

2013

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Recommended Citation

Aumann, Antony, "Kierkegaard, Paraphrase, and the Unity of Form and Content" (2013). *Journal Articles*. Paper 1.
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Kierkegaard, Paraphrase, and the Unity of Form and Content

Writing about Kierkegaard presents numerous difficulties.¹ Some stem from his poetic or literary style. This is particularly true when the goal is to clarify his philosophical positions and arguments. Such things seldom appear on the surface of his texts. To uncover them, one must acquire a knack for reading between the lines. One must develop a skill set more commonly associated with interpreting art than understanding philosophy.

Yet, writing about or even paraphrasing Kierkegaard requires no special literary talent. It demands no particular flair for the poetic, unless clarity and straightforwardness should count. The use of literary tropes might even be a defect. It might obscure one's explanation of Kierkegaard's ideas. It might undermine one's ability to make what he says more transparent.

The foregoing paragraph states an intuitive position. Many Kierkegaard commentators would accept it, even if few publicly have.² Several contemporary aestheticians might support it as well.³ However, Kierkegaard himself rejects the notion.⁴ He says we cannot paraphrase in a straightforward fashion some of the ideas he expresses in an artistic format. To use the words of Johannes Climacus, these ideas defy direct communication.⁵

What Kierkegaard says is both intriguing and troublesome. If true, it requires us to reassess how we write about Kierkegaard, and perhaps how we think about the relationship between the form and content of philosophical writing more generally. Thus, we would like to know why Kierkegaard said it, and whether we should believe him. My primary goal is to answer these questions. More precisely, I aim to piece together and defend the justification he offers for his position.⁶ At the end of the paper, I will discuss some implications for contemporary scholarship. An excursus into Kierkegaard's aesthetics will serve as my point of departure.

I. The Unity of Form and Content

“Form” and “content” are notoriously ambiguous words. Thus, “unity of form and content” can mean many things.⁷ Some scholars employ the expression to pick out a good-making feature of works of art. For them, “content” refers to *what* an artwork represents, expresses, or embodies, i.e. its theme, meaning, or subject matter. “Form,” by contrast, refers to *how* an artwork presents its content to us or the manner in which it does so. Thus understood, form and content comprise a unity when the two elements fit together well. Such a fit occurs when the form of a work of art serves as a particularly effective vehicle for conveying its content.⁸ Noël Carroll’s discussion of Pieter Bruegel’s painting, *The Fall of Icarus*, illustrates the idea:

[T]he content, subject matter, meaning or theme of *The Fall of Icarus* is the way in which epoch-making history passes us by unnoticed. . . . This theme is articulated by decentering the subject of the painting—Icarus’s legendary fall—off to one side where it is likely to be missed, thereby presenting and reinforcing the meaning of the work through its visual appearance. . . . The very design of the painting brings its meaning home to us. It is a deftly suitable means for making us aware of what the painting is about.⁹

This position suffers from its share of problems.¹⁰ Nevertheless, several nineteenth-century philosophers embraced it. Hegel, for instance, defended a version in the lectures he delivered on aesthetics during the 1820’s.¹¹ Several Danish Hegelians subsequently brought the view to Copenhagen. The aesthetician Johan Ludwig Heiberg (1791-1860) served as the primary conduit for the flow of ideas, writing and speaking about the topic extensively during Kierkegaard’s student days.¹² Unsurprisingly, the tradition influenced *Either/Or* (1843). In fact, A, the pseudonymous author of the first volume, relies on it to explain the greatness of classic works of art.¹³

As part of his account, A discusses why failing to exhibit a unity of form and content detracts from a work of art. On his view, the problem is not that disunity results in a loss of beauty, elegance, or some other uncontroversially aesthetic property. It is rather that disunity leads to conveying content in an ineffective manner. More precisely, when the form and content of an artwork do not fit each other, the artwork presents its content inaccurately.

A develops this position in his essay on Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. He argues that we should regard Mozart's opera as the greatest of all works of art.¹⁴ It deserves such reverence partly because it exhibits the greatest possible unity of form and content.¹⁵ Mozart has not merely hit upon a *compelling* way to represent the opera's subject matter of erotic love. The chosen medium of music is the *only* way to accomplish the task:

The most abstract idea conceivable is the sensual [*Sandseelig*] in its elemental originality. But through which medium can [the sensual, the immediate erotic] be presented? Only through music. It cannot be presented in sculpture because it has a qualification of a kind of inwardness; it cannot be painted, for it cannot be caught in definite contours. In its lyricism, it is a force, a wind, impatience, passion, etc., yet in such a way that it exists not in one instant but in a succession of instants, for if it existed in one instant, it could be depicted or painted. That it exists in a succession of instants expresses its epic character, but still it is not epic in the stricter sense, for it has not reached the point of words; it continually moves within immediacy. Consequently, it cannot be presented in poetry, either. The only medium that can present it is music. . . . In Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, we have the perfect unity of this idea and its corresponding form.¹⁶

In this passage, A revives a view defended by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), the former of whom he cites explicitly.¹⁷ Lessing and Mendelssohn held that many if not all artistic mediums have limitations. Because of their

physical properties, they cannot be used to represent certain things. For example, a painting only offers viewers an image of an individual time slice in the history of its object. Consequently, it can only accurately depict that which is confined to an individual time slice. It will do injustice to anything extended across time, such as movement or change. Similarly, a sculpture only presents a three-dimensional body to those who behold it. Thus, it can only properly portray such a body. It is ill-suited to capturing actions, abstractions, and the inner stirrings of the soul.¹⁸

A's argument is largely¹⁹ an application of Lessing and Mendelssohn's theory. He begins by pointing out that the subject matter of *Don Giovanni* is both invisible and protracted in time. While erotic love is transitory, it lasts longer than an instant. In addition, it concerns the inward aspects of human life and not (just) the outward or bodily ones.²⁰ A concludes that no artist can accurately represent this subject matter in the medium of painting or sculpture.

