</sup> Stewart (2004b, pp. 568-569).

given how Martensen will set up the two positions, they are not actually contradictory. Thus he does not reject Aristotelian logic in order to synthesize them. His rejection of Aristotelian logic comes into play at a different place.) Following the presentation given by Waaler and Tolstrup, we can summarize what Martensen says thus.

According to Martensen, old unmediated rationalism was the view that human reason could provide us with everything we wanted in the realm of religion without any help from God. Unaided human reason could ascertain the content of basic Christian dogmas such as the Incarnation and the Trinity as well as prove their truth. In addition, reason could penetrate these puzzling dogmas and explain how they were internally coherent. A supernatural revelation from God that communicated these doctrines was therefore superfluous.<sup>21</sup>

By contrast, old unmediated supernaturalism was the view that unaided human reason could do nothing on its own. In order to learn about the Christian doctrines, human beings had to rely on a supernatural communication from God. Moreover, because reason could not confirm the truth of these doctrines once they were revealed, humans had to believe them simply on God's authority. Finally, because reason could not even grasp their content, the doctrines remained nothing more than incomprehensible mysteries.<sup>22</sup>

Martensen synthesizes or mediates these two positions in the following way. On the one hand, he rejects the self-sufficiency of human reason posited by old unmediated rationalism. As he had in his dissertation, he insists that human beings must rely on a supernatural revelation from God in order to become acquainted with truths about the divine. On the other hand, Martensen rejects the claim made by old unmediated supernaturalism that unaided reason is

---

<sup>21</sup> Waaler and Tolstrup (2004, pp. 215-216).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

helpless. Although reason cannot establish or confirm the truth of the revealed dogmas, it can nevertheless grasp them on the conceptual level. That is to say, it can show how religious dogmas such as the Incarnation and the Trinity, which initially appear incoherent, are actually comprehensible. Here is where Hegelian logic comes into play. For the dogmas become comprehensible only once the laws of excluded middle and non-contradiction are rejected. And it is the breakthrough of Hegelian logic that makes such rejections possible.<sup>23</sup>

In his 1837-1838 lectures on the topic, Martensen associates his position with the mediaeval slogan “faith seeking understanding”.<sup>24</sup> It is easy to see why the slogan fits. Like the mediaevals, Martensen thinks that we human beings cannot discover the Christian doctrines on our own. We require a supernatural communication from God in order to become acquainted with them. Thus, we must start out with a naïve faith, one that simply and humbly accepts whatever God reveals. But we do not have to stop here; we can go further. By utilizing the insights of Hegelian logic, we can take the revealed doctrines, which will initially seem mysterious, and raise them up to the conceptual level. In other words, we can show how the initially incoherent doctrines actually make sense. Doing so is the goal of Martensen’s speculative project or what sometimes gets called his “mediation theology”.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. The Existential Payoff of the Speculative Project

I stated above that the Danish Hegelians saw speculative thinking or the speculative project as important for Christian existence. They believed it would provide them with a kind of existential pay-off, i.e. benefits for their everyday Christian lives. In order to understand why they held this

---

<sup>23</sup> Stewart (2003, pp. 349-351); Waaler and Tolstrup (2004, pp. 215-216)

<sup>24</sup> Koch (2004, p. 282).

<sup>25</sup> Koch (2004, p. 233).

position, we can once again turn to Martensen. In particular, we can look at some provocative comments he makes about the Jews.

In his article on rationalism and supernaturalism, Martensen claims that the Jews did not reject Jesus merely because they were wicked people.<sup>26</sup> They rejected him in part because they could not understand his claim to divinity. And the reason they could not understand his claim to divinity was that they embraced Aristotelian logic. The specific sticking point was the laws of excluded middle and non-contradiction, which ruled out the possibility that contradictory predicates such as “God” and “man” could both apply to one and the same subject—something Jesus’ claims to be God entailed. Martensen writes:

It understandably struck them as blasphemy that the supernatural Lord of heaven and earth should appear here in a natural, human form. Seen from the point of view of logic, their accusation rested on the *principium exclusi medii* or on the assumption that the contradicting predicates “God” and “man” could not be mediated in the selfsame subject.<sup>27</sup>

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

Martensen uses this story to construct a more general thesis about human nature. He believes the Jews were not somehow unique in resisting the call to believe what they did not

---

<sup>26</sup> Martensen (2004, p. 588).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

understand. Almost all reflective believers will get frustrated in such a situation. Moreover, they will remain frustrated as long as there is tension between faith and understanding or, as Martensen sometimes puts it, between what theology teaches and what philosophy teaches.<sup>28</sup> Thus, reflective believers will not be satisfied with old supernaturalism's naïve faith in mysteries. Relief will come only once they have comprehended these mysteries.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the practical payoff of the speculative project lies in its ability to grant people the relief they crave. And it does so by helping them to acquire religious knowledge.

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

Human nature is not meant to be divided against itself and to live with a divorce between faith and understanding. For this reason, we must aspire to harmony in our beings and strive towards full agreement with ourselves.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Martensen (2004, pp. 592-593); cf. Koch (2004, p. 275).

<sup>29</sup> Martensen (2004, pp. 592-593).

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Koch (2004, p. 375) (my trans.). Koch quotes pp. 46-47 of Martensen's work, *Dogmatiske Oplysninger: Et Leilighedsskrift* [Dogmatic Inquiries: An Occasional Publication], from 1850. The work is a rejoinder to comments made by Rasmus Nielsen (1809-1884) in *Mag. S. Kierkegaard's "Johannes Climacus" og Dr. H. Martensen's "Christelige Dogmatik.": En Undersøgende Anmeldelse* [Magister S. Kierkegaard's "Johannes Climacus" and Dr. H. Martensen's "Christian Dogmatics": An Investigative Review]. Nielsen saw himself as Kierkegaard's disciple and defended what he took to be Kierkegaard's view.

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

It is helpful and important to recognize that Martensen's position approximates a position found in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>31</sup> In this work, Hegel locates one source of human unhappiness in the alienation from God that many people experience. People feel alienated, he thinks, because they buy into the Judeo-Christian picture of God as radically different from and superior to them.<sup>32</sup> Viewing God as transcendent and superior makes people unhappy because it leads them to see themselves as lowly and undignified by contrast.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, Hegel realizes that Christianity addresses this problem. For example, by claiming that God has taken on human form in the person of Jesus Christ, Christianity says that the separation between the divine and the human has been overcome. And by claiming that God qua Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of true believers, it says that all human beings can actually experience unity with God.

---

<sup>31</sup> The exact line of influence between Hegel and Martensen here is unclear. Martensen knew Hegel's writings well and may have gotten the relevant position directly from them. That being said, the position in question was actually quite common in Martensen's day and age. His teacher, F.C. Sibbern (1785-1872), defended a version of it as early as the 1820's (Koch 2004, pp. 94-102). And Sibbern was merely recasting a view set forth by the German thinker Henrich Steffens (1773-1845), who lectured on it in Copenhagen at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Koch 2004, p. 275; Schiørring 1982, pp. 179-180). Moreover, Steffens was merely bringing to Denmark an ideal that was popular among the German Romantics. They too thought that the goal of human development was to attain an inner harmony of one's faculties and that the way to achieve this goal was to acquire knowledge (Beiser 2005, p. 37). Thus it is likely that Martensen's position did not only come from Hegel but had multiple sources.

<sup>32</sup> Hegel (1977, pp. 126-127); Forster (1998, pp. 23-25, 43-44).

<sup>33</sup> Hegel (1977, p. 127); Forster (1998, pp. 61-63).

Nevertheless, Hegel finds the Christian narrative deficient.<sup>34</sup> First, the unity between the divine and the human that Christianity describes is incomplete. The doctrine of the Incarnation states that perfect unity occurs in one specific individual (Jesus Christ), not in all human beings.<sup>35</sup> And while all human beings can (at least in principle) enjoy a kind of unity with God by being filled with the Holy Spirit, this unity is only preliminary—an inchoate precursor to the full reconciliation that happens in the afterlife.<sup>36</sup> Second, the unity with God described in the Christian narrative is not known or proven. In the case of Incarnation, the postulated unity is taken on faith. In the case of the Holy Spirit, it is simply felt or intuited.<sup>37</sup>

One of the main goals of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to overcome these deficiencies. It seeks to do so by providing a philosophical proof that human beings are *identical* with God in important respects.<sup>38</sup> The person who follows the philosophical demonstration will experience a more profound unity with God than the person who simply accepts the Christian narrative. For he will not see God as a superior being who sometimes deigns to dwell in him; he will understand God as a superior being that he himself is. In addition, the person who follows Hegel's proof will enjoy a more profound connection between faith/feeling and thought than the person who simply accepts the Christian narrative. For he will not believe, feel, or intuit that he is united with God; he will *know* that this is the case.

In conclusion, we can provide a rough summary of Hegel's view regarding the importance of philosophy by saying that he thinks philosophy paves the way to a higher mode of

---

<sup>34</sup> Beiser (2005, pp. 146-147); Stewart (2003, p. 476).

<sup>35</sup> Hegel (1977, pp. 462-463).

<sup>36</sup> Hegel (1977, p. 463); Beiser (2005, pp. 42-44).

<sup>37</sup> Hegel (1977, p. 463); Beiser (2005, pp. 146-147).

<sup>38</sup> Hegel (1977, pp. 130-131, 459-460); Beiser (2005, pp. 42-45); Forster (1998, pp. 198-199).

religious existence than would otherwise be attainable. In this respect, his view has much in common with the one that Martensen defends.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4. Kierkegaard's Position

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

##### 4.1. Part One

The point of departure is Kierkegaard's egalitarian conception of Christianity.<sup>40</sup> Kierkegaard believes that God sets up Christianity as a universal human task—i.e. a task given to everyone.<sup>41</sup> In addition, he believes that out of consideration for fairness, God designs the task so that it is equally open to and equally difficult for everyone. He declares:

---

<sup>39</sup> If we think about the basic structure of Martensen's position, we can find additional historical antecedents. For example, a number of Enlightenment thinkers, including Diderot and Kant, held that the way to improve humankind was to teach them the arts and sciences (Beiser 1987, pp. 32-33). Moreover, Socrates maintained that knowledge is virtue and hence that which makes human flourishing possible. Thus he too fits into the tradition under discussion.

<sup>40</sup> Kierkegaard's egalitarianism has its roots in his theological commitments. Nevertheless, the appeal of what he says is not limited to those who share these commitments. For the notion of egalitarianism he advocates in the sphere of religion bears a striking resemblance to the one Kant advocates in the realm of ethics (see Evans 2004, pp. 91-93; Outka 1982, pp. 171-172). Therefore, everything that follows from Kierkegaard's egalitarianism should also be of interest, *mutatis mutandis*, to those who find themselves attracted to the Kantian ethical tradition.

<sup>41</sup> Kierkegaard (1997a, p. 263). See also Evans (1983, pp. 73-75, 87).

But it must always be remembered that Christianity is in no way whatsoever associated with differences between man and man, the differences of capacities and endowments.

No, no, it offers itself unconditionally to every human being.<sup>42</sup>

Climacus makes the same point in *Postscript*:

Let it be ten times true, then, that Christianity does not consist in differences; let it be the most blessed comfort of earthly life that the sacred humaneness of Christianity is that it can be appropriated by everyone (CUP, p. 366).<sup>43</sup>

In a later passage, Climacus adds:

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

The general idea here is that no one can have a harder time with Christianity simply because she lacks certain abilities or suffers from unfortunate life circumstances. And no one can have an easier time simply because she possesses certain abilities or enjoys fortunate life circumstances.<sup>44</sup>

It is possible to provide a more precise account of Kierkegaard's point. An egalitarian conception of Christianity rules out the possibility that anyone can have *an unfair advantage*

---

<sup>42</sup> Kierkegaard (1967-78, p. 3:176). See also Kierkegaard (1998, p. 180).

<sup>43</sup> See also Kierkegaard (1967-78, p. 2:221).

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the scriptural backing for Kierkegaard's egalitarian conception of Christianity, see Outka (1982, pp. 179-180).

when it comes to the task of becoming and being a Christian. Such an advantage would exist if and only if:

- (1) Some person *P* enjoyed some capability or circumstance *C* that some other person *P\** could not enjoy; and
- (2) the enjoyment of *C* provided *P* with some Christian benefit *B* that *P\** could not acquire in some other way.

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

Second, by “a Christian benefit,” I mean something that promotes or enhances one’s Christian well-being. I do not wish to restrict the domain here to things that help one secure an eternal salvation. I also wish to include anything that helps one live the ideal Christian life in the here and now. Thus, what ultimately gets counted as a Christian benefit will turn in part on how we construe the ideal Christian life. But, in general, something that enables one to avoid obstacles or problems that would otherwise hinder one’s ability to live the ideal Christian life will count as a Christian benefit. So too will something that enables one to advance farther along the way towards the Christian ideal than one could otherwise get.

Third, it is important that Christian benefit *B* cannot be acquired in some other way than through the enjoyment of capability or circumstance *C*. If *B* could be had in multiple different ways, the fact that one particular way was closed off to some people would not necessarily be

unfair. It would still be possible for the playing field to be level in a complicated way, with different people receiving the same benefit from different sources.

#### 4.2. Part Two

Kierkegaard's egalitarian conception of Christianity shows its relevance to the matter at hand when applied to the intellectual differences that obtain between people. If one person cannot have an easier time with Christianity because of her circumstances or natural endowments, then by instantiation an intelligent person cannot have an easier time because of her intellectual acumen. Similarly, a cultured person cannot have an easier time because of her culture and an educated person cannot have an easier time because of her education. In short, Christianity cannot be "difficult for the obtuse and easy for the brainy" (CUP, p. 557; see also CUP, p. 469).

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

- (1) Some person  $P$  grasped some bit of philosophical understanding  $U$  that was too sophisticated for some other person  $P^*$  to grasp; and
- (2) grasping  $U$  provided  $P$  with some Christian benefit  $B$  that  $P^*$  could not acquire in some other way.

In what follows, I will refer to this general conclusion as SPUNCA, for *Sophisticated Philosophical Understanding is Not Christianly Advantageous*.

#### 4.3. Part Three

Kierkegaard ultimately rejects Martensen's claim that speculative thought provides benefits for Christian believers because it entails a violation of SPUNCA. Here's why. First, not everyone

has the ability to engage in speculative thought. In fact, very few people can do so. Thus, condition (1) for violating SPUNCA is easily met. Second, as we see in the case of the Jews, those who grasp Hegel's teachings, i.e. those clever enough to engage in speculative thought, have an easier time becoming Christians. In addition, those intelligent enough to grasp the results of the speculative project get to a higher level of Christian existence. Unlike the simple folk who on account of their simplicity remain at the level of naïve faith, the speculative thinkers acquire understanding as well. They leave behind naïve faith as "a lesson for slow learners in the sphere of intellectuality, an asylum for dullards" (CUP, p. 327; see also CUP, p. 609). Thus, condition (2) for violating SPUNCA is met as well.

In summary, Kierkegaard rejects Martensen's view because it entails that smart people have an unfair advantage when it comes to Christianity. To use slightly different words, he rejects Martensen's view because it entails an intellectual elitism that is at odds with Christianity. He has Climacus say:

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

Kierkegaard adds in his journals:

But I cannot escape the thought that every man, unconditionally every man, no matter how simple he is or how suffering, nevertheless can comprehend the highest, specifically, the religious. If this is not so, then Christianity is really nonsense. For me it is frightful to see the recklessness with which philosophers and the like introduce differentiating

categories like genius, talent, etc., into religion. They have no intimation that religion is thereby abolished... Think of the highest, think of Christ—suppose that He came into the world in order to save a few clever people, for others could not understand Him.

Detestable! Disgusting! He is not nauseated by any human suffering, by anyone's stupidity—but the society of clever people: yes, that would have nauseated Him.<sup>45</sup>

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

#### 4.4. Dénouement

Kierkegaard can accommodate his rejection of Martensen's position in two different ways. First, he can insist that the speculative project has to fail. The idea here runs as follows: If the speculative project were to succeed and the speculative thinker could explain away the paradox of the Incarnation, she would have an advantage over the simple person. Unlike the simple person, she would not have to believe something she could not understand. The task of becoming and being a Christian would thus be psychologically less stressful for her. This advantage, however, would be unacceptable since it would run afoul of the egalitarian nature of Christianity. Therefore, by *modus tollens*, the speculative project must fail. The speculative thinker must not be able to explain away the paradox (see, e.g., CUP, pp. 213-218). In other words, the proper interpretation of the relationship between reason and religion must be the one Martensen describes as old, unmediated supernaturalism.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Kierkegaard (1967-78, p. 1:446).

<sup>46</sup> Waaler and Tolstrup (2004, pp. 223-224). This point would apply only to the theoretical or doctrinal aspects of religion. It would not apply to the practical aspects of religion, i.e. those that concern how religious

The second way Kierkegaard can accommodate his rejection of Martensen's position is by interpreting Christianity so that the results of the speculative project simply become irrelevant. To see how this would work, notice that Kierkegaard rejects the idea that faith involves simply assenting to certain propositions. He has Climacus explicitly deny that "a Christian is one who accepts Christianity's doctrine" (CUP, p. 607; see also CUP, pp. 37, 215, 326). Christian faith is instead something much more personal; it is a passionate and unconditional commitment to following Christ (CUP, pp. 610-616). By definition, the unconditionally obedient person will follow Christ whether or not the speculative project succeeds. Insofar as her faith is concerned, she will be indifferent to the results of the speculative project. On this interpretation of Christianity, there is no need to claim the speculative project must fail. Speculative thought provides no Christian benefits simply because its results are *irrelevant* to the Christian way of life.<sup>47</sup>

---

people should act or what they should do. Climacus asserts that the everyday tasks of religion (CUP, p. 379) and ethics (CUP, p. 391) must be easy for everyone understand. There must be no difficulty at the point of *comprehending* the tasks that would delay people (and the simple people more than the smart people) from moving on to the more important point of *doing* the tasks.

<sup>47</sup> While *Kierkegaard* sometimes takes the second path (see Kierkegaard 1967-78, pp. 3:365-367), there are at least two reasons why *Climacus* refuses to do so. First, Climacus fears that those who do not *have to* exercise a disposition to believe without understanding will not actually acquire one. On account of their laziness, they will acquire one only if absolutely necessary. Therefore, true faith—i.e. true unconditional commitment—will arise only if people are forced to believe against their understanding. Or, as he puts it, true faith will arise only if the object of faith is an irreconcilable paradox, i.e. only if the speculative project fails (CUP, pp. 230, 610-611, 614; cf. CUP, pp. 423-427). Second, Climacus thinks the true knight of faith is not only *willing* to pay any price in order to follow Christ but actually *wants* to pay it. The knight of faith, therefore, will work hard to keep his understanding at bay and ensure that he sacrifices it (CUP, pp. 233, 564-565). In this respect, Climacus claims, the knight of faith is like

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

### 5. The Apparent Paradox in Kierkegaard's Position

At the outset of the paper, I said that my interpretation of Kierkegaard would suffer from a serious problem. It is now time to address that problem.

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

---

“a girl truly in love.” Such a girl wants to express her love by paying the highest price for it and becomes disappointed if she gains the beloved on the cheap (CUP, p. 231).

Climacus' two reasons for rejecting the second path suffer from a common problem. There is nothing about them that pertains specifically to the disposition to believe against the understanding. The same reasons should entail, *mutatis mutandis*, that the knight of faith must realize all his other difficult dispositions, for example, his disposition to abandon all his possessions in order to follow Christ. However, Climacus does not require the knight of faith to realize these other dispositions. With respect to them, he requires only that the disposition exist (see CUP, pp. 406, 410). Therefore, he seemingly treats the disposition to believe against the understanding as a special case (Adams 2005, pp. 330-333). Unfortunately, it is not at all clear why it warrants such treatment. It seems Climacus ought either to require the knight of faith to realize all his dispositions or to concede that the knight of faith does not have to realize his disposition to believe against the understanding. If he pursues the latter option, which seems by far the more reasonable one, he could allow for the speculative project to succeed as outlined above.

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

Second, SPUNCA—or, rather, accepting SPUNCA—comes across as providing an important Christian benefit that cannot be had in any other way. Let me explain. Climacus claims that excessive philosophical reflection hinders people from becoming ideal Christians. In particular, it leads them to neglect everyday Christian tasks such as loving their neighbors (CUP, p. 606). Sometimes this neglect occurs because people accidentally get caught up in high-flown abstract thoughts and consequently overlook their everyday responsibilities. The caricature of the absentminded professor provides a good example of this phenomenon (CUP, pp. 120-121, 145).<sup>48</sup> Other times the neglect occurs because people intentionally postpone the everyday tasks of faith in order to engage in philosophical reflection (CUP, pp. 23, 27, 200).<sup>49</sup> Climacus refers to an anecdote from Plutarch that brings out the idea:

When Eudamidas in the academy saw the senescent Xenocrates seeking the truth together with his followers, he asked: Who is this old man? And when the reply was given that he was a wise man, one of those seeking after virtue, he exclaimed, “When, then, will he use it?” (CUP, p. 33n)<sup>50</sup>

Whatever the proximate cause, Climacus thinks one *underlying* cause of this problem is that people wrongly believe philosophical reflection is important. More specifically, they wrongly

---

<sup>48</sup> See also Kierkegaard (1990, p. 105).

<sup>49</sup> See also Kierkegaard (1990, p. 195n).

<sup>50</sup> The anecdote comes from Plutarch’s *Moralia* (1967-84, p. 3:192). For an extended discussion of Climacus’ worry that philosophical reflection leads to a postponement of the tasks of faith, see Adams (2005).

believe it provides sophisticated philosophical understanding that is advantageous for living the Christian life. (As we have seen, both Martensen and Hegel hold versions of this view.)

Therefore, if people knew that philosophical reflection was *not* important in this way—i.e. if they accepted SPUNCA—they would be less likely to neglect the everyday tasks of faith. That is to say, accepting SPUNCA would help immunize them against one common problem that hinders them from becoming ideal Christians. And that fits the stipulated definition of ‘Christian benefit’.<sup>51</sup>

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

Here is a bit of sophisticated philosophical understanding that is Christianly advantageous: ‘sophisticated philosophical understanding is not Christianly advantageous.’

Abstracting away, we get the following formal structure:

Here is an S that is P: ‘No S’s are P’s.’

This structure is obviously problematic. For the statement ‘No S’s are P’s’ serves as a counter-example to the claim it itself makes, viz. no S’s are P’s. We can describe this problem as a self-reference paradox or a self-referentially inconsistent statement. And, to the extent that it helps,

---

<sup>51</sup> We can raise the problem in a more concrete way by imagining the following person whom we will call ‘John’. On the one hand, John is philosophically inclined. He is what contemporary psychologists would call ‘high in need for cognition’. As a result, he is the sort of person who will get distracted by philosophical investigations into Christianity if he does not see the truth of SPUNCA. On the other hand, John is not terribly bright. Despite the fact that he is philosophically inclined, he does not have what it takes to grasp sophisticated philosophical truths. In particular, he does not have what it takes to see the truth of SPUNCA. If John exists—and it seems as though he might—then knowledge of SPUNCA will provide those who have it with an unfair advantage over him.

we can say it bears analogy to the relativist's paradox (the only universal truth is that there are no universal truths), Rorty's paradox (the only good meta-level theory is that all meta-level theories are bad), and the paradox of Socrates' ignorance (the only thing Socrates knows is that he is ignorant).

At this point it is worth noting that not every interpreter of Kierkegaard would balk at this problem. Certain postmodern readers, who actually delight in the paradoxes and contradictions they find in Kierkegaard's writings, would embrace the problem rather than try to resolve it.<sup>52</sup> I admit to having a small amount of sympathy for this position and think there are times when it is the right stance to take up. However, I do not think that *now* is one of those times. For I do not believe we actually encounter a contradiction here. More pointedly, I do not believe SPUNCA *actually* generates the self-reference paradox that it *appears* to generate. In the next two sections (§§6-7), I will explain why I hold this position. My strategy will be to look at two accounts of how Kierkegaard escapes the paradox. The first one will fail, but in an instructive way. The second one will succeed.

## 6. The Allison and Conant Solution to the Paradox

Two important commentators, Henry Allison and James Conant, have addressed something like the paradox described above. They both acknowledge that one of Climacus' goals in *Postscript* is to make people aware that acquiring more philosophical knowledge will not help them with the Christian project.<sup>53</sup> In other words, they both admit that Climacus desires to communicate something akin to SPUNCA. In addition, they both confess that the challenge facing commentators is to understand how Climacus can accomplish this goal without contradicting

---

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Jegstrup (2004, p. 4).

<sup>53</sup> Allison (1967, pp. 433, 459-560); Conant (1993, pp. 205, 206).

himself, i.e. without turning SPUNCA itself into a piece of sophisticated philosophical knowledge that provides Christian advantages.<sup>54</sup> Here is how they take on that challenge.

Allison and Conant start by conceding that if we read *Postscript* straightforwardly, i.e. if we read it as a serious philosophical work that should be taken at face value, we get our paradox.<sup>55</sup> However, both insist there are good reasons for *not* reading *Postscript* in this way. First, Kierkegaard is aware of the relevant type of paradox. He even has Climacus describe several tokens of it, some of which sound eerily similar to the one under investigation.<sup>56</sup> Given this fact, it would seem strange for him to fall prey to the paradox unintentionally.<sup>57</sup> Second, several of the arguments presented in *Postscript* appear so poorly constructed and so absurd that it is hard to imagine someone with Kierkegaard's intellectual acumen forwarding them seriously.<sup>58</sup> Third, Climacus revokes everything he says in *Postscript* and declares that the book

---

<sup>54</sup> Allison (1967, p. 458); Conant (1993, pp. 207-208).

<sup>55</sup> Allison (1967, p. 458); Conant (1993, pp. 210, 215-216).

<sup>56</sup> For example, early in *Postscript*, Climacus discusses the person who wants to communicate the conviction that "truth is inwardness; objectively there is no truth, but the appropriation is the truth" (CUP, p. 77). The challenge facing this person is to communicate his conviction without turning it into something that is itself an objective truth. On the very next page, Climacus describes the difficulty of communicating the conviction that "the truth is not the truth but that the way is the truth, that is, that the truth is only in the becoming, in the process of appropriation, that consequently there is no result" (CUP, p. 78). The challenge here is to communicate the position without turning it into an instance of what it rejects, namely a truth in the form of a result. Finally, in the section on Lessing, he discusses the problem of communicating the view that actual existence is important, while abstract doctrines are not. The temptation here is to present the view as itself being an important abstract doctrine (CUP, pp. 122-123).

<sup>57</sup> Allison (1967, p. 459); Conant (1993, pp. 211-245).

<sup>58</sup> Allison (1967, p. 453); Conant (1993, pp. 214-215).

is superfluous (CUP, pp. 618-621). A person with a serious philosophical message is not likely to say this. Fourth, Climacus claims to be a humorist, someone whose fundamental attitude towards life is not serious (CUP, pp. 501, 617). And fifth, when Climacus reviews his earlier work, *Philosophical Fragments*, he downplays the importance of its content and emphasizes its ironic or humorous form. These comments might make us suspicious that something similar goes on in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments"*.<sup>59</sup>

The conclusion Allison and Conant draw from this evidence is that we should not treat *Postscript* as a piece of serious philosophy or as a work that contains serious philosophical positions. We should instead treat it as a joke—perhaps even a parody of serious pieces of philosophy.<sup>60</sup> This move does indeed let Climacus avoid the self-reference paradox. *Postscript* no longer offers readers a Christianly advantageous piece of sophisticated philosophical knowledge about how sophisticated philosophical knowledge is not Christianly advantageous. It does not do so because it simply does not offer readers a piece of sophisticated philosophical knowledge. It offers something else: a joke, a parody of sophisticated philosophical knowledge.

This position has received a significant amount of criticism in recent times. The standard line of objection involves challenging the reasons Allison and Conant give for reading *Postscript* as a joke.<sup>61</sup> While these challenges are important, there is a much more effective way to attack the Allison and Conant position. It runs as follows.

---

<sup>59</sup> CUP, p. 274n; Conant (1993, pp. 210, 215).

<sup>60</sup> Allison (1967, pp. 454-456); Conant (1993, pp. 205, 207, 215).

<sup>61</sup> The standard line of criticism of the Allison and Conant position can be found primarily in Lippitt (2000a, pp. 47-71) and Rudd (2000, pp. 119-126). But see also Ferreira (1994, pp. 29-44); Lippitt (1997, pp. 181-202); Lippitt (2000b, pp. 107-117); Lippitt and Hutto (1998, pp. 263-286); Muench (2007, pp. 424-440); and Weston (1999, pp. 35-64).

To begin with, neither Allison nor Conant is content to say *Postscript* is merely a joke. Both insist that, while it is a joke, it is a joke with a serious point.<sup>62</sup> To leverage a phrase Kierkegaard often uses, it is a unity of jest and earnestness (CUP, p. 274n). Both Conant and Allison speak of this serious point in (what at least some people have called) non-cognitive terms. Allison claims, for example, that the joke serves to help us “see” or “come to grips with” the futility or irrelevance of philosophy when it comes to the task of being Christian.<sup>63</sup> Conant adds that Climacus uses the joke to “show” or “reveal” to us that, with respect to Christianity, there is nothing more we need to know.<sup>64</sup> He also talks about how the joke “shatters the illusion” that we can get somewhere, Christianly speaking, by acquiring philosophical understanding.<sup>65</sup>

Allison and Conant use non-cognitive terminology to speak about the serious point of Climacus’ parody for a very important reason. They want to avoid saying that Climacus is trying to get us to *know* something or that he is trying to impart philosophical *understanding* to us.<sup>66</sup> If they came out and said either of these things, the paradox would have its revenge. For the relevant bit of knowledge or understanding would certainly be that philosophical understanding is not Christianly advantageous. Hence, Climacus would once again be trying to communicate the Christianly advantageous piece of philosophical understanding that philosophical understanding is not Christianly advantageous. And that is just the original paradox of communicating SPUNCA. Of course, Climacus would now be communicating SPUNCA by way of a joke and not by way of an ordinary assertion. But the paradox would arise nonetheless.

---

<sup>62</sup> See, e.g., Allison (1967, p. 456).

<sup>63</sup> Allison (1967, pp. 433, 460).

<sup>64</sup> Conant (1993, pp. 205-206).

<sup>65</sup> Conant (1993, p. 207).

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., Conant (1993, p. 205).

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

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

## 7. An Alternative Solution to the Paradox

I laud Allison and Conant for taking the paradox seriously and I think they are right to focus on humor as the key to getting around it. However, I believe they go astray in several ways. First, they are wrong to say we must stop reading *Postscript* straightforwardly. Second, they are wrong to appeal to non-cognitive states. Finally, they are wrong about the precise way in which

*Postscript* is humorous. There is, however, a way to go that does not fall prey to their mistakes. In what follows, I will outline the steps to this alternative solution.

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

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

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

Climacus does in *Postscript* is to provide them with such reasons, one of which I have outlined above.

But now our paradox threatens to return. Here's why. First, even if SPUNCA itself is not sophisticated, the arguments given in its defense certainly are. We would not be hard pressed to find people who lack the intellectual ability to grasp them. Second, these arguments provide Climacus' sophisticated readers with an important Christian benefit that they could not get in any other way. For without these arguments, the sophisticated readers of *Postscript* will not accept SPUNCA and hence will continue to engage in philosophical reflection instead of living Christianly. Putting these points together, we have a piece of information that is both philosophically sophisticated and Christianly beneficial to know. That is, we once again have an apparent violation of SPUNCA. Granted, it is not SPUNCA itself that comprises the new counter-example but rather the arguments for SPUNCA. Still, these arguments occur within *Postscript* and *Postscript* endorses SPUNCA. Therefore, we can say that *Postscript* seemingly serves as a counter-example to one of the theses it endorses. And that sounds like our original self-reference paradox, albeit in slightly different form.

To avoid this sticky situation, we must take a second step: we must recognize the way in which *Postscript* is a humorous book. To start off, note that the sophisticated arguments for SPUNCA contained in *Postscript* really only have derivative value. That is to say, they only have value insofar as they help people accept SPUNCA, and it is accepting SPUNCA that provides the real Christian benefits. However, as argued above, the benefits of accepting SPUNCA are already enjoyed by simple people. For simple people start out from the point of embracing this truth. Therefore, all things considered, the sophisticated arguments of *Postscript* do not provide the sophisticated people who can understand them with any benefits that

unsophisticated people do not already possess. That is to say, after more than 600 pages, *Postscript* brings its sophisticated readers no further than where the simple man on the street gets without reading it. And this is what makes it a humorous book.<sup>67</sup> Climacus foreshadows the humorous point in the following passage:

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

He acknowledges it explicitly at the end of *Postscript*:

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

To put the point another way, what pertains to Christianity generally, applies to *Postscript* as well: “more understanding goes no further than less understanding. On the contrary they go equally far, the exceptionally gifted person slowly, the simple person swiftly” (CUP, p. 607).<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> To clarify, contrary to Allison and Conant, humor does not play the role of getting the sophisticated readers of *Postscript* to embrace SPUNCA. The arguments for SPUNCA play this role. Instead, humor is a by-product of the fact that the sophisticated readers of *Postscript* must make a great effort just to catch up to the simple people. This fact is humorous because it is ironic. And it is ironic in two ways. First, what the sophisticated people believe about their station in life is the exact opposite of the truth. They believe they are far ahead of the simple people when in fact they are far behind. Second, what the sophisticated people think about their intellectual abilities is the exact opposite of the truth. They think their intellectual abilities will make Christianity easier when in fact their intellectual abilities make Christianity more difficult.

<sup>68</sup> See also Kierkegaard (1993a, p. 78).

We can now see why Climacus' sophisticated arguments for SPUNCA do not constitute a counter-example to SPUNCA. They would constitute a counterexample only if both (1) they were so sophisticated that simple people could not understand them and yet (2) they provided a Christian benefit that simple people could not acquire in some other way. But given what we have just said, we know the arguments for SPUNCA do not meet the second condition. While the arguments do provide a Christian benefit, it is not one that "simple people cannot acquire in some other way." Rather, it is one that can be and indeed is had by those too simple to understand the arguments. Thus we can say that the arguments do not bring the intellectual elite beyond the simple people. Rather, they take the intellectual elite, who on account of their sophistication *think* they have gone beyond the simple people, to the place where the simple people already are. Therefore, not only SPUNCA itself but the arguments for SPUNCA avoid a self-reference paradox.

## 8. Additional Objections and Replies

There are several further objections that threaten to undermine the philosophical coherence of SPUNCA and, more generally, the version of egalitarianism that Climacus endorses in *Postscript*. In this final section of the paper, I will look at three of the most troubling objections and offer a number of potential responses.

### 8.1. First Objection and Reply

Notice that Climacus seems to have turned the tables on the Hegelians. Far from its being the case that their sophistication provides them with an *advantage* with respect to Christianity, it seems to provide them with a *disadvantage*. To be specific, it is a lot harder for them to come to terms with SPUNCA than it is for simple people. Unlike simple people, the Hegelians do not start out from the point of accepting this position. They must take the time to find or develop

reasons for accepting it first. Moreover, unlike simple people, the Hegelians have a deep psychological need to acquire sophisticated philosophical understanding. Such a need makes them naturally inclined to *reject* SPUNCA. Climacus acknowledges the basic point here when he says that “cultured people have only a very ironic advantage over simple folk with regard to becoming and continuing to be Christians: the advantage that it is more difficult” (CUP, p. 606).

Given this situation, someone might object that we now face an inverted version of our original problem. There are still some people who have an easier time with Christianity—it just happens to be the simple people instead of the smart people. But if Climacus’ egalitarian interpretation of Christianity holds, if Christianity is “equally difficult for all,” then this difference is out of place. Indeed, why should it be acceptable for the simple people to have an advantage now when it was not acceptable for the smart people to have an advantage before?

This objection rests on a failure to understand the “equally difficult for all” corollary in the way Climacus intends it. True, Climacus wants to interpret the Christian task so that it requires the same amount of effort of everyone. But for him this means the difficulty of the task must be indexed to the abilities of the individual. He says:

[T]o become a Christian is actually the most difficult of all tasks, because the task, although the same, varies in relation to the capabilities of the respective individuals. This is not the case with tasks involving differences (CUP, p. 377).

And later:

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

The upshot is that the person with greater abilities will face greater challenges and the person with lesser abilities will face lesser challenges. Climacus could find support here from the parable of the talents<sup>69</sup> and the parable of the faithful servant<sup>70</sup>: to whom much has been given, much will be required. On this version of egalitarianism, it is not a problem that Christianity is more difficult for the more sophisticated people. It is precisely the way things ought to be.

## 8.2. Second Objection and Reply

Notice that an egalitarian view of Christianity not only entails that sophisticated people cannot have an unfair advantage over simple people (and vice versa), but also that the people of one generation cannot have an unfair advantage over the people of another generation. Climacus recognizes this point. He argues in *Philosophical Fragments* that those who lived at the time of Christ had no advantage vis-à-vis becoming Christian over those who lived and are living in later generations.<sup>71</sup> Climacus makes the complementary point in *Postscript*: “It has not become easier to become a Christian in the nineteenth century than in the first period” (CUP, p. 606; see also CUP, p. 97).<sup>72</sup> As a kind of summary statement of his position, he asks rhetorically:

Would God really bring about a reconciliation with a few human beings such that their reconciliation with Him would make their difference from everyone else a glaring injustice? ...Would God allow the power of time to decide whom he would grant his

---

<sup>69</sup> Matthew 25:14-30.

<sup>70</sup> Luke 12:48.

<sup>71</sup> Kierkegaard (1985, pp. 59-71).

<sup>72</sup> This theme gets treated at length in one of Kierkegaard’s later pseudonymous works, *Practice in Christianity* (Kierkegaard 1991, pp. 66, 107, 203, 207-209). For other discussions of the point, see Evans (1992, p. 148); Outka (1987, pp. 276-281).

favor? Or would it not rather be worthy of God to make reconciliation with Him equally difficult for every person in every time and every place.<sup>73</sup>

Given my interpretation, however, *Postscript* might appear to violate this additional corollary. Here's why. First, *Postscript* was written in 1846 and hence was not available to those who lived earlier. Second, as discussed, *Postscript* provides its sophisticated readers with an important Christian benefit. By convincing them of the truth of SPUNCA, it helps immunize them against the disease of excessive reflection that distracts them from their everyday Christian tasks. Therefore, unless the sophisticated people who lived prior to 1846 could acquire the benefit gained by reading *Postscript* in some other way, the sophisticated readers of *Postscript* would have an unfair advantage over them.<sup>74</sup>

In part, what is at stake here is the originality of *Postscript*. If *Postscript* is the first to defend SPUNCA, if no earlier book or person or revelation had ever done so, then we definitely have a violation of Climacus' egalitarian principles on our hands. The first thing to say in response to this potential problem is that Climacus denies providing readers with anything new. This is partly what he means when he suggests that he has not made any matchless discoveries (CUP, p. 617), that the book is superfluous (CUP, pp. 618-619), and that he only knows what everyone else knows (CUP, p. 623). Perhaps more importantly, Kierkegaard himself denies the originality of *Postscript*. In "A First and Last Explanation", which he appends to *Postscript* under his own name, he claims that the value of the pseudonymous works "unconditionally does not consist in making any new proposal, some unheard-of discovery, or in founding a new party

---

<sup>73</sup> Kierkegaard (1985, p. 106) (trans. altered).

<sup>74</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this problem to my attention.

and wanting to go further” (CUP, pp. 629-630).<sup>75</sup> Their value consists only in providing one more reading of the old familiar scriptural texts (ibid.).

Of course, it is one thing to say *Postscript* is unoriginal; it is another for this to be the case. What actual precursors might exist? One possible antecedent to *Postscript*'s attack on Hegelianism is the early Christian attack on Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a heterogeneous phenomenon and scholars struggle to identify a unified set of Gnostic teachings or practices.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, one strand of Gnosticism held that there is a secret knowledge revealed only to the initiated that is necessary for salvation.<sup>77</sup> Early Christians such as Irenaeus attacked this strand of Gnosticism in part because it denied that knowledge of God was openly available to all.<sup>78</sup> The parallel to Climacus' attack on the Hegelians is obvious. Both attacks involve objecting to the notion that there exists knowledge that (1) is accessible only to a select group of people and yet (2) provides a benefit for living the Christian life that cannot be had in any other way. There are good reasons to think Kierkegaard recognized this parallel. First, the Biblical scholar F. C. Baur (1792-1860) had written about it in his *Die Christliche Gnosis*, which Kierkegaard owned and read.<sup>79</sup> Second, Climacus states at one point that “giving thinking supremacy over everything else”—which is an oblique reference to the Hegelian position—“is Gnosticism” (CUP, p. 341). Thus it seems possible that Kierkegaard has Gnosticism in mind, and with some right, when he says that *Postscript* does not contain anything substantially new.

---

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Kierkegaard (1997b, p. 165)

<sup>76</sup> King (2003, pp. 5-19).

<sup>77</sup> King (2003, pp. 26-27).

<sup>78</sup> Tiessen (2007, pp. 43-47).

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of Baur's book, see O'Regan (2001). For a discussion of Kierkegaard's relationship with Baur, see Possen (2007).

Finding historical precursors to *Postscript*, however, does not entirely solve the problem. Even if there were many such precursors, we might still have a violation of egalitarianism on our hands. In particular, if the precursors to *Postscript* were not widely known—in fact if they were not *universally known by all sophisticated people*—the sophisticated people who lacked access to them would be at a disadvantage. These people could not gain the benefits enjoyed by those people who had a chance to read a book like *Postscript*.

What we have here is essentially a version of the well-known theological problem created by the existence of those who have never heard the Christian gospel. An exhaustive treatment of this problem would take us beyond the primarily philosophical scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the connection to the egalitarian principles that lie at the heart of Climacus' objection to Hegelianism makes a modest venture into this territory both necessary and worthwhile. Thus I will conclude the paper by taking a brief look at the problem in question and examining two responses we find in Kierkegaard's writings, paying special attention to their implications for the attack on the Hegelians.

### 8.3. Third Objection and Reply

On most orthodox accounts of Christianity, having a certain amount of historical knowledge about Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation. Climacus toes the orthodox line on this point. He says that “the single individual's salvation indeed depends on his being brought into relation to that historical event [the Incarnation]” (CUP, p. 584). A problem arises because a great number of people die without learning anything about Christ. And for the vast majority of these people, their ignorance is no fault of their own. It is due to the accidental circumstances of their lives: they are born at the wrong time or in the wrong place. Compared with those who have had the

good fortune to hear the Christian story, these people are at an unfair disadvantage. Thus it seems Christianity is *not* “equally difficult for every person in every time and every place”.<sup>80</sup>

The first response to this problem that we find in Kierkegaard’s writings comes at the end of *Postscript*. Here Climacus simply bites the bullet. He weakens his egalitarian conception of Christianity and allows for an exception with respect to those who have not heard about the gospel. These people, he concedes, do not get treated fairly. They are “excluded [from salvation] through no fault of their own but by the accidental circumstance that Christianity has not yet been proclaimed to them” (CUP, pp. 582-583). Climacus admits that this is an unhappy consequence of his position. But its unhappiness does not lead him to reject his position.

The difficulty with this response is that it undermines Climacus’ main theoretical objection to Hegelianism. To recall, Hegelianism entails that the speculative thinkers have pride of place in the realm of religion by dint of their sophisticated philosophical knowledge. Climacus finds this position repugnant because it privileges a specific group of people on the basis of an accidental characteristic or circumstance. We now see, however, that Climacus’ own treatment of the unevangelized does much the same thing. It too entails that a specific group of people enjoy an unfair advantage due to the accidental circumstances of their lives. Therefore, if Climacus stands by his treatment of the unevangelized, he can no longer object to Hegelianism *simply* because it privileges people on the basis of accidental characteristics or circumstances. He must *add* something about why the particular way in which Hegelianism makes this move is

---

<sup>80</sup> Kierkegaard (1985, p. 106). For other discussions of this problem, see Evans (1983, pp. 269-270; 1992, pp. 149-151); Gouwens (2007, pp. 98-104); and Outka (1987, pp. 276-281). Christian theologians address the issue of the unevangelized in many different ways, most of which I will not discuss. For a very accessible survey of some prominent alternatives, see Fackre, Nash, and Sanders (1995). For a related discussion of Christian attitudes towards adherents of other religions, see Hick et al. (1995).

problematic. More specifically, he must explain why the fortuitous features Hegelianism selects (viz. one's intellectual ability and education) creates a problem that does not arise *mutatis mutandis* for the fortuitous features he selects (viz. time and place of one's existence). It is unclear, however, what philosophical considerations Climacus could appeal to as a basis for treating these features differently.<sup>81</sup> As Evans puts it, "if the principle of equality is weakened to take into account accidents of time and geography, it is hard to see why it should not be further weakened to take into account other sorts of 'accidents of upbringing'".<sup>82</sup> Without something to say here, Climacus' main objection to Hegelianism loses its teeth.

Kierkegaard's second response to the problem of the unevangelized preserves the egalitarian principle weakened by the first response. It does so by expanding on an idea discussed earlier. Recall how, to combat the possibility that simple people have a paradoxical advantage over sophisticated people, Climacus suggested that the task of Christianity was different for the two groups of people. In particular, he suggested that the difficulty of the task was correlated with the abilities of each group. Kierkegaard takes this idea and, in a late journal entry, applies it to the problem of the unevangelized:

As soon as the question of a man's eternal salvation is made commensurable with a decision in time by a relation to something historical occurring in time, the nightmare comes at once, the torments of sympathy, that there will be countless millions who will not be eternally saved. If one thinks with regard to the countless millions who lived

---

<sup>81</sup> Climacus might be able to point to scriptural texts to support his position. Some defenders of the "exclusivist" or "particularist" interpretation of Christianity that Climacus endorses here go this route (see Geivett and Phillips 1996, pp. 213-245). This way of proceeding makes the debate between Climacus and the Hegelians not a matter of theoretical or philosophical principles but rather a matter of Biblical exegesis.

<sup>82</sup> Evans (1992, p. 150).

before this historical event and the countless millions who live after it but in complete ignorance of it, if one assumes that they could not possibly be eternally damned for this reason—if one assumes this and finds a sympathetic relief in it, the matter still remains painful with respect to the millions who lived afterwards, or for every individual in relation to the countless many who are his contemporaries and to whom that historical event is proclaimed but upon whom it does not make a decisive impression. The more exactly the terms of salvation are stipulated, the fewer there always are who one can believe will be saved. But sympathy finds it tormenting to be saved in contradistinction to others. *So I have interpreted it as follows: the terms of salvation differ for every individual, for every single solitary human being.*<sup>83</sup>

Kierkegaard explicitly states here that the requirements for salvation are specific to the individual. Given the context, the implication is that the task can vary not only with respect to one's intellectual abilities but with respect to *any* of one's circumstances and endowments, including the time and place in which one lives. This proposal effectively removes the possession of historical knowledge of Christ as a necessary requirement for salvation. People who lack this knowledge will be held to a different standard, one that is appropriate to their situation. In this way, the evangelized no longer have an unfair advantage over the unevangelized and Kierkegaard no longer has a violation of egalitarianism on his hands.

Unfortunately, this second response indirectly weakens another one of Climacus' criticisms of the Hegelians. For if we assume the conditions for salvation are specific to people's circumstances and capabilities, it follows that the Hegelians too will have their own conditions for salvation. And it seems possible that these conditions will involve remaining true to

---

<sup>83</sup> Kierkegaard (1967-78, pp. 4:530-531) (my emphasis).

Hegelianism. In order to become saved, they might need to continue engaging in sophisticated philosophical reflection. (Perhaps that is just what God has called them to do!) The mere possibility of this scenario entails that Climacus cannot be sure that engaging in philosophical reflection hinders the Hegelians from becoming ideal Christians. He cannot be sure that it distracts them from doing their everyday Christian tasks. Indeed, any blanket claim about the negative Christian value of reflection would presuppose a version of the one-size-fits-all Christianity that the response under consideration rejects. These considerations considerably weaken one of Climacus' attacks on the Hegelians. For as we saw in §1, Climacus wants to say the Hegelians go astray, Christianly speaking, when they spend so much time engaged in philosophical reflection. He could not say this with confidence if he accepted the second response to the problem of the unevangelized.

That being said, accepting the second response would not prevent Climacus from leveling his main theoretical objection against the Hegelians. He could still say they are wrong to endorse a form of intellectual elitism that gives them pride of place in the realm of religion by dint of their sophisticated philosophical knowledge. Granted, the Hegelians might be right in thinking that acquiring such knowledge helps *them* attain the highest mode of religious existence. Thus they might be right in spending all *their* time engaged in philosophical reflection. But they would be wrong in their belief that acquiring sophisticated philosophical knowledge is the *conditio sine qua non* of the highest mode of religious life. And thus they would be wrong in placing themselves above those who did not possess such knowledge simply because those others did not possess it. This, of course, is the real point behind SPUNCA. Therefore, it is possible for Climacus to address the problem of the unevangelized without abandoning this core thesis of *Postscript*.

## References

- Adams, Robert M. 2005. Kierkegaard's Arguments against Objective Reasoning in Religion. In *Ten Essential Texts in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. S. M. Kahn, 321-335. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Allison, Henry E. 1967. Christianity and Nonsense. *Review of Metaphysics* 20(3): 432-460.
- Baur, F. C. 1835. *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religionsphilosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*. Tübingen.
- Beiser, Frederick C. 1987. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Harvard University Press.
- Beiser, Frederick C. 2005. *Hegel*. New York: Routledge.
- Bornemann, J. A. 1839. Af Martensen: *de autonomia conscientiae*. *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik* 1: 1-40.
- Conant, James. 1993. Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense. In *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. T. Cohen, P. Guyer, and H. Putnam, 195-224. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press.
- Conant, James. 1995. Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Works as Authors. In *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. T. Tessin and M. von der Ruhr, 248-331. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Evans, C. Stephen. 1983. *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript": The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.
- Evans, C. Stephen. 1992. *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments"*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

- Evans, C. Stephen. 2004. *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fackre, Gabriel, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, eds. 1995. *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Ferreira, M. Jamie. 1994. The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox, and Religion. *Religious Studies* 30: 29-44.
- Forster, Michael N. 1998. *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*. University of Chicago Press.
- Geivett, R. Douglas and W. Gary Phillips. 1996. A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach. In *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Hick et al., 211-245. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Gouwens, David J. 2007. Kierkegaard on the Universally Religious and the Specifically Christian as Resources for Interreligious Conversation. In *Kierkegaard and Religious Pluralism: Papers of the AAR Kierkegaard, Religion, and Culture Group, and the Søren Kierkegaard Society*, ed. Andrew J. Burgess, 83-104. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Hegel, G. W. F. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans: Miller, A.V.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hick, John, Dennis L. Okholm, and Timothy R. Phillips, eds. 1996. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

- Jegstrup, Elsebet. 2004. Introduction to *The New Kierkegaard*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1967-78. *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E.H., H. V. Hong, and G. Malantschuk). 7 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1985. *Philosophical Fragments* and *Johannes Climacus* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong) Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1990. *Judge for Yourself!* In *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1991. *Practice in Christianity* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1992. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments"* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1993a. *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1993b. *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1997a. *Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1997b. *Without Authority* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1998. *The Moment* (No. 1-10). In *The Moment and Late Writings* (ed. and trans.: Hong, E. H. and H. V. Hong). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- King, Karen L. 2003. *What is Gnosticism?* Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Koch, Carl Henrik. 2004. *Den Danske Idealisme*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Lippitt, John. 1997. A Funny Thing Happened to Me on the Way to Salvation: Climacus as Humorist in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. *Religious Studies* 33: 181-202.
- Lippitt, John. 2000a. *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Lippitt, John. 2000b. On Authority and Revocation: Climacus as Humorist. In *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Houe, P., G. D. Marino, and S. H. Rossel, 107-117. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft. Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Lippitt, John and Daniel Hutto. 1998 Making Sense of Nonsense: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 98: 263-286.
- Martensen, Hans L. 1997. The Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology. In *Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's philosophy of religion*, ed. and tr. C. L. Thompson and D. J. Kangas. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.
- Martensen, Hans L. 2004. Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *Principium Exclusi Medii*. In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. N. J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser, and J. Stewart, tr. J. Stewart, 587-598. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Muench, Paul. 2003. The Socratic Method of Kierkegaard's Pseudonym Johannes Climacus: Indirect Communication and the Art of "Taking Away". In *Søren Kierkegaard and the*

- Word(s): Essays on Hermeneutics and Communication*, ed. P. Houe and G. D. Marino, 139-150. Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel.
- Muench, Paul. 2007. Understanding Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*: Mirror of the Reader's Faults or Socratic Exemplar? In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. N. J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser, and J. Stewart, 424-440. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Mynster, J. P. [1839] 2004. Rationalism, Supernaturalism. In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. N. J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser, and J. Stewart, tr. J. Stewart, 570-582. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- O'Regan, Cyril. 2001. *Gnostic Return in Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Outka, Gene. 1982. Equality and Individuality: Thoughts on Two Themes in Kierkegaard. *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 10(2): 171-203.
- Outka, Gene. 1987. Equality and the Fate of Theism in Modern Culture. *The Journal of Religion* 67(3): 275-288.
- Plutarch. 1967-84. *Moralia* (ed. and trans.: F. C. Babbitt). 15 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Possen, David D. 2007. F.C. Baur: On the Similarity and Dissimilarity between Jesus and Socrates. In *Kierkegaard and his German Contemporaries*, ed. J. Stewart, 22-38. Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources. Vol. 6. Tome 2. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.
- Roberts, Robert C. 1980. Thinking Subjectively. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11(2): 71-92.

- Rudd, Anthony J. 2000. On Straight and Crooked Readings: Why the *Postscript* Does Not Self-Destruct. In *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Houe, P., G. D. Marino, and S. H. Rossel, 119-126. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft. Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Schiørring, J. H. 1982. Martensen. In *Kierkegaard's Teachers*, ed. N. Thulstrup and M. M. Thulstrup. Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana. Vol. 12. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel.
- Stewart, Jon. 2003. *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stewart, Jon. 2004a. The Paradox and the Criticism of Hegelian Mediation in *Philosophical Fragments*. In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. N. J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser, and J. Stewart, 184-207. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Stewart, Jon. 2004b. Introduction to Mynster's "Rationalism, Supernaturalism". In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. N. J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser, and J. Stewart, 565-569. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Stewart, Jon. 2004c. Introduction to Martensen's "Rationalism, Supernaturalism, and the *Principium Exclisi Medii*." In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. N. J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser, and J. Stewart, 583-587. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Thulstrup, Niels. 1980. *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel* (trans.: G.L. Stengren). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Tiessen, Terrance. 2007. Gnosticism as Heresy: The Response of Irenaeus. *Didaskalia* 18 (1): 31-48.

- Waler, Arild and Christian Fink Tolstrup. 2004. *Philosophical Fragments*—in Response to the Debate between Mynster and Martensen. In *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. N. J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser, and J. Stewart, 208-234. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Weston, Michael. 1999. Evading the Issue: The Strategy of Kierkegaard's *Postscript*. *Philosophical Investigations* 22(1): 35-64.