

**Communicating Without Imparting: A Reappraisal of Kierkegaard's Indirect
Communication**

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Abstract

In some unpublished lecture notes on communication, Kierkegaard introduces a distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ communication. According to these notes, the key distinguishing feature of indirect communication, with respect to its formal structure, is that it lacks an ‘object’. By this, Kierkegaard appears to envisage a form of communication in which what gets imparted is strictly *nothing*. However, this presents an immediate puzzle, especially given that our natural way of understanding communication *just is* as the transmission of some content from one person to another. How can we even possibly conceive of a communication that has no ‘object’, i.e., no communicative content?

Regarding Kierkegaard on indirect communication, a standard general interpretative strategy rows back on the notion of a form of communication in which what is imparted is strictly nothing. Instead, critics appeal (more or less expressly) to the idea of communicative content that is imparted indirectly, i.e., implicitly or ambiguously. My overall aim in this thesis is threefold. Firstly, I aim to clarify the notion of communication that lacks an object. I show that, while it does not rely on the possibility of forms of communication that contain no intelligible content, this notion does rely on there being ways of communicating that are strictly *non-didactic*, i.e., not aimed at imparting any knowledge or information. Secondly, I show how variants of the standard interpretation misconstrue Kierkegaard’s strict direct/indirect distinction, as a distinction between explicit and implicit ways of imparting content. Thirdly, I offer an alternative. Specifically, I defend the following: that indirect communication’s purpose is to problematise the recipient’s relation to that which he takes himself to already know. I develop this alternative by re-examining Kierkegaard’s conception of ‘doubly-reflected’ mode of communication, the artistry he thinks this involves, and its role in his overall communicative strategy.

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General Introduction

In his drafted notes for a series of lectures on communication, Søren Kierkegaard works out a schema for understanding the dynamics of communication. According to Kierkegaard, there are *four* components that are constitutive of human communication: “1) the object, 2) the communicator, 3) the receiver [and] 4) the communication”.¹

This schema is readily illustrated. We may envisage, for example, an educational setting, where a teacher of mathematics is trying to teach his students how to execute some mathematical formulae. The usual procedure in this context is straightforward: the students lack knowledge of a certain mathematical formula; the teacher then plans the lesson accordingly and delivers the lesson to the students in class, and the students gains knowledge of the relevant mathematical formulae. Applying Kierkegaard’s schema to the context at hand, the four components are accordingly:

- 1) Object = The mathematical content to be learnt
- 2) Communicator = The teacher
- 3) Receiver = The students
- 4) Communication = How the teacher delivers his lesson to the students (e.g., lecture notes, visual aids)

Kierkegaard’s schema is compatible with a simple and natural way of understanding communication: one person (or a group) imparts some communicative content, which can typically be captured in certain propositions, such as a mathematical formula, to another through certain media, such as verbal explanations, text-book presentations, diagrams, and the like. Indeed, when we communicate, most of us are either imparting or receiving information

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume I: A-E*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Indiana University Press, 1967), 306.

(or both). We see this occur in many contexts other than teaching, such as the transmission of news.

For Kierkegaard, however, the fourfold schema above only applies fully to what he calls ‘direct communication’ or the “communication of knowledge”.² That is, the schema only applies to communication that is concerned with imparting knowledge or information. But in addition to direct communication, Kierkegaard argues that there are instances of our communication in which there is no ‘object’, that is, no communicative content. The name for this type of communication is ‘indirect communication’ or “the communication of capability”.³ Kierkegaard introduces this contrast as follows:

If it is the object which is reflected upon, then we have the communication of knowledge [*Videns*]. If, on the other hand, there is no “object”...then we have in contrast to the communication of knowledge the communication of capability [*Kunnens*].⁴

Famously, Kierkegaard’s interest is primarily in the form of communication that he calls ‘indirect’. However, his claim that there is such a form of communication, where this means a form of communication that lacks an ‘object’, presents an immediate puzzle. Given that our natural and straightforward view of communication just *is* the imparting of some content from one party to another, how then could there be any communication without such content?

This immediate difficulty in understanding Kierkegaard’s conception of indirect communication is attested by the ways that his expositors have tended to qualify or downplay his claim, that such communication has no ‘object’. As we have seen, this claim is made clearly and explicitly in his draft lecture notes. As I shall detail in the first chapter, however, on certain prominent readings of Kierkegaard’s indirect communication, this claim simply does not hold. Rather, in these readings, indirect communication is conceived in terms of the idea of an indirect *way* of imparting communicative content. Against any such interpretation,

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

the main aim of my thesis is to establish the view that Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication should *not* be understood as a way of imparting communicative content, not even implicitly or non-directly. That is, I shall argue that indirect communication is radically different from any form of communication in which A communicates *x* to B, where *x* stands for some communicative content; I will do this by showing how Kierkegaard's draft lecture notes fit well in this regard with how this notion is elsewhere invoked and deployed in his writings.

Now, before I proceed to provide a general overview of the chapters to come, I want to make one crucial clarification regarding Kierkegaard's claim, that indirect communication is objectless. In making such claim, Kierkegaard is *not*, I argue, advancing the idea that indirect communication *contains* no content, or that indirect communication has nothing communicatively intelligible or sensible at all, as some critics have propounded.⁵ Instead, Kierkegaard's claim should be understood in relation to the *telos* of indirect communication – that it is *not* indirect communication's purpose to communicate *didactically*, where this involves imparting some knowledge or information with the prospect of informing, convincing, or soliciting assent from the recipient concerning some doctrine, treatise, theses, or any of the like; to communicate didactically is to communicate directly. But what purpose, then, does indirect communication serve? As I will show, indirect communication's purpose is to dispel illusions in which an individual is self-blinded and self-estranged. And indirect communication dispels such illusion through *provocation* – that the indirect communicator provokes the recipient to engage in what Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus calls 'double-reflection', which involves a process of self-examination.

⁵ James Conant, for instance, sees Kierkegaard's pseudonymous text *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as nothing but *plain nonsense*. I will critically engage with Conant's views in Chapter Four.

In what follows, I will give an overview of the chapters to come. And it will help, in this regard, to provide the general structure of my thesis, which takes the following three-step form:

- 1) To show what indirect communication is *not* (Chapter One).
- 2) To show why, for Kierkegaard, indirect communication is needed (Chapter Two).
- 3) To show what indirect communication *is* (Chapters Three and Four).

Considering the above steps, the burden of my first chapter is to present and rule out *three* possible but implausible stratagems for understanding indirect communication. In doing so, my intention is to establish *two* necessary constraints for building upon a more positive conception of what indirect communication *is* – the two constraints are as follows:

- 1) We must avoid attributing to indirect communication a goal that is achievable by direct communication.
- 2) Indirect communication does not impart information or knowledge, not even implicitly.

The second chapter aims to clarify the considerations motivating Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication. I will take issue with the view that the illusion of Christendom is a case of self-deception, where the assumption is that those in the illusion *knows* fully they are not Christians, but intentionally maintain the false belief that they are Christians. On this model of understanding, those in the grip of such illusion refuse to admit that they are living in an illusion for fear of making changes or losing face. And so, according to this view, Kierkegaard's motivation for using indirect communication derives from a consideration to dispel his audience's illusion without upsetting them. Against this view, I argue that the illusion is better understood as a case of self-blindness constituted by *two* forms of self-estrangement:

- 1) Confusing the Categories (i.e., the Aesthetic-Intellectual and the Ethico-Religious),
and,
- 2) The Lack of Primitivity

Against such illusion, double-reflection is called upon as a remedy, which is the main focus of the next chapter.⁶

In the third chapter, I will show that double-reflection involves *both* moments of abstract, objective, third-personal reflection, *and* concrete, subjective, first-personal reflection. And crucially, this second moment of reflection is where self-examination and appropriation occur. I then take issue with one possible misunderstanding of the concept of ‘appropriation’, which claims that appropriation is to be understood as action in the crude sense of practicing or ‘living out’ some principles for living. Whilst I acknowledge the place of ‘action’ in double-reflection’s appropriation, I reject the claim that action is essential to appropriation in the sense of ‘action’ as the successful implementation of intentions to act. Instead, with reference to Climacus’ distinction between thought and action, I submit and defend the following: that the action of appropriation in double-reflection denotes the moment where the agent either first-personally avow or disavow, commit or reject, some possible course of existence or agency.

The fourth and final chapter will be split into two parts, the first part investigates what it means to understand indirect communication as a ‘doubly-reflected’ mode of communication, and the artistry involved in executing indirect communication. I will take Anti-Climacus’ account of indirect communication as the point of departure for my investigation. Then, in the second part, I want to provide an account of how Kierkegaard’s

⁶ I draw term ‘aesthetic-intellectual’ from Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or - Part II*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 16. And the term ‘ethico-religious’ I draw from Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 101.

own pseudonymous texts exemplify indirect communication *qua* doubly-reflected mode of communication – specifically, his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, authored by the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. To do this, I will reconstruct and critically assess and compare James Conant's and Paul Muench's interpretation of the *Postscript* as a piece of indirect communication. Whilst both critics offer compelling interpretations, both interpretations have points of concerns that I think mischaracterise the *Postscript*'s indirect communication. Drawing from the positives of both critics' interpretation, I argue that Climacus *provokes* the reader to engage in self-examination in double-reflection by himself serving as an occasion for the reader to undergo an experience of uncanniness, whereby the reader simultaneously finds something familiar and unfamiliar; relatable and unrelatable, in Climacus.

Chapter 1 What Indirect Communication is ‘Not’: Three Stratagems for Understanding Indirect Communication

As a first step to building a more positive conception of indirect communication, it is crucial to begin by showing what indirect communication is *not*. Therefore, this chapter aims to rule out *three* possible but implausible stratagems for understanding indirect communication. I have termed the three stratagems as follows:

- 1) The Religious Language Interpretation
- 2) The Religious Choice Interpretation
- 3) The Bypass Interpretation

As I will show, both the Religious Language Interpretation (1) and the Bypass Interpretation (3) cannot work as viable interpretations, since they conceive indirect communication as a means of imparting knowledge or information, albeit in an implicit manner, thus construing indirect communication in terms of direct communication. This basically breaks the strict distinction that Kierkegaard established between direct and indirect communication in his unpublished lecture notes on communication. And as for the Religious Choice Interpretation (2), this interpretation attributes to indirect communication a goal that is essentially achievable by means of direct communication. However, Kierkegaard makes explicitly clear in his retrospective work of self-commentary, *Point of View for My Work as an Author*, that “an illusion can never be removed directly, and basically only indirectly”.⁷ The implication here is that both direct and indirect communication are distinguished by the goals they achieve, that this goal of dispelling illusions is unique to indirect communication; that it is something direct communication cannot achieve. In other words, both forms of communication perform different functions and serve different goals – that direct communication imparts knowledge or information, whilst indirect communication dispels

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 43.

what Kierkegaard calls the illusion of Christendom, something which we will discuss in briefly in this chapter, and in much greater detail in the next chapter. Now, in what follows, I will introduce the three stratagems briefly.

Following a tradition that claims religious truths are ineffable, proponents of the first stratagem ('Religious Language Interpretation') argue that only indirect communication can communicate religious truths. Proponents of the second stratagem ('Religious Choice Interpretation') see no problem with communicating religious truths directly. But what direct communication cannot do, according to proponents of this interpretation, is to bring the recipient to the point of either accepting or rejecting religious faith. The third and final stratagem ('Bypass Interpretation') situates Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication within the context of dispelling the illusion of Christendom. According to this interpretation, indirect communication was Kierkegaard's means of informing his audience that they are living in an illusion when they call themselves Christians without offending them.

By the end of this chapter, I hope to have established *two* constraints that will guide us in formulating a more positive conception of indirect communication – the two constraints are as follows:

- 1) We must avoid attributing to indirect communication a goal essentially achievable by direct communication.
- 2) Indirect communication does not impart knowledge or information, not even implicitly.

1. Religious Language Interpretation

Just as King David learnt through prophetic revelation that no house built by man could accommodate God, so some thinkers argue that this is also true of human concepts and language.⁸ In what follows, I will critically examine Harry Nielsen's account of indirect communication, which claims that the religious truth of human sin, which Nielsen frames as the difference between Christ and man, is unthinkable, and therefore, ineffable. For Nielsen, sin is unthinkable and ineffable because it is an 'existence-determinant'.⁹ We will discuss what Nielsen means and also, how Nielsen thinks one can indirectly communicate this religious truth of sin.

After reconstructing Nielsen's account, I will raise *two* objections, one of which comes from critic David Lochhead. I then present James Kellenberger's account as a compelling alternative to Nielsen's. Like Nielsen, Kellenberger also finds communicating religious truths directly problematic. However, unlike Nielsen, Kellenberger does not rely on the notion that religious truths are somehow ineffable. Instead, Kellenberger thinks 'can' does not imply 'ought' – that we can directly communicate religious truths does not mean we *should*. More importantly, I also want to point out that Kellenberger's account provides one useful insight for understanding the limitations of direct communication – that direct communication can *tell* another person some information but cannot *enable* another person to have an appropriate response to the information. This insight is one which we will carry forward in forthcoming discussions.

⁸ For the reference to David, please see 2 Samuel 7; Cf. Isaiah 66:1-2. Also, for an interesting discussion of this, please see, Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 23-25.

⁹ Note that the translation of the *Postscript* I am using is different to Nielsen's. In Hannay's translation, 'existence-determinant' is translated as 'existence-category'. But for consistency's sake, I will stick with Nielsen's 'existence-determinant'. Please see, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 491.

1.1 Nielsen: Indirect Communication and Sin

In Nielsen's view, the account of Christ walking on water (recorded in the Gospel of Mark) is an instance of indirect communication. Crucial to Nielsen's interpretation is the distinction between what he calls the 'immediate' and the 'mediate' (or 'indirect') content, which is essentially a distinction between an explicit and implicit message, respectively.

Turning to the account of Christ walking on water, Nielsen claims that the immediate content is

a man walking on water...doing something men can't do, and the disciples in the boat...are buffaloes, terrified.¹⁰

Then, Nielsen asserts that the immediate content should elicit a sense of puzzlement from the reader, specifically a puzzlement concerning the difference between Christ, who can walk on water, and the reader himself, who cannot:

An enormous difference strikes the naked eye...when we confront the immediate content of Mark 6 [...] I can feel primitively puzzled by the fact that I don't even have a name for the difference between me and a man who can do what humans can't do.¹¹

Following from above, Nielsen reveals that this unnamed difference between Christ and man is 'sin'. Nielsen then proceeds to explain why this difference is unthinkable by drawing our attention to the concept of an 'existence-determinant', which appears in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous text, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* – as Nielsen asserts:

Kierkegaard, not independently of the New Testament and the Christian tradition, calls sin an "existence-determinant, and precisely one which cannot be thought". Particular sins are something a human being can think, i.e., plan, consciously commit, later recall, and so forth. However, a determinant of the whole of my existence could not be thought, could not for example be discovered by cogitation, since my thinking capacity along with the rest of me would be dyed with the same dye.¹²

Here, Nielsen distinguishes between *two* conceptions of sin, one that is thinkable and one that is not. According to Nielsen, the common conception of sin as "evildoings" is thinkable, for

¹⁰ Harry A Nielsen, "Two Levels of Indirect Communication: Language and "Legend" in Mark 6," *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results* (1982): 92.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 93.

¹² *Ibid.*

sin, in this sense, is something we can plan on doing and recall later.¹³ However, sin as an ‘existence-determinant’, Nielsen claims, is unthinkable. Nielsen does not explain his understanding of ‘existence-determinant’ in detail. But as we shall see, Nielsen takes this idea of an ‘existence-determinant’ to mean something like an “all-enveloping state” in which one cannot get outside of – consider Nielsen’s following question:

If every human were in fact in such an unthinkable, all-enveloping state, how would anyone ever become aware of it?¹⁴

In responding to his own question, Nielsen proceeds to show how the account of Christ walking on water, indirectly informs readers that sin is the difference between Christ and the reader. Here, the notion of mediate or indirect content comes into play for Nielsen. As Nielsen explains, when the reader allows his puzzlement with the immediate content to lead him “into conversation with other parts of [Mark]”, the mediate or indirect content will emerge from the immediate – as Nielsen writes:

...underneath the immediate content of Mark 6 lies a further content that comes to light as I let the immediate lead me into conversation with other parts of the book [i.e., the Gospel of Mark]. A mediate content comes into view: a sin-message, the intimation of an unperceivable state holds me fast. In Mark 6 this mediate content reveals my state by means of a contrast with someone who is not in that state, a sinless one, as other texts in the New Testament assert directly.¹⁵

Crucial to point out here before proceeding to objections is that Nielsen clearly names *two* places where the essential difference between man and Christ is spelt out explicitly *as* sin. The first is in the Gospel of Mark, bar Mark 6; the second is in the other New Testament texts.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

1.2 Objections to Nielsen's Interpretation

Following our reconstruction of Nielsen's account, I will now raise *two* objections. Firstly, there is an apparent performative contradiction on Nielsen's part. In claiming that sin is unthinkable and therefore, ineffable, Nielsen has thought and posited something about sin: that it is unthinkable and ineffable. In my view, Nielsen's mistake derives from taking Johannes Climacus' discussion of sin out of context. Recall that Nielsen anchors his view on Climacus' claim that sin is an 'existence-determinant'. However, Climacus' discussion of sin in the pages which Nielsen quotes from expresses the idea that sin cannot be thought *merely* as a "teaching or doctrine", not that sin is something totally unthinkable.¹⁶ As I understand, Climacus' discussion of sin was targeting a specific problem that he thinks was prevalent amongst his contemporaries – that they were thinking and inquiring about Christianity at a distance from themselves, that the doctrines have no existential meaning or implications for how they live; the doctrines remain *merely* as doctrines, so to speak. Crucially, this theme of thinking and inquiring about Christianity at an existential distance from oneself is vital for understanding Kierkegaard's authorial aim. We will explore this in more detail from the next chapter onwards.

My second objection is that Nielsen violates Kierkegaard's distinction between direct and indirect communication when he introduces the idea that the latter imparts a hidden message. This concern is also echoed in David Lochhead's response to Nielsen's paper – as Lochhead puts it:

I suspect that Professor Nielsen and I have very different understandings of what constitutes the difference between direct and indirect communication [...] I fear that Professor Nielsen has confused the distinction between direct and indirect communication with another one. *I would describe Professor Nielsen's argument as distinguishing explicit and implicit communication.*¹⁷

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 491.

¹⁷ David Lochhead, "Comment on Nielsen," in *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results*, ed. Alastair McKinnon. (Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1982), 102. Italics mine.

Indeed, as Lochhead objects, Nielsen's account has confused the distinction between direct and indirect communication with explicit and implicit communication, respectively. To say that indirect communication imparts a hidden message is to say that indirect communication has an object, which directly conflicts with Kierkegaard's fourfold schema for understanding the distinction between direct and indirect communication.

Moreover, Nielsen's account raises concerns over the necessity of indirect communication. Recall, according to Nielsen's understanding, indirect communication is required to communicate religious truths, such as 'man is sinful, and Christ is not'. However, as we have seen, Nielsen also claims that places beyond Mark 6 asserts sin directly. So, as it turns out, sin *is* directly communicable. But if sin is directly communicable, then what purpose does indirect communication serve? And so, part of the problem with Nielsen's account is that he has not convincingly shown why direct communication is limited with respect to communicating religious truths, and why, in this regard, indirect communication is suitable in overcoming those limits.

1.3 Kellenberger's Account: Indirect Communication & Religious Understanding

Although James Kellenberger would agree with Nielsen that direct communication is limited with respect to communicating religious truths, Kellenberger does not subscribe to the idea that religious truths are somehow ineffable. On the contrary, Kellenberger accepts,

...[that] religious truths can be directly stated. One can directly say in words 'There is a God' and 'Christ is God'.¹⁸

As we shall see, Kellenberger thinks direct communication is limited because it cannot impart a religious understanding of religious truths to the recipient. We shall discuss what such understanding entails for Kellenberger. In what follows, I will reconstruct Kellenberger's account and argue why his account presents a compelling alternative to Nielsen's, not least because Kellenberger gives good reasons for why direct communication is limited with respect to the communication of religious truths.

Now, as Kellenberger asserts, direct communication is limited with respect to communicating religious truths,

because it cannot communicate a *reaction* and subjectivity or subjective truth is a reaction, a 'personal appropriation', as opposed to learning a possibly indifferently received objective truth. Information can be directly communicated by a plain telling. But the teller's reaction to that information – even if it be the supreme truth of the universe – cannot, logically cannot, be communicated by a plain telling since it is not the sort of thing that telling communicates. It must be awakened or evoked in the hearer or reader; that is, it must be re-created, and in *this sense* reduplicated. And for this task indirect communication must do service.¹⁹

In identifying the limitations of direct communication, I think Kellenberger is teasing out a very important distinction that is often neglected in the current literature on indirect communication. This distinction, I submit, is the distinction between *telling* and *enabling*. As Kellenberger points out, whilst direct communication can be used to *tell* a person some

¹⁸ James Kellenberger, "Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Religious Truth," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (1984): 157.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 154.

information about something, direct communication cannot *enable* a person to react to the information imparted.

Now, the above might not be immediately obvious, especially when considering the possibility of imparting information in a threatening way, which could possibly evoke a fearful reaction from the recipient. Although Kellenberger does not comment on or address the above possibility, it is important to bear in mind the context in which Kellenberger introduces his telling/enabling distinction, which is the communication of religious truths. And so, the kind of reaction that Kellenberger has in mind must also be specifically religious in nature. Certainly, as we shall see, Kellenberger thinks that this religious reaction to religious truths is the individual's turning toward God, which Kellenberger also calls a 'religious understanding'. We will unpack this in more detail below.

To explain his concept of religious understanding, Kellenberger introduces another distinction, one which derives from Anti-Climacus' critical engagement with Socratic Intellectualism, namely, that "to understand and to understand are two things".²⁰ Kellenberger explains the distinction as follows:

...at one level, one shows that one understands by standing up and saying the right thing, but, at another level, unless one acts accordingly, one shows that one has not understood after all. At the first level understanding is a matter of correct articulation. At the second level understanding is a matter of correct living.²¹

As per Kellenberger's explanation, true understanding at the first level involves correctly articulating some information. For instance, a student counts as having truly understood the lesson's content if the student is able to explain what they have learnt to another. In other words, this first level of understanding denotes a cognitive understanding. True understanding at the second level, on the other hand, goes beyond cognitively grasping some information; as

²⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 90.

²¹ Kellenberger, "Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Religious Truth," 156.

Kellenberger point out, true understanding at the second level is a “matter of correct living”.²² We can put this into perspective by considering the following example: when a parent scolds their child for misbehaving, the child is said to have truly understood what the parent was saying if the child understands that what they did was wrong *and* stops misbehaving; whereas if the child persists in misbehaviour, then the child has not truly understood.

With this distinction in place, Kellenberger argues that direct communication (or telling) can only impart the first level of understanding. This is certainly compatible with Climacus’ comment on direct communication in his *Postscript*, where direct communication is considered to be successfully in operation when “...one person addresses something to someone and another acknowledges the same, word for word”.²³ Putting this in relation to imparting religious truths, Kellenberger thinks that direct communication is successful when the communicator says: “There is a God”, “God’s presence is real”, or “God became a man in Christ”, and the recipient can correctly articulate these truths back to the communicator.²⁴ However, what direct communication cannot do, Kellenberger argues, is to impart these religious truths in such a way that *enables* the recipient to turn “toward God or at least [to turn] toward an openness to God”.²⁵ This turning toward God, Kellenberger thinks, constitutes the second level of understanding highlighted above, which is also what Kellenberger calls the religious understanding. This is because turning toward God signifies a transformation of one’s life (i.e., “a matter of correct living”), that one now engages in a *personal* relationship with God.²⁶ It is precisely this kind of reaction that Kellenberger thinks direct communication cannot impart to the recipient.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 63.

²⁴ Kellenberger, "Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Religious Truth," 156.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

That said, however, is it not possible to impart religious truths directly along with the instruction to turn toward God? In response, it is important to emphasise Kellenberger's point that this religious understanding or reaction is *personal* – hence, Kellenberger calls such reaction a *personal* appropriation. As Kellenberger put it, “personal appropriation is a concomitant of seeing or discovering the truth of what one has come to understand religiously” for oneself.²⁷ Indeed, it is one thing to tell a person some religious truth and inform them that they must react in *x*, *y*, and *z* ways, and quite another for a person to react to that truth in *x*, *y*, and *z* ways for themselves. It is the latter that Kellenberger thinks is important for receiving religious truths, and to which “indirect communication must do service”.²⁸

However, I think we can further interrogate the above by putting the following line of thought on the table: is it not possible to consistently and frequently impart religious truths *along with* the instruction to turn toward God, such that overtime, the other comes to turn toward God for themselves? In response to this, it is apparently a basic commitment of Kierkegaard that a person's relationship with God (a God-relation) should not be dependent upon or mediated by another person; for one person does not owe their faith to anyone else but God.²⁹

Let us now turn to Kellenberger's account of indirect communication. In formulating a positive conception of indirect communication, Kellenberger directs our attention to the dialogue between Nathan the prophet and King David, which is recorded in 2 Samuel in the Old Testament – Kellenberger gives a retelling of the story:

David had desired for himself Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his soldiers, and he had sent word to the commander of his army to put Uriah in the forefront of the heaviest fighting and then to draw back from him. This was done, and when Uriah had been killed

²⁷ Ibid. 157.

²⁸ Ibid. 154.

²⁹ Please see, Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 10-11; Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. M. G. Piety (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 165-68; Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 63.

David took Bathsheba for his wife. Nathan then goes to David and tells him of two men who live in a certain city, one a rich man with many flocks, the other a poor man with but one ewe lamb. When a traveller visits the rich man, instead of preparing one of his own flock, he takes the poor man's ewe lamb and prepares it for the traveller. David, when he hears Nathan's account, is angered against the man who has done this for his lack of pity. 'You,' says Nathan, 'are the man'.³⁰

Prima facie, one might find Kellenberger's use of Nathan's parable unfit as an illustration of indirect communication, for Nathan directly asserts that David is the man. Here, Kellenberger's distinction between telling and enabling is crucial – that although Nathan *tells* David he is a sinner, it is Nathan's parable (the indirect communication) that *enabled* David to see *for himself* that he is indeed a sinner, which then moved David to turn back to God in repentance. As Kellenberger emphasises, David's religious understanding of himself as a sinner,

takes a discovery on David's part, one which, be it noted, requires that he not self-righteously denounce any comparison between himself and the rich man.³¹

The point is that Nathan could not make David repent by telling him that he is a sinner and that he should repent; David must acknowledge the need to repent for himself. On this note, it is important to point out that Nathan does not present himself as a figure of authority to David in the sense of telling or teaching David that he has fallen short of God's standard, and what David must do to rectify his wrong. Instead, Nathan simply tells a story with a shrewd rich man character, of whom David can compare himself to. And as Kellenberger points out, David *did* compare himself with the shrewd rich man, which then enabled "David to the point of personally appropriating the truth" that he is a sinner.³²

Now, to end this section, I want to raise *two* important points that will be taken up in forthcoming discussions. Firstly, I agree with Kellenberger that indirect communication involves presenting appropriate models of comparison, such as in the case of Nathan's

³⁰ Kellenberger, "Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Religious Truth," 157.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

parable.³³ I will revisit this idea in Chapter Three (towards the end) and in Chapter Four.

Secondly, there is one question that is crucial to Kellenberger's account which he does not raise and/or address, namely, why is it important to obtain a religious understanding of

religious truths, or why is a merely cognitive understanding of religious truths insufficient?

Whilst the focus of Kellenberger's account is more on re-examining the limitations of direct communication with respect to communicating religious truths, as opposed to explaining the importance of obtaining a religious understanding of religious truths, I think Kellenberger's negligence of the latter is telling of a greater negligence. This greater negligence concerns an understanding of the motivation that drives Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication.