Judge William develops a similar line of thought in the second volume of *Either/Or*.²¹ He begins with the following assumption. Art, by which the judge means painting and sculpture, concentrates everything in the moment.²² It represents how things look at a particular point in time. Therefore, art only has one appropriate subject matter, namely the class of things that exist merely for one moment or that can be reduced to what takes place in a moment. It will distort anything else.²³

Like A, the judge believes some things fall outside the domain of topics capable of accurate artistic depiction. His primary example is marital love. The ideal husband, the judge claims, does not express his love for his spouse simply by being faithful at one decisive point in time. He does so by remaining true to her every moment of every day.²⁴ Thus, marital love is essentially extended in time.²⁵ Reducing it to what happens at any particular moment would obscure this fact. Consequently, art cannot accurately represent marital love:

Romantic love can be portrayed very well in the moment; marital love cannot, for an ideal husband is not one who is ideal once in his life but one who is that every day. If I wish to portray a hero who conquers kingdoms and countries, this can be done very well in the moment, but a cross-bearer who takes up his cross every day can never be portrayed in either poetry or art, for the point is that he does it every day.²⁶

The judge makes the same claim about humility:

Humility is hard to portray precisely because it is sequence, and . . . [the observer] really needs to see something that poetry and art cannot provide, to see its continuous coming into existence, for it is essential to humility to come into existence continuously, and if this is shown to him in its ideal moment, he misses something, for he senses that its true ideality consists not in its being ideal at the moment but in its being continuous.²⁷

In summary, according to Judge William, using painting or sculpture to portray something essentially extended in time does that thing violence. It compacts what is by nature protracted. The resultant work of art misleads viewers. It gives the false impression that its subject matter possesses a pregnant or decisive moment.²⁸

This general aesthetic theory also receives attention from Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Climacus makes an important contribution to the discussion because he focuses on linguistic media instead of painting and sculpture. Take the following passage:

[J]ust as easy as it is to state that a human being is nothing before God, so is it difficult to express this in existence. But to describe and depict this in more detail is in turn difficult, because speech is surely a more abstract medium than existence, and in relation to the ethical all speech involves a little deception, because speech, despite the most subtle and skilled precautionary measures, always still has an appearance of

the foreshortened perspective. Therefore, even if the discourse makes the most enthusiastic and most desperate effort to show how difficult it is, or makes an extreme effort in an indirect form, it still always remains more difficult to do than it appears in the discourse.²⁹

Here Climacus asserts that the struggle to see oneself as nothing before God is always more difficult than it comes across in a description of the task. “Easier said than done,” we might put it. This point has interesting consequences. It entails we cannot use language to represent the subject matter in question. At least not accurately. Not without “a little deception.” Thus, like A and Judge William, Climacus maintains that presenting content in the wrong form gives people the wrong impression of it.

II. Form-Content Contradictions

Around the time Kierkegaard published these ideas on the relationship between form and content in works of art, he began to think about a parallel issue in academic discourse. He started to wonder whether expressing his philosophical convictions might require the use of a particular style, perhaps one distinct from the kind found in stereotypical academic treatises.³⁰

Many of Kierkegaard’s contemporaries shared his concern.³¹ Indeed, some of the early German Romantics, most notably Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772-1801)) and Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), raised a similar question.³² They asked whether they could express their views accurately in a systematic fashion. In the end, they decided they could not. So they abandoned the systematic format employed by many philosophers of their day in favor of a fragmentary one. Their reflections and decisions paved the way for Kierkegaard’s.³³

We might wonder, however, why any of these thinkers looked for a fit between the form and content of their philosophical writing. At first glance, their quest seems misguided. Unity of form and content is an *aesthetic* property. It is a good-making feature of *works of art*. Philosophical writing does not aim at the creation of art, let alone good art. (At least qua philosophical writing it does not do so.) Its goal is to provide clear and compelling accounts, explanations, or justifications of theories, phenomena, concepts, etc. Someone can perform these tasks, and perform them well, without constructing a work of art in the process. Thus, it should not count against a piece of philosophical writing if its form does not fit its content. And Kierkegaard and the Romantics should not have troubled themselves with finding such a fit.

Yet they did so trouble themselves, and we learn much by learning why. Consider again the rationale behind criticizing a mismatch between form and content in a work of art. A, Judge William, and Climacus explain the criticism by saying that artistically representing content in the wrong form results in distortion. It involves failing to portray the subject matter accurately. I believe we catch a glimpse here of the problem bothering Kierkegaard, Novalis, and Schlegel. They feared that presenting philosophical content in the wrong form meant expressing it in an impoverished way.

We can develop this suggestion by examining another passage from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. In this one, Climacus says a failure of fit between the form and content of one's communication can generate a contradiction. With a touch of sarcasm, he declares:

To require of a thinker that he *contradict* [*modsige*] his entire thought and his world-view by the *form* he gives his communication, to console him by saying that in this way he will be beneficial, to let him remain convinced that nobody cares about it, indeed, that nobody notices it in these objective times, since such extreme conclusions

are merely tomfoolery, which every systematic day laborer regards as nothing—well, that is good advice, and also quite cheap.³⁴

If correct, Climacus's view has interesting consequences. A contradiction in one's communication is not (merely) an aesthetic defect. It is a philosophical one. Thus, failing to exhibit a unity of form and content would result not (just) in bad art but in bad philosophy.

Is Climacus correct? I believe so. To see why, we must understand how the problem he mentions can arise. We must grasp how the style of a piece of communication can contradict its content.

Climacus offers us little explicit help on this point. However, by inference from some examples he uses, one of which we will inspect momentarily, I surmise he makes tacit use of a principle endorsed by several aestheticians today. The principle states that the style or form of one's writing can implicitly express a claim. Consequently, the form of one's writing is not entirely distinct from its content. Rather, the form contributes to the content or has a kind of content all its own.³⁵

With this principle in place, the possibility of form-content contradictions follows relatively quickly. The implicit claims expressed by the *form* of a piece of writing can state one thing. The explicit claims expressed by the *content* of that piece of writing—i.e. the content not implied by the form and that I will call the lexical or semantic content—can state something else. These two sets of claims can then contradict each other.

This explanation gives rise to a new question. How can the style or form of a text implicitly express a claim? Once again, Climacus provides few overt answers. However, he does supply examples of form-content contradictions. The most telling one occurs in the lines immediately following the passage quoted above:

Suppose it was the life-view of a religiously existing subject that one may not have followers, that this would be treason to both God and men; suppose he were a bit

obtuse . . . and announced this directly with unction and pathos—what then? Well, then he would be understood and soon ten would apply who, just for a free shave each week, would offer their services in proclaiming this doctrine; that is, in further substantiation of the truth of his doctrine, he would have been so very fortunate as to gain followers who accepted and spread this doctrine about having no follower.³⁶

Note two points about the example. First, the lexical content of the speaker's communication is that human beings should not have followers. Second, the manner in which he communicates this content actually prompts people to become his followers. When he announces his message "with unction and pathos" he creates an atmosphere that encourages those who hear him to take up his cause.

The fact that the speaker induces people to become his followers *gives the impression* that becoming his follower is an appropriate course of action to take. To explain the source of this impression, we can appeal, somewhat anachronistically, to Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle. The principle states that we typically assume people engage in cooperative and rational behavior.³⁷ Although Grice does not explicitly say so, in part this means we presume that people will encourage others to do only what it is appropriate to do in a given situation. Accordingly, when we witness someone encouraging others to do something, we take it that he or she believes the action suits the circumstances.

Thus, the style employed by the speaker in Climacus's example implies that becoming his follower is appropriate. However, such an implication contradicts the semantic content of the speaker's communication. For, according to the semantic content, becoming a follower is *not* appropriate. Consequently, the speaker's communication falls prey to a form-content contradiction.

III. The Problem for Paraphrasing

The possibility of form-content contradictions discloses a subtle way paraphrasing can go awry. Consider the following example.³⁸ There exists a *SparkNotes* volume devoted to Kierkegaard.³⁹ It contains short summaries of several of his writings. It also provides a brief overview of his main arguments and ideas. On a charitable reading, the semantic content of the “SparkNote on Søren Kierkegaard” accurately captures the explicit meaning of the works it covers. Of course, it does not express or evoke the same profound emotions. It does not produce the same powerful effects on its readers. But such shortcomings hardly matter. A good paraphrase need only say the same thing as the original, not give rise to all the same experiences.⁴⁰

Given this initial positive assessment, should we consider the *SparkNotes* paraphrases a success? Not necessarily. A problem still arises if (1) the form of the paraphrases implicitly expresses something that the form of the originals does not, and (2) this implication contradicts the lexical content of the originals. If these conditions obtain, we cannot rightly say the *SparkNotes* volume says what Kierkegaard’s original writings do. For in addition to expressing everything the originals do, it would also express something more. And this surplus content would be at odds with the content of the originals. Thus, the *SparkNotes* volume would distort the meaning of Kierkegaard’s texts to some degree.

Does the “SparkNote on Søren Kierkegaard” actually suffer from this problem? It seems likely. The abstract and systematic style of the “SparkNote” leads readers to reflect on the topics Kierkegaard broaches in a correspondingly abstract and systematic fashion. It thereby implies that such reflection is appropriate, a point Kierkegaard rejects.⁴¹ Thus, the *SparkNotes* volume does not always express what Kierkegaard’s texts do. It sometimes communicates positions that contradict those found in Kierkegaard’s works. In this respect, it comes up short as a paraphrase.

This illustration might not vex us too much. It shows there are some stylistic restrictions on how we can successfully go about the paraphrase project.⁴² We cannot use just any old format we feel like. But so what? As long as these restrictions do not rule out *every* approach, as long as they leave *some* options open, why should we fret?

According to Kierkegaard, stylistic restrictions should concern aspiring paraphrasers in a special case, namely *when the class of forbidden styles includes the one they wish to use*. Turning to an example he discusses will clarify his point. The example primarily will concern the paraphrase of *Postscript* attempted by Kierkegaard's one-time protégé, Rasmus Nielsen (1809-1884). However, as we shall see, Nielsen utilizes a writing style many of today's commentators have adopted. Thus, Kierkegaard's objection to Nielsen will apply to them as well.

IV. Nielsen's Paraphrase of Concluding Unscientific Postscript

We can begin with our own brief paraphrase of *Postscript*. Doing so is somewhat of a necessary evil. It is *necessary* because we cannot understand Nielsen's error without grasping the position he seeks to paraphrase. A quotation from *Postscript* would no doubt serve us best. However, Climacus presents his position so diffusely no passage of reasonable length would do. Providing a paraphrase is somewhat *evil* because any problem afflicting Nielsen's paraphrase will threaten ours as well. I will return to this issue in the final section of the paper. For now we can proceed.

Postscript contains an account of two ways to approach ethical and religious issues. On the one hand, there is *the objective way*.⁴³ We can recognize it as the approach typically taken by academic scholars. Its primary aims are the acquisition of true beliefs and the avoidance of false ones. Accordingly, it focuses on the theoretical and empirical justifications of various candidates for belief as well as the internal coherence of the same.

The objective approach is tied to a specific attitude. Those who adopt it try to be *disinterested* and *dispassionate* in their intellectual labors.⁴⁴ They fear that letting their goals, values, and emotions come into play will lead to bias and ultimately distortion, undermining their pursuit of the truth. Thus, they attempt to set aside their personal points of view as well as any consideration for the implications their inquiries might have for their lives. In Climacus's words, they strive to look at matters *sub specie aeterni*.⁴⁵

On the other hand, there is *the subjective way* of approaching ethical and religious issues. It is opposed to the objective way in several respects. People who adopt it do not directly concern themselves with the justification or internal coherence of the doctrines they believe. They focus their attention on the matter of appropriation—of how to make these doctrines their own.⁴⁶ In other words, they concentrate on how to live out the doctrines within the confines of their everyday lives. Their attitude throughout this process also differs from that taken up by those who pursue the objective approach. They do not strive to be disinterested or dispassionate. They do not attempt to disregard the personal implications of their intellectual inquiries. Instead, they are passionately interested in what the ethical and religious doctrines they encounter mean *for them*—for who they are, how they should live, and the sort of person they should become.⁴⁷

The main thesis of *Postscript* is that we should take up the subjective approach when dealing with ethical and religious matters.⁴⁸ Whatever value the objective approach may have in other domains, it is inappropriate here.⁴⁹ This is in part the meaning behind Climacus's famous dictum that, when it comes to ethics and religion, "subjectivity is truth."⁵⁰

Rasmus Nielsen sets forth his paraphrases of *Postscript* in a number of books and lectures published around 1850. His most important work in this vein is *Magister S. Kierkegaard's "Johannes Climacus" and Dr. H. Martensen's "Christian Dogmatics."*⁵¹

Herein Nielsen provides lengthy quotations from *Postscript* followed by painstaking analysis and commentary, the spirit of which I hope to have captured in the foregoing.

Kierkegaard has harsh words for Nielsen's project. He declares that he "not only cannot give approval but must categorically take exception to Professor Nielsen's books."⁵² However, his dissatisfaction does not stem from the fact that Nielsen gets Climacus's positions wrong. It stems from the fact that Nielsen presents these positions in the wrong style. In other words, Kierkegaard's objection does not concern *what* Nielsen says but *how* he says it. He concedes that because of Nielsen "many have now become aware of [Climacus's] cause."⁵³ But he adds that "the cause has retrogressed, *because it has acquired a less consistent form.*"⁵⁴

Nielsen proceeds by presenting *Postscript* as it appears through an academic lens. He frames the book within the context of a scholarly debate with some of the Danish Hegelians. He even portrays it as a contribution to the debate.⁵⁵ Most importantly, the manner in which Nielsen paraphrases *Postscript* reflects his academic approach to the text: he uses an abstract, disinterested, and dispassionate style of writing.⁵⁶

To see the defect of Nielsen's strategy, it helps to step back and consider what often happens when we read a text. Usually, we enter into the frame of mind of the perceived author. We find ourselves viewing some part of the world or approaching some topic in the way the perceived author does. This general pattern holds for Nielsen's works in particular. When reading them, we are led to adopt a scholarly or academic mindset. More precisely, we are induced to take up the same objective approach toward the ethical and religious subject matter of *Postscript* as Nielsen does. The fact that Nielsen's writing style encourages us to become objective gives the impression that becoming objective is appropriate. However, as discussed, Climacus rejects this claim. Herein lies the flaw in Nielsen's paraphrase. Its style implicitly expresses a claim that contradicts Climacus's main thesis.

We might think Nielsen could escape this contradiction. Climacus's thesis maintains that we must approach ethical and religious matters in a subjective fashion. A contradiction arises only if this thesis itself is an ethical or religious matter. But it might not be. It might be a higher order statement *about* ethical and religious matters. If so, Climacus's thesis would not forbid us from approaching it (i.e. the thesis itself) in an objective fashion or from encouraging others to do so. Thus, paraphrasing the thesis in the style Nielsen employs would not engender a form-content contradiction.

However, the underlying assumption here is false. According to Climacus, how we approach ethical and religious matters *is* an ethical and religious matter. Single-mindedly adopting an objective approach with respect to ethics or religion is an ethical or religious failing. It involves an unhealthy kind of self-forgetfulness.⁵⁷ Thus, Nielsen's texts fall prey to a form-content contradiction after all.

To summarize, the semantic content of Nielsen's paraphrase is unproblematic. However, as noted in the previous section, that is not good enough. To construct an adequate paraphrase it must also be the case that the style one employs does not imply anything at odds with the content of the original. Nielsen's paraphrase fails to meet this additional requirement. That is why Kierkegaard takes exception to it.⁵⁸

V. Implications for Contemporary Kierkegaard Scholarship

In the middle decades of the last century, Kierkegaard played the whipping boy in analytic philosophical circles. Members of these groups considered him a thinker who at best set forth shoddy arguments for dubious conclusions and at worst practiced the dark arts of misology. John Laird, for example, described his encounter with Kierkegaard's writings with the following derogatory remarks: "Even in a wide literary interpretation of "philosophy"—and no other could be appropriate—I found very little that seemed to be worth stating in a formal

way.”⁵⁹ Brand Blanshard wound up his attack on Kierkegaard in a similar vein: “One reads on with gathering disillusionment, coming in the end to realize that Kierkegaard, if a philosopher at all, is a distinct species of philosopher, and that it is useless to look for clearly stated theses, still less for ordered arguments in support of them.”⁶⁰ In general, Laird, Blanshard, and like-minded folk saw Kierkegaard as a figure of perhaps some literary interest, but not one worthy of sustained philosophical attention.

There has been a movement afoot since then to counteract this impression. Many Kierkegaard scholars have endeavored to provide a more favorable picture of his work. As part of this process, they have offered up rational reconstructions or analytic paraphrases of the arguments and views contained in his writings.⁶¹ Their efforts have enjoyed success and Kierkegaard’s philosophical reputation has grown.

It sounds strange to say, but some Kierkegaard scholars dislike the direction in which things have gone.⁶² Their objection is an existential one, for want of a better word. They believe transposing the content of Kierkegaard’s works into “APA-style arguments” robs these works of their most valuable possession.⁶³ It saps them of their ability to transform our lives, to help us become better human beings. Kierkegaard is a physician of the soul, these scholars maintain, one who treats our sickness unto death. Our particular strain of the sickness requires a poetic treatment. Handing us a set of propositions or an argument will not do, in part because our problem just is that we have an excessive attachment to propositions and arguments. Thus, a version of Kierkegaard without the literary trappings lacks the all-important therapeutic power of his originals.⁶⁴

On my account, putting an “analytic” face on Kierkegaard’s writings suffers from an entirely different flaw. Because it involves approaching Kierkegaard as Nielsen does, it commits the same error: it distorts the meaning of some of Kierkegaard’s texts. This is no small problem. The analytic paraphrase project typically aims at lending Kierkegaard’s

writings an air of greater philosophical respectability. To do so, it must capture the meaning of his works accurately. Otherwise, what it champions will not belong to Kierkegaard. *He* and *his* will not increase because of the effort.

There is danger here of serious fallout. My conclusion threatens to render pointless much analytic scholarship on Kierkegaard's *Postscript*. Indeed, if the resultant representations of this text are always *misrepresentations*, how can they help us? Will they not just lead us astray? Therefore, we might think scholars of an analytic persuasion should jump ship.⁶⁵ Indeed, on one plausible interpretation, that is the moral of *Postscript's* final line: "Oh, would that no ordinary seaman will lay a dialectical hand on this work but let it stand as it now stands."⁶⁶

However, giving up on analytic scholarship of *Postscript* would be an overreaction.⁶⁷ If Kierkegaard effectively recommends it at the end of the book, he makes a mistake. The fact that an analytic paraphrase fails in the sense that it distorts the original does not entail that it is useless. Even a distortion of a text can serve as a stepping-stone to an accurate understanding of it. Moreover, we often need such stepping-stones. Many analytic philosophers will pay no mind to Kierkegaard's writings until it is shown that these writings contain coherent arguments. Such arguments do not exist on the surface level of his texts. We must piece them together out of the raw materials we find. In other words, we must offer up careful, analytic paraphrases. Of course, we might hope the aforementioned type of philosophers will ultimately engage with more than just some paraphrase. However, as Kierkegaard says in *Point of View*, we must begin where our audience is.⁶⁸

Thus, my position does not require Kierkegaard scholars—even those of an analytic bent, such as myself—to give up our stock in trade. However, it does oblige us to admit the flaws of our work in order to mitigate the damage we do. We must acknowledge that the style

of our presentation can give a misleading impression of some of Kierkegaard's writings. It can make our readers think he holds views or endorses courses of action he does not.

Some might consider the request for such statements superfluous. Disclaimers already populate the literature on Kierkegaard.⁶⁹ For instance, many scholars express hesitancy at attributing to him views he pens under pseudonyms.⁷⁰ Several admit to the irony of writing philosophical commentaries on works that criticize philosophizing.⁷¹ More than a few confess that Kierkegaard's goals were not primarily philosophical and that the value of his writings lies less in their academic contributions than in their ability to transform people's lives.⁷²

However, these particular qualifications fail to address the problem I raise. They do not mention how changing the style in which we communicate some of Kierkegaard's positions misrepresents them. Therefore, we must add this concession to the ones usually provided.

VI. The Self-Reference Problem

A final consideration deserves attention. My paper appears to suffer from a self-reference problem. On the one hand, I argue that using an analytic writing style to paraphrase *Postscript* is misguided. On the other hand, I employ such a style, and do so while paraphrasing *Postscript*. Therefore, according to my own thesis, my paper is flawed.

This problem evades an entirely satisfactory solution. Nevertheless, I can soften the blow. First, it will not do simply to dismiss my thesis as false. If my thesis is false, then there are no stylistic restrictions on paraphrasing Kierkegaard, and the analytic format I employ is perfectly acceptable. Thus, if my reasoning is otherwise sound, my conclusion still goes through.

Matters might seem worse if my thesis is true. Under this hypothesis, my attempts to defend Kierkegaard's position are flawed. Moreover, they are flawed precisely because they proceed in an analytic fashion. But my paper does not therefore lack all philosophical value. It still does something of philosophical merit—just not what meets the eye. Rather than offering a *demonstration* of my thesis, it provides a *performance* of my thesis. It *illustrates* how using the wrong style to paraphrase Kierkegaard creates difficulties, and such illustrations are compelling in their own right.

Notes:

¹ See, for example, W. S. K. Cameron, “[Writing] About Writing About Kierkegaard,” *Philosophy Today* 39, no. 1 (1995): 56-66; Steven M. Emmanuel, “Reading Kierkegaard,” *Philosophy Today* 36, no. 3 (1992): 240-255; Patrick Goold, “Reading Kierkegaard: Two Pitfalls and a Strategy for Avoiding Them,” *Faith and Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (1990): 304-315; Edward F. Mooney, “Pseudonyms and Style,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, ed. John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

² See, for example, C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard’s “Fragments” and “Postscript”: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1983), 14; Poul Lübcke, “Kierkegaard and Indirect Communication,” *History of European Ideas* 12, no. 1 (1990): 31.

³ See, for example, Peter Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts: An Essay in Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 86. For a dissenting view, see Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 2-53; Lawrence M. Hinman, “Philosophy and Style,” *Monist* 63, no. 4 (1980): 512-529.

⁴ Kierkegaard’s writings will be referred to throughout using the following sigla:

CUP1 *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Vol. 1, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1992).

EO1 *Either/Or, Part I*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1988).

EO2 *Either/Or, Part II*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1988).

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- JP* *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, 7 vols. (Bloomington, IN and London: Indiana University Press 1967-1978). Citations will give volume number followed by entry number.
- Pap.* *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. Peter Andreas Heiberg, Victor Kuhr, and Einer Torsting, 11 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendals 1909-1948). Citations will give volume number, followed by section number, followed by page number.
- PV* *Point of View, Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- SKS 2* *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter Bd. 2: Enten-Eller, Første del*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997).
- SKS 3* *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter Bd. 3: Enten-Eller, Anden del*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Johnny Kondrup and Finn Hauberg Mortensen (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997).
- SKS 7* *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter Bd. 7: Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen and Johnny Kondrup (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2002).
- SVI XIII* *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, ed. Anders Björn Drachmann, Johan Ludwig Heiberg and Hans Ostenfeldt Lange, vol. 13 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1906).

⁵ *SKS 7*, 79-80; 220-221 / *CUP1*, 79-80; 242.

⁶ The justification is Kierkegaard's in the sense that it arises in his writings. Whether he believed it is another matter. He published some of the texts upon which I will draw under pseudonyms, and he asks us not to attribute views found in these writings to him (see *SKS* 7, 571 / *CUPI*, 627). I will generally respect this request.

⁷ See Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts*, 86; Meyer Schapiro, "On Perfection, Coherence, and Unity of Form and Content," in *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics*, ed. Bill Beckley and David Shapiro (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 7.

⁸ See A. C. Bradley, "Poetry for Poetry's Sake," in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 15; Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 125-127; Richard Eldridge, "Form and Content: An Aesthetic Theory of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23, no. 4 (1985): 303-316; Gordon Graham, "Learning from Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, no. 1 (1995): 30; Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 60-68, 130-132; Kelly Dean Jolley, "(Kivy on) the Form-Content Identity Thesis," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, no. 2 (2008): 193-204; Schapiro, "On Perfection, Coherence, and Unity of Form and Content," 7-13.

⁹ Carroll, *Philosophy of Art*, 126.

¹⁰ For instance, it has difficulties with works that lack representational content. See Carroll, *Philosophy of Art*, 131-136; Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts*, 84-117.

¹¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 102, 490. See also Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel and the 'End' of Art," *The Owl of Minerva* 29, no. 1 (1997): 3-5; David James "The Significance of Kierkegaard's Interpretation of *Don Giovanni* in Relation to Hegel's Philosophy of Art," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2008), 153; Terry Pinkard,

“Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic Art,” in *Hegel and the Arts*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 12-13.

¹² See James, “The Significance of Kierkegaard’s Interpretation of *Don Giovanni*,” 147n2; George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM-Canterbury Press, 1999), 16-18, 36-37, 99; Pattison, “Kierkegaard and Genre,” *Poetics Today* 28, no. 3 (2007): 479; Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 210-212; Jon Stewart, *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark, Tome I, The Heiberg Period: 1824-1836* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2007), 178-182.

¹³ *SKS* 2, 57-65 / *EOI*, 49-57. See also James, “The Significance of Kierkegaard’s Interpretation of *Don Giovanni*,” 154-155; Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 96-99, 105; Pattison, “Kierkegaard and Genre,” 482-483; Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 212-214; Sylvia Walsh Utterback, “Don Juan and the Representation of Spiritual Sensuousness,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47, no. 4 (1979): 627-644.

¹⁴ *SKS* 2, 58-59 / *EOI*, 51. For a discussion of A’s essay, see Thomas Henry Croxall, “Kierkegaard and Mozart,” *Music and Letters* 26, no. 3 (1945): 152-156; James, “The Significance of Kierkegaard’s Interpretation of *Don Giovanni*,” 154-155; George Pattison, “Søren Kierkegaard: A Theatre Critic of the Heiberg School,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23, no. 1 (1983): 26-27; Pattison “Kierkegaard and Genre,” 482-483; Utterback, “Don Juan and the Representation of Spiritual Sensuousness,” 632-637; Martin Yaffe, “An Unsung Appreciation of the ‘Musical-Erotic’ in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*: Hermann Cohen’s Nod toward Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or, I*, ed. R. L. Perkins, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 77-78.

¹⁵ *SKS* 2, 64 / *EOI*, 57. See Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 96.

¹⁶ *SKS* 2, 64 / *EOI*, 56-57; translation altered.

¹⁷ *SKS* 2, 167 / *EOI*, 169.

¹⁸ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), chapters 2, 3, and 16; Moses Mendelssohn, “On the Main Principles of the Fine Arts and Sciences,” *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 177-181. See also Paul Guyer, “18th Century German Aesthetics,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2008 Edition).

¹⁹ When A extends the argument to cover poetry in addition to painting and sculpture, he goes beyond Lessing and Mendelssohn’s theory. His rationale for this move is simple. For him, erotic love is a primitive impulse that has not reached the level of linguistic consciousness. Therefore, we cannot capture it in a linguistic medium such as poetry, even though we can talk about it (see *SKS* 2, 76-77; 99; 105-118 / *EOI*, 69-71; 95; 101-115).

²⁰ See *SKS* 2, 109 / *EOI*, 106.

²¹ *SKS* 3, 132-137 / *EO2*, 133-139

²² *SKS* 3, 132 / *EO2*, 133.

²³ *SKS* 3, 134 / *EO2*, 135. For other discussions of Judge William’s view, including problems with it, see Michael Fried, *Menzel’s Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 144-147; Sylvia Walsh, *Living Poetically: Kierkegaard’s Existential Aesthetics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 109-111.

²⁴ *SKS* 3, 137 / *EO2*, 138.

²⁵ *SKS* 3, 137 / *EO2*, 138-139.

²⁶ *SKS* 3, 134 / *EO2*, 135. See also *SKS* 3, 137 / *EO2*, 138.

²⁷ *SKS* 3, 134 / *EO2*, 135.

²⁸ Both A and the judge presuppose a strict resemblance view of artistic representation, which was typical for the times. Should we reject this view and embrace one that allows for symbolic representation, their position becomes untenable.

²⁹ *SKS* 7, 421 / *CUPI*, 463.

³⁰ See Genia Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52-57.

³¹ Pattison, "Kierkegaard and Genre," 478.

³² Karl Ameriks, "Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10-12; Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 128.

³³ See K. Brian Söderquist, "Friedrich Schlegel: On Ironic Communication, Subjectivity, and Selfhood" in *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries: Literature and Aesthetics*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008).

³⁴ *SKS* 7, 75 / *CUPI*, 75; my emphasis.

³⁵ For example, Kivy states: "For the way in which the artist employs the medium is, in effect, part of the content, because it expresses something in the artist's point of view about the content" (*Philosophies of Arts*, 117). Martha Nussbaum attributes much the same view to the ancient Greeks, but what she says also reflects her own position: "Forms of writing were not seen as vessels into which different contents could be indifferently poured; form was itself a statement, a content" (*Love's Knowledge*, 15). See also Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 147-148; Peter Kivy, "Paraphrasing Poetry (for Profit and Pleasure)," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69, no. 4 (2011): 375-376; Jenefer Robinson, "Style and Personality in the Literary Work," *Philosophical Review* 94 (1985): 227-247; Hayden White,

The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 1-25.

³⁶ *SKS* 7, 75-76 / *CUPI*, 75.

³⁷ H. Paul Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics, vol. 3: Speech Acts*, ed. by Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 45-48.

³⁸ A different version of this example was developed by Lawrence Hinman in "Philosophy and Style," 514-518.

³⁹ SparkNotes Editors, "SparkNote on Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)," SparkNotes LLC, last modified 2005, <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/kierkegaard>.

⁴⁰ See Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts*, 104-106.

⁴¹ *SKS* 7, 104-105; 274-288 / *CUPI*, 107-109; 301-315.

⁴² Cf. Hinman, "Philosophy and Style," 514.

⁴³ See *SKS* 7, 29-61 / *CUPI*, 21-57.

⁴⁴ *SKS* 7, 29-30; 38-39; 59; 176-178 / *CUPI*, 21-22; 31-32; 55; 192-194.

⁴⁵ *SKS* 7, 274-281 / *CUPI*, 301-309.

⁴⁶ *SKS* 7, 29 / *CUPI*, 21.

⁴⁷ *SKS* 7, 153-163; 286; 289; 321 / *CUPI*, 165-177; 314; 317; 351.

⁴⁸ *SKS* 7, 56-57; 182-183 / *CUPI*, 52-53; 199. See Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript,"* chapter 7; Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Logical Status of Religious Beliefs," in *Metaphysical Beliefs*, ed. Stephen Toulmin, Ronald W. Hepburn, and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1957), 184; Louis P. Pojman, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (San Francisco, CA: International Scholars Publications, 1999), 127-143; Robert C. Roberts, "Thinking Subjectively," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, no. 2 (1980): 71-92.

⁴⁹ James Conant, “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. Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 311n35; John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard’s Thought* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 13-18; Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 486.

⁵⁰ *SKS* 7, 176-188 / *CUP1*, 192-205.

⁵¹ Rasmus Nielsen, Mag. S. Kierkegaards “Johannes Climacus” og Dr. H. Martensens “Christelige dogmatik”: En Undersøgende Anmeldelse (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1849).

⁵² *Pap.* XI-3 B / *JP* 6, 6869.

⁵³ *Pap.* X-6 B 121 / *JP* 6, 6574.

⁵⁴ *Pap.* X-6 B 121 / *JP* 6, 6574; my emphasis.

⁵⁵ *Pap.* X-6 B 121 / *JP* 6, 6574.

⁵⁶ *Pap.* X-6 B 121 / *JP* 6, 6574. For a contemporary example of the kind of “objective” writing under discussion, see Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Louis P. Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity: Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Religion* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1984).

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the point, see Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 48-51.

⁵⁸ Compare Climacus’s remarks concerning scholarly treatments of *Philosophical Fragments* (*SKS* 7, 248n* / *CUP1*, 274n*).

⁵⁹ Quoted in Brand Blanshard, “Kierkegaard on Faith,” *The Personalist* 49, no. 1 (1968): 19.

⁶⁰ Blanshard, “Kierkegaard on Faith,” 20.

⁶¹ See, paradigmatically, the work of Evans, Hannay, and Pojman.

⁶² For discussions of this point, see Rick Anthony Furtak, “Love and the Discipline of Philosophy,” in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 66-71; Alastair Hannay, “Kierkegaard on Natural and Commanded Love,” in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 112-116; Edward F. Mooney, “Kierkegaard at the APA: Comments on Evans,” Keynote Address, Søren Kierkegaard Society Group, 2008 Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association.

⁶³ Mooney, “Kierkegaard at the APA.”

⁶⁴ Mooney, “Kierkegaard at the APA”; Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres*, 38-41, 52-58.

⁶⁵ For a similar suggestion, see Thomas Henry Croxall, “Kierkegaard on Music: A Paper Based on Kierkegaard’s Essay: ‘De umiddlebare erotiske Stadier, eller Det Musikalsk-Erotiske’ from *Enten Eller*, vol. I,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 73 (1946): 11; Anthony Kearney, “Confusing the Issue? A.C. Bradley’s Theory of Poetry and its Contents,” *Victorian Poetry* 41, no. 2 (2003): 253-255; Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts*, 87.

⁶⁶ *SKS* 7, 573 / *CUP1*, 630.

⁶⁷ See David Hills, “Problems of Paraphrase: Bottom’s Dream,” *The Baltic International Yearbook of Cognition, Logic, and Communication* 3 (2008): 13.

⁶⁸ *SVI*, XIII, 533-536 / *PV*, 45-47.

⁶⁹ For an extended discussion of this point, see Cameron, “[Writing] About Writing About Kierkegaard,” 56-66.

⁷⁰ For two recent examples, see M. G. Piety, *Ways of Knowing: Kierkegaard's Pluralist Epistemology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 17-19; Patrick Stokes, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors: Interest, Self, and Moral Vision* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2010), 13-14. For two canonical examples, see Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript,"* 6-9; Walsh, *Living Poetically*, 10-11.

⁷¹ See Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006), 43-44; Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together," 248; Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript,"* xiii; Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ix; Poul L. Holmer, "On Understanding Kierkegaard," *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 10, no. 1-2 (1955) 93-97; Poul Lübcke, "Kierkegaard and Indirect Communication," 31; George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Montreal, CA: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 1-7.

⁷² See James Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense," in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 195; Evans, *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript,"* 2-3, 14-15; Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18; Brian V. Hill, "Søren Kierkegaard and Educational Theory," *Educational Theory*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1966) 345; Pojman, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*, xv-xvi; Mark C. Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1975), vii-viii.