As we have seen, Kellenberger focuses exclusively on indirect communication as targeting a lack in the religious life – that the religious individual is not turning to God or engaging in a personal relationship with God. But as I will detail in the next chapter, whilst Kierkegaard would agree that there is a lack in his contemporaries' religious life, he thinks there is in fact a more prior lack which results in the kind of religious lack that Kellenberger identifies. This more prior lack is existential in nature and it involves the peculiar condition of forgetting that one exists as an individual human being. In short, for Kierkegaard, one is not living religiously because one is detached or estranged from oneself as a human. This concern is voiced out most clearly by Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus in the following way: "If one had forgotten what it is to exist religiously, no doubt one had also forgotten what it is to exist humanly".³⁴ More on this in the forthcoming chapters.

³³ On this note, consider Kierkegaard's discussion of Nathan's parable in: Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 37-39.

³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 209.

2. Religious Choice Interpretation

In this section, my goal is to critically examine Poul Lübcke's account of indirect communication. As we shall see, Lübcke's distinction between direct and indirect communication heavily rely on J. L. Austin's speech-act theory. According to Lübcke, whilst direct communication encompasses a variety of speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary), "only the very specific perlocutionary acts of a speaker trying to bring a listener to the point of decision is in the indirect mode" – as Lübcke asserts in full:

...direct communication is not bound to the act of asserting, but covers a lot of other speech-acts as well: The (pseudo)hegelian rattling off of a philosophical lesson (a pure *locutionary act*), the acts of giving orders, to beg and beseech, to threaten and to warn someone (*illocutionary acts*) and the enterprise of trying to move somebody's heart or to persuade him (*perlocutionary acts*) and so on. *Only the very specific perlocutionary acts of a speaker trying to bring a listener to the point of decision is in the indirect mode.*³⁵

In other words, Lübcke thinks that whilst one can use direct communication to say something with meaning (a locutionary act); to perform some act with what one says, whether it is "asking a question, giving an order, making a promise, stating a fact, and so on" (an illocutionary act); to achieve an end by saying something, such as convincing or persuading (a perlocutionary act); *only* indirect communication can achieve the perlocutionary effect of putting the recipient in a position to make a choice.³⁶ But what choice? As we will see, Lübcke thinks the choice in question essentially amounts to a choice between accepting or rejecting Christianity.

In what follows, I will begin by reconstructing Lübcke's account of indirect communication, after which, I will launch *three* criticisms against it. My criticisms run as follows. Firstly, Lübcke attributes to indirect communication a goal that is achievable through direct communication. Secondly, I find Lübcke's understanding of indirect communication to be incompatible with Kierkegaard's schema for understanding how indirect communication is

³⁵ Poul Lübcke, "Kierkegaard and Indirect Communication," *History of European Ideas* 12, no. 1 (1990): 34. emphasis mine.

³⁶ Michael Morris, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 237.

objectless. Thirdly, Lübcke uses Anti-Climacus' account of indirect communication without properly addressing details that are crucial – I will point out what those details are.

2.1 Reconstructing Lübcke's Account of Indirect Communication

In the beginning of his paper, Lübcke makes his position explicitly clear, that Kierkegaard did not use indirect communication to communicate the ineffable – as he asserts: indirect communication should not be “looked upon as an attempt to express the inexpressible, as an attempt to grip with a semantic problem”.³⁷ And similar to Kellenberger, Lübcke thinks that being able to directly communicate religious truths, for instance, does not imply that one should – as Lübcke asserts:

But that we *can* do it [i.e., directly communicate religious truths] is not the same as saying that we *ought* to do it, and given certain ends, situations could and, in fact, do arise which call for silence, irony, humor, metaphoric and poetic style or other ‘indirect’ ways of using the language.³⁸

As the above passage indicates, Lübcke thinks that there are situations in which asserting religious truths directly is inappropriate and that it is more appropriate to deploy indirect communication instead. Now, given what we have discussed in the opening to this section, it is clear that the kind of situation which calls for indirect communication for Lübcke is that of bringing the recipient to the point of making a choice. And so, as Lübcke claims, rather than communicating the ineffable, Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication “has to do with the *pragmatic* aspect of language concerning the relation between language users and signs”.³⁹ That is, according to Lübcke, Kierkegaard's deployment of indirect communication is driven by a consideration for how to use language to achieve certain ends – in this case, of bringing the recipient to the point of making a choice.

To demonstrate how indirect communication achieves the perlocutionary effect of bringing the recipient to the point of making a choice, Lübcke draws our attention to a passage introduced in the pseudonymous text, *Practice in Christianity*, authored by the pseudonym Anti-Climacus – the passage goes as follows:

³⁷ Lübcke, "Kierkegaard and Indirect Communication," 32.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. 33.

Indirect communication can be an art of communication in redoubling the communication; the art consists in making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody, purely objective, and then continually placing the qualitative opposites in a unity...For example, it is indirect communication to place jest and earnestness together in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot – and then to be a nobody oneself. If anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself.⁴⁰

From this passage, Lübcke draws the conclusion that indirect communication brings the recipient to a point of making a choice by presenting a contradiction to the recipient – this contradiction constitutes the dialectical knot to which the recipient must untie for himself. And according to Lübcke, untying this knot amounts to deciding which side of the contradiction to accept, as Lübcke claims:

Using indirect communication the speaker is ‘...composing qualitative opposites into unity’, i.e. he is producing a contradiction [...] He wants to put the hearer in such a position that if he wants ‘...to profit by this sort of communication, he must himself undo the knot for himself’, i.e. he must decide for himself whether he wants to accept the one or the other side of the contradiction. It is the decision of the listener which is the main thing.⁴¹

Now, at this point, one might raise the following question: between what two choices is the recipient deciding on? As Lübcke asserts, the choice involves becoming or not becoming a Christian:

...our confirmation of the religious way of life was the main perlocutionary effect [Kierkegaard] wanted to achieve. But because confirmation is a kind of decision, Kierkegaard thought he had to use the indirect ‘cunning mode of speech’ and thereby force us either to say yes or no – hoping to get the positive answer.⁴²

And as Lübcke adds, Kierkegaard’s use of indirect communication is not just simply about presenting a choice between being and not-being Christian, but that he also wants his recipients to confirm the religious life (i.e., becoming a Christian), which is a kind of choice. And since confirming the religious life is itself a choice that the recipient needs to make,

⁴⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 133.

⁴¹ Lübcke, "Kierkegaard and Indirect Communication," 33.

⁴² *Ibid.* 36.

Lübcke thinks that Kierkegaard must also present the other side of the choice, which is to decline the religious life.

Following from above, Lübcke makes clear that insofar as indirect communication presents two conflicting choices (i.e., the dialectical knot) – to be or not to be a Christian – indirect communication must *contain* content. As Lübcke claims:

Without this semantic content it would be impossible to generate contradictions, indeed, without the same semantic content it would be impossible for Kierkegaard's pseudonyms to present the different descriptions and evaluations of the world, which he wants us to choose between.⁴³

Then, immediately after presenting the above claim, Lübcke draws our attention to Kierkegaard's fourfold schema, pointing out that indirect communication as a device for communicating ethical matters has no 'object' (i.e., communicative content) – Lübcke writes: "with indirect communications about ethical matters, the object is cancelled out".⁴⁴ And as Lübcke points out, this *prima facie* contradicts his claim that indirect communication contains content. However, as Lübcke explains, what Kierkegaard meant was not that indirect communication contains no content. Rather, imparting content is pointless to an audience that already possess knowledge of how to live ethically – as Lübcke claims:

In ethics, the object is cancelled out because everyone already 'knows' what is right and wrong, and so there is simply nothing left to teach [...] That is, we do not cancel the object because there is no object, we cancel it because everyone 'knows' about it inasmuch as everyone 'knows' the ethical way of life. And given the universality of this knowledge, it would be pointless to spell it out.⁴⁵

And so, as Lübcke claims, whilst indirect communication contains content, indirect communication does not impart content because there is no point in imparting content.

⁴³ Ibid. 34.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

2.2 Criticisms Of Lübcke's Account

Firstly, I find Lübcke's way of making the distinction between direct and indirect communication unconvincing. He thinks indirect communication is distinct from direct communication in that *only* the former can achieve the perlocutionary effect of bringing the recipient to the point of making a choice between becoming or not becoming a Christian. However, if the concern is to present a choice, then surely, this can be achieved by means of direct communication, like so: 'You can either choose to live a Christian life or reject it'. The possibility of communicating this choice directly shows that Lübcke has attributed to indirect communication a goal that is essentially achievable by direct communication. In this connection, there is no indication that indirect communication, as Kierkegaard conceives it, aims at bringing the recipient to the point of making a choice, much less a religious choice. Rather, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the aim of indirect communication is to dispel illusions. Of course, Lübcke could insist that a choice follows *after* dispelling an illusion – namely, the choice between remaining in or leaving the illusion. Supposing this is the case, it still remains true that the *primary* aim of indirect communication is to dispel illusions, and that this is a key distinguishing feature of indirect communication.

Secondly, although I agree with Lübcke that indirect communication contains content, Lübcke neglects many details that are crucial. For one, Lübcke does not make any attempts to explain or defend Kierkegaard's bold and controversial philosophical claim that humans already possess ethical knowledge of what is right or wrong. Moreover, I disagree with Lübcke's understanding of indirect communication as being objectless – that objectless does *not*, as Lübcke take it, signify the *meaninglessness* of conveying knowledge to an audience that already has knowledge. Instead, Kierkegaard's conception of indirect communication as objectless should be understood as targeting the *telos* of indirect communication, that although indirect communication contains content, it does *not* aim to

didactically impart content, where this involves teaching some knowledge or information to the recipient, or convincing the recipient of some doctrine or theses, and so on. This is evident, I argue, in Anti-Climacus' conception of a dialectical knot, which brings me to my third and final criticism against Lübcke.

Whilst I agree with Lübcke that indirect communication *contains* content, I argue that the 'knot' of dialectical knot, cannot, as Lübcke suggests, be an obvious matter of choosing between two transparent choices: to be Christian or not to be. Certainly, the term '*dialectical*' suggests that something propositional or conceptual is at hand, thus indicating the presence of communicative content. However, the way in which Anti-Climacus builds up this notion of a '*knot*' indicate that the propositions and concepts are somehow entangled with one another in such a way that makes the communication becomes a puzzle, a knot of which the recipient must untie for himself.⁴⁶ And so, while this notion of a dialectical knot signals that indirect communication contains content, it also indicates that indirect communication's aim is *not* to impart content didactically, not even implicitly, nor does it impart a choice, as Lübcke claims. Lastly, Lübcke also does not make any mention of indirect communication as a doubly-reflected mode of communication, and the artistry that it involves. More on this will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

⁴⁶ Consider in this regard Aristotle's image of a 'knot' to capture the notion of a philosophical 'aporia', i.e., problem or difficulty in his *Metaphysics* III.1, 995a29–33.

3. The Bypass Interpretation

How should one communicate to another that they are not who they think they are? The pain of this problem is entertainingly captured and brought out in reality television programmes. Consider the popular television series ‘Kitchen Nightmares’, starring, celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay. As soon as Ramsay tries to convince restauranteurs that they are not who they think they are (e.g., good or responsible restauranteurs), the restauranteurs immediately deny Ramsay’s criticisms vehemently. As we shall see, proponents of the Bypass Interpretation think something analogous is at work between Kierkegaard and his target audience.

As I have mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, proponents of the Bypass Interpretation situate Kierkegaard’s use of indirect communication on Kierkegaard’s task of dispelling the illusion of Christendom. Roughly, the illusion of Christendom denotes the situation where people take themselves to be Christians when they are not. And according to proponents of the Bypass Interpretation, Kierkegaard needed to use indirect communication to dispel such illusion by criticising his deluded recipients in such a way that *bypasses* their defence mechanisms. On this model of understanding, indirect communication is essentially comparable to something like Gricean implicature, where some information is imparted implicitly.

In this section, my main goal is to critically assess the accounts of Elin Fredsted, John Mullen, and Jon Stewart. Now, in order to make it apparent that the three critics above construe indirect communication as functioning something like Gricean implicature, I think it will be fruitful to begin by providing a broad overview of Grice’s account of implicature before I reconstruct the three critics’ accounts. After that, I will raise objections against the Bypass Interpretation in anticipation for the next chapter, where I will critically engage with

the Bypass Interpretation's underlying assumptions concerning Kierkegaard's target audience, as well as the illusion plaguing his audience.

3.1 An Overview of Gricean Implicature

In Grice's theory of linguistics, the term 'implicature' generally denotes utterances or any other forms of expression in which the intended meaning differs from the literal or immediate meaning of what is expressed. In other words, it is a feature of implicature that it communicates *more* than what is directly expressed. For example, when person A comes late to the meeting and person B says 'Well, someone is early' – in this scenario, the immediate meaning of person B's utterance is that person A is early. But given the context, one can infer that the intended meaning behind B's utterance is that A is in fact late. In this sense, B has communicated a meaning that is different from what he meant literally, thus imparting some information implicitly.

Central to Grice's theory of implicature is the 'Cooperative Principle' and its four maxims, which is essentially Grice's framework for understanding the rules that communicators and recipients must cooperatively observe in order to communicate effectively.⁴⁷ As we shall see, Grice thinks these rules are important in predicting and understanding instances of implicature.

Now, as Grice conceives, there are essentially four categories under the Cooperative Principle, each with its maxims and/or supermaxims. They are listed as follows:

- 1) Quantity – One should provide just enough information (no more and no less) to ensure clarity
- 2) Quality – With good evidence, one should always aim to say what one believes to be true (Supermaxim = "Try to make your contribution one that is true")
- 3) Relation – One should ensure that one's expression is relevant to the topic of conversation ("Be relevant")

⁴⁷ Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Harvard University Press, 1989), 29. Note however, that Grice was acutely aware of the fact that his 'Cooperative Principle' does not necessarily apply to all types of conversational exchanges, as Grice reflects: "For a time, I was attracted by the idea that observance of the Cooperative Principle and the maxims, in a talk exchange, could be thought of as a quasi-contractual matter [...] But while some such quasi-contractual basis as this may apply to some cases, there are too many types of exchange, like quarreling and letter writing, that it fails to fit comfortably".

- 4) Manner – The *way* in which one expresses one’s message must be clear (“Be perspicuous”).⁴⁸

So, with the Cooperative Principle and its maxims laid out, let us put Grice’s framework into perspective with the following illustration. Imagine a person who is lost and asks someone for directions. In order for the communication to work, the person giving directions must provide just enough information to the recipient in a manner that is clear and concise. For instance, the person giving directions must clearly map out the route that the lost person must take in order to arrive at the desired destination, along with nearby landmarks and street names. To provide anything beyond that would simply be a distraction (e.g., the history of the location or its population).

In our example, the person providing information does not give more than what is required to ensure that the communication does not go off-topic – he thereby observes the first and third maxim (Quantity and Relation). The person also communicates in an unambiguous manner (he maps out the route and gives nearby landmarks and street names), thereby observing the fourth maxim (Manner). Finally, the person giving instructions does so with the conviction that what he says is truthful, that he does not say with the intent to deceive. What we have here is regular conversation in which one person informs the other to the best of his knowledge. But what we are interested in is how Grice’s Cooperative Principle predicts instances of implicature. I shall detail this in the below.

Now, in order to reliably judge whether a piece of communication is an instance of implicature or not, Grice thinks one must observe whether the communication at hand ‘flouts’ or ‘exploits’ the maxims of the Cooperative Principle. For instance, one can exploit the first maxim by communicating more or less information than necessary or, exploit the fourth maxim by being intentionally ambiguous. Here, it must be noted, however, that flouting or

⁴⁸ Ibid. 28.

exploiting a maxim of the Cooperative Principle is not just a matter of deviating from them or violating them, for that would simply amount to something like plain lying or misinformation. Rather, to flout or exploit a maxim with the intent of deploying implicature is to purposefully violate the maxims as a way of informing the recipient of something. Further to this, Grice claims that we can generally differentiate cases of implicature from lying and misleading when the communicator does *not* give the recipient any room to think that the communicator is trying to lie or mislead – as Grice claims:

A general pattern for the working out of a conversational implicature might be given as follows: “He has said that *p*; there is no reason to suppose that he is not observing the maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle; he could not be doing this unless he thought that *q*; he knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that the supposition that he thinks *q* is required; he has done nothing to stop me thinking that *q*; he intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that *q*; and so he has implicated that *q*”.⁴⁹

And so, implicature is deployed on the account that the communicator satisfies two conditions:

- 1) That the communicator purposefully violates the maxims of the Cooperative Principle with the intent to inform and not to deceive or mislead.
- 2) That the communicator does not give the recipient the impression that the communicator is communicating with the intent to lie or mislead.

Now, before I move on to exposit the three critics’ accounts, it will certainly help to provide another illustration of implicature in action; let us consider Grice’s famous example of the recommendation letter. In writing Mr. X’s letter of recommendation for a job in philosophy, Mr. X’s referee writes:

Dear Sir, Mr. X’s command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid. 31.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 33.

As Grice argues, despite the lack of detail concerning Mr. X's suitability for the job, the recipient must at least assume that the referee is trying to be informative, otherwise the referee would not have written in the first place. The referee also cannot be ignorant of Mr. X's ability, since the referee is Mr. X's teacher. By the same token, the referee is most likely aware that he is giving less information than what is required. So, based on all these considerations, the recipient of the letter must conclude the following: given the context of the communication (i.e., a letter of recommendation for a job in philosophy), and that the referee makes no mention whatsoever of Mr. X's abilities as a philosopher, what is implied then is that Mr. X is not suitable for the job – as Grice asserts:

[The referee or teacher] cannot be opting out [of the 'Cooperative Principle'], since if he wished to be uncooperative, why write at all? He cannot be unable, through ignorance, to say more, since the man is his pupil; moreover, he knows that more information than this is wanted. He must, therefore, be wishing to impart information that he is reluctant to write down. This supposition is tenable only if he thinks Mr. X is no good at philosophy. This, then, is what he is implicating.⁵¹

Here, Grice's example brings home to what I mentioned in the beginning, namely, that it is characteristic of implicature that one means something different than what was literally communicated. In doing so, some information is implicitly imparted.

⁵¹ Ibid.

3.2 *Fredsted, Mullen, and Stewart*

In what follows, I will reconstruct the three critics' account of indirect communication and point out their similarities with Grice's implicature where present; any critical remarks will come in the next subsection. Amongst the three critics, Elin Fredsted's account stands out as being the most implicature-like, not least because Fredsted makes a direct comparison between Kierkegaard's indirect communication with Grice's theory of implicature. As Fredsted understands, both indirect communication and implicature are forms of "non-straightforward and ambiguous communication" that elicits the recipient's interpretation concerning the meaning of the communication.⁵² This is evident from Fredsted's following claim:

...the two perceptions of communication discussed here can be seen to have a minimal common denominator: there is a degree of agreement between Grice's conversational implicature and Kierkegaard's thesis concerning indirect and ambiguous communication, viz. *potential vagueness*, which creates a situation in which the recipient must interpret.⁵³

Fredsted's conception of indirect communication here raises the following questions: in what way is indirect communication a form of ambiguous or vague communication, and what purpose could such communication serve? I want to begin by addressing the latter.

According to Fredsted's reading of *Point of View*, Kierkegaard

affirms that indirect, ambiguous language is the form of communication best suited for serious communication and to make the recipient aware and able to make his own choice – independently of Kierkegaard.⁵⁴

By 'serious communication', Fredsted denotes communication that makes the recipient hermeneutically active, which Fredsted thinks is crucial in enabling the recipient to freely make their own choice. This is evident in Fredsted's comment on direct communication, which Fredsted thinks "does not take the recipient seriously, as it neither activates him nor

⁵² Elin Fredsted, "On Semantic and Pragmatic Ambiguity," *Journal of pragmatics* 30, no. 5 (1998): 539.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 531.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 529.

gives him the freedom to make his own choice”.⁵⁵ Now, it is obvious that Fredsted thinks direct communication is limited in enabling the recipient to freely make some sort of decision, and to which indirect communication must come to the rescue.

To understand what this decision or choice involves, Fredsted directs our attention to indirect communication’s role in Kierkegaard’s authorship, which is to dispel illusions. And in Fredsted’s view, indirect communication is able to dispel illusions by ambiguously conveying a ‘way out’ of the illusion – as Fredsted claims:

The intention of [indirect] communication, then, is to create a challenge to the recipient’s unequivocal attitude to life, which first comes under attack with the assistance of the ambiguous alternative contained in the message, which also contains pointers towards a new self-realisation.⁵⁶

We can readily infer from Fredsted’s claim above that the choice confronting the recipient of indirect communication is this: to remain in the illusion or to take up the “ambiguous alternative contained in the message, which also contains pointers towards a new self-realisation”.⁵⁷ Furthermore, it is also implied that the deluded recipient must freely exercise their agency in choosing to depart from their illusory way of life, which is why in Fredsted’s view, an ambiguous non-forceful communication is needed. But how, in Fredsted’s view, does Kierkegaard inform his recipients of this choice in an ambiguous manner? According to Fredsted, the ambiguity consists in Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms – as Fredsted asserts:

The ‘aesthetic’ writings are published under pseudonyms and characterised by an ambiguous and indirect style.⁵⁸

And insofar as Fredsted takes Kierkegaard’s indirect communication as a means of ambiguously communicating a non-illusory way of living through the use of pseudonyms,

⁵⁵ Ibid. 540.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 530.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 529.

Fredsted thinks that “Kierkegaard’s writings breach several of Grice's maxims”, much like implicature.⁵⁹

Next, we look at John Mullen’s account of indirect communication. Central to Mullen’s interpretation is his view that the illusion of Christendom is best characterised as a *lifestyle*, albeit an illusory one – as Mullen asserts:

It was not *theories* against which Kierkegaard was to do battle, it was *styles of living*...which were also illusions.⁶⁰

Then, as Mullen claims, it is part and parcel of a lifestyle that there are mechanisms for dismissing criticisms:

The point is that any serious style of living has a technique for explaining away the critic by treating him as part of the problem.⁶¹

As Mullen’s claim above makes clear, direct criticisms of a lifestyle will fail because it anticipates criticisms against itself and will therefore treat criticisms as problematic rather than constructive. And in Mullen’s view, resistance to direct criticism occurs because a lifestyle is intimately connected with the individual who adopts the lifestyle. For this reason, to attack a person’s lifestyle is to essentially attack the *person* who adopts the lifestyle – as Mullen explains:

Our dearest values and judgements are elements of ourselves which we need very badly. To feel them challenged seriously is to experience something frightful. What is at stake when our style of living is challenged is a large part of our self-image, including our self-esteem; and this is a large part of ourself. It is no mystery then that if we sense such a challenge, we will respond with anxiety, and with our ‘explaining away’ procedures.⁶²

As we can see, Mullen holds that a lifestyle encompasses or reflects an individual’s values and ways of making judgements, all of which constitute an individual’s understanding of himself. And so, on Mullen’s model, direct communication is limited with respect to

⁵⁹ Ibid. 531.

⁶⁰ John Mullen, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy: Self Deception and Cowardice in the Present Age* (University Press of America, 1995), 36.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

dispelling an illusion (or lifestyle) because direct communication wounds the recipient's self-image and self-esteem. So, how then, does Mullen think indirect communication overcome such limitation?

Essentially, Mullen thinks that indirect communication works by *overcoming* or *avoiding* the recipient's resistance – as Mullen asserts:

For such a challenge to work, therefore, it must be able to either *overcome* or to *avoid* these procedures [of explaining away].⁶³

The key word here is 'overcome' or 'avoid', which indicate a *bypassing* of the recipient's defence mechanisms. And according to Mullen, indirect communication is able to overcome or avoid the recipient's defences because it is basically a form of ironic communication. As Mullen explains, to communicate ironically is to speak in such a way that one is uncommitted to the meaning of one's speech:

To *speak* with irony is, in general, to be detached from your meanings, to intend something different from the meanings of the words employed.⁶⁴

Mullen then gives us an illustration of what it is like to communicate ironically – the illustration runs as follows:

For example, you enter a room in which there is a sumptuous spread of food. Your young child blurts out, 'Wow, look at all that food'. He does not speak ironically. You, however, do, when you casually note, 'I see you've thrown together a little snack.'⁶⁵

Following his illustration, Mullen gives the following explanation:

It is ironic speech first because you have been explicitly conscious of the mode of communication, of your place in the situation, and of the fact that you stated the reverse of your true meaning while knowing that your true meaning would be understood. You are in a sense uncommitted to the impression or meaning your phrases would have.⁶⁶

Here, Mullen's conception of indirect communication clearly resembles Grice's implicature in *two* important ways. Firstly, that the meaning of what the communicator intends is different

⁶³ Ibid. 36-7.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 37.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

than that which he directly communicates. And secondly, the communicator expects that the recipient can receive the true meaning of what the communicator intends to communicate by referring to the context of the communication.

This brings us to Jon Stewart's account, which claims that indirect communication involves the use of codes. The idea is that Kierkegaard addresses his opponents through the use ofonyms and key words as opposed to addressing them directly by name – as Stewart asserts:

When [Kierkegaard] wanted to criticise one of his contemporaries, he often did so indirectly; instead of using the names of his opponents, he made use ofonyms, such as Dr. Hjortespring (which he used to refer to Heiberg)...Just as Kierkegaard used pseudonyms in an attempt to remain anonymous as an author, so also he usedonyms for his intellectual enemies in order to give them at least a semblance of anonymity. He also availed himself of a handful of key phrases or terms which he clearly associated with particular individuals. This was perhaps a part of the strategy of indirect communication. The key terms andonyms functioned as a kind of code for Kierkegaard's contemporary readers, who were doubtless able to identify the real targets of the criticism by means of them.⁶⁷

Similar to Mullen, Stewart also sees Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication as motivated by a consideration to avoid upsetting his recipients. As Stewart claims, Kierkegaard's deployment of indirect communication is to maintain a degree of respect for the targets of his criticisms, and in this connection, to "avoid a scandal".⁶⁸ And like Fredsted, Stewart thinks Kierkegaard's use of pseudonym is integral to his overall strategy of indirect communication – that the pseudonyms, as Stewart claims, enable Kierkegaard to remain anonymous, thus allowing Kierkegaard to launch his criticisms in a non-direct or more discreet manner. In this regard, Stewart thinks that Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus and his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* play an important part, as we shall see.

Against the trend of reading the *Postscript* as a polemic against Hegel, Stewart argues that the *Postscript*'s true target is not so much Hegel himself than with the Danish

⁶⁷ Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42-43.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 454.

Hegelians of Kierkegaard's time, such as Hans Lassen Martensen and the aforementioned, Johan Ludvig Heiberg – as Stewart asserts:

... I would like to argue that the *Postscript* is primarily concerned not so much with Hegel himself but rather with Kierkegaard's old enemies Martensen and, perhaps to a lesser degree, Heiberg, two of the chief exponents of Danish Hegelianism.⁶⁹

Stewart's reasoning is this: that despite the *Postscript*'s numerous references to Hegel's philosophy, with key words such as “the system, the method, world history, and mediation”,

one is surprised to find that there are virtually no quotations from Hegel's primary texts, no textual analyses, and when Hegel's name does come up, it is usually incidental and not in the context of any substantive discussion of his thought.⁷⁰

That is, Stewart thinks the lack of engagement with Hegel's primary works should lead readers of the *Postscript* to draw the following conclusion: that the references “are generally intended to stand for Hegelianism or some picture of it”.⁷¹

Then, Stewart goes on to specify theonyms or terms that Climacus uses to discreetly criticise Martensen – these include, *inter alia*, “a Hegelian” or “*Privatdocent*”.⁷² Stewart identifies *two* main reasons behind Kierkegaard's attack on Martensen (via the pseudonym Climacus) – the first is more biographical and the second is more theological. Concerning the first reason, Stewart claims that Kierkegaard's criticism against Martensen derives from the former's jealousy over latter's achievements:

During the years before the publication of the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard's enmity for Martensen reached new heights. There are a number of personal reasons that can explain his animosity. While Kierkegaard was passed over for academic posts, Martensen was appointed to the Royal Danish Society of Scholars in 1841 and in the same year received the position of professor extraordinarius and later in 1850 the position of ordinarius. In short, Kierkegaard was embittered about the lack of recognition that he received, while his rival was showered with praise.⁷³

And as for the second, more theological reason, Stewart asserts that,

⁶⁹ Ibid. 454.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 453-54.

⁷¹ Ibid. 454.

⁷² Ibid. 457-59.

⁷³ Ibid. 456.

Kierkegaard saw in the figure of Martensen, who began as a university professor and became a priest, an inappropriate and indeed unholy mixture of secular philosophy and Christianity. To his mind, this mixture compromises and corrupts the true nature of Christian faith.⁷⁴

Now, unlike the two critics discussed previously, Stewart's methodology is obviously more biographical. And on this note of dissimilarity, it is also noticeable that Stewart does not situate his discussion of indirect communication on Kierkegaard's task of dispelling the illusion of Christendom. Rather, Stewart's account of indirect communication focuses more on Kierkegaard's polemic against his intellectual contemporaries. But just like the two previous critics, Stewart's account also bears resemblance to Gricean implicature in that Stewart thinks criticisms are imparted, albeit implicitly through the use ofonyms and other key terms associated with the recipients. Moreover, just as recipients of implicature can receive the implied message by inferring from the context of the communication, Stewart thinks that readers of the *Postscript* can recognise the polemic against Martensen by inferring from theonyms and key terms – as Stewart claims: “although these criticisms were veiled, contemporary readers had no difficulty recognising Martensen as their target”.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid. 456-57.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 455.

3.3 Criticisms Of the Bypass Interpretation

Following from our exposition above, I want to interrogate the Bypass Interpretation by first questioning the effectiveness of the strategy proposed by Mullen and Stewart. Recall, Stewart argues that Kierkegaard's indirect communication involves the use ofonyms and key terms, which can allow Kierkegaard to criticise his intellectual opponents without causing a scandal. But given Stewart accepts that recipients (e.g., Martensen and Heiberg) of the communication know that they are being criticised despite theonyms and associated key terms, it is not immediately obvious how the use ofonyms and key terms, then, is effective in relation to the goal of avoiding a scandal. If the targets know that they are being criticised, then presumably, a negative reaction will ensue. The same concern applies to Mullen's account as well. As mentioned, Mullen construes indirect communication as ironic communication, where one person utters something with a hidden meaning beneath what is directly imparted; the aim is to impart criticisms whilst bypassing the recipient's 'explaining away' procedures.⁷⁶ But if as Mullen claims, the recipients are able to retrieve the intended meaning by inferring from the context of the communication, this suggests that the recipient will become aware that their illusory lifestyle is under attack. And if that is the case, would the recipient not explain away the criticisms anyway? If so, why bother communicating ironically in the first place?

In response to the above objections, one could defend the Bypass Interpretation by posing *two* counters. The first involves a slight modification of the goal of indirect communication – that rather than imparting criticisms in such a way that completely bypasses the recipient's defences, the goal is to impart criticisms with the prospect of *minimising* the damage inflicted upon the recipient. In other words, the goal is to criticise the recipient in such a way that makes the criticism easier to accept. The second counter is to argue that even

⁷⁶ Mullen, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy: Self Deception and Cowardice in the Present Age*, 36-7.

if the effectiveness of the strategies propounded by Mullen or Stewart are doubtful in relation to the intended goal, this does not necessarily mean that indirect communication does not impart criticisms implicitly. What is needed in this case, perhaps, is to find an interpretative strategy of indirect communication that sees indirect communication as imparting criticisms implicitly *and* effectively. In what follows, I will argue why Bypass Interpretation still cannot work as a viable interpretative strategy even with these two counters in place.

In response to the first counter, I argue that not only does Kierkegaard make no mention of indirect communication as minimising damage, but that he even makes explicitly clear that indirect communication works by *wounding* the recipient. As I will show below, insofar as indirect communication is Kierkegaard's device for engaging polemically with his audience, the polemic does not, as proponents of the Bypass Interpretation argue, work by manoeuvring around the recipient's defence mechanisms. Turning to his autobiography, Kierkegaard describes indirect communication as a "corrosive" for "remov[ing] the delusion", since the "delusion is an obstacle" to direct communication.⁷⁷ As Kierkegaard elaborates, to corrode the recipient's illusion involves deceiving the recipient into truth, which Kierkegaard claims he draws from Socrates – as Kierkegaard writes,

One can deceive a person out of what is true, and – to recall old Socrates – one can deceive a person into what is true. Yes, in only this way can a deluded person actually be brought into what is true – by deceiving him.⁷⁸

Note that this idea of deceiving the other into truth is crucial to Kierkegaard's conception of indirect communication, specifically the artistry involved in executing indirect communication. But we will not discuss this in detail until we reach Chapter Four. For our present discussion, I simply want to draw attention to the description of indirect communication as a corrosive, which strongly indicate that indirect communication does not

⁷⁷ Ibid. 54.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 53.

work by finding its way around the recipient's defences, but rather by tearing that defence down along with the illusion.

In this connection, I think it is integral to indirect communication's aim of dispelling illusions that it offends its recipients. Evidence for this can be found once again in Kierkegaard's *Point of View*, where he claims that indirect communication works by compelling the recipient to become aware of living in an illusion, which in turn compels the recipient to judge himself. And in compelling the recipient to become aware and judge, Kierkegaard anticipates the recipient's infuriation. He asserts:

By compelling [the recipient] to become aware, I succeed in compelling him to judge. Now he judges. But what he judges is not in my power. Perhaps he judges the very opposite of what I desire. Furthermore, that he was compelled to judge perhaps makes him infuriated, ragingly infuriated – infuriated with the cause, with me – and perhaps I become the victim of my daring venture. To compel people to become aware and judge is namely the law for true martyrdom.⁷⁹

Here, the comparison between indirect communication and martyrdom clearly indicates that offending the recipient is an expected outcome, rather than something to be avoided. In fact, the recipient's infuriation is welcomed, since the recipient's infuriation is a potential indicator that he is made aware of living in an illusion, and that the recipient is beginning to judge himself.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard also openly criticised some proclaimers of Christianity in Christendom for shying away from the task of making their audience aware that they are living in an illusion – as Kierkegaard writes:

The objection I have repeatedly made privately against those who ordinarily proclaim Christianity in Christendom is that they, themselves surrounded and safeguarded by all too many illusions, do not have the courage to make people aware. That is, they do not have sufficient self-denial in relation to their cause [...] Therefore they do not actually risk going out among the people or abandoning illusions in order to make a genuine idea-impression, because they have a dim notion that it is truly a dangerous matter to make people aware. Mendaciously to make them aware, that is, to bow and scrape before them, to flatter them, to ask for their attention and lenient judgment, to submit – the truth – to balloting well, this involves no danger, at least not here in the world, where on the contrary

⁷⁹ Ibid. 50.

it involves every advantage; but yet it perhaps does involve the danger of eventually failing in eternity.⁸⁰

Here, I want to draw attention to Kierkegaard's use of the plural 'illusions' – that the proclaimers of his time are “surrounded and safeguarded by all too many illusions”.⁸¹ On the face of it, the use of plural seems confusing, especially considering that Kierkegaard has only introduced and discussed *one* illusion throughout his discussion, namely, the illusion of claiming to be a Christian when one is not. But given the context of Kierkegaard's criticism, I think what Kierkegaard means is that the proclaimers here have an added layer to their illusion – that in addition to thinking themselves as Christians when they are not, they also think of themselves as genuinely proclaiming Christianity to the public when they are not. As Kierkegaard sharply objects, such proclaimers are in fact “failing in eternity” because their proclamation and attempts at making the public aware is nothing but flattery.⁸² In other words, they are not true proclaimers insofar as true Christian proclamation involves exercising enough self-denial to make the public aware of their illusion without being afraid of the public's condemnation. This clearly harks back to Kierkegaard's association between indirect communication and martyrdom. As such, even if we grant that indirect communication is used for imparting criticisms – which I think it does not – it cannot be used in such a way that avoids or minimises offence. This train of criticism will be taken up further in the next chapter.

Now, as for the second counter, I argue that regardless of whether indirect communication is supposed to minimise the recipient's damage or not, the fact that proponents of the Bypass Interpretation construe indirect communication as imparting criticism discreetly already violates the strict distinction that Kierkegaard established between direct and indirect communication. In what follows, I want to present Katherine Ramsland's

⁸⁰ Ibid. 51.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

criticism against the Bypass Interpretation. In her paper titled, ‘Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication’, part of Ramsland’s goal was to show that indirect communication should not be understood as “something like a ‘Gricean implicature’”.⁸³ In order to show how indirect communication is distinct from implicature, Ramsland begins by reconstructing Grice’s account of implicature. And at the end of her reconstruction, Ramsland summarises as follows:

For Grice, implication appears to be an unstated but statable message which is carried in some way in the context of something which is explicitly expressed.⁸⁴

The key here for Ramsland is that an implied message is an unstated message that *can* in fact be made explicit if so desired – hence, the implied message is statable.

Following her summary of Grice’s implicature, Ramsland argues that in so far as there is a message to be imparted from one party to another (even if only implicitly), implicature is, strictly speaking, a form of direct communication. As Ramsland points out, the problem with the Bypass Interpretation is that it misconstrues the distinction between direct and indirect communication as a distinction between “explicit and implicit forms of expression,” respectively.⁸⁵ Ramsland demonstrates her point using Grice’s example of the recommendation letter, which we have also looked at earlier – Ramsland argues:

The ‘unspoken message’ that [Mr. X] Is no good in philosophy can be brought into direct expression. Thus, the ‘Grice implicature’ is, in principle, directly expressible, even if not expressed but only implied. As such, it is not indirect communication.⁸⁶

Here, I think Ramsland launches a compelling criticism on the Bypass Interpretation, as it brings to the fore that imparting knowledge or information implicitly is not equivalent to having no knowledge or information to impart at all, the latter of which Kierkegaard was at pains to show in his lecture notes concerning indirect communication. However, I must re-

⁸³ Katherine Ramsland, "Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48, no. 2 (1987): 327.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 329.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 334.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

emphasise here that neither Ramsland nor myself propound the idea that indirect communication *contains* no content – i.e., that indirect communication is unintelligible or nonsensical communication. That although indirect communication contains content, it does *not* aim to impart any knowledge or information to the recipient, not even implicitly.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented and discussed three possible but ultimately unviable interpretative strategies for understanding indirect communication. I have shown that these strategies are objectionable, as they break the strict distinction that Kierkegaard establishes between direct and indirect communication in his lecture notes on communication; these strategies break the distinction either by:

- 1) Attributing to indirect communication a goal that is essentially achievable through direct communication.
- 2) Construing indirect communication in terms of direct communication, by seeing the former as imparting knowledge or information, albeit in an implicit manner.

For instance, in the case of the Religious Language Interpretation and the Bypass Interpretation, indirect communication is understood as a device for imparting some knowledge or information in a non-direct way. And in the case of the Religious Choice Interpretation, indirect communication is understood as a device for presenting to the recipient a choice between accepting or rejecting Christianity, something that one can clearly achieve by means of direct communication.

So, I hope to have shown in this chapter that if we are to build a cogent conception of indirect communication, one that properly adheres to Kierkegaard's schema for understanding the distinction between direct and indirect communication, then our conception of indirect communication must avoid the two problems listed above. Now, as a first step to showing what indirect communication is, it is crucial in the next chapter that we critically discuss the considerations that motivate Kierkegaard's deployment of indirect communication. To do this, I will carry some of our criticisms against the Bypass Interpretation onto the next chapter, especially concerning the idea that Kierkegaard used indirect communication to avoid offending his recipients. One crucial underlying assumption of the Bypass

Interpretation is that Kierkegaard's deluded recipients *know* that they are in an illusion when they call themselves Christians, and that exposing them for a wrong that they are aware of would therefore, upset them.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Critics such as Antony Aumann see these terms ('illusion' and 'delusion') as interchangeable. However, throughout this thesis, I will treat them as separate concepts. As I understand, 'illusion' denotes the phenomenon *en masse* – that masses and masses of people in nineteenth-century Denmark think of themselves as Christian when they are not. 'Delusion', on the other hand, is targeted at the individual level – that the individual thinks of himself as a Christian when he is not. This is evident in Kierkegaard's claim that the "illusion is worsened by the very delusion that one is a Christian", indicating a separation of the two terms. Please see, Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 48; Antony Aumann, "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication, the Crowd, and a Monstrous Illusion," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Point of View*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Mercer University Press, 2010), 30.

Chapter 2 The Purpose of Indirect Communication: Re-Examining the Illusion of Christendom

In the previous chapter where I criticised the Bypass Interpretation, I gave reasons for why the considerations motivating Kierkegaard's deployment of indirect communication *cannot* be one of avoiding offence. I showed that, on the contrary, indirect communication as Kierkegaard conceives it works precisely by *wounding* the deluded recipient. As I understand, the above misunderstanding concerning Kierkegaard's motivation comes from a misunderstanding of Kierkegaard's target audience and the nature of the illusion plaguing his audience. According to this misunderstanding, Kierkegaard was writing to an audience who *knows* that they are intentionally deceiving themselves when they call themselves Christians, but stubbornly refuses to admit that they are doing so, for fear of making changes and losing face. Such misunderstanding essentially sees Kierkegaard's target audience as suffering from self-deception understood in the traditional sense of intentionally deceiving oneself that p ('I am a Christian') when one knows very well that $\sim p$ ('I am not a Christian'). On this misunderstanding of Kierkegaard's target audience, direct communication is seen as limited because it exposes a wrong that the recipient is fully aware of and is fully motivated to maintain, which naturally upsets the deluded recipient.

In my view, this reading essentially downplays the complexity of the illusion that Kierkegaard thinks is plaguing his audience, which in turn leads to a misunderstanding of direct communication's limitations, and also consequently, a misunderstanding of Kierkegaard's motivations for deploying indirect communication. The main aim of this chapter, therefore, is to clarify the considerations motivating Kierkegaard's deployment of indirect communication in order to develop a better understanding of indirect communication than those I ruled out in the previous chapter.

This chapter will begin by giving reasons for why one might view Kierkegaard's target audience as exemplifying the kind of self-deception highlighted above (i.e.,

intentionally deceiving oneself of p , despite fully knowing that $\sim p$). I will do this with reference to Antony Aumann's analysis of Kierkegaard's target audience. Aumann takes it that Kierkegaard's target audience suffer from the kind of self-deception described. I also want to bring to light the following point: that the Bypass Interpretation is driven by the understanding that Kierkegaard was writing to those who know that they are not Christians and are well motivated to cover this fact.

Against the above view, I argue that the illusion is better characterised as a case of self-blindness, which calls for primitive thinking as a remedy. Crucially, I apply Katherine Ramsland's model of self-blindness, showing that Kierkegaard's target audience exemplify the kind of self-blindness Ramsland highlights. Essentially, Ramsland's model of self-blindness claims that a self-blinded person is one who is not first-personally present with themselves *qua* agent, and for this reason, they lack a first-personal awareness of how they exercise their agency or how they live. And as I will show, *two* forms of self-estrangement constitute the problem of self-blindness, namely:

- 1) The Confusion the Categories (i.e., the categories of the 'Aesthetic-Intellectual' and the 'Ethico-Religious') and,
- 2) The Lack of Primitivity

As I will show, the categories are essentially borderlines limiting the appropriate modes of thought and inquiry for various topics or subject matters. For instance, any subject matter pertaining to 'what it means to be human' (existential) or 'how one ought to live as a human' (agential) fall within the rubric of the 'Ethico-Religious'; crucially, the matter of becoming a Christian for Kierkegaard belong in such category. Furthermore, Kierkegaard also thinks that proper thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters involves self-examining, wherein one examines how the matter at hand relates to one's existence and agency *qua* human. Through this process of self-examination, one is brought a first-personal awareness of how one lives.

Such mode of thought and inquiry, as we shall see, essentially constitutes what Kierkegaard calls primitive thinking. On the other hand, for any subject matters belonging to the category of the Aesthetic-Intellectual, it is appropriate to think and inquire them apart from one's existence and agency *qua* human (i.e., disinterestedly). The confusion of Kierkegaard's audience, then, is to take up the matter of what it means to be Christian in a disinterested manner.

Then, I raise and address the following question: why do Kierkegaard's target audience take up a disinterested stance in relation to Christianity? As I will show, the confusion of categories derives from what Kierkegaard calls a lack of primitivity, which he also calls 'dishonesty' or 'self-deception'. Importantly, however, lacking primitivity (understood as dishonesty or self-deception), is not a matter of intentionally deceiving oneself of p whilst knowing $\sim p$. Rather, lacking primitivity denotes the peculiar existential condition of evading the burdens of being oneself, a human being who is given make commitments and take responsibility for one's existence and agency. For this reason, it is also characteristic of those who lack primitivity to stand at a remove from their agency, or to lack a *personal* interest in ethico-religious matters, deflecting such matters to popular or public opinion.

Now, what the lack of primitivity calls for, Kierkegaard thinks, is a more 'primitive thinking', which is precisely the mode of thought and inquiry appropriate for ethico-religious matters. But crucially, as I will point out, Kierkegaard's concept of primitive thinking finds fuller development in what he calls 'double-reflection', a mode of thought and inquiry that attributed to Socrates; this Socratic style of thinking is discussed most extensively by his pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which we will look at in detail in the next chapter. As we will see, double-reflection is a mode of thought and inquiry in which the thinker brings his abstract thought of what it means to be human or how one ought to live as a human into concrete relation with his own existence and

agency. And in doing so, the thinker at once engages in a process of self-examination, which then discloses first-personally how the thinker lives.

1. The Illusion as Self-Deception

The phenomenon of self-deception is one that runs deep in philosophical inquiry. This is attested by the numerous philosophical approaches to understanding the phenomenon. For our purposes, however, I will isolate and discuss one typical conception of self-deception, which sees self-deception in terms of “interpersonal deception”, where “A intentionally gets B to believe some proposition p , all the while knowing or believing truly that $\sim p$ ”.⁸⁸ On this typical conception of self-deception, self-deception apparently involves two key features:

1. That the self-deceiver must hold contradictory beliefs p and $\sim p$, and
2. That the self-deceiver must *intentionally* get himself to belief p despite knowing that $\sim p$.⁸⁹

Admittedly, the above conception raises many pressing philosophical questions – for instance, how is it even possible maintain contradictory beliefs whilst knowing that the beliefs are contradictory, or how is it possible to successfully deceive oneself whilst knowing one’s intention to deceive oneself? To address these issues would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Again, our purpose here is not to analyse or defend the above but to understand how one might find Kierkegaard’s target audience as exemplifying the kind of self-deception mentioned above.

Now, to see why one might be inclined to view Kierkegaard’s target audience as exemplifying self-deception, I want to turn now to the following passage from Kierkegaard’s autobiography, *Point of View for My Work as An Author*:

Everyone who in earnest and also with some clarity of vision considers what is called Christendom, or the condition in a so-called Christian country, must without any doubt immediately have serious misgivings. What does it mean, after all, that all these thousands and thousands as a matter of course call themselves Christians! These many, many people, of whom by far the great majority, according to everything that can be discerned, have their lives in entirely different categories, something one can ascertain by the simplest observation! People who perhaps never once go to church, never think about God, never

⁸⁸ “Self-Deception,” Ian Deweese-Boyd, accessed March 13, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/self-deception/>

⁸⁹ Ibid.

name his name except when they curse! People to whom it has never occurred that their lives should have some duty to God, people who either maintain that a certain civil impunity is the highest or do not find even this to be entirely necessary! Yet all these people, even those who insist that there is no God, they all are Christians, call themselves Christians, are recognized as Christians by the state, are buried as Christians by the Church, are discharged as Christians to eternity! That there must be an enormous underlying confusion here, a dreadful illusion, of that there can surely be no doubt.⁹⁰

Here, in the above, we have Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the illusion of Christendom. One immediately noticeable point concerns the traits and behaviour of those under such illusion – that people call themselves Christians despite not going to church, not thinking about God, not living as if they are accountable to God, and even going so far as to deny God's existence. Clearly, something has gone wrong, for there is glaringly wide gap between people's claim to be Christians and the kind of deeds that they exhibit. At this point, one might raise the following question: how is it even possible for anyone to call themselves Christian whilst exhibiting the kinds of behaviour mentioned above?

This kind of absurdity would naturally lead readers to draw the following conclusion: that the illusion simply cannot be a case of ignorance. Critic Antony Aumann agrees and puts the point accordingly,

...the facts of the matter are clear and no honest person could entertain the idea that all are Christians [...] Thus Kierkegaard thinks that the members of his audience *know better* than to do what they are doing. They know they should not call their way of living 'Christianity,' but they do so anyway.⁹¹

Certainly, there is solid textual evidence to suggest that Kierkegaard does not buy into the ignorance story either, especially when he draws a distinction between those who are "ignorant and must be given some knowledge", and those who are "under a delusion that must first be taken away".⁹² It was, of course, the latter that Kierkegaard was addressing.

But if Kierkegaard's audience are not ignorant of their inauthentic Christianity, why then, do they persist in calling themselves Christians? Why not change their ways such that

⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 42.

⁹¹ Aumann, "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication, the Crowd, and a Monstrous Illusion," 312.

⁹² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 54.

they can live genuine Christian lives? As Aumann suggests, “[Kierkegaard’s audience] *want* the illusion to remain in place” because they want to enjoy the pleasures of calling themselves Christian without having “to engage in the constant struggle and strain of the Christian life with its demand of self-denial and its promise of suffering”.⁹³ From this, Aumann concludes that “the illusion [*Sandsebedrag*] is actually a case of self-deception [*Selvbedrag*]”.⁹⁴

To support his reading, Aumann directs readers to the following passage from Kierkegaard’s religious discourse, *Judge For Yourself!*, where Kierkegaard explicitly calls out his audience for being self-deceived when they identify themselves as Christians – the passage runs as follows:

The world *wants* to be deceived; not only is it deceived – ah, then the matter would not be so dangerous! – but it *wants* to be deceived. Intensely, more intensely, more passionately perhaps than any witness to the truth has fought for the truth, the world fights to be deceived; it most gratefully rewards with applause, money, and prestige anyone who complies with its wish to be deceived. And perhaps the world has never needed to become sober as much as it does today.⁹⁵

With this passage in place, we can readily see why some critics are inclined to see Kierkegaard’s target audience as exemplifying the kind of self-deception we discussed above, where the self-deceiver *intentionally* deceives himself that *p*, despite knowing $\sim p$. Using this passage, one can make the following case: that Kierkegaard’s audience hold the belief that they are Christians (*p*), despite knowing that they are not Christians ($\sim p$); they are motivated to maintain *p* because they desperately want to avoid making the necessary sacrifices that comes with being a Christian.

Then, as further evidence, Aumann directs readers’ attention to Kierkegaard’s anecdote of the religious enthusiast who denounces people in Christendom for being inauthentic Christians, which we will also look in detail in the next section. As Aumann

⁹³ Aumann, "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication, the Crowd, and a Monstrous Illusion," 315-16.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 315.

⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, 139-40; Aumann, "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication, the Crowd, and a Monstrous Illusion," 315-17.

interprets, the message of Kierkegaard's anecdote is this: that direct communication is limited with respect to dispelling the illusion of Christendom because the "religious enthusiast (the direct communicator) and the target audience are at cross-purposes"; that the direct communicator wants to expose the illusion whilst the deluded audience wants to keep the illusion in place for fear of making changes to their lives.⁹⁶ Moreover, as Aumann adds, the audience resists the enthusiast's direct communication because they do not want to "admit to themselves and each other that the speaker was right".⁹⁷ Out of a concern to defend these interests, Aumann claims, the audience will "work against [the direct communicator]...and arm [their] defenses appropriately".⁹⁸

Certainly, it is not difficult to envisage proponents of the Bypass Interpretation quickly agreeing with Aumann's analysis, especially considering Aumann's point regarding the audience's fear of admitting that they are in the wrong, which is reminiscent of John Mullen's analysis of Kierkegaard's target audience. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Mullen thinks that Kierkegaard's deluded recipients would 'explain away' direct criticisms because they feel their values and everything else that constitute their identity to be under threat.

Here, in support of Aumann and Mullen's reading, one might appeal to the following passage from Kierkegaard's *Point of View*:

By a direct attack he only strengthens a person in the illusion and also infuriates him. Generally speaking, there is nothing that requires as gentle a treatment as the removal of an illusion. If one in any way causes the one ensnared to be antagonized, then all is lost. And this one does by a direct attack, which in addition also contains the presumptuousness of demanding that another person confess to one or face-to-face with one make the confession that actually is most beneficial when the person concerned makes it to himself secretly.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Aumann, "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication, the Crowd, and a Monstrous Illusion," 318.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 319.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 318.

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 43.

Using the above passage, one could support Aumann and Mullen's reading by making the following point – that direct communication is limited with respect to Kierkegaard's task of dispelling the illusion of Christendom because it infuriates and antagonises the recipient. And direct communication does this by putting the recipient in the uncomfortable position of having to confess that "he has been living in an illusion" to the direct communicator.¹⁰⁰ It is out of such considerations, one might claim on behalf of Aumann and Mullen, that drove Kierkegaard to deploy indirect communication.

Now, by piecing the story together in this way, we can hopefully understand why some critics are inclined to see Kierkegaard's target audience as being self-deceived in the sense described above. In this connection, we can also hopefully understand the considerations motivating the Bypass Interpretation – that since his audience know they are in an illusion when they call themselves Christians, and that they are motivated to conceal this fact, Kierkegaard must impart criticisms or inform his audience without triggering them by doing it non-directly, implicitly. But in what follows, I will show why the illusion is better characterised as a case of self-blindness, constituted by forms of self-estrangement.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 44.

2. The Illusion as Self-Blindness

As we have seen, one crucial underlying assumption at work in the self-deception reading is that Kierkegaard's target audience *know* they are in an illusion when they call themselves Christian (i.e., they are *not* ignorant), and that they are well-motivated to resist direct communication and maintain the illusion for the reasons mentioned above – i.e., not wanting to make the necessary changes that come with being Christian, and not wanting to admit to being in the wrong. However, in what follows, I will challenge this characterisation of Kierkegaard's target audience by appealing to his anecdote of the religious enthusiast, the very same one Aumann used in support for his reading. My aim is to show how the anecdote in fact points to *self-blindness*, rather than self-deception in the sense described in the previous section. To do this, it is imperative that we layout the kind of self-blindness that we will be working with throughout. And as mentioned in the introduction, I will show how Kierkegaard's target audience exemplify the kind of self-blindness highlighted by Ramsland, to which we will now turn to in the below.

In articulating her account of self-blindness, Ramsland brings forward the case of a woman who denied that she had a nervous laughter. As Ramsland explains, the woman denied the fact of her nervous laughter because the “*content* of her self-image blocked an awareness of her actual experiential engagement”.¹⁰¹ Now, to understand what Ramsland means, it is vital that we discuss her account of consciousness, which she discusses in tandem with Kierkegaard's distinction between direct and indirect communication. As Ramsland makes clear, her working definition of consciousness is “reflective consciousness”, which denotes the processes that bring “order to the phenomenal flux of our basic experience by transforming it into intelligible concepts for human comprehension”.¹⁰² In other words, in

¹⁰¹ Ramsland, "Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication," 330.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 329.

Ramsland's view, our consciousness is that which makes sense of our experience by conceptualising our experience. Our consciousness conceptualises our experience, according to Ramsland, by making "the perceived world an object [of thought or contemplation] for itself".¹⁰³ That is, part of how our consciousness brings order to our experience is by objectifying our perceived world. And in Ramsland's view, our consciousness' objectification of our perceived world is intimately tied with direct communication's role in communicating our experience with others – as Ramsland explains:

What Kierkegaard refers to as 'direct communication' relies on this objectifying activity. Realities are translated into concepts and then into words so that the signified is immanent in the word-sign. Reality which can be thus objectified for consciousness can be made public, shared by a community who experience it and understand its expression.¹⁰⁴

In other words, the thought is that once our consciousness objectifies our perceived world, our perceived world can then be conceptualised, so that we can put into words and communicate directly what we experience.

Then, following from above, Ramsland proceeds to point out that there is in fact an aspect of our experience which cannot come fully into view in the process of objectification. For this reason, there are parts of our experience that partially escapes conceptualisation and therefore, direct expression. For Ramsland, this elusive part of our experience is the consciousness itself, which as mentioned earlier, is the very processes that mediate and make sense of our experience. To explain what she means, Ramsland frames the mediating processes of our consciousness as the '*how*' of our experience – that is, *how* we experience *what* we experience. And by this how/what dichotomy, Ramsland wants to capture the distinction between the basic character of our agency or comportment in the world (i.e., *how* we exercise our agency, or *how* comport ourselves in the world, or how we live), and the

¹⁰³ Ibid. 329-30.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 330.

perceived and mediated content of our experiences (i.e., *what* we perceive ourselves, others, and the world to be).

Then, as Ramsland elaborates, our consciousness' inability to fully objectify and conceptualise itself is due to a tension between the consciousness' own mediating processes and the structure of our concepts – that our consciousness is *constantly* in the process of making sense of our experience (by processes of objectification and conceptualisation); but our concepts are *static*, which means that our concepts “cannot accurately capture the flow of the process in question”.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, “any continuous experiential process will at least partially elude the concepts of objective reflection”.¹⁰⁶ And so, whilst we have no problem objectifying and conceptualising the world, Ramsland thinks the same cannot be said about our own consciousness, or the *how* of our experience – i.e., *how* we exercise our agency, or *how* comport ourselves in the world, or how we live. And this problem of agential opacity, for Ramsland, is where indirect communication emerges as a possible remedy – as she asserts,

indirect communication...bypasses this process of reflective objectification; [as] it occurs through the medium of prereflective experiencing rather than as an act of intentional consciousness.¹⁰⁷

Here, Ramsland's basic idea is that, unlike direct communication, indirect communication can communicate the bare unmediated 'how' of our experience because it does not rely on the mediating processes of our consciousness. Note, we shall not pursue Ramsland's account of indirect communication any further, as what is crucial for our purposes here is her model of self-blindness. So, I will leave our discussion of her account of indirect communication towards the end of the next chapter.

After providing an account of consciousness and its role in mediating our experience, Ramsland brings her account of consciousness into relation with the case of the woman with

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the nervous laughter that we mentioned previously. As Ramsland explains, the woman's denial of her nervous laughter stems from an inability to access the *how* of her experience. As Ramsland point out, even if the woman had tried to reflect on *how* she laughs, she still would not be able to access the *how*, for her reflection is mediated by the *what* of her experience – i.e., what she perceives herself to be, which is that she does *not* have a nervous laughter. Hence, as we saw earlier, Ramsland concludes that the “*content* of [the woman's] self-image blocked an awareness of her actual experiential engagement”.¹⁰⁸ In other words, the woman is unable to become first-personally aware that *she* is indeed laughing nervously – e.g., ‘Oh! I do have a nervous laugh!’. This kind of self-blindness, I want to argue, is what plagues Kierkegaard's target audience, which brings me to an analysis of Kierkegaard's anecdote.

As we have mentioned, Kierkegaard's anecdote tells of a religious enthusiast who denounces all those in Christendom as being inauthentic Christians. I agree with Aumann that the anecdote speaks largely for the futility of dispelling the illusion with direct communication. However, I think there is a much more profound insight that Kierkegaard wants to bring out through the anecdote that is overlooked in Aumann's analysis. The anecdote goes as follows:

Every once in a while a religious enthusiast appears. He makes an assault on Christendom; he makes a big noise, denounces nearly all as not being Christians and he accomplishes nothing. He does not take into account that an illusion is not so easy to remove. If it is the case that most people are under an illusion when they call themselves Christians, what do they do about an enthusiast like that? First and foremost, they pay no attention to him at all, do not read his book but promptly lay it *ad acta* [aside]; or if he makes use of the Living Word, they go around on another street and do not listen to him at all... They make him out to be a fanatic and his Christianity to be an exaggeration.¹⁰⁹

Undeniably, what immediately catches our attention is the dismissal of the religious enthusiast (who stands in for any direct communicator). And given the passages we have discussed in the previous section concerning direct communication's potential of infuriating

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 42-43.

or antagonising the deluded recipient, it is very easy then, to automatically assume as a matter of fact that the religious enthusiast is dismissed on the basis of having exposed the public's illusion, that the public are now offended and upset at the enthusiast for embarrassing them, and for ruining their peaceful (inauthentic) Christian lives.

Whilst such factors might contribute to the deluded public's resistance to direct communication, I want to first point out that within the anecdote, there is no indication that the public is remotely angry at the religious enthusiast, let alone feeling offended about having their faith exposed as illusory. Instead, there is a sense in which the enthusiast's denouncement is not even being taken seriously *as* a denouncement; notice, the public regards the enthusiast as a fanatic, as nothing but noise. As we can see from Kierkegaard's anecdote, the public's reaction suggests that they are *not*, as Aumann firmly claims, those who have an awareness of being in an illusion, and will, therefore, arm its defences accordingly against direct communication. Furthermore, notice also that the public does not even consider the religious enthusiast as a threat that they have to 'explain away' (as per Mullen's understanding); there is no retaliation, and no defence mechanisms to bypass either.¹¹⁰ The reason for this is, I think, due to the public being unable to see first-personally for themselves as the very object of the religious enthusiast's denouncement, that it is *them* who the religious enthusiast is talking about, that *they* are indeed living in an illusion. That just as the woman with the nervous laughter is unable to see that she laughs nervously because "the *content* of her self-image blocked an awareness of her actual experiential engagement", so too with Kierkegaard's target audience.¹¹¹ That the content of Kierkegaard's target audience's self-

¹¹⁰ Cf. Nietzsche's Mad Man Parable. which tells of a mad man who rushes to the marketplace, announcing to the public that God is dead. Nietzsche's mad man meets the same fate as Kierkegaard's religious enthusiast (i.e., ignored), as the public in the marketplace does not see that they have killed God, that nihilism is a live possibility for them. Similarly, I think the public in Kierkegaard's anecdote cannot entertain the possibility of not being Christians as a live possibility for them.

¹¹¹ Ramsland, "Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication," 330.

image is that they are Christians, and this self-image of being a Christian essentially blocks a first-personal awareness of *how* they go about being Christians.

Now, at this point, one might raise *two* objections. Firstly, supposing the anecdote captures a sense of ignorance or non-awareness on the part of the deluded audience, how then, can we reconcile the anecdote with Kierkegaard's distinction between those who are "ignorant and must be given some knowledge", and those who are "under a delusion that must first be taken away".¹¹² Kierkegaard's distinction clearly speaks against any notion of ignorance on the part of the deluded audience. Secondly, on a related note, just because the deluded public in Kierkegaard's anecdote did not resist the religious enthusiast angrily, that they simply ignore or dismiss the religious enthusiast as a fanatic or as making noise, this does not mean that the audience are not aware of being in an illusion. By the same token, the audience's lack of fury does not mean that they are not offended at having their wrongs exposed either. Perhaps the audience *are* aware of being in an illusion *and* they are angry with the religious enthusiast for exposing their wrong, but they choose to resist him in a more mature and calm way – by ignoring him.

As a general response to both, I want to first point out that I am not claiming (and I do not think Kierkegaard is either) that Kierkegaard's target audience are *totally* unaware of being in an illusion, nor do I deny anger on the part of Kierkegaard's audience. But I do want to be clear on *two* things. That firstly, the problem as Kierkegaard understands, is not as simple as Aumann's self-deception model make out to be – that the audience *must* be aware of being in an illusion and that they *must*, therefore, be angry at having their illusion exposed as such. Secondly, I think to see the recipient's anger or offence as the main motivation for Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication is wrong. In what follows, I will address the first objection.

¹¹² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 54.

Concerning the first objection, I want to bring forward Kierkegaard's analogy for describing the distinction between those who are ignorant and those who are in an illusion. According to Kierkegaard, communicating to an ignorant audience is like "writing on a blank piece of paper", whilst communicating to a deluded audience is like "bringing out by means of chemicals some writing that is hidden under other writing".¹¹³ What Kierkegaard's analogy expresses, I think, is this: that unlike an ignorant audience who needs to be made aware of x , where x stands for the fact of being in an illusion, a deluded recipient possess awareness of x , but possesses such awareness in a way that is *muddled*. As Kierkegaard put it, one must bring out some writing underneath some other writing, thus presenting an imagery of convolution. This signifies that perhaps Kierkegaard's audience have *some* degree of awareness of being in an illusion, but that the awareness is not transparent enough such that they fully register first-personally as being in an illusion. And so, whilst I am sympathetic to Aumann's claim that Kierkegaard's target audience are not ignorant, I think Kierkegaard's analogy gives us reason to think that the matter is not as binary as 'ignorant/not-ignorant'. Rather, there is a sense in which those in the illusion are both ignorant *and* not-ignorant. Here, I would like to point out how Ramsland's model of self-blindness fits well in this regard, since on according to Ramsland, our "experiential process...*partially* elude" the mediating processes of our consciousness, thus indicating that not all of *how* we exercise our agency escapes our awareness.¹¹⁴

And as further evidence for the illusion's non-binary murkiness, Kierkegaard regards the communicative situation in Christendom as a hugely complex one, as he found himself writing to an audience who despite falling short of authentic Christianity is still, in some sense, a Christian – as Kierkegaard puts it, the strange situation in Christendom is "to become

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ramsland, "Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication," 330.

a Christian when in a way one is a Christian”.¹¹⁵ In other words, the communicative situation in Christendom is radically different than one in which a person is introducing Christianity to someone who is totally outside of Christianity because in Christendom, everyone are Christians. The implication then, is this: that although Kierkegaard finds something suspicious in his audience’s Christian life, it would not be totally correct to characterise Kierkegaard’s audience as non-Christians. Instead, it would be more accurate to understand the audience as those who have not properly avowed (or disavowed) themselves as Christians. As I shall detail in the next chapter, this capacity to avow or disavow is only available when one is first-personally aware of how one is living as a Christian. This is where double-reflection (specifically, appropriation in double-reflection) play a significant role.

Now, in response to the second objection, even if we allow that Kierkegaard’s audience *are* angry and angry for the reasons Aumann and Mullen suggests, these reasons cannot, I argue, be the *primary* considerations motivating Kierkegaard’s use of indirect communication. To show this, I want to return to the passage presented towards the end of the previous section concerning direct communication’s potential to infuriate and antagonise the deluded recipient. Notice, Kierkegaard asserts that direct communication “strengthens a person in the illusion and *also* infuriates him”.¹¹⁶ Here, I emphasise the word ‘also’, as it indicates that infuriation of the recipient is added as a *sub-consequence* to the first, that of strengthening the illusion. And in this connection, notice also how Kierkegaard frames “the presumptuousness of demanding that another person confess to [the communicator]” as an *additional* consequence, as opposed to *the* consequence.¹¹⁷

Here, concerning the “presumptuousness of demanding that another person confess to [the communicator]”, one might point out that although Kierkegaard frames the problem as

¹¹⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 56.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 43. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

an additional consequence, it is an additional consequence to *antagonising* the recipient.¹¹⁸ With this, one might argue that the recipient's anger is still a factor motivating Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication. Again, I am not denying anger on the part of the recipient. But I also want to suggest in response to the above, that perhaps the kind of anger (or antagonisation) Kierkegaard speaks of is not the kind (or not merely the kind) that Aumann or Mullen has in mind, where the recipient is angry because they are put in the shameful position of having to admit to being in the wrong. In light of Kierkegaard's anecdote, I am inclined to see the antagonisation as indicating a sense of an annoyance, where the deluded audience sees the enthusiast not as threat but as a nuisance, a nuisance comparable to a buzzing fly on a hot summer's day (hence, the enthusiast is dismissed as noise).

If my understanding is accurate to what Kierkegaard means, both details, then, indicate that although infuriating or putting the recipient to shame are factors that could contribute to direct communication's limitations, they are *not* the *primary* limitations of direct communication with respect to dispelling the illusion of Christendom. Therefore, they are also not the primary considerations motivating Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication.

Conversely, if the kind of anger that Aumann or Mullen describes *were* the primary limitations, then Aumann would be right in raising concerns over Kierkegaard's claim that "an illusion can never be removed directly, and basically *only* indirectly".¹¹⁹ On Aumann's understanding, there is insufficient reasons to think that direct communication will necessarily fail at dispelling the illusion of Christendom, simply because "the audience wants the opposite of what the direct communicator wants".¹²⁰ As we have seen, Aumann is committed to the idea that Kierkegaard's self-deceiving audience is well-motivated to maintain the illusion. Consequently, he is also committed to the view that "the obstacle facing direct

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁰ Aumann, "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication, the Crowd, and a Monstrous Illusion," 323.

communication stems from a conflict of desires” (between the audience and the direct communicator).¹²¹ And so, as Aumann argues, the above limitation does *not* rule out the possibility that using direct communication persistently could in fact dispel the illusion – as Aumann asserts:

For all we know there are cases where, perhaps simply out of dogged perseverance, the direct communicator succeeds at making the audience aware of the truth even though the audience does not want to be made aware of it.¹²²

Certainly, I think Aumann would be right *if* direct communication’s core limitation were the conflict of desires between Kierkegaard and his audience, that his target audience *are* a band of stubborn self-deceivers who *know* that they are in an illusion but refuse to change and will furiously retaliate against anyone who tries to expose their illusion through direct communication. Certainly, if Aumann’s analysis accurately represents Kierkegaard’s audience, then indeed, there might be a chance of convincing such an audience to stop living in an illusion – perhaps over time, his audience will come to admit that $\sim p$ (i.e., they are *not* Christians). However, as I have been pointing out, Kierkegaard’s anecdote presents a sharply contrasting picture to the one Aumann or Mullen advances. And whilst I do not intend to dispute with Aumann on whether *only* indirect communication can dispel the illusion of Christendom, I do want to advance an understanding of the limitations of direct communication that does *not* see pragmatic considerations like infuriating the recipient or putting the recipient to shame as the *prime* motivations, for I think Kierkegaard identifies limitations that are more prior than those Aumann or Mullen highlighted. Going forward, we must continue our reconsideration of what the illusion of Christendom is, and also, reconsider how direct communication makes it such that it strengthens the illusion of Christendom.

In what follows, I will discuss the *two* forms of self-estrangement that I think constitute the self-blindness Kierkegaard’s target audience suffers from.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

2.1 *Confusion of Categories*

As we have seen, the main focus of the self-deception reading is set on the incongruity between people's claim to be Christians and the kinds of behaviours that they exhibit. Whilst giving attention to this part of Kierkegaard's diagnosis is not wrong, I think the self-deception reading fails to bring into view that people in the illusion also "have their [Christian] lives in entirely different *categories*".¹²³ But what does it mean to live one's Christian life in entirely different categories? The problem of confusing the categories is one that Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus himself draws attention to, as when he writes:

In our day, everything is mixed up: the aesthetic is defended ethically, faith intellectually, etc. One is finished with everything and yet is far from attentive to in what sphere each question finds its answer. In the world of spirit this causes even greater confusion than if, e.g., in civic life clerical matters were dealt with, for instance, by the Commissioners of Paving.¹²⁴

As Climacus' remark indicates, there are boundaries (or spheres) that govern and determine the appropriate mode of thought and inquiry for matters that belong to each of those spheres. Confusing the categories, then, involve a collapse of that boundary, where one thinks and inquires ethico-religious matters as though they were aesthetic-intellectual matters, and vice versa. But in order to understand the confusion in more concrete terms, it is crucial that we look at the categories in turn along with the matters that belong to them, starting with the category of the aesthetic-intellectual.

Noticeably, the word 'aesthetic' will inevitably call to mind the associated objects or concepts, such as the beautiful, the fine arts, music, poetry, and so on. Certainly, as per Climacus' usage of the term in *Postscript*, the term 'aesthetics' is intimately linked with "art and poetry".¹²⁵ But more so than the objects or concepts themselves, the term is also meant to

¹²³ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 41. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 271.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 262fn.

capture the very way in which we properly contemplate and appreciate these objects of art.

Loosely following the Kantian notion of aesthetic judgement, Climacus thinks it is typical to contemplate aesthetic objects ‘disinterestedly’, as Climacus asserts:

... art and poetry are not related in an essential way to one who exists, for the contemplative enjoyment of them, ‘joy over the beautiful’ [a reference to Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*] is disinterested, and the spectator is contemplatively outside himself *qua* existing person.¹²⁶

Firstly, notice that a disinterested mode of contemplation does *not*, as we might think, denote something like being emotionally cold or detached.¹²⁷ Rather, as Climacus explains, to contemplate disinterestedly is to distance oneself from any existential concerns in one’s contemplation – that one is *not* thinking how the object of thought relates to one’s existence and agency *qua* human. Hence, as Climacus describes, the disinterested thinker is a *spectator* in relation to his agency, that he is *outside* himself *qua* existing person. Secondly, as Climacus points out, it is appropriate to contemplate aesthetic objects such as art or poetry disinterestedly, since these objects do not immediately or essentially pertain to any matters or concerns on what it means to be human or how one ought to live as a human. It would not be out of place, for instance, to enjoy a piece of music for its own sake without having to think and inquire about the existential implications that the piece might have for one’s existence and agency.

And on this score, Climacus thinks that the appropriateness of disinterested thought and inquiry equally apply to objects of thought that readily come under the rubric of the ‘intellectual’ – as Climacus asserts, “the aesthetic *and* the intellectual are *disinterested*”.¹²⁸ Here, we can readily think of objects that fit this category, such as some mathematical formulae, coding languages, propositional logic, treatise, doctrines, theses, and so on. And

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ On this point, please also see, Daniel Watts, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought," *Hegel Bulletin* 39, no. 1 (2018): 92.

¹²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 266-67. Emphasis mine.

just as it would not be odd to regard aesthetic objects apart from one's existence, so too with the intellectual objects mentioned above. In fact, the converse would be true – that is, it would be strange to think and inquire the existential implications of, say, some mathematical formula.

Now, what about the category of the ethico-religious? As a first step, we can infer from the fact that the ethico-religious as a rivalling category to the aesthetic-intellectual means that the former encompasses any objects of thought where it *requires* one's thought and inquiry to be *personally interested* in how the matter at hand relates to one's existence and agency. This is because ethico-religious matters essentially relate to one's existence and agency *qua* human, as they are matters that pertain to what it means to be human or how one ought to live as a human. But what matters would fit such category? There are quite a number of items that emerge from Kierkegaard's writings as fitting the bill, which could include, *inter alia*, prayer, mortality, immortality, thanking God for His blessings, marriage, exemplars, sin, communication, human flourishing and the pursuit of the Good, and of course, the matter of what it means to be Christian.¹²⁹ For our purposes of understanding the illusion of Christendom, the last one will be our main focus.

However, it is crucial to note from the list of ethico-religious matters highlighted above that confusing the categories clearly go beyond treating the matter of what it means to be Christian aesthetic-intellectually. For instance, in Kierkegaard's discourse, 'At a Graveside', Kierkegaard highlights one can confuse the matter of mortality as if it were an aesthetic-intellectual matter by representing death as a reaper "sharpen[ing] its scythe and scar[ing] women and children".¹³⁰ According to Kierkegaard, to represent death in the above way is merely to stimulate one's mood or to stir one's emotions (as if it death were a piece of

¹²⁹ Ibid. 136-52.

¹³⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 76.

artwork or music). To regard death in this way is to stand at a remove from one's own death. But as Kierkegaard points out, insofar as we humans are mortal, what matters is to contemplate death *earnestly*, which involves engaging in serious contemplation about the possibility of one's *own* death, and to examine oneself in light of this possibility (e.g., given I am mortal, how then should I live my life? What does my death mean for my existence?).¹³¹

And as with mortality, the need for first-personal self-examination is also closely bound up with the matter of becoming a Christian. This connection between being a Christian and the need for self-examination is spelled out most explicitly in Kierkegaard's religious discourse, *For Self-Examination*, where with clear reference to the Epistle of James, Kierkegaard draws the following analogy: that God's Word is like a *mirror*. Using this analogy, Kierkegaard highlights the difference between one who treats God's Word as an ethico-religious matter, and one who confusedly treats God's Word as if it were an aesthetic-intellectual matter; the one who treats God's Word as a matter of the former *sees himself* in the mirror of God's Word (i.e., examines himself in relation to God's Word), whilst the one who treats God's Word as a matter of the latter only *observes* the mirror itself (i.e., does not examine himself in relation to God's Word). But what does it mean concretely to treat God's Word as an aesthetic-intellectual matter?

To address the above, let us consider the following passage:

But how is God's Word read in Christendom? If we were to be divided into two classes – since specific exceptions cannot be considered here – then one would have to say that the majority never read God's Word, a minority read it more or less learnedly, that is, nevertheless do not read God's Word but observe the mirror. To say it in other words, the majority regard God's Word as an obsolete ancient book one puts aside; a minority look upon God's Word as an extremely remarkable ancient book upon which one expends an amazing diligence, acumen, etc. – observing the mirror.¹³²

As Kierkegaard makes clear, the situation of Christendom is this: that there are those who do not read God's Word altogether, treating it as ancient and therefore, irrelevant, or there are

¹³¹ Ibid. 73-92.

¹³² Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, 33.

those who do read God's Word, but they do so in such a way that they treat it as an "extremely remarkable ancient book" upon which they must expend "an amazing diligence, acumen" on scrutinising.¹³³ The latter kind, Kierkegaard writes, only observe the mirror of God's Word. And so, as the above passage indicate, to treat God's Word aesthetic-intellectually (i.e., to only observe the mirror) involves reading God's Word in a purely scholarly way, where the interest of one's thought and inquiry is *not* on how God's Word relates to one's existence and agency, but on, for instance, "interpreting obscure passages".¹³⁴ And in reading God's Word in this purely scholarly way, one stands at a *remove* from God's Word.

Now, at this point, one may receive the impression that Kierkegaard is against any scholarly deliberation on God's Word, that the moment one endeavours to rigorously analyse God's Word, one is doing it disservice. This, I argue, cannot be further from the truth. It is important to first bear in mind that Kierkegaard happily accepts some knowledge is needed in becoming a Christian, as per his unpublished lecture notes on communication.¹³⁵ This indicates that Kierkegaard thinks that some understanding (and therefore, some interpretive work, exegesis, or analysis) of the doctrine is in order. On this note, Kierkegaard even explicitly says that he is not "disparag[ing] scholarship...far from it", for he fully acknowledges that there are difficult passages in God's Word.¹³⁶

However, in Kierkegaard's view, just as one misses the grip that death should have on us by contemplating on death disinterestedly, one also misses what is essential to Christianity in treating it *merely* as a doctrine apt for disinterested analysis. This is because one does not see Christianity as something that essentially concerns what it means to be

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 29.

¹³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 307. Consider also, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 204.

¹³⁶ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, 28.

human and how one ought to live as a human; that Christianity is something *personal*. And so, putting the above into consideration, what makes the illusion of Christendom *illusory*, then, is that people in Christendom complacently go about their Christian lives in a detached manner, when engaging in a *personal* relationship with God is truly at the heart of Christian faith, which precisely requires one to *not* stand at a remove from oneself *qua* human, for there must be a person or subject who God has a relationship with.

This brings us to discuss how one *should* read God's Word, or what it means to see oneself in the mirror of God's Word. As Kierkegaard explains repeatedly in his discourse, to see oneself in the mirror of God's Word is to read God's Word in such a way that one sees oneself as the addressee – as Kierkegaard puts it:

... if you are to read God's Word in order to see yourself in the mirror, then during the reading you must incessantly say to yourself: It is I to whom it is speaking, it is I about whom it is speaking.¹³⁷

To be sure, however, seeing oneself in the mirror of God's Word is not, Kierkegaard warns, a matter of just saying or attaching an 'I'. The worry here is that one can say 'I' "in distraction, in an absentminded moment", that one is still in fact detached from one's existence and agency.¹³⁸ Here, consider also the Epicurean attitude towards death ("when it is, I am not, and when I am, it is not"), which comes under attack in Kierkegaard's discourse 'At a Graveside'.¹³⁹ As Kierkegaard claims, there is a kind of cunning to this attitude, for despite the inclusion of 'I', the contemplator "places himself on the outside" whereby the contemplator stands as a spectator in relation to his own death.¹⁴⁰

So, seeing oneself in the mirror of God's Word is not merely a matter of just saying 'I', but it is to truly from a first-personal ('I') standpoint, where one's existence and agency is

¹³⁷ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, 40.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 32.

¹³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, 73. Note, that Kierkegaard is not so much directing his criticism against Epicurus or with his saying but more so with a certain way of exploiting Epicurus' insight – i.e., the way of the "cunning contemplator".

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

constantly in view during one's reading of God's Word. Helpfully, Kierkegaard puts this first-personal reading of God's Word into perspective with reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan. That as one reads the parable, one must *not* think to oneself:

It is not I; after all, it was a priest, and I am not a priest; I do, however, find it admirable of the Gospel to have it be a priest, because the priests are the worst of all.¹⁴¹

Rather, the appropriate way to read the parable is to think to oneself: "This priest is I myself".¹⁴² On this score, seeing oneself in the mirror of God's Word also involves *not* being pedantic in one's reading, where one thinks to oneself:

On my honor I can assure you that never in my life did I come along a road where there lay a half-dead man who had been assaulted by robbers; generally speaking, robbers are a rarity among us.¹⁴³

Reading God's Word pedantically in the sense described above is to put one's existence and agency at a distance from God's Word, which is to confuse the categories. Instead, to treat God's Word as it should be treated (i.e., as an ethico-religious matter), involves thinking and inquiring how one should live as a Christian in one's own context. As Kierkegaard put it, although one might "never [have] met anyone who was assaulted by robbers, there are enough people in misery on [one's] road just as on mine".¹⁴⁴ The point is to put God's Word concretely into relation with one's own situation and context, which as we shall see, is why primitive thinking (or double-reflection) is important. Crucially, Kierkegaard explains, by seeing oneself in the mirror of God's Word, one essentially engages in self-examination, asking: "Have I done this?".¹⁴⁵ This process of self-examination discloses the basic character of one's agency – that is, whether one is truly striving to follow God's Word, and thus, striving to be a Christian, or whether one is a "[Christian] only in imagination".¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 40.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 41.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 41-42

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 32

¹⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 43.

Now, following from what we have discussed so far, one question remains, namely, why did Kierkegaard's audience confusedly take up the matter of what it means to be Christian in a disinterested way? One readily available answer is to claim ignorance – that Kierkegaard's audience does not know that Christianity essentially relates to one's existence and agency *qua* human. But Kierkegaard evidently does not accept this, as when he asserts that “it is only all too easy to understand the requirement contained in God's Word”; Kierkegaard even goes as far as to say that his audience misuse biblical scholarship “in order to defend [themselves] against God's Word”.¹⁴⁷ That is, Kierkegaard's audience take a disinterested approach to Christianity as being the *essentially* Christian; that being a Christian just *is*, for instance, to engage in disinterested scholarly investigation on God's Word. But why? As we shall see in the next section, Kierkegaard thinks the confusion of categories derives from the existential condition of evading from the burdens of being oneself, a human being who is given to make commitments and take responsibility for one's agency. Such condition, Kierkegaard calls the lack of primitivity, which takes us to the next subsection.

¹⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, 34.

2.2 *Lack of Primitivity*

In critically commentating on his audience, Kierkegaard laments that “the basic misfortune of the modern age [is] that it lacks primitivity”.¹⁴⁸ This modern condition finds another expression in Climacus’ *Postscript*, namely, that one has forgotten one’s existence as a human being.¹⁴⁹ On this score, the *Postscript* is not short of mocking such condition, as for instance, when Climacus satirises the professor who only remembers that he exists as a human being “only when drawing his salary every three months”.¹⁵⁰ But how does one forget one’s existence as a human being? Part of the mockery here is directed at the Hegelian proposal for ‘pure thought’ or presuppositionless thought and inquiry, which we will look at in the next chapter. The other part, I think, is directed at the idea that moderns have become estranged from themselves such that they do not live as a human who is given to make commitments and take responsibility for how they live.

Now, according to Kierkegaard, not taking responsibility for one’s agency results in the tendency to deflect ethico-religious matters (i.e., that which pertains to what it means to be human or how to live as a human being) to popular or public opinion. This is amply captured in Kierkegaard’s following assertion:

It is undeniably the safest and most comfortable thing to join up thoroughly with tradition, to do as the others, to believe, think, and talk as the others and prefer to go out after finite goals...But the primitive existence always contains a reexamination of the fundamental...This is honesty in the deepest sense. Completely to lack primitivity and consequently reexamination, to accept everything automatically as common practice and let it suffice that it is common practice, consequently to evade responsibility...*this is dishonesty*.¹⁵¹

Here, in the above passage, there are *three* main points that I must explain. Firstly, by ‘fundamental’, Kierkegaard is referring to what he calls the “fundamental questions” of human existence, which are questions pertaining broadly to “what it is to be a human being”

¹⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 306.

¹⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 217.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 162.

¹⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 306.

or how one ought to live as a human being – e.g., ‘what is the meaning and purpose of human existence’, or ‘what is one’s calling or vocation in life?’.¹⁵² Worthy to mention here is that Kierkegaard also sometimes deploy the term ‘universal’ or the “universally human”, indicating that which concerns the human condition (e.g., mortality).¹⁵³ Understood this way, these terms essentially denote matters belonging in the category of the ethico-religious. Now, as for the second point: those who lack primitivity lack a *personal* interest in thinking about these fundamental questions of human existence, for they happily defer these questions to an abstract authority, such as prevailing social norms, traditions, ways of thinking and talking, popular trends and practices, and so on. Thirdly, to lack primitivity, Kierkegaard thinks, is to be *dishonest*.

Now, in calling the lack of primitivity a case of ‘dishonesty’, Kierkegaard also invokes the idea of ‘self-deception’. Here, Kierkegaard quickly clarifies that dishonesty or self-deception is not to be understood as “deliberate deception”, thus eliminating the kind of self-deception we discussed in the first section, where one deliberately or intentionally deceive oneself that p whilst knowing $\sim p$.¹⁵⁴ Rather, as Kierkegaard elaborates, dishonesty or self-deception as he understands denotes *two* conditions – firstly, that one does commit oneself to any particular course of existence or ways of living, and secondly, that one is not being true to who one essentially is. The former condition is best captured in Kierkegaard’s following description, that it is typical of an existentially dishonest individual to,

[begin] seventeen things but [complete] none, knows vaguely about everything possible but knows nothing useful, has made up his mind about his purpose in life seventeen times and has changed it seventeen times.¹⁵⁵

As for the second condition, we must turn to Anti-Climacus’ *Sickness Unto Death*, which famously deals with the problem of despair (i.e., sin) understood as not being true to

¹⁵² Ibid. 304-05.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 306.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 290.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 290-91.

one's 'self'. According to Anti-Climacus' anatomy of the human self, the human self is essentially a "synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity", and that the self can only truly become itself by resting "transparently in the power that established it", namely, God.¹⁵⁶ To go off-balance on either side of the synthesis is to be, as critic Clare Carlisle put it, "untrue to [the self's] wholeness", or to be untrue to who one essentially is.¹⁵⁷

Now, recall from the passage above concerning the lack of primitivity, lacking primitivity involves the preference to pursue after finite goals over the re-examination of the fundamental questions of human existence. Notably, Anti-Climacus frames going off-balance on the side of finitude precisely as "lack[ing] primitivity or to have robbed oneself of one's primitivity, to have emasculated oneself in a spiritual sense".¹⁵⁸ And as Anti-Climacus explains, lacking primitivity means having one's agency shaped entirely by one's immediate surroundings and by those around oneself – as Anti-Climacus describes, "such a person forgets himself... finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man".¹⁵⁹ That is, as Anti-Climacus describes, lacking primitivity is essentially an evasion from being oneself in favour of having the comfort of one's existence shaped entirely by one's immediate surroundings; the comfort comes from not having to bear the burden of making commitments and of taking responsibility for one's agency.

Here, I think Hannah Arendt's report and analysis of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann's trial can help fruitfully illuminate what Kierkegaard wants to capture. As Arendt reports, Eichmann heavily relied on clichés and stock phrases when he gave his last words moments before serving his death sentence. As Arendt understands, this is because

¹⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 13-14.

¹⁵⁷ Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed* (A&C Black, 2006), 102.

¹⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, 33.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention which all events and facts arouse by virtue of their existence.¹⁶⁰

In other words, by hiding behind an abstract authority such as prevalent social customs or norms, one absolves the burden of having to think how one should live or having to bear responsibility for how one lives, a burden that comes by virtue of being human. In this regard, think, for instance, of the justifications people might give for their misconduct: ‘I am just following orders’ or ‘I’m not the only one, other people do it too!’. Also, in addition to absolving responsibility, there is a sense in which in relying on clichés or commonly accepted stock phrases, one is detached from oneself *qua* agent, for one does not stand by what one says; or take ownership of what one says; or *avow* what one says as being one’s own words.

And as Arendt adds, this thoughtless following of prevalent social customs or norms calls for ‘thinking’, which Arendt models on Socrates, who was said to have arrived late to a party because he was captivated in thought.¹⁶¹ According to Arendt, Socrates’ thinking essentially disrupts the flow of one’s existence and agency, for it is a sense of puzzlement over the deeper and more fundamental meaning of things – as Arendt writes: “For thinking’s chief characteristic is that it interrupts all doing, all ordinary activities no matter what they happen to be”.¹⁶² Then, Arendt continues, such thinking can enable the individual to retrieve himself from thoughtless obedience to social customs or norms, for such

...thinking inevitably has a destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil, in short, on those customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics.¹⁶³

In other words, such Socratic thinking can enable one to become first-personally present with oneself, to become first-personally aware of how one lives. Similarly, against the thoughtless

¹⁶⁰ Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (1971): 418.

¹⁶¹ A reference to Plato’s *Symposium*.

¹⁶² Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," 423.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 434.

following of prevalent social customs or norms, Kierkegaard proposes for a more ‘primitive thinking’, which is a mode of thought and inquiry comparable to Arendt’s, not least because primitive thinking (or double-reflection) was also modelled on Socrates. We shall look at this in the below.

In order to help his audience regain a more “primitive impression of [their] existence” (i.e., of reconnecting his audience with their existence and agency *qua* human being), Kierkegaard sees that he must push for a more ‘primitive thinking’.¹⁶⁴ As Kierkegaard explains, primitive thinking involves a *personal* interest in thinking about “fundamental questions”, which as mentioned, are questions pertaining to what it means to be human or how one ought to live as a human.¹⁶⁵ And as a way of illustrating primitive thinking in more concrete terms, Kierkegaard makes a comparison between two kinds of individuals:

A man in whom there is not much primitivity will come to consider the question of which girl he should marry. He will reflect: There is a choice, and the question is – which girl? The more primitive person perhaps will so immerse himself in the question of what reality there is in marrying that he never gets married. A man who does not have much primitivity will perhaps reflect on which public office he should seek or, if he has chosen a certain career, which appointment he should seek, whether in Jutland or in Fyn or in the capital. The more primitive man perhaps will so immerse himself in the question of whether this mode of existence is essential for man that he never gets the position.¹⁶⁶

As we can see, the individual who lacks primitivity is focused on the immediate or finite concerns in front of them (e.g., ‘which girl to marry?’, or ‘which career path to embark on?’), whilst the one who exercises primitive thinking prioritises the reflection on questions pertaining to what it means to be human or how one ought to live as a human (e.g., ‘is there any meaning and purpose to living a married life?’, or ‘is having a career essential to my existence as a human?’). Noticeably, much like Arendt’s concept of ‘thinking’, Kierkegaard’s concept of primitive thinking also disrupts and takes one out of one’s immediate engagements, in order to think about the meaning of one’s engagements. More importantly,

¹⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 292.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 304-06.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 305.

Kierkegaard's comparison here nicely brings out why this Socratic style of thinking is disruptive vis-à-vis one's existence and agency – it is because such thinking admits of an element of *abstraction*, since such existential matters themselves also admit a degree of abstractness to them.

To be sure, however, engaging in abstract thought and inquiry on what it is to be human or how one ought to live as a human in itself, does *not*, I think, constitute primitive thinking proper. Consider Kierkegaard's aesthete 'A' from the pseudonymous work *Either/Or*, a character who maximally represents the life of detachment, voyeurism, and self-estrangement. Like the primitive person, 'A' is apparently also highly capable of engaging in abstract thought on the meaning of things, in this case, of marriage.¹⁶⁷ Consider the following reflection from the aesthete:

Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way. Whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret it either way.¹⁶⁸

Here, much like the primitive person who gets caught up with abstract thought and inquiry about the meaning of marriage to the point where he never marries, the kind of hyperreflective activity demonstrated by the aesthete gives a similar sense of paralysis as well. Of course, this is not to say that primitive thinking concerning the meaning of marriage should lead to marriage. But the point here is, I argue, that the primitive person who exercises primitive thinking in Kierkegaard's example has only really demonstrated *one* part of primitive thinking *proper*. This is especially the case, considering that abstract thought and inquiry *abstracts* one out of oneself, but yet, the whole point of primitive thinking is to one's primitive impression of their existence, which involves reconnecting a person with their existence and agency.

¹⁶⁷ For a similar view and discussion, please see, Clare Carlisle, "Kierkegaard's Despair in An Age of Reflection," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 32, no. 2 (2011): 260.

¹⁶⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or - Part I*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 38.

Now, as I have already mentioned, I think Kierkegaard's concept of primitive thinking sees fuller development in what he calls 'double-reflection', which is mode of thought and inquiry that is attributed to Socrates. As critic Daniel Watts also note,

'Primitivity' for Kierkegaard is evidently bound up with the idea of Socratic, doubly-reflected thinking, as jointly constituted by abstract reflection and concrete self-examination.¹⁶⁹

Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter when we come to look in detail at the concept of double-reflection, what makes Socrates exemplary as one who exercises proper primitive thinking or double-reflection is that he is able to have the initial moment of abstract thought and inquiry about what it means to be human or how one ought to live as a human, but then bring that abstract thought and inquiry back concretely into relation with his own situation or context, by asking what x means for his own existence and agency, where x stands for some abstract thought and inquiry on fundamental questions on human existence – e.g., 'if humans are mortal, what does this mean for my existence as a human, and how should I live or what should I do?'. As Kierkegaard highlights, a "primitive existence always contains a reexamination of the fundamental" – that is, a concrete re-examination of the fundamental questions of human existence in relation to one's existence and agency.¹⁷⁰ And in doing so, one is essentially to engaging in the process of self-examination, thus bringing one's agency to one's first-personal awareness. More on this will be discussed in the next chapter.

Now, following from our discussion on primitive thinking, one might raise the following concern: if Kierkegaard's target audience are evading from themselves *qua* agents given to make commitments and take responsibility for how they live, and that they therefore, deflect questions on what it means to be human and how they ought to live as human to popular and public opinion, how then, can introducing a mode of thought and inquiry that

¹⁶⁹ Daniel Watts, "Kierkegaard and the Search for Self-Knowledge," *European Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (2013): 541.

¹⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 306.

reconnects them with their agency help at all? Presumably, the trouble here is that Kierkegaard's audience are running away from primitive thinking, which explains why they deflect fundamental questions to others in the first place; if not, they would have already engaged in primitive thinking. As I argue, Kierkegaard is certainly not unaware of this, for he thinks that a person's capacity to engage in self-examination must be drawn out from them.¹⁷¹ As Kierkegaard's admission clearly indicate, he is not so naïve as to pretend that the illusion could be dispelled just by introducing primitive thinking. But in outlining the concept of primitive thinking, Kierkegaard is anticipating the end goal of his indirect communication, which is to "compel [the deluded person] to become aware" of their agency – i.e., that they have been engaging with Christianity disinterestedly and thus, living in an illusion.¹⁷² And as we shall discuss in the next chapter, in order to bring a first-personal agential awareness to the deluded person, indirect communication must operate by putting the other in a situation in which they will have to engage in self-examination (i.e., exercise primitive thinking or double-reflection). Crucially, indirect communication does this, I think, by means of provocation. More on this will be taken up from the next chapter onwards.

As a closing to this subsection, I want to present and analyse Climacus' satire on his contemporaries, as I think the satire is helpful in bringing out the connection between the lack of primitivity and self-blindness. As we shall read, Climacus' satire tells of a man who has misgivings about the authenticity of his Christian life, who then meets the same response as the religious enthusiast; those around the man dismiss him as a nuisance, and the man's wife simply cannot fathom why her husband would even doubt his faith – the satire goes as follows:

...if someone were to say plainly and innocently that he was worried for himself, that as far he was concerned it might not be quite right for him to call himself a Christian, he would not exactly suffer persecution or be put to death. But angry glances would come his way and people would say: 'How tiresome to make such a fuss about nothing; why can't

¹⁷¹ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 279.

¹⁷² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 50.

he behave like the rest of us who are all Christians?...And should he happen to be married, his wife would say to him, ‘Dearest husband, how can you get such notions into your head? Aren’t you a Christian? Aren’t you a Dane, and doesn’t the geography book tell us that the prevailing religion in Denmark is Lutheran Christianity? You aren’t a Jew, or a Mohammedan; so what can you be? After all, a thousand years have gone since paganism was replaced, so I know you are no pagan. Don’t you attend to your duties at the office as a good civil servant should; aren’t you a good subject of a Christian nation, a Lutheran Christian state? Then you must be a Christian.’¹⁷³

Here, *three* points ensue. Firstly, notice that just as the public in Kierkegaard’s anecdote dismiss the religious enthusiast as over-exaggerating, so too with the people around the man who has misgivings about his Christian faith – they mock the man for making a fuss over nothing. Secondly, notice the wife betrays her lack of primitivity by quickly deferring the question of what it means to be Christian to public opinion – that just as the public regards the satisfaction of certain conditions as a qualifier for authentic faith (e.g., that one is born in Denmark, that one is a dutiful civil servant or citizen), so does the wife. And as a confirmation of the wife’s lack of primitivity, Climacus gives the following commentary, which comes immediately after the above satire:

You see? We have become so objective that even a civil servant’s wife argues to the single individual from the whole, from the state, from the idea of society, from geographical science.¹⁷⁴

As Climacus’ commentary makes clear, the wife has her existence as an individual human based entirely upon her immediate surroundings, such as the state, society, or geographical science; that she does not take responsibility for how own existence and agency.

Thirdly and most importantly, the wife does not even notice the ridiculousness of grounding her faith on superficial and impersonal grounds. She speaks as if the authenticity of her faith *should* derive from superficial and impersonal considerations such as nationality, geographical location, as opposed to the quality of her own Christian life, or her personal relationship with God. The satire here, I think, essentially captures the phenomenon of self-

¹⁷³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 44-45.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 45.

blindness as sketched out by Ramsland – that just as the woman from Ramsland’s example cannot see first-personally *how* she laughs (that she laughs nervously), so the wife in Climacus’ satire cannot see first-personally *how* she lives as a Christian (that she has a superficial and impersonal relation to Christianity); as Ramsland would put it, the wife’s first-personal awareness of the basic character of her agency is blocked by the *what* of her experience (i.e., that she and her husband and everyone in nineteenth-century Denmark *must* be Christians).

On this note, I think it is crucial to re-emphasise Ramsland’s point that self-blindness need not be *total* blindness to how one comports oneself. Recall, Ramsland thinks that the ‘*how*’ of our experiencing eludes our consciousness’ mediating processes, but note, only *partially*.¹⁷⁵ The implication is that there is perhaps, in some cases, a faint awareness of how one is *qua* agent. And I want to offer a line of reading the satire to suggest that Climacus’ satire might be alive to the possibility of pseudo-awareness in cases of self-blindness. Notice the very last sentence that the wife utters: “You must be a Christian”.¹⁷⁶ The most obvious and straightforward way to interpret this utterance is to see it as having an assertoric force – that the husband *must* be a Christian, given that he satisfies *x*, *y*, and *z* conditions. However, another possible way to read the utterance is to read it as an episode of a Freudian slip, where the wife in fact also doubts or begins to doubt the authenticity of her faith, but nevertheless proceeds to utter what she utters in an attempt to assure her husband *and* herself that they are Christians – we can readily picture the utterance as taking the following form: ‘You must be a Christian...right?’.¹⁷⁷ If it is possible to read the wife’s utterance in this way, then it is also possible to see that self-blindness as it emerges in Kierkegaard and Climacus’ thinking need not entail a total lack of awareness of one’s agency.

¹⁷⁵ Ramsland, "Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication," 330.

¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 45.

¹⁷⁷ Thank you to Prof. Beatrice Han-Pile for bringing this reading to my attention.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by showing why one might find the self-deception model for understanding Kierkegaard's target audience and the illusion of Christendom appealing. Crucially, the underlying assumption of such reading is that the self-deceived person *knows* that they are in an illusion when they call themselves Christians, and that they are motivated to remain in the illusion for fear of making changes and losing face upon having their illusion exposed as such. In turn, the implication of the self-deception reading is that Kierkegaard used indirect communication as a way of bypassing the deluded recipient's defences, as proponents of the Bypass Interpretation would claim.

Against the self-deception model, I have suggested to see the illusion instead as a case of self-blindness constituted by forms of self-estrangement – that those in the grip of the illusion of Christendom cannot see first-personally that *they* are in an illusion when they call themselves Christians. On this note, I also drew attention to Kierkegaard's charge against his audience for confusing the categories, in which one engages disinterestedly with that which requires one to engage in first-personally interested ways.

Also, I re-examined Kierkegaard's anecdote, suggesting that the absence of resistance on the deluded public's part indicates a lack of *first-personal* awareness that there is something suspicious about their Christianity, or that there is something not quite right to call themselves Christians. As we have seen from the anecdote, the public ignores and dismisses the religious enthusiast as a fanatic, not worthy of attention. Similarly, in Climacus' satire, neither those around the man who doubted his faith, nor the man's wife showed any signs of being aware that they are going about their Christian life superficially and impersonally; they were not even upset that the man's re-examination of his own faith could reveal their superficial and impersonal relation to Christianity. If my characterisation of Kierkegaard's target audience is correct, that they are self-blinded in the sense described above, then we do

have reason to dispense with interpretations which claim that indirect communication's purpose is to impart criticisms in an implicit and therefore, non-offensive or non-triggering way.

More importantly, as I have mentioned in the above, Kierkegaard presents primitive thinking as a mode of thought and inquiry that can enable his audience to regain a more "primitive impression of [their] existence", that is, of reconnecting his audience with their agency *qua* human being in a first-personal way.¹⁷⁸ And as I have also mentioned, such mode of thought and inquiry finds fuller development in the concept of double-reflection, which is discussed most extensively by his pseudonym Johannes Climacus in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. We will now turn to discuss double-reflection in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 292.

Chapter 3 Double-Reflection as Such: Abstract and Concrete Reflection

In the previous chapter, I argued that the illusion of Christendom is better characterised as a case of self-blindness that is constituted by forms of self-estrangement (i.e., the confusion of categories and the lack of primitivity). I further established the importance that primitive thinking plays in combating against self-blindness and self-estrangement. Most importantly, Kierkegaard's concept of primitive thinking finds fuller development in his concept of a double-reflection, which he regards as exemplified in a paradigmatic way by Socrates. This concept of double-reflection is discussed most extensively by his pseudonym Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which is the topic of discussion for this chapter. Crucially, the concept of double-reflection as it is discussed in Climacus' *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* appears in *two* distinct but closely linked formulations: 'double-reflection as such' and 'double-reflection in communication'.¹⁷⁹ The first formulation expresses double-reflection purely as a mode of thought and inquiry. The second formulation on the other hand essentially denotes indirect communication. This chapter will focus on discussing the former formulation, leaving the latter for the next chapter.

This chapter will begin by highlighting the differences between the *two* distinct moments of reflection that come together in double-reflection, namely, 'Objective Thinking' and 'Subjective Thinking'. Crucially, as we shall see, objective thinking is that disinterested mode of thought and inquiry appropriate for aesthetic-intellectual matters. Now, the inclusion of objective thinking in double-reflection might seem to be in tension with the overall aim of double-reflection, especially since double-reflection is supposed to be that mode of thought and inquiry aimed at reconnecting an individual with their existence and agency *qua* human. Given such aim, what role can a mode of disinterested thought and inquiry play?

¹⁷⁹ I borrow the terms for this distinction from: Martin Andic, "Love's Redoubling and the Eternal Like for Like," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Mercer University Press, 1999), 24-25.

To address the above, I will introduce and explain Climacus' distinction between accidental knowing and essential knowing, which is basically an extension to his distinction between objective thinking and subjective thinking, respectively. With reference to Climacus' distinction between accidental knowing and essential knowing, I want to bring out *two* subtle but important points concerning double-reflection. Firstly, it is not objective thinking *per se* that is problematic; what is problematic rather is a *maximally* abstract or objective mode of thought and inquiry, which Climacus attributes to Hegel's proposal of pure thought or presuppositionless thought and inquiry. Secondly, double-reflection as a mode of thought and inquiry is *both* abstract, objective, third-personal *and* concrete, subjective, first-personal. As alluded to in the previous chapter, objective thinking is in order, at least initially since there is a degree of abstractness to ethico-religious matters. What is crucial is that the thinker brings that abstract thought back into concrete relation with their own existence and agency. In other words, in double-reflection, the thinker moves from the first moment of reflection (i.e., objective thinking) to the second moment of reflection (i.e., subjective thinking). And in this second moment of reflection, the thinker engages in self-examination. As we shall see, Socrates is exemplary in this regard.

But in addition to self-examination, the second moment of reflection in double-reflection (i.e., subjective thinking) also involves what Climacus calls 'assimilation' (or more commonly known as 'appropriation').¹⁸⁰ One possible misinterpretation of appropriation is to see it as action in the crude sense of putting some principles for living into practice. On this misinterpretation, double-reflection is essentially understood as a movement from thought to action. And whilst I do acknowledge the place of 'action' in double-reflection, I reject the notion of acting in the crude sense. As I will show with reference to Climacus' distinction between thought and action, the 'action' of double-reflection is not a matter of practicing, but

¹⁸⁰ I will use 'appropriation' throughout to avoid verbiage.

of the thinker's identifying himself first-personally with a possible course of existing and exercising agency – that is, the agent *avows* *x* as *his*, where *x* stands for some possible course of existing or exercising one's agency. This moment of avowal or disavowal comes after the thinker's self-examination. It is this first-personal avowal of Christianity that Kierkegaard's deluded audience lack.

Lastly, in the closing section of this chapter, I will raise and address the following the question: what makes it such that Kierkegaard cannot tell or inform his audience directly that they are self-blinded, and that they are in an illusion when they engage with Christianity disinterestedly; that they need to examine how they live and obtain a first-personal awareness of how they live as a Christian (i.e., to engage in double-reflection)? As I will argue, since direct communication imparts knowledge or information, direct communication affords a third-person report of the recipient's agency, thus further estranging the recipient from himself. Moreover, direct communication as Kierkegaard envisions can only engage the recipient in situation where they either agree or disagree with the knowledge or information imparted. And because of this, Kierkegaard thinks telling the other to engage in self-examination directly would only put the recipient in a situation where they think they are invited to agree or disagree whether to engage in self-examination. Kierkegaard firmly maintains that the capacity for engaging in self-examination in double-reflection must be brought out from the recipient, which is where indirect communication come into play. And in anticipation for the next chapter, I will present Katherine Ramsland's account of indirect communication, which claims that indirect communication works *not* by imparting any knowledge or information (not even implicitly), but by invoking appropriate models for comparison such that the recipient is *provoked* to engage in double-reflection.

1. Objective Thinking and Subjective Thinking

To begin our discussion, let us turn to consider Climacus' outline of double-reflection:

While objective thought is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker is, as existing, essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it. Therefore, his thinking has a different kind of reflection, namely the reflection of inwardness, of possession, by virtue of which it belongs to the subject and to no other. While objective thought invests everything in result, and helps all mankind to cheat by copying and rattling off result and answer by rote, subjective thought invests everything in becoming and omits the result; partly just because this belongs to him, since he possesses the way, partly because as an existing individual he is constantly coming to be, which holds true of every human being who has not let himself be fooled into becoming objective, into inhumanly becoming speculation. The reflection of inwardness is the subjective thinker's double reflection. In thinking, he thinks the universal, but as existing in this thinking, as assimilating this in his inwardness, he becomes more and more subjectively isolated.¹⁸¹

As we can see, *two* modes of thinking emerge from Climacus' outline of double-reflection, namely, 'Objective Thinking' and 'Subjective Thinking'. To understand how these two are distinct, I will discuss and explain their differences; I have highlighted their differences in the table below:

Objective Thinking	Subjective Thinking
The thinker who engages in objective thinking is <i>indifferent</i> to his own existence.	The thinker who engages in subjective thinking is <i>interested</i> in his own thinking and therefore, <i>exists</i> in his own thinking.
The thinker who engages in objective thinking invests everything in <i>results</i> .	The thinker who engages in subjective thinking invests everything in <i>becoming</i> .
The objective thinker does <i>not engage</i> in double-reflection. Therefore, appropriation does <i>not</i> occur, and the objective thinker does <i>not exist</i> in his thinking about the universal.	The subjective thinker <i>engages</i> in double-reflection. Therefore, appropriation occurs, and the subjective thinker <i>exists</i> in his thinking about the universal.

Admittedly, the sudden bombardment of new terminologies and concepts is nothing short of intimidating (e.g., indifference, results, assimilation/appropriation). However, as I will show, some of these concepts are in fact concepts that we have already covered in the

¹⁸¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 62.

previous chapter; they simply find a different expression in Climacus' *Postscript*. Take the first difference for instance, that objective thinking is characteristically *indifferent* and subjective thinking is characteristically *interested* vis-à-vis existence. Here, we are brought to recall the appropriate modes of thought and inquiry for matters belonging in the categories of the aesthetic-intellectual and the ethico-religious. That the appropriate mode of thought and inquiry for aesthetic-intellectual matters is *disinterested* contemplation, where one contemplates the object of thought apart from any concerns for one's existence and agency *qua* human being, that one contemplates as a spectator. Climacus confirms the link in the following,

The path of objective reflection...always leads *away from the subject*, whose existence or non-existence becomes, and from the objective point of view quite rightly, infinitely indifferent.¹⁸²

And so, whereas previously we did not have a name for the appropriate mode of thought and inquiry for aesthetic-intellectual matters, it now gets spelled out as 'objective thinking' in Climacus' conception of double-reflection.

Conversely, the appropriate mode of thought and inquiry for ethico-religious matters involves a personal *interest* in one's existence and agency, where one thinks and inquires how the matter at hand relates to one's existence and to one's agency. Clearly, Climacus' description of subjective thinking fits well in this regard. Again, Climacus confirms the connection:

Subjective reflection turns in towards subjectivity [...] It is not for a single moment forgotten here that the subject is existing and that existing is a becoming...¹⁸³

And more than confirming subjective thinking as the appropriate mode of thought and inquiry for ethico-religious matters, Climacus' description here also reveals why he uses the subjectivity/objectivity contrast to describe the two modes of thought. 'Subjective thinking' is

¹⁸² Ibid. 163. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 165.

so-called because it is directed towards the *subject*, which is the thinker himself. On the other hand, ‘objective thinking’ is so-called because the mode of thought is directed away from the subject and towards the *object* of thought. Or in so far as the subject *is* the object of thought, the subject is treated merely as an object, i.e. in a spectatorial mode of self-regard.

Turning now to the second difference between objective thinking and subjective thinking. The former, as we can see, has its focus directed towards what Climacus calls ‘results’, whilst the latter has its focus on ‘becoming’. This opposition between results and becoming might strike us as perplexing, especially considering that we do not normally put these two concepts as antithetical to one another. But in pitting ‘results’ against ‘becoming’, Climacus is already narrowing the definition of the former within the context of human existence. That is, results stand opposed to becoming because results terminate one’s becoming of oneself; that by obtaining results, one no longer feels the need to search for the meaning of one’s existence or strive to become who they are to become.

Results have this terminative power, I think, because results are essentially stock answers to the fundamental questions of what it means to be human, or how one ought to live as a human (Cf. clichés and stock phrases). This is why in highlighting the difference between objective thinking and subjective thinking, Climacus describes results as that which helps mankind cheat – i.e., to cheat in a person’s thought and inquiry on what it means for them to be human, or how they ought to live as a human. The subjective thinker, Climacus writes, leaves out results or stock answers in favour of becoming, more specifically on his *own* becoming. That is, the subjective thinker is concerned to think for himself on what it means for him to be human and how he ought to live his life, or to search for the meaning and purpose of his own existence. For this reason, the subjective thinker’s reflection concerns him and him alone, since the subjective thinker does not prescribe to others what it means for

them to be human, or how they ought to live. Hence, the matter of the subjective thinker's becoming belongs to him alone.

Here, we reach the third difference, namely, appropriation. Now, in order to enter into a discussion of what appropriation means, it is crucial that we first discuss the following: how can a disinterested mode of thought and inquiry have any part to play in a mode of thought and inquiry that is supposed to reacquaint an individual with their existence and agency *qua* human? As touched upon in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard admits that thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters admit a degree of abstractness. However, the key to proper thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters require a return from the abstract back to oneself; to remain in the abstract places one in a mode of purely disinterested contemplation, which misses the essential character of ethico-religious matters – that such matters bear an essential relation to one's existence and agency *qua* human. And so, in the next section, I want to show that it is part and parcel of one who exercises double-reflection to bring the abstract back to himself concretely in relation to his own existence and agency. And crucially, that it is not objective thinking that Climacus finds objectionable, but with the idea of pure thought or presuppositionless thinking, which as mentioned in the previous chapter, is very much linked with self-estrangement, with forgetting one's existence as a human being. (I will leave the discussion of appropriation for section three.)

2. Accidental Knowing and Essential Knowing: Socrates' Double-Reflection and the Fantasy of Pure Thought

In this section, my main goal is to show that objective thinking has a role to play in double-reflection, that double-reflection as a mode of thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters is *both* abstract, objective, third-personal *and* concrete, subjective, first-personal. To do this, I want us to begin by considering Climacus' distinction between accidental knowing and essential knowing, which I think not only furthers our understanding of the distinction between objective thinking and subjective thinking, but it also brings to light that objective thinking *per se* is not the problem; pure thought is. The distinction between the two kinds of knowing is introduced by Climacus as follows:

All essential knowing concerns existence, or only such knowing as has an essential relation to existence is essential, is essential knowing. Knowing that does not concern existence, inwardly in the reflection of inwardness, is from an essential point of view accidental knowing, its degree and scope from an essential point of view indifferent. That essential knowing essentially relates to existence does not, however, signify that abstract identity mentioned above, between thought and being; nor, objectively, does it mean that the knowledge corresponds to something that is there as its object. It means that the knowledge relates to the knower, who is essentially someone existing, and that for this reason all essential knowledge essentially relates to existence and to existing.¹⁸⁴

In the above passage, readers are told that essential knowing is knowing that is concerned with existence, and that for this reason, the knowing has an essential relation to existence. Conversely, if one's knowing does *not* concern existence, then the knowing is to be considered as 'accidental'. Noticeably, the distinction between accidental knowing and essential knowing is reminiscent of Climacus' distinction between objective thinking and subjective thinking. Here, I think we are invited to see the distinction between accidental knowing and essential knowing as an extension or elaboration of the distinction between objective thinking and subjective thinking. For instance, like subjective thinking, essential knowing is characterised by an interest or concern for existence, whereas accidental knowing

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 166.

is like objective thinking, in that they are both characterised by an indifference towards existence. But to ensure that we are not talking about an altogether different distinction, it will be beneficial to test the connection by taking up the following inquiry: in what way is objective thinking ‘accidental’ and in what way is subjective thinking ‘essential’?

Starting with the objective thinking and accidental knowing, such knowing is described as accidental *not* because one comes to know something accidentally (i.e., by chance). This point should be obvious, especially considering that both types of knowing are introduced in the context of how one is oriented towards their existence, whether with personal concern or indifference. And with this consideration in mind, I suggest the following understanding: that objective thinking is accidental because the thinker’s existence is irrelevant or unimportant in this mode of thought and inquiry. This reading is evident in Climacus’ following claim:

...the path of objective reflection makes the subject *accidental*, and existence thereby into something indifferent, vanishing.¹⁸⁵

From this, we can infer that subjective thinking is essential because the subject and the subject’s existence is an *essential* component to the subjective mode of thought and inquiry. Indeed, this is compatible with Climacus’ description of subjective thinking as characterised by the thinker’s *interest* in his own existence.

Following from above, I want to draw our attention to *two* further distinguishing features of essential knowing. The first distinguishing feature concerns the knowledge that is taken up. As Climacus makes clear, the knowledge taken up in essential knowing is called ‘essential knowledge’, which is “knowledge [that] relates to the knower, who is essentially someone existing”, and that for this reason, “all essential knowledge essentially relates to existence and to existing”.¹⁸⁶ Then, Climacus also distinguishes essential knowledge from

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 162. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 166.

knowledge in the objective sense, where such “knowledge corresponds to something that is there as its object”. Now, in setting up this distinction between two categories of knowledge, what Climacus is invoking here, I show, are the two categories and the objects of thought that belong in those categories, namely, the categories of the aesthetic-intellectual and the ethico-religious.

As Climacus distinguishes, essential knowledge is not like some empirical *object* out there in the world waiting to be discovered and known. Knowledge of the latter kind might involve knowledge of how many white swans there are in the world, or what side effects a particular drug might have on the human body. Common to these examples lie in the mode of acquisition, which is that it is not *essential* for the thinker to take his own existence into account – that is, the thinker need not think and inquire how such knowledge relates to their own existence. The implication here then is that the knowing required for knowledge in the objective sense is accidental knowing (or objective thinking), where the thinker’s existence is a matter of indifference, since what matters is only the object of thought itself, whether one has understood it or grasped it correctly. As such, knowledge that “corresponds to something that is there as its object” would be objects of thought belonging to the category of the aesthetic-intellectual.¹⁸⁷

Essential knowledge, on the other hand, relates to existence. For this reason, one’s existence is *essential* in the process of thought and inquiry – that one would miss what is crucial to essential knowledge when thought and inquired disinterestedly or apart from the thinker’s own existence. And as such, essential knowledge are essentially objects of thought belonging to the category of the ethico-religious, which as mentioned in the previous chapter, are matters that bear an essential relation to one’s existence and agency *qua* human. Climacus

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

illustrates the above point with reference to the knowledge of God or knowing God – as

Climacus writes:

Let us take knowledge of God as an example. Objectively, reflection is on it being the true God, subjectively on the individual relating to something in such a way that his relation is truly a God-relationship.¹⁸⁸

In this short passage, Climacus claims that when God is thought and inquired objectively, meaning as an empirical object in the world out there to be known, one's focus is on whether God truly exists or not, or whether the god that is thought and inquired about is *the* true God, and so on. On the other hand, when God is thought and inquired subjectively, one's focus is on whether one's relationship with God is *true* or not. Clearly, there is a difference in orientation towards the matter of knowing God.

Then, as Climacus continues, to think and inquire about God in the objective or accidental mode is to be confused (i.e., confuse the categories), for “God is subject” and not an empirical object in the world to be known.¹⁸⁹ Climacus illustrates this confusion comedically with the following thought-experiment:

If someone living in the midst of Christianity enters the house of God, the house of the true God, knowing the true conception of God, and now prays but prays untruly, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol – where then is there more truth? The one prays truly to God though he worships an idol; the other prays untruly to the true God, and therefore truly worships an idol.¹⁹⁰

Here, Climacus' thought-experiment makes apparent the illusoriness of confusing the categories – that when one goes about their Christian lives disinterestedly, then God is nothing more than an object or an idol, even though one is worshipping the true God. For this reason, knowing God requires a kind of knowing whereby the knowing does not objectify God. This knowing, of course, is essential knowing (or subjective thinking), in which one thinks and inquire about God in relation to one's own existence and agency; in doing so, one

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 168.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 169.

approaches God not as a *something* but as a *someone* that the thinker can relate to on a personal level. That is, God becomes one's own God, rather than a something that has no relation or real significance to one's own existence and agency. And so, it is a distinguishing feature of essential knowing (or subjective thinking) that it takes up objects of thought belonging to the category of the ethico-religious.

This brings me to the second distinguishing feature of essential knowing, that essential knowing for Climacus is to be distinguished from what he calls the 'abstract identity', which is something that Climacus mentions in the pages prior to the passage above; this abstract identity is what Climacus calls the "fantastic *I-I*".¹⁹¹ Crucially, this notion of a 'fantastic *I-I*' is Climacus' way of expressing mockery and suspicion towards the Hegelian proposal for an absolutely presuppositionless mode of thought and inquiry (also called 'pure thought'), which emerges from Hegel's own project of articulating a form of philosophical thought and inquiry that does not begin with any assumptions and concepts as a given. That is, the thought and inquiry must not be mediated by concepts or thoughts arising from other reflective processes – that such thought and inquiry must, in Hegel's terms, begin with the immediate or rather, be "immediacy itself".¹⁹² The idea here is that thought should not be motivated or determined by other concepts or prior reflections, but should be self-motivated or self-determined.

So, it is part and parcel of presuppositionless thought and inquiry that it involves total abstraction from the particularities of the thinker. That is, the thinker's own assumptions must be completely taken out from the very process of one's thought and inquiry for it to be truly presuppositionless. Due to this, there is a sense in which thought itself takes on being

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 165-66. Note, '*I-I*' is a reference to J. G. Fichte's notion of "self-consciousness as philosophy's foundation". Please see *Postscript*, p. 100fn.

¹⁹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, ed. and trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48.

and thinks itself through the thinker who is reduced to a vessel for thought itself. This is clearly expressed, for instance, in Hegel's following claim:

[T]hinking is only genuine...with respect to its form insofar as it is not a *particular* being or doing of the subject, but consists precisely in this, that consciousness conducts itself as an abstract 'I,' as *freed* from all *particularity* of features, states, etc., and does only what is universal, in which it is identical with all individuals.¹⁹³

Roughly, the idea is that thinking in its most genuine and *pure* form is not when thinking is done by a particular thinker, but rather when thinking takes on the "abstract 'I'", an 'I' that is purified from the thinker's own particularities. And so, in distinguishing essential knowing from that abstract identity of the 'fantastic *I-I*', it is clearly a distinguishing feature of essential knowing that it is not totally abstracted from the thinker's own existence.

But why is presuppositionless thought and inquiry labelled as 'fantastic'? As I argue, Climacus labels presuppositionless thought and inquiry as 'fantastic' because he finds it absurd that a thinker can even possibly occupy a totally presuppositionless perspective in thought and inquiry, or that a thinker can completely transcend their own particularity in thought. That is, the presuppositionless standpoint is fantastic for Climacus because such standpoint is really no standpoint at all – to borrow the title of a famous work by Thomas Nagel, such standpoint is 'a view from nowhere'. That this absolutely presuppositionless thought and inquiry cannot be fully taken up by any agent who is temporally situated within their own existential circumstances and context. is best captured in Climacus' satirical remark about the 'fantastic *I-I*': "The *I-I* is a mathematical point that doesn't exist at all; so anyone may happily adopt this standpoint and no one will be in their way".¹⁹⁴

In this connection, Climacus makes a piercing objection against Hegel's call for a completely presuppositionless form of philosophical thought and inquiry. As Climacus

¹⁹³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic, with the Zusätze: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. W. A. Suchting T. F. Geraets, and H. S. Harris (Hackett Publishing, 1991), 55.

¹⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 165.

argues, Hegel fails to introspectively detect the implications of his own proposal – that the proposal itself was arrived at via processes of prior reflection or by other presuppositions of what proper philosophical thought and inquiry should look like. As Climacus puts it sharply: “The beginning of the system that begins with the immediate *is then itself attained through a reflection*”.¹⁹⁵ Famously, the above concerns and objections led Climacus to label this absolutely presuppositionless thought and inquiry as a “pure chimera” – that is, a fantasy.¹⁹⁶

Now, given that essential knowing is set apart from presuppositionless thought and inquiry, it might be tempting to hastily associate presuppositionless thought and inquiry with objective thinking or accidental knowing, since essential knowing is set up as antithetical to accidental knowing. That is, one might quickly infer that if essential knowing is distinguished from accidental knowing and presuppositionless thought and inquiry, then accidental knowing *must* be this presuppositionless thought and inquiry. However, nowhere in the passage does Climacus ever call accidental knowing (or objective thinking) as presuppositionless thought and inquiry. But it is important to acknowledge, however, that accidental knowing (or objective thinking) does share in the abstractness that is characteristic of presuppositionless thought and inquiry, since accidental knowing (or objective thinking) is thought and inquiry that is detached from the thinker’s own existence.

What sets presuppositionless thought and inquiry apart from accidental knowing (or objective thinking) is that the former is properly abstract in the sense of *total* abstraction from the thinker’s particularities. Accidental knowing (or objective thinking) is not quite to the same degree, I think, especially when we consider Climacus’ following claim:

The path of objective reflection now *leads* to abstract thinking, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of various kinds, and always leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence becomes, and from the objective point of view quite rightly, infinitely indifferent”.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 95.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 163. Emphasis mine. Note, we have already looked at this quote in the first section. But I am quoting to emphasise a different point.

As Climacus makes clear, objective thinking can *lead* to thinking that is abstract (*proper*), since objective thinking, like presuppositionless thought and inquiry, has its focus directed away from the subject. But there is still clearly a qualitative difference between something as *being* that and something as *leading* to that. For this reason, we ought not to hastily associate accidental knowing (or objective thinking) with presuppositionless thought and inquiry, albeit they share the common trait of indifference towards the thinker and their existence.

On this note, it is crucial to keep in mind that objective thinking has its proper place in the contemplation of aesthetic-intellectual matters, and even in ethico-religious matters, at least initially. The problem is when one exercises objective thinking in one's thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters without that shift to subjective thinking in double-reflection. This brings me to the next point, which is that Climacus sees Socrates as presenting a model for how objective thinking and subjective thinking can work together in double-reflection.

Crucially, Climacus asserts that the subjective thinker has the task "of understanding the abstract concretely", that the subjective thinker "understands what [it] is to be the abstract human concretely in terms of being this particular existing human being".¹⁹⁸ Here, what Climacus means is that ethico-religious matters admit of an element of abstractness, for the scope of such matters are broad, and that such matters are also considered as detached from immediate and practical concerns. But what makes the subjective thinker distinct is that they are able to think and inquire about ethico-religious matters in such a way that the thought and inquiry does not remain stuck in the abstract. Rather, the subjective thinker exercises double-reflection, thus bringing their thought and inquiry about the abstract back into concrete relation with their own existence, such that the thought and inquiry about the abstract has

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 295.

meaning for their own situation and context. As we shall see, the ability to think the abstract concretely is, in Climacus' view, exemplified by the Socratic style of thought and inquiry – that, for instance, Socrates pursues abstract questions concerning what it means to be human, such as ‘What does it mean to live well as a human?’ or ‘What does it mean to be mortal?’ or ‘What is the good human life?’, in such a way that the thought and inquiry does not remain in the abstract but is always brought back into relation with himself or with his interlocutors.

With the above in mind, let us turn to Climacus' consideration of Socrates' reflection on immortality, which goes as follows:

Let us consider Socrates. Nowadays everyone dabbles in a few proofs; one person has several, another not so many. But Socrates! He submits the question in what is objectively a problematic way: *if* there is an immortality. Does that mean that compared with one of the modern thinkers with three proofs he was a doubter? Not at all, he invests his entire life in this ‘if there is’. He dares to die, and with the passion of the infinite he has so ordered his entire life as to make it likely that it must be so – *if* there is an immortality. Is there any better proof of the immortality of the soul? But those with three proofs do not at all order their lives accordingly. If there is an immortality it must be disgusted with the way they live.¹⁹⁹

In this passage, Climacus highlights the similarities and differences between Socrates and those who want to prove that there is an immortality – that like those who want to prove immortality, Socrates also cast his thought and inquiry of immortality objectively. But where Socrates departs from those who scurry for proof is that Socrates does not remain in the objective, disinterested, abstract mode of thought and inquiry. As Climacus reveals, Socrates' life is at stake in the whole process of his thought and inquiry: notably, Socrates holds fast to this ‘*if*’ (i.e., *if* there is an immortality). Then, as Climacus point out, in holding fast to this ‘if’, Socrates orders his whole life around this ‘if’.

To be sure, however, Climacus is not claiming that Socrates is exemplifying a kind of wishful thinking, whereby Socrates wants to believe that there is an immortality, and so, he is wishfully living as if there is an immortality regardless of whether there is immortality or

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 169-70.

not. We must bear in mind that Socrates is not even in the business of trying to make it certain that there is an immortality, as those who try to prove immortality are. Rather, in saying that Socrates lives in such a way that he makes it likely that there is an immortality, Climacus wants to capture the idea that Socrates takes up the possibility of immortality as a live possibility *for him*, which then consequently shapes how Socrates exists and how he exercises his agency. Importantly, as we shall discuss in the next section, this first-personal taking up of a possible course of existence and agency constitutes the appropriation in double-reflection.

Crucially then, Socrates' return to himself from the abstract signifies a shift in his thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters, like that of immortality – this shift goes from the third-person perspective ('if there is an immortality') to the first-person perspective ('if there is an immortality, how then, should *I* (Socrates) live?'). And in shifting to the first-personal perspective, Socrates is brought to examine himself, thus bringing a first-personal awareness of how he exercises his agency. Moreover, this turning from the third-person to the first-personal 'I' of subjective thinking in double-reflection, I think, constitutes what Climacus meant by the "reflection of inwardness".²⁰⁰ That the motion of the subjective thinker's thought and inquiry is comparable to that of a boomerang, where the attention is initially directed outwardly towards the object of thought, but understanding that the object of thought bears an essential relation to his existence and agency, the subjective thinker brings the initial moment of abstract thought and inquiry back concretely and *inwardly* upon himself.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 62.

3. Thought and Action: The Case of the Good Samaritan

Finally, we reach the last difference between objective thinking and subjective thinking – that the subjective thinker engages in double-reflection by first engaging in abstract thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters, and then to appropriating that thought and inquiry of ethico-religious matters. The key here clearly depends on understanding the term ‘appropriation’. Now, as mentioned in the introduction, one possible interpretation of the term is to understand it as denoting action in the sense of putting into practice some principles for living. To appreciate how this interpretation might gain traction, let us begin by considering the following short passage from the *Postscript*:

No, it is said, not every acceptance of Christian teaching makes one a Christian; what it especially depends on is appropriation, that one appropriates this doctrine and holds it fast in a quite different way from any other, that one will live and die in it, risk one’s life for it, etc.²⁰¹

On a surface reading of the passage, one can readily tease out a distinction between a person who acknowledges and accepts the teachings of Christianity, and a person who will make sacrifices for the sake of upholding the teachings of Christianity, thus going beyond acknowledging and accepting the teachings; crucially, it is the latter that appropriates. And here, the most apparent difference is this: that the former merely *knows* the doctrines, whilst the latter not only knows but *practices* the doctrines, and is, therefore, a Christian. Reading the concept of appropriation this way, one might say, fits well with what Kierkegaard said about his contemporaries. Of certain people, he writes that they ‘never once go to church, never think about God, never name his name except when they curse!’ and that ‘it has never occurred [to them] that their lives should have some duty to God’.²⁰² And so, one might think, if double-reflection is supposed to be a remedial measure against the illusion of Christendom, then double-reflection cannot just merely be a matter of obtaining a first-personal awareness

²⁰¹ Ibid. 512.

²⁰² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 41.

of one's agency. Surely, as one might assert, in the case of Kierkegaard's audience, the end goal of their thought and inquiry should be to act, to practice, or to 'live out' Christianity.

Now, as I understand it, the key underlying assumption to the above misinterpretation concerning appropriation is this: at the root of it, what Kierkegaard found objectionable about the illusion of Christendom is a lack of Christian behaviour on the part of the audience. Whilst it is true that Kierkegaard sometimes complain about the lack of Christian behaviour amongst his audience, I think Kierkegaard gives us reasons to think that his concern goes beyond that of practicing or not-practicing. Consider again Kierkegaard's criticism of those who confuse the categories by reading God's Word disinterestedly (i.e., those who only observe the mirror). Strictly speaking, such an individual *is* in some sense practicing Christianity, especially if we take reading the Scriptures as a form of practicing Christianity.²⁰³ But the fact that the above reader come under Kierkegaard's criticism strongly suggests that the deeper problem here for Kierkegaard, I argue, is not whether or not people are engaging in practices associated with Christianity, but with *how* people are practicing Christianity: that is, whether people are engaging with Christianity first-personally or disinterestedly, third-personally. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, what Kierkegaard found *illusory* about Christendom was precisely people's lack of personal engagement with Christianity – that Kierkegaard's audience complacently go about being Christians disinterestedly, when Christianity essentially *requires* one's personal engagement with it (e.g., personal relationship with God in faith). And as mentioned, this lack of personal engagement with Christianity is borne out of a deeper existential condition – that of forgetting their existence as a human being; of evading from themselves *qua* agent given to make commitments and take responsibility for their agency.

²⁰³ For instance, consider Psalm 1.

Furthermore, as I argue, to construe the enterprise of being a Christian as a matter of applying some Christian principles to one's life is to precisely come under Kierkegaard's criticism, for one then engages with Christianity disinterestedly, as one treats Christianity *merely* as some doctrine that one needs to apply. Consider the scenario of a person who takes delight in the Christian principles for living, happily applies those principles to their lives, but does not engage in a personal relationship with God. By the lights of Christianity, such an individual cannot truly be considered a Christian, since being Christian involves a deeply personal relationship with God.²⁰⁴ The possibility of such scenario should cast doubt on viewing appropriation as a matter of practicing. But if appropriation is not a matter of applying and practicing some principles for living, what then, could appropriation be?

In light of the above, the burden of this section is to show that insofar as there is action in appropriation, such action denotes an individual's first-personally identifying themselves with some possible course of existence and agency *as* belonging to *them*. To do this, it is vital that we discuss Climacus' distinction between thought and action. And as an entry to that distinction, let us begin by considering Climacus' rendition of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which goes as follows:

When the Levite passed by the unfortunate man who had been fallen upon by robbers on the way from Jericho to Jerusalem, the thought may have struck him, while still some distance from the sufferer, that it was a beautiful deed to help someone in distress; he may even already have thought of how rewarding a good deed like this is in itself; perhaps he rode more slowly because immersed in this thought. But as he came closer and closer the difficulties began to appear, and he rode past. Now he probably rode fast in order to get away quickly, away from the thought of the danger on the road, away from the thought that the robbers might be nearby, away from the thought of how easily the victim might come to confuse him with the robbers who had left him lying there. He failed to act. But suppose that, on the way, he was overtaken by repentance, suppose he turned quickly about, fearing neither robbers nor other hazards but only that he might arrive too late. Suppose he did arrive too late, the Good Samaritan having already managed to get the sufferer into the inn – had he not then acted? Certainly he had, and yet he did not come to act in the external world.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Consider, for instance, Matthew 7:21-23.

²⁰⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 285.

Now, on the face of it, Climacus' rendition of the parable seems to support the idea of appropriation's action as practicing some principles for living – that the Levite, for instance, had practiced what he knew to be his duty when he turned back to help the injured man, even though he was too late. However, upon closer attention, Climacus explicitly makes clear in the last sentence, that in so far as the Levite had acted, the Levite's action was not to be confused with acting in the external sense (the Levite “did not come to act in the external world”).²⁰⁶ In other words, Climacus considers the Levite to have acted not because the Levite had turned back to help the injured man; in Climacus' view, it was something else that had determined the Levite's acting. But what could that be?

In response to the above concern, I think Climacus has in fact given us a clue for figuring out his concept of 'action' – that if the Levite's action is *not* to be confused with action in the *external* sense, then perhaps we should turn to consider the Levite's action in the *internal* sense. To test this idea of an internal action, let us consider Climacus' distinction between thought and action, which goes as follows:

To think that the external is what makes the action into an action is foolishness [...] If there is to be any distinction at all between thought and action, this can only be sustained by assigning possibility, disinterestedness, and objectivity to thinking – action to subjectivity. But now a *confinium* readily comes in sight. Thus, when thinking that I want to do such and such, this thought is not yet an action and differs in all eternity from it qualitatively, but it is a possibility in which the interest of action and actuality is already reflected. Disinterestedness and objectivity are therefore about to be disturbed because actuality wants to come to grips with them. (Thus there is a sin in thought.) – What is actual is not the external action but an internality in which the individual cancels the possibility and identifies himself with what is thought, in order to exist in it. This is action.²⁰⁷

After rejecting action as some external outward behaviour, Climacus proceeds to introduce a distinction between thought and action, asserting that if there is to be a difference between the two, the difference must lie in thought being typically disinterested. But, as Climacus go on to claim, there is a unique kind of thinking that stretches the border between thought and action,

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 284.

disturbing the disinterestedness typical of thought. This unique kind of thinking is none other than double-reflection – as Climacus indicate, the disinterestedness typical of thought is disturbed when one’s thought and inquiry involves a first-personal interest in actualising a possible course of existence and agency (“I want to do such and such”).²⁰⁸ And crucially, towards the end of the passage, Climacus presents action as an individual’s internally identifying himself with his thought on a possible course of existence and agency – that an individual does not just contemplate disinterestedly on such possibility, but takes up, avows, or *appropriates* first-personally such possibility *as* his own. Using myself as an example, action is when I avow this particular way of existing or this particular way of exercising agency *as mine*.

So, in articulating a distinction between thought and action, I think Climacus is also at once articulating how objective thinking and subjective thinking work together in double-reflection. That in the first moment of reflection (i.e., objective thinking), one is engaged in disinterestedly contemplating some possible course of existence and agency. In the case of our Levite, he first contemplates disinterestedly on how “beautiful [a] deed to help someone in distress” is, or “how rewarding a good deed like this is in itself”.²⁰⁹ But as the Levite exercises objective thinking in tandem with subjective thinking in double-reflection, the disinterestedness of the first reflection is disrupted, as now the Levite in the second moment of reflection or subjective thinking brings the possibility of helping the injured man into relation with his existence and agency, which involves engaging in a process of self-examination (e.g., ‘have I helped the injured man?’). This process of self-examination thus brings to fore first-personally his agency or how he has been living – that he has not, for instance, bore God’s name well as a Levite. The burden is especially heavy here, considering that in ancient Israelite history, Levites are divinely chosen as priestly representatives of God.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Climacus' sensitivity to this historic detail is reflected in his rendition – that the Levite was “overtaken by repentance”; for in turning his back on the injured man, the Levite his also turning back on who he is.²¹⁰ And so, the Levite appropriates the possibility of helping the injured man as *his* way of exercising his agency.

Now, at this point, one might raise the following concern: whilst it is not difficult to understand the Levite's action as an internal identifying himself with the possibility of helping the injured man, there is still no denying that the Levite had returned to help the injured man, that the Levite had therefore, acted in the external sense. Certainly, the Levite had acted in the external sense; and I do not think that Climacus is denying this either. Rather, as Climacus makes clear in the opening of the above passage, what he finds problematic (or foolish even), is the view “that the external is what makes the action into an action”.²¹¹ That is, what Climacus is expressing here, I think, is that a person's outward behaviour does *not* define or shape who they are; that just as those who read God's Word disinterestedly is in a way practicing Christianity, this does not necessarily make them a Christian, especially when being a Christian involves a first-personal engagement with its teachings, with God in faith. Rather, it is the first-personal avowal of a possible course of existence and exercising agency that makes the person who they claim to be. And this ownership of or commitment to one's way of living is precisely what is missing from Kierkegaard's self-blinded deluded audience.

So, considering Climacus' model for understanding action as the internal identifying oneself with one's thought about some possibility of agency, Climacus might happily accept then, that even if the Levite had *not* returned to help the injured man, that the Levite simply glances over to where the injured man was, or that the Levite suddenly stops in his tracks, the

²¹⁰ Ibid. 284.

²¹¹ Ibid.

Levite had still acted, for he had already appropriated the possibility of helping the injured man as his way of exercising his agency, as something integral to his existence.²¹²

²¹² Thank you to Dr. Steven Gormley for bringing this to my attention.

4. The Limits of Direct Communication: Third-Person Report and Assent

In this last section, I want to raise and address the following question: if the illusion of Christendom is in fact a case of self-blindness constituted by forms of self-estrangement, why then, can Kierkegaard not inform his deluded recipients directly of their condition? In fact, in calling out his audience's confusion of categories and lack of primitivity, has Kierkegaard not already done just that? Now, as I will argue, although it is entirely possible to speak about the illusion as plainly as Kierkegaard has, or to even directly and openly criticise a person ensnared in the illusion of Christendom, this is not the same as *enabling* the deluded person to see that *they themselves* are indeed trapped in the illusion. This, as I have been alluding to, is especially the case when the deluded person is essentially estranged from themselves and from their agency first-personally. In what follows, I want to argue for the following: that direct communication is limited with respect to dispelling the illusion of Christendom because as a mode of communication that imparts knowledge or information, direct communication imparts a *third-person report* of the recipient's agency, which further estranges the recipient from himself.

To begin, I want to draw attention to the following passage from a study on self-knowledge by Richard Moran – the passage runs as follows:

a *report* on an attitude of mine has an explanatory basis, grounded in evidence, and need not imply a commitment to the attitude's truth or justification, any more than its third-person equivalent would. Instead, the attribution is made in order to identify the states, forces, or whatever else that is driving the actual psychological machinery. An *avowal* of one's belief, by contrast, is not made on any psychologically explanatory basis, and is rather the expression of one's own present commitment to the truth of the proposition in question [. . .] When I *avow* a belief, I am not treating it as just an empirical fact about me [. . .] it is not something I am assailed by, but rather is mine to maintain or revoke.²¹³

²¹³ Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 86-89.

Here, I think Moran's distinction on *reporting* and *avowing* helpfully disclose what is ingredient to proper self-knowledge – that self-knowledge cannot merely be a matter of accurately reporting third-personally on what one thinks, says, or does; but that it also involves being first-personally aware of one's agency such that one could *avow* what one thinks, says, or does, *as* one's own. Indeed, whilst we could hardly call someone who cannot accurately describe themselves as possessing self-knowledge, it would also be odd to consider someone who only affords a third-person descriptive report on themselves as exemplary of a self-knowing agent.

As a way of bringing out the relevance of Moran's distinction to Kierkegaard's communication to his deluded audience, let us consider what a purely third-personal, detached report of oneself would look like by looking the following monologue from the film adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis' novel, *American Psycho*:

I live in the American Gardens building on West 81st street, on the eleventh floor. My name is Patrick Bateman. I'm twenty-seven years old. I believe in taking care of myself, and a balanced diet and a rigorous exercise routine. In the morning, if my face is a little puffy, I'll put on an ice pack while doing my stomach crunches. I can do a thousand now. After I remove the ice pack, I use a deep pore cleanser lotion. In the shower, I use a water activated gel cleanser. Then, a honey almond body scrub. And on the face, an exfoliating gel scrub. Then I apply an herb mint facial mask, which I leave on for ten minutes while I prepare the rest of my routine. I always use an aftershave lotion with little or no alcohol, because alcohol dries your face out and makes you look older. Then moisturizer, then an anti-aging eye balm followed by a final moisturizing protective lotion. There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no 'real me'. Only an entity, something illusory. And though I can hide my cold gaze, and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable, I simply am not there.²¹⁴

Sure enough, our protagonist Patrick Bateman is highly capable of introspection, as he reports himself with a great level of detail and accuracy: from the impersonal facts about himself (e.g., place of residency, name, and age), to his daily routine, down to his emotions and psychology. But in spite of all this reporting, one thing is clear: that Bateman is not first-

²¹⁴ *American Psycho*, directed by Marry Harron (United States: Lions Gate Films, 2000), DVD.

personally present with himself *qua* agent in a way that he owns the things that he says or does. But why should it matter whether a person is first-personally present with himself or not *qua* agent, vis-à-vis self-knowledge? In other words, what makes it such that a third-person report is insufficient to count as having self-knowledge? To address this, I will now return to reconsider Kierkegaard's anecdote of the religious enthusiast and the deluded public with reference to Moran's distinction between reporting and avowing.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a crucial point that I brought out concerning the anecdote is, *pace* Aumann and Mullen, that the deluded public's response to the religious enthusiast was *not* one of anger at having the illusion exposed as such. Rather, the enthusiast was simply dismissed as irrelevant. To recall, the point there was to first cast suspicion on the underlying assumption of the self-deception reading, that Kierkegaard's target audience *know* that they are deceiving themselves when calling themselves Christians; and then to present self-blindness as an alternative. Here, I want to carry the analysis of Kierkegaard's anecdote by applying Moran's distinction between reporting and avowing to the anecdote – that in denouncing the public as not being Christians, what the enthusiast is doing essentially is giving the public a third-person report on themselves. Here, there is no doubt that the deluded public understands what the enthusiast is saying – that the enthusiast is talking about Christianity, and that there are those who fall short of authentic Christianity.

However, as I argue, what direct communication cannot do is to *enable* the public to see that it is *them* that the enthusiast is talking about. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the recipient's self-image of being a Christian obstructs their first-personal awareness of how they live as a Christian (i.e., disinterestedly) – that even if they tried to reflect on how they live as a Christian, their thinking would immediately be mediated by their self-image of being a Christian. And so, from the perspective of the deluded public, there is a *distance* between themselves and the inauthentic Christians that the enthusiast is denouncing or reporting; they

simply cannot entertain the possibility of not being Christians as a live possibility for them – we can readily envisage the following complaint: ‘What is this person even saying? How can I not be a Christian?’ (Note, the similarity with the wife in Climacus’ satire). This inability to see that they themselves are living in an illusion, I think, explains why the deluded public in Kierkegaard’s anecdote react in the way that they do towards religious enthusiast, which is a sense of complacency.

On this note, consider Moran’s following point:

...without [the] capacity to endorse or withhold endorsement from [one’s] attitude, and without the exercise of that capacity making a difference to what [one] feels, this information may as well be about some other person....²¹⁵

This capacity to “endorse or withhold endorsement” is precisely the first-person agent’s awareness of which Bateman and Kierkegaard’s audience lack.²¹⁶ That in order to endorse or not endorse some thought, or deed, or word as one’s own, one must be present with oneself *qua* agent. But since Kierkegaard’s audience are detached from themselves *qua* agent, what the religious enthusiast says resounds as a report on some other party – that perhaps there are others out there that are not Christians, but not them.

Now, as a follow-up question to the above, if Kierkegaard (or the enthusiast) cannot directly tell the deluded audience that they are in an illusion in such a way that enables them to see for themselves first-personally that *they* are in an illusion, can Kierkegaard (or the enthusiast) not directly tell the deluded audience to re-examine their faith, and thereby, bring the basic character of their agency to the fore? The thought is that if giving the deluded recipient a report on why they are in an illusion (e.g., that they go about their Christian lives disinterestedly) does not work, can Kierkegaard not tell his audience directly to engage in self-examination in double-reflection?

²¹⁵ Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An essay on Self-Knowledge*, 93.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

As we shall see with reference to Kierkegaard's unpublished lecture notes on communication, Kierkegaard is firmly committed to the view that the capacity for self-examination cannot be imparted as a piece of knowledge or information; that one cannot just directly *tell* or inform another person that they need to engage in self-examination or, by the same token, tell someone to become first-personally aware of their agency so that they can either avow or disavow their actions. Such limitation of direct communication is most clearly and comedically expressed in Kierkegaard's story between the Corporal and the Farm Lad – the story goes as follows:

An example of the misunderstanding through conceiving instruction aimed at capability as instruction in knowledge.

A sergeant in the National Guard says to a recruit, 'You there, stand up straight.'

Recruit: 'Sure enough.'

Sergeant: 'Yes, and don't talk during the drill.'

Recruit: 'All right, I won't if you'll just tell me.'

Sergeant: 'What the devil! You are not supposed to talk during drill!'

Recruit: 'Well, don't get so mad. If I know I'm not supposed to, I'll quit talking during drill.'²¹⁷

As Kierkegaard's story illustrates, the reason why direct communication as the 'communication of knowledge' cannot enable the recipient to engage in self-examination, I think, is because it is part and parcel of direct communication that it engages the recipient in a mode of assenting or not assenting the knowledge or information imparted. As Kierkegaard makes clear in the above, direct communication generates a misunderstanding in which the recipient thinks he is getting something to know and to agree or disagree with. What is crucial in the case of Kierkegaard's audience is not whether they agree or disagree about engaging in self-examination, but that they exercise their capacity to engage in self-examination. More

²¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 272.

importantly, I think the back-and-forth Kierkegaard sets up between the Corporal and the Farm Lad also anticipates the futility of communicating directly to another a second-order plea to examine themselves – for instance, ‘Examine yourself! And remember, this is not about whether you agree or disagree! You should just examine yourself’. In this scenario, Kierkegaard anticipates that the recipient will simply say (as the Farm Lad does), ‘I know’ or ‘I agree’. But knowing or agreeing with the communicator’s plea to engage in self-examination is obviously not the same as engaging in self-examination. The latter, Kierkegaard thinks, must be enabled or drawn out from the recipient. This is evident, for instance, in Kierkegaard’s claim that the Corporal must “pound the soldier out of” the Lad.²¹⁸ This, I think, explains why Kierkegaard calls indirect communication the ‘communication of capability’ – that what the indirect communication should do is to *bring out* or *draw forth* the recipient’s capability to engage in self-examination, which is why Kierkegaard thinks indirect communication is a matter of *upbringing*.²¹⁹

Following from above, the next question to investigate is this: if the capability to engage in self-examination in double-reflection cannot be had by means of direct communication, but must be brought out or enabled by means of indirect communication, how then does indirect communication achieve this? In the following section, I will return to Ramsland’s account of indirect communication as a way of preparing us for the next chapter, where we will look in detail at how indirect communication provokes the other to engage in self-examination in double-reflection.

²¹⁸ Ibid. 270.

²¹⁹ Ibid. 279.

5. Ramsland's Account of Indirect Communication: Provocation to Double-Reflection – 'That's Like Me!'

Central to Ramsland's interpretation of indirect communication is the view that "Kierkegaard's analysis of indirect communication relies on the structure and activities of consciousness".²²⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ramsland thinks that our consciousness partially escapes its own mediating processes, that *how* we experience *what* we experience is not first-personally available to us. Indirect communication, however, can capture and communicate the bare unmediated *how* of a person's agency to them, since unlike direct communication, indirect communication does not rely on the mediating processes of consciousness (i.e., objectification and conceptualisation). Instead, Ramsland asserts, indirect communication "takes place through a conceptually unmediated experiential context".²²¹ What this means, Ramsland explains, is that indirect communication is "that which will be so similar to a person's experiencing that it could be almost a mirror: The experiencing of another human being".²²²

Now, in order to obtain a better understanding of what Ramsland is saying above, it is crucial that we now turn to her discussion of Kierkegaard's concept of 'double-reflection', which Ramsland claims "profiles the basis for [Kierkegaard's] development of indirect communication".²²³ As Ramsland makes clear, through double-reflection, "we *can* get a glimpse of the subjective feature of our experiencing", as double-reflection allows us to obtain "an awareness of our presence in what we think".²²⁴ In other words, like myself, Ramsland also sees double-reflection as the mode of thought and inquiry that allows us to obtain a first-personal awareness of how we live.

²²⁰ Ramsland, "Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication," 329.

²²¹ Ibid. 331.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid. 330.

²²⁴ Ibid.

Then, Ramsland shows how indirect communication as that which functions on the plane of human experiencing can provoke the other person into engaging in double-reflection, which then allows the person to become first-personally aware of how they live. Crucial to Ramsland's demonstration is the case of a woman who firmly denied that she had a nervous laughter, which we have already discussed briefly in the previous section. As we have mentioned, the woman denied the fact of her nervous laughter because the "*content* of her self-image blocked an awareness of her actual experiential engagement".²²⁵ That is, as per Ramsland's account of consciousness, the woman cannot see that *she* is laughing nervously even if she tried to reflect on how she exercises her agency, as her reflection would be mediated by her self-image of *not* having a nervous laughter.

However, as Ramsland continues, the woman is able to become first-personally aware of how she laughs, when "she heard her sister laugh in a fashion remarkably similar to her own", which "was distinctly a nervous laugh".²²⁶ Through her sister's laughter, the self-blinded woman was provoked to engage in the process of double-reflection, thus obtaining self-knowledge in the sense of knowing first-personally how she laughs. As Ramsland claims, the sister's laughter

...provoked an awareness of the personal nature of [the woman's own prereflective] involvement in the world which was not available to her in what she thought until she was startled into taking note of it... This is the double-reflection.²²⁷

In other words, the sister's laughter *is* the indirect communication, since the sister's laughter is precisely the "experiencing of another human being", which is also the occasion that provoked the woman into engaging in double-reflection.²²⁸ Crucially, notice also that on Ramsland's model, indirect communication is not about imparting knowledge or information discreetly, but about enabling the recipient to obtain a first-personal awareness of how they

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid. 331.

exercise their agency via the presence of an appropriate model of comparison that provokes the recipient into double-reflection – in the case of Ramsland’s illustration, the sister fulfils this role. Moreover, catching “a *glimpse* of the subjective feature of [their] experiencing” through double-reflection then, is to have a “that’s like me!” moment.²²⁹

Now, before closing this section, I want to make the following point concerning Ramsland’s account of indirect communication and double-reflection: in Ramsland’s illustration, there is no indication that the sister is intentionally mimicking the woman’s nervous laughter with the aim of provoking the woman to engage in double-reflection. But what about Kierkegaard’s deployment of indirect communication? Unlike the sister, Kierkegaard evidently intended to deploy indirect communication through his writings; that through his writings, he can compel those in the grip of the illusion to judge or examine themselves.²³⁰ Ramsland is clearly aware of this, as when she attributes intentional provocation to Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms, which is a “medium of lived existence” involving “fictional characters” and “personas”, through whom readers might recognise themselves in – as Ramsland put it, the pseudonyms are *mirrors* that Kierkegaard holds up to his readers.²³¹ The implication here is that in using pseudonyms, Kierkegaard is intentionally presenting models of comparison that readers of his work can catch themselves in. Certainly, the notion of mirroring is important to Kierkegaard’s literary practice – consider, for instance, his epigraph in *Stages On Life’s Way*, which he cites from Lichtenberg: “such works are mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out”.²³² Consider also Kierkegaard’s depiction of the Holy Scriptures as a mirror, and that proper reading of the Scriptures require seeing oneself in the mirror.²³³ And whilst I acknowledge the kind of mirroring Ramsland

²²⁹ Ibid. 330-32.

²³⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 50.

²³¹ Ramsland, "Grice and Kierkegaard: Implication and Communication," 333-34.

²³² Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 8.

²³³ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, 25.

discusses as integral to Kierkegaard's indirect communication, I think there is also another form of mirroring at work in Kierkegaard's indirect communication which does not only reflect how the reader currently is – that is, it does not only incite 'that's like me!' moments, but also alludes to the shadow of a better version of oneself, thus inciting a 'that's not like me!' moment as well. I will continue this discussion in detail in the next chapter.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that double-reflection as a mode of thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters is *both* abstract, objective, third-personal *and* concrete, subjective, first-personal – that double-reflection involves a shift from the third-person to the first-person. I have also argued that it is pure thought or presuppositionless thinking that Climacus finds suspicious, not objective thinking *per se*. Then, I have also argued that in so far as appropriation in the second moment of reflection in double-reflection involves ‘action’, action is not to be understood in the crude sense of practicing some principles for living. Rather, action is a person’s identification or avowal of some possibility of existence or agency – that a person takes up such possibility as belonging to them. Then, lastly, *pace* Aumann or Mullen, I have argued that direct communication is limited because it affords a third-person report to the recipient, which further estranges the recipient from themselves; and also, direct communication cannot enable the other to engage in self-examination in double-reflection, as direct communication engages the recipient to assent or not assent with what has been imparted, thus giving the recipient the impression that they are invited to agree or disagree with the call to engage in self-examination in double-reflection. In the closing, I have also presented and discussed Ramsland’s account of indirect communication as a transition into the next chapter, where we will discuss how Kierkegaard’s indirect communication provokes his readers into engaging in self-examination in double-reflection.

Chapter 4 Double-Reflection in Communication: A Matter of Artistry

In the previous chapter, I argued that double-reflection should be understood as a shift from third-personal to first-personal thought and inquiry. In the process of developing this interpretation, we have looked at Climacus' distinction between objective thinking and subjective thinking, as well as how these come together in double-reflection. In this chapter, we will focus on the second formulation of double-reflection, namely, 'double-reflection in communication'. Essentially, this second formulation denotes indirect communication. This is evident, for instance, when considering Anti-Climacus' claim, in *Practice in Christianity*, that,

Indirect communication can be an art of communication in redoubling the communication [...] This is what some pseudonymous writers are accustomed to calling the double-reflection of the communication.²³⁴

In light of the above, I will begin the chapter by turning to Anti-Climacus' account of indirect communication, investigating what it means for indirect communication to be a doubly-reflected mode of communication, and why in this connection, executing indirect communication is a matter of artistry. As I will show, indirect communication as a doubly-reflected mode of communication involves the production of a 'dialectical knot', whereby the communication becomes an interpretative puzzle. As for the artistry involved in executing indirect communication, this resides in the indirect communicator's *incognito* – that the indirect communicator is not to come across as a didactic figure in the sense of having some knowledge or information to impart.

Crucially, the indirect communicator's *incognito* is made possible by deceiving the deluded recipient into truth, which involves appearing other than who one is. This is where Kierkegaard thinks his pseudonyms come into play. Although his ultimate aim is to enable his

²³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 133. Consider also, Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 18fn.

audience to examine or judge themselves in the process of double-reflection, which in turn enables the audience to become first-personally aware of confusedly living the Christian life disinterestedly, Kierkegaard will proceed by communicating to his audience *as if* Christianity belonged in the category of the aesthetic-intellectual. In other words, the artistry of the indirect communicator's incognito involves engaging the deluded recipient on their own terms. And in Kierkegaard's view, engaging the deluded recipient on their own terms involves taking up the matter of what it means to be Christian disinterestedly, as the recipient would. And furthermore, as we shall see, as part of the deception, Kierkegaard's pseudonym will disavow any authority to represent a Christian point of view, will even deny being a Christian.

Then, once I have highlighted the features ingredient to the double-reflection and art involved in indirect communication, I will proceed to give an account of how Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, exemplifies indirect communication as a doubly-reflected mode of communication, its artistry, and what it means to properly interpret the *Postscript* in this way. Now, in order to work out my own interpretation of the *Postscript*, I will first reconstruct James Conant's and Paul Muench's rival interpretations of the *Postscript*. I will then assess their interpretation's compatibility against the features highlighted concerning the double-reflection and art of indirect communication. Roughly, the dialectic between the two critics can be characterised as follows:

Critic	Interpretation	Intended Experience
Conant	The <i>Postscript</i> mirrors the readers' confusion by Climacus' investigation on what it means to be Christian disinterestedly; the investigation collapses in plain <i>nonsense</i> ; No positive	'That's like me!'

	guidance on how to think and inquire about what it means to be Christian; Only negative provocation.	
Muench	The <i>Postscript</i> is <i>not</i> nonsensical. There is positive guidance on how one ought to think and inquire about what it means to be Christian through Climacus' exemplification of a proper mode of thought and inquiry such matter.	'That's not like me, but that's who I should be!'

As I will argue, although I find Conant's interpretation overall to be more compatible with the features ingredient to the double-reflection and art involved in indirect communication, one major concern I have with Conant's interpretation is that we risk losing any sense of communication in indirect *communication*, since on Conant's interpretation, the *Postscript* contains no intelligible content – that the work offers nothing beyond a purely negative provocation. Moreover, Conant's interpretation also raises the concern of how the *Postscript* can provoke the reader to self-examination in double-reflection without incurring the opposite effect, where the reader is encouraged to further indulge in their confusion of disinterestedly contemplating what it means to be Christian. We can sharpen the concern by considering Conant's view, that Climacus indulges in the readers' confusion in order to mirror the readers' confusion.

Muench also flags up both of the above concerns with Conant's interpretation, and against these concerns, Muench advances an interpretation of the *Postscript* in which its author Johannes Climacus serves as a positive exemplar, showing the readers how they ought to think and inquire about what it means to be Christians – i.e., first-personally. However, as I will show, just as Conant's interpretation might be seen as fostering disinterested contemplation, so too with Muench's interpretation. As I will argue, in setting up Climacus as a positive exemplar in which readers are to regard as being different than themselves, and

crucially, as one whose reflective activities readers should mimic, Muench invokes the possibility of readers beholding Climacus in admiration, which Climacus thinks is a form of disinterested contemplation. More importantly, in construing Climacus in this way, Muench's Climacus loses the aesthetic-intellectual character that constitutes indirect communication's artistry of going incognito via the deception of the recipient into truth.

In the light of the difficulties faced by both of these interpretations, I want to bring forth the following point: that although the *Postscript* is an aesthetic-intellectual production, Kierkegaard sees it as a *limiting* aesthetic-intellectual production. Here, I draw inspiration from critic Daniel Watts' analysis of the *Philosophical Crumbs*, in which the *Crumbs* is seen as a "limiting case of aesthetic-intellectual representation".²³⁵ The idea of a limiting case derives from the Kantian conception of a boundary, wherein a boundary "has a positive character by virtue of sharing features both with entities within the domain it bounds and also with what lies beyond".²³⁶

Applying this idea of a limiting case to the *Postscript*, I want to suggest the following interpretation as a way of avoiding the problems present in both Conant's and Muench's interpretation: that although Climacus engages in disinterested thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters, such as what it means to be Christian, Climacus is *not, pace* Conant, merely a mirror image of his deluded readers, for there is a sense in which Climacus *is* different from his deluded readers. Crucially however, Climacus' dissimilarity is not, *pace* Muench, due to his exemplification of a mode of thought and inquiry apt for ethico-religious matters. Rather, as I suggest, the dissimilarity lies in Climacus' constantly running up against the limits of a purely disinterested mode of thought and inquiry concerning ethico-religious matters in such a way that also positively draws attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that *is* suitable for ethico-religious matters. More importantly, Climacus' dissimilarity has this

²³⁵ Watts, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought," 101.

²³⁶ *Ibid.* 98.

unsettling tension which stings the deluded reader: that this fellow Johannes Climacus who claims to be a loafer and an outsider to Christianity is somehow closer to Christianity than his supposedly Christian readers, who take seriously that a disinterested approach to Christianity *is* the essentially Christian. This sting in Climacus' dissimilarity, I suggest, is what provokes the deluded reader to examine how they are living their lives as a Christian, or how they take up the matter of what it means to be a Christian.

Essentially, my view is that Climacus serves as an occasion for the reader to undergo an experience of *uncanniness*, whereby the reader simultaneously finds something familiar and unfamiliar; relatable and unrelatable; similar and dissimilar in Climacus. And in this moment of dissimilarity is where readers experience the provocation to self-examination. And so, if Conant's interpretation claims to instigate a 'That's like me!' moment, whilst Muench's interpretation claims to instigate a 'That's not like, but that's who I should be!' moment, then my interpretation would go midway between the two critics: that indirect communication creates a 'That's like me *and* not like me' moment. And in creating this tension, I suggest that Kierkegaard is, through Climacus, presenting a unique kind of mirror in which what is reflected is not merely what the reader is currently like with all their blemishes (as per Conant's interpretation), but that the mirror also reflects a *silhouette* of a non-blemished (i.e., non-deluded) version of the reader, thus faintly disclosing the way out of the illusion.

1. Anti-Climacus' Account of Indirect Communication: Dialectical Knots and the Artistry of Incognito Mode

In this section, we will investigate what it means for indirect communication to be conceived as a doubly-reflected mode of communication, and the artistry that executing such communication involves. As mentioned in the introduction, my investigation will take Anti-Climacus' account of indirect communication as our point of departure; the account is laid out in his *Practice in Christianity* as follows:

Indirect communication can be an art of communication in redoubling the communication; the art consists in making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody, purely objective, and then continually placing the qualitative opposites in a unity. This is what some pseudonymous writers are accustomed to calling the double-reflection of the communication. For example, it is indirect communication to place jest and earnestness together in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot—and then to be a nobody oneself. If anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself [...] Here is an example of indirect communication or communication in double-reflection. One presents faith in the eminent sense and represents it in such a way that the most orthodox sees it as a defense of the faith and the atheist sees it as an attack, while the communicator is a zero, a nonperson, an objective something.²³⁷

As we can see, what makes indirect communication a doubly-reflected mode of communication is that it produces 'dialectical knots' by means of "continually placing qualitative opposites in a unity", such as jest and earnestness, or attack and defence.²³⁸ The unity of the latter opposition (i.e., attack and defence) is fairly straightforward – that the communication can legitimately be interpreted both as an instance of a polemic (attack) and an apologetic (defence).²³⁹ As for jest and earnestness, jesting roughly denotes a sense of detachment, non-commitment, or non-seriousness, whilst earnestness denotes a sense of

²³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 133.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Apparently, as Kierkegaard conceives it, part of Anti-Climacus' indirect communication in *Practice in Christianity* precisely involves the dialectical knot of attack and defence in that Anti-Climacus' defence of Christianity is entangled with his attack on Christendom. In addition to Anti-Climacus' communication, G. E. Lessing's communication of Christianity apparently also exemplify the combination of attack and defence. Please see, Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 252; Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 58.

commitment and seriousness. And so, the idea is that the communication can at once be interpreted as *both* being not-serious *and* serious.²⁴⁰

At this point, it is crucial to re-emphasise the point as I have in the first chapter, that the very notion of a ‘*dialectical knot*’ indicate that something propositional or conceptual is at hand – think, in this regard, of the pattern of Hegel’s *dialectics* (‘thesis, antithesis, synthesis’). Now, the imagery of a ‘*knot*’, however, indicate that the propositions and concepts are entangled with one another in such a way that the communication is an interpretative riddle, in which it is possible to interpret the communication equally as attack and defence, or as jest and earnestness. And so, this notion of a dialectical knot signifies that although indirect communication *contains* communicative content, meaning there are propositions and concepts wherein readers can critically discuss, develop, and engage with, its primary aim is *not* to *impart* communicative content *didactically* (not even implicitly), where the idea of a didactic communication involves imparting some knowledge or information with the prospect of informing, convincing, or soliciting assent from the recipient concerning some doctrine, treatise, theses, or any of the like.

Following from the above, I will proceed to bring out the connection between the non-didactic quality of indirect communication and the idea that deploying indirect communication is a matter of artistry. Turning our attention again to the above passage, Anti-Climacus makes clear that the art of indirect communication “consists in making oneself, the communicator, into a nobody...”.²⁴¹ That is, the artistry is a matter of the communicator’s negating himself *qua* communicator. Undoubtedly, the notion of a communicator-less communication not only strikes us as conceptually bizarre, but practically impossible. For how can there be no communicator in the communicative process? In what follows, I want to

²⁴⁰ For an example of such communication, please see what Socrates “said about the sea-crossing” in Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 74-75.

²⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 133.

argue for the following conception of artistry: that indirect communication's art of negating oneself *qua* communicator denotes the negation of oneself as a *didactic* communicator given to impart some knowledge or information with the prospect of informing, convincing, or soliciting assent from the recipient. To negate oneself in this way, as we shall see, require that the communicator's going *incognito*. But why is going incognito in the sense of not coming across as a didactic figure important? We have in fact already come some way of answering this question in the discussions from previous chapters. As I shall unpack below, the artistry of going incognito is important insofar as the indirect communicator is to help the recipient 'stand alone' in relation to ethico-religious matters without being recognised as doing such.

Let us turn our attention more closely to *Practice in Christianity*, where Anti-Climacus makes a distinction between the indirect communication of Christ and the indirect communication of the maieutic teacher. According to Anti-Climacus, Christ's indirect communication relies on the dialectic of His very existence as the God-man, which "confronts [the recipient] with a choice: whether [one] will believe him or not", whether faith or offence.²⁴² In doing so, Christ essentially presents Himself as an object of faith, which in turn means that the recipient's focus is directed towards Christ.²⁴³ In contrast, the maieutic teacher's indirect communication works by pushing the recipient's attention away, so that the recipient's attention is on himself and not on the communicator (as it is with the case of Christ) – as Anti-Climacus asserts:

... a maieutic teacher to a certain extent does the same thing [as Christ], poses the dialectical duplexity, but with the directly opposite intention, just to turn the other person away from him, to turn him inward in order to make him free, not in order to draw him to himself.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Ibid. 134.

²⁴³ Note, by object of faith, Anti-Climacus clearly does not mean object in the sense of that which is apt for disinterested contemplation, insofar as faith denotes a relationship between man and Christ, which requires the agent to be first-personally interested in Christ.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 142.

Crucially, the construal of the indirect communicator as a maieutic teacher immediately makes one think of Socrates, especially the notion of Socratic midwifery, which is roughly the idea that Socrates does not claim to ‘give birth to’ or impart truth but assists the other in obtaining truth for themselves. Kierkegaard certainly makes no secret of modelling his conception of indirect communication upon Socrates, especially considering that this idea of Socratic midwifery is reminiscent of Kierkegaard’s formulation for capturing the ideal relation between an indirect communicator and his recipient: “to stand alone – by another’s help”.²⁴⁵ For Kierkegaard, the dash between the two clauses is no accident, for it is intended to express the *distance* between the indirect communicator and the recipient. The thought is that the indirect communicator must *not* come across as a figure of authority concerning what it means to be human or how one ought to live as a human. By coming across as a figure of authority on such matters – that is, as one who claims to have answers to such matters – the communicator presents himself as a figure that the recipient can readily defer such matters to. In turn, this accentuates the recipient’s self-estrangement, for then the recipient does not need to examine such matters in relation to his own existence and agency, which is key, since these matters bear an essential relation to human existence and agency. And so, the most that an indirect communicator should do, Kierkegaard thinks, is to compel the other to judge for themselves, which is to draw out the other’s capability for self-examination in relation to ethico-religious matters.

But how does the indirect communicator go incognito? That is, how can the indirect communicator help the other stand-alone without being recognised as such? As I shall argue, indirect communication’s artistry of going incognito involves deceiving the recipient into truth. Once again, with reference to Socrates, Kierkegaard writes:

²⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 280.

Do not be deceived by the word *deception*. One can deceive a person out of what is true, and – to recall old Socrates – one can deceive a person into what is true. Yes, in only this way can a deluded person actually be brought into what is true – by deceiving him.²⁴⁶

Here, this notion of deceiving the recipient into truth, which Kierkegaard attributes to Socrates, does *not* mean telling the other *p* when knowing $\sim p$. Rather, the deception Kierkegaard has in mind consists in appearing *other than* who or what one essentially is. Crucially, this idea of taking up an appearance play a central role in Kierkegaard's literary production and aim, especially concerning his use of pseudonyms. As Kierkegaard makes clear, whilst the aim of his authorship is to enable his audience to engage in self-examination such that the audience can obtain a first-personal awareness of how they exercise their agency, Kierkegaard must not appear as one who is carrying out this aim. Instead, he thinks he must write as an aesthetic-intellectual author, which is where the pseudonyms come into play. As Kierkegaard writes: "the [aesthetic] writing is a deception, and herein is the deeper significance of the *pseudonymity*".²⁴⁷ In *Point of View*, he makes clear that the aesthetic pseudonyms are the pseudonyms from *Either/Or* up to and including *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.²⁴⁸ Now, given our interpretative interest, we will focus our discussion on the *Postscript* and its pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus.

Then, as Kierkegaard continues, to write as an aesthetic-intellectual author means engaging the deluded recipients on their own terms; such deception, Kierkegaard claims, constitutes indirect communication's corrosion of the illusion. He writes:

²⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 53.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 53.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 5-6. It is worth noting that Kierkegaard introduces Anti-Climacus as a "new pseudonym", who Kierkegaard claims as an "upbuilding author" and hence a "higher pseudonymity" than the ones from *Either/Or* through to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The implication, I take it, is that although being a pseudonym, Anti-Climacus' strategy is different than say, Johannes Climacus; that unlike the latter, the former does not deceive the reader into truth by engaging the audience on their own terms (i.e., treating Christianity confusedly as an aesthetic-intellectual matter). Certainly, Kierkegaard confirms this, as when he writes that Anti-Climacus embodies ethico-religious communication, wherein the pseudonym represents the Christian ideal at its highest, thus provoking the deluded recipient to feel inept at living as a Christian. This in turn makes the recipient feel the need for God's grace. Please see, Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 227, 29, 41, 68. See also, the Preface to *Practice in Christianity*; Watts, "Kierkegaard and the Search for Self-Knowledge," 543.

...direct communication presupposes that the recipient's ability to receive is entirely in order, but here that is simply not the case – indeed, here a delusion is an obstacle. That means a corrosive must first be used, but this corrosive is the negative, but the negative in connection with communicating is precisely to deceive. What, then, does it mean ‘to deceive’? It means that one does not begin *directly* with what one wishes to communicate but begins by taking the other's delusion at face value. Thus one does not begin (to hold to what essentially is the theme of this book) in this way: I am Christian, you are not a Christian – but this way: You are a Christian, I am not Christian. Or one does not begin in this way: It is Christianity that I am proclaiming, and you are living in purely [aesthetic] categories. No, one begins this way: Let us talk about the [aesthetic]. The deception consists in one's speaking this way precisely in order to arrive at the religious.²⁴⁹

As we can see, engaging with the deluded recipients on their own terms means taking the recipient's illusion at face value – that through his pseudonyms, Kierkegaard will partake in the illusion by engaging in disinterested thought and inquiry on Christianity, treating Christianity as if it were an aesthetic-intellectual matter. And as part of the deception, the pseudonyms will disavow any authority to represent a Christian point of view, will even deny being a Christian. This clearly echoes the *modus operandi* of the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, who in the *Postscript* repeatedly declares that he is not a Christian.²⁵⁰

This raises the fundamental interpretative question about Climacus' writings: in what way, if at all, these writings embody a communicative strategy that relies on a kind of deception. In what follows, I will explore this question, firstly by reconstructing James Conant's interpretation of *Postscript's* indirect communication. As we shall see, Conant's interpretation of the *Postscript* incorporates the two ideas mentioned directly above, namely, that Climacus takes his readers' illusion at face value, and that Climacus denies being a Christian. But before discussing Conant's interpretation, I think it will be fruitful as a summary to lay out the characteristics we have covered concerning indirect communication as a doubly-reflected mode of communication, and the artistry involved in executing such communication:

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 54.

²⁵⁰ See, for instance, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 17, 520-26.

The Double-Reflection in Indirect Communication	The Artistry
Involves combining qualitative opposites in unity, such that the communication can be interpreted in equally opposing ways (e.g., as both attack and defence, or as both in jest and in earnestness).	Involves the indirect communicator's <i>incognito</i> .
The notion of a 'Dialectical Knot' does not immediately preclude the containment of communicative content (e.g., concepts and propositions) in indirect communication, only that the primary aim of indirect communication is not to impart some knowledge or information to the reader.	The indirect communicator's <i>incognito</i> is made possible by deceiving the recipient into truth, which in turn involves engaging with the deluded reader on their own terms by taking up the matter of being Christian disinterestedly. The deception also involves denying that one is a Christian.

2. Conant's Interpretation of *Postscript*: Mirror and Plain Nonsense

Central to Conant's interpretation of the *Postscript* is the conviction that trying to "cut through all the rhetorical dross" and "extract the central chain of reasoning" would result in "disastrous misunderstandings" of the *Postscript*, misunderstandings whereby one happily thinks that some philosophical doctrine or theses can be extracted where there is none.²⁵¹ In raising the possibility of such misunderstanding, Conant propounds an interpretation of the *Postscript* that sees the *form* of the work as more important than the *content*. Crucially, Conant's emphasis on the literary form of the *Postscript* closely follows Climacus' response to a review of a preceding work to the *Postscript*, namely, the *Philosophical Crumbs*.

Turning to Climacus' response to a review of his *Crumbs*, Climacus reveals that the *Crumbs* was not written for those who were unknowledgeable, but "written for the knowledgeable whose misfortune is that they know too much", and that in such a situation, "being able to *impart* becomes in the end the art of *taking away*, or tricking a person out of something".²⁵² And as Climacus makes clear, to take away in the context of Christendom is to disturb or frustrate a person's conviction that they are already in the know with respect to Christianity – that, for instance, they already know what it means to be Christians. The *Crumbs* then, properly understood, shakes up that conviction by causing the reader to pause and examine themselves in double-reflection.²⁵³

But how does the *Crumbs* cause the recipient to pause and engage in self-examination? To answer this, it is important to lay out plainly Climacus' response to the review of his *Crumbs*. Note, since the review is extremely lengthy, I will refrain from quoting the full passage. Instead, I will isolate the part that Conant takes as the cornerstone for his hermeneutic principle of 'form-over-content'. The relevant part runs as follows:

²⁵¹ James Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," *Pursuits of reason: Essays in honor of Stanley Cavell* (1993): 195.

²⁵² Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 230-31fn.

²⁵³ *Ibid.* 231fn.

[The reviewer's] account is accurate and on the whole dialectically reliable, but now comes the hitch: in spite of the account being correct, anyone reading it by itself is bound to get an altogether wrong impression of the book [...] The account is didactic, purely and simply didactic; the reader will therefore gain the impression that the piece itself is didactic. This in my view is the most mistaken impression one can have of it. The clash of form, the experiment's teasing resistance to the content, the poetic cheek (which even invents Christianity), the only attempt made to go further, that is beyond the so-called speculative construction, the tirelessly active irony; the parody of speculation in the entire plan, the satire in so much effort being made as though something was *ganz Ausserordentliches und Zwar Neues* [something quite extraordinary, that is, new] should come out of it, while what constantly emerges is old-fashioned orthodoxy in fitting severity – of all this the [reviewer] finds not the least hint.²⁵⁴

As Climacus' response makes clear, although there is a sense in which the review is accurate in its assessment of the *Crumbs*, the review nevertheless receives a wrong impression of the work by treating it as a didactic piece – that is, a piece which claims to impart knowledge or information. As Climacus reveals, what is missing from the reviewer's reading is the detection of "active irony" in the *Crumbs*, and that the *Crumbs* is a "parody of speculation".²⁵⁵ Moreover, according to Climacus, a proper reception of the *Crumbs* must pay heed to the form's "teasing resistance" to its content.²⁵⁶ And crucially, Conant applies what is said here about the *Crumbs* to the *Postscript*: that a proper interpretation of the *Postscript* must pay attention to the form the work.

What we must now consider is what it means for Conant to pay attention to the form of the *Postscript*, and why doing so would, in Conant's view, reveal the nonsensicality of the work. Although Conant himself does not frame it explicitly as such, I think there are essentially *two* senses to what Conant means by paying heed to the form of a work like *Postscript*. The first sense of paying attention to the form of the *Postscript* means paying attention to the *structure* of the work. In the second sense, it is to pay attention to how the work *presents* itself. Let us begin with the former.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 230fn. Please also see, Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 204-07.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

In terms of the structure of the *Postscript*, Conant's view is that the work can basically be neatly divided into *two* main parts, namely, the *body* and the *frame*. In Conant's view, the appendices in the *Postscript* constitute the frame of the work. And crucially, for Conant, "it is in these appendices that the pseudonymous author (Climacus) provides instructions for how to read his work".²⁵⁷ And since Climacus' response to the review of his *Crumbs* appears in an appendix titled 'Glance at a contemporary effort in Danish literature', Conant takes the Climacus' response as informative of how to read the *Postscript*. The other appendix that Conant sees as informative of his interpretation is titled 'An understanding with the reader'. And as Conant asserts, the appendix in question,

follows from [the 'Conclusion' of the *Postscript*] and functions (as do the preface and the final sections of the *Tractatus*) as part of the frame of the work in which the author allows himself to comment on the work as a whole and provide directions for how to read it.²⁵⁸

Notably, in commenting on the *Postscript*'s appendix, Conant mentions Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Here, the mentioning is no accident, for Conant thinks that both the *Tractatus* and *Postscript* culminate in "a gesture of *revocation*", as both works contain instructions (in their respective frames) to dismiss the content (or body) of the work as "*plain nonsense*".²⁵⁹ The passage that Conant takes as a request to revoke the *Postscript* goes as follows:

As in Catholic books, especially from former times, one finds at the back a note informing the reader that everything is to be understood conformably with the doctrine of the holy universal mother Church, so too what I write contains an additional notice to the effect that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked, that the book has not only a conclusion but a revocation into the bargain.²⁶⁰

Naturally, this raises the question of what purpose a work that ends in a moment of revocation could serve. (I focus here on the *Postscript*, leaving aside Conant's controversial

²⁵⁷ James Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief* (St. Martin's Press, 1995), 287-88. See also, Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 202.

²⁵⁸ Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 202.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 197-98.

²⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 522.

reading of the early Wittgenstein). To this, Conant would first point out with reference to a comment by Climacus: "...that to write a book and [to] revoke it is something else than not writing it".²⁶¹ In bringing this comment to light, Conant wants to show that writing a work that is to be revoked is not pointless; that understanding a work like the *Postscript* turn on an understanding of a "certain conception of philosophical authorship" or an understanding with the philosophical activity that the author Johannes Climacus is engaging in.²⁶²

In articulating the kind of philosophical activity that Conant takes Climacus to be engaging in, Conant appeals to Climacus' self-characterisation as a humourist. As Conant understands, there are essentially *two* senses in which we are to understand Climacus' self-characterisation as a humourist. The first is to deny having authority on the matters at hand, as Climacus himself asserts:

To be an authority is much too burdensome an existence for a humorist, who regards it precisely as one of life's comforts that there are great men of this kind, able and willing to be authorities and whose opinions one has the benefit of accepting without further ado, unless one is fool enough to pull these great men down, for in that there is no profit. Above all, may heaven preserve the book and me from any appreciative vehemence, that a loudmouthed party-man should quote it appreciatively and enrol me in the register.²⁶³

Conant thinks this is crucial, as he takes Climacus' self-characterisation as humourist confirms once again that "we have somehow gone astray [if] we take the [*Postscript*] to be forwarding anything like a doctrine", that we even "imagine that it offers us a teaching that we can quote approvingly" when that is what the author himself precisely denies.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Ibid 523; Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," 252, 305.

²⁶² Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 196; Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," 250.

²⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 521.

²⁶⁴ Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 202.

As for the other meaning to the title of humourist, Conant points out, has to do with a kind of sincerity, namely, that of exposing the ludicrousness of something that is ludicrous.²⁶⁵

The passage Conant points to goes as follows:

I boast of a certain honesty [...] an honesty that in turn comforts and arms me with an uncommon sense of the comic and a certain talent for ridiculing what is ridiculous; for, strangely enough, what is not ridiculous I cannot make ridiculous – that presumably requires other talents.²⁶⁶

In drawing attention to this passage, Conant thinks that the aim of a work like *Postscript* – where it ends in revocation – is to expose the readers' illusion by making its illusoriness apparent. For the *Postscript's* aim, Conant claims, is “not to illuminate the nature of the truth of Christianity but to break the illusion that the task of becoming a Christian is one that can be furthered by means of philosophy”.²⁶⁷ And as I have also argued in Chapter Two, Conant is also of the view that the illusion is constituted by a confusion of the categories, where one enters “into the [Christian] life in a disinterested manner”, thus missing what is essential about Christianity.²⁶⁸ So how then, in Conant's view, does the *Postscript* expose or dispel the illusion? Addressing this question is crucial, as it essentially discloses how Conant interprets the indirect communication of *Postscript*. Now, in order to address the question adequately, it is crucial that we grasp how Conant understands the confusion that abounds in Christendom. Notably, Conant identifies *three* symptoms or manifestations of the confusion of categories.

The first way in which the confusion manifests itself, according to Conant, is to base one's faith on “purely impersonal or objective [facts] about one's life (whether one goes to church on Sundays, or has been baptised, or lives in a Christian country and has Christian

²⁶⁵ Note that Conant uses a different translation of the *Postscript* to the one I am using (i.e., the Hannay translation). In the Hannay translation, ‘sincerity’ is translated as ‘honesty’, whilst ‘ludicrous’ is translated as ‘ridiculous’. These differences will become clear as I present the passage.

²⁶⁶ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 524.

²⁶⁷ James Conant, “Must We Show What We Cannot Say?,” *The Bucknell Review* 32, no. 1 (1989): 276.

²⁶⁸ Conant, “Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors,” 262.

parents, etc.)”.²⁶⁹ Conant’s point is undoubtedly reminiscent of Climacus’ satire of the wife who finds it strange that her husband is having second thoughts on whether he is a Christian or not. And as we have seen, in an effort to reassure her husband (and probably herself), the wife goes on to list out impersonal qualities that proves the authenticity of her husband’s faith.

The second way in which the confusion of categories manifests itself, Conant thinks, involves “[converting] the practical difficulty of living a certain sort of life into the intellectual difficulty of trying to understand how it is one can become a person who leads such a life”.²⁷⁰ Consequently, to live a Christian life well, for instance, becomes a matter of gaining knowledge or obtaining conceptual clarifications on what it means to live well as a Christian. And according to Conant, speculative philosophy immediately emerges as a candidate for such a task – that is, the task of knowledge acquisition and conceptual clarifications. As Conant writes:

The problem with speculative philosophy, in Climacus’ view, is that it stubbornly holds fast to the idea that the question of what it is to lead either an ethical or a Christian life is one that requires a certain degree of essential preliminary clarification – that it is incumbent on philosophy to provide a thorough understanding of what is involved in such a task, and that only philosophy has the resources at its disposal to provide such an understanding.²⁷¹

And in this quest for knowledge, Conant thinks, one forgets themselves in the sense of forgetting their own existence as human beings. In support of his view, Conant draws attention to the following passage from the *Postscript*:

My main thought was that in our time, due to the quantity of knowledge, one has forgotten what it is to exist and what inwardness means, and that the misunderstanding between speculation and Christianity might be explained by this.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," 267.

²⁷⁰ Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 205.

²⁷¹ Ibid. 206.

²⁷² Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 209; Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 203.

Indeed, as we have observed previously, the *Postscript* is tireless in poking fun of this condition of self-forgetfulness.²⁷³ As Conant understands it, this condition of self-forgetfulness, where one is detached from oneself, is intimately tied with the condition of self-blindness in which one is “unable to recognize the disparity between how he actually lives and what he says about how one should live”.²⁷⁴

Conant is also keen to point out that the problem here is by no means exclusive to philosophers. On Conant’s reading, the term ‘speculative philosophy’ encompasses not so much a specific group of people than a “form of reflection which subserves a strategy of evasion” from the burdens and responsibilities of living the Christian life.²⁷⁵ Such mode of reflection, we have seen, is that disinterested objective mode of thought and inquiry suitable for contemplating aesthetic-intellectual matters. Certainly, we have seen how this plays out in the reading of God’s Word – that in an attempt to evade the burdens and responsibility of living a Christian life, those in Christendom read God’s Word in a purely disinterestedly or scholarly way, thus misusing biblical scholarship, claiming that more exegetical work is required in order to live the Christian life well. And as Conant adds,

It is part of the genius of this mode of reflection (i.e, speculative philosophy), as Kierkegaard sees it, to succeed in offering the reflecting individual the semblance of progress where no genuine movement has been made...²⁷⁶

Given that a personal relationship with God is at the heart of Christianity, genuine movement in the Christian life would consist in, for example, in continually developing a more personal and intimate relationship with God.

²⁷³ For instance, Climacus jokes about the professor who only remembers his existence as human being “when drawing his salary every three months”. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 162. I have also cited this in Chapter Two.

²⁷⁴ Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 204.

²⁷⁵ Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," 311.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

The third and final manifestation of the confusion of categories, Conant claims, is that those in the illusion “not only fails to command a clear view of [their] life, but also of the language [they draw] upon to describe it”.²⁷⁷ That is, due to confusedly treating the task of becoming a Christian as one of understanding, there is a sense in which those in the grip of the illusion of Christendom deploy religious language, such as “authority, obedience, faith, silence, revelation”, in a way that is devoid of meaning.²⁷⁸ Conant thinks that the deluded individual’s usage of these terms are meaningless because they use these terms outside of the proper context in which these terms should be used. He writes:

He [i.e., the deluded person] is seduced into this confusion, Climacus thinks, by his inattention to the decisive categorical shift in meaning that takes place when the notions of ‘faith’ or ‘belief’ are transposed from an epistemic to a religious context [...] in such a pseudo-religious employment, [these terms] no longer [have] any clear meaning”.²⁷⁹

Conant’s thought here is that because Climacus’ deluded readers take the task of becoming a Christian as if it were one of disinterested intellectual understanding, a natural result of this is that religious terms such as ‘faith’ or ‘belief’ would be deployed (confusedly) in an epistemic context of say, gathering evidence or knowing what the right beliefs to adopt are. But to deploy religious terms in the above way absolves what is essential to these terms – that these terms express a *personal* relationship with God, as opposed to, say, the subscription to some theological argument for the existence of God. We have in fact seen how this confusion play out as well in Climacus’ distinction between the one who knows God objectively (or accidentally), and the one who knows God subjectively (or essentially) – that the one who knows God in the former way is concerned with knowing whether God truly exists or not, or whether the god being asked about is the true God; whilst the one who knows God in the latter way is concerned with whether their *relationship* with God is true or not.

²⁷⁷ Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 209.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

It was against such problems, Conant thinks, that the *Postscript* was written. And so, we now return to our original question of *how*, in Conant's view, the *Postscript* exposes or dispels the illusion of Christendom. Clearly, Conant thinks the revocation of the *Postscript* as nonsensical is integral to the work's mechanisms for dispelling the illusion. But how is nonsense supposed to do the job of exposing the illusoriness of the illusion of Christendom? To unpack how this plays out for Conant, we must turn our attention once again to the form of the *Postscript*, which brings us to the second sense of paying heed to the form of *Postscript*, namely how the work *presents* itself.

According to Conant, the *Postscript* "presents the difficulty [of becoming a Christian] in a form in which it appears as if it were one of understanding", thus engaging the confused reader "on his own ground".²⁸⁰ As Conant points out, the *Postscript* sets the reader up to expect that "something *was ganz Ausserordentliches und Zwar Neues* [something quite extraordinary, that is, new] should come out of it", as the work takes on the form of "a doctrine as to the true nature of Christianity".²⁸¹ However, as Conant claims, that just as the *Crumbs* was a parody of speculative philosophy, so too with the *Postscript*: "that the [*Postscript*] as a whole represents an elaborate *reductio ad absurdum* of the philosophical project of clarifying and propounding what it is to be a Christian".²⁸² In other words, in Conant's view, the *Postscript* basically takes on the guise of a serious philosophical investigation on what it means to be Christian, thus setting the reader up to think that some extraordinary doctrine should emerge when what ends up emerging is plain nonsense.

One crucial part of the parody, Conant thinks, lies in the character of Climacus: namely, that in parodying the reader's confusion Climacus will himself participate and

²⁸⁰ Ibid. 207.

²⁸¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 230fn; Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," 291.

²⁸² Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 207. For a similar interpretation, see also, Henry E. Allison, "Christianity and Nonsense," *Review of Metaphysics* 20, no. 3 (1967): 432-33.

indulge in the very same confusions as the reader. In doing so, Conant thinks, Climacus is essentially *mirroring* the readers' confusion back to the reader, in the hopes that the reader will catch himself in Climacus' own confusion. Conant summarises this reading of Kierkegaard's indirect method via Climacus as follows:

The indirect method does not directly contest the captive's illusion. Rather, it enters into and participates in the illusion [...] There is a sense in which the whole point of the indirect method is precisely not to dispute 'the monstrous illusion'. The strategy is to provide the illusion's captive a mirror in whose reflection he can recognise his own confusions, in whose reflection he can recognise the monstrous illusion as both monstrous and illusory.²⁸³

Then, as Conant explains, the whole procedure of mirroring the readers' confusion begins when Climacus takes on the project of showing that Christianity cannot be "established on objective grounds", that faith cannot be had by means of "objective reasons", whether it is historical evidence, or "testimony derived from the Holy Scriptures", or even "any additional evidence provided by those who have borne witness over the centuries".²⁸⁴ This kind of project, Conant thinks, lures the confused reader into thinking that "objective reasoning" or "objective knowledge" is inadequate in securing the kind of certainty that Christian faith requires, which gives the reader the impression that faith is "*continuous* with ordinary forms of belief".²⁸⁵ And as a result, Conant thinks, Climacus' readers will be tempted to pose the following question: "what kind of *knowledge* is involved here?".²⁸⁶ That is, the reader will be led to think and inquire about what "further information or more evidence" is needed to secure one's faith.²⁸⁷

But to raise such a question, Conant claims, betrays the fact that the reader has in fact confused the categories, for the reader mistakenly take what is supposed to be a "categorical

²⁸³ Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," 273-74.

²⁸⁴ Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 207.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Conant, "Must We Show What We Cannot Say?," 255.

distinction” (which concerns “the proper employment of certain religious concepts) for “an epistemological discovery” (which concerns “the relevant quantity or quality of evidence”); or have confusedly taken what is supposed to be a “categorical truth” (i.e., truth about how one should think and inquire the matter at hand) for an “empirical fact” apt for disinterested contemplation.²⁸⁸

According to Conant, having invited the reader to indulge her intellectualising tendencies in relation to Christianity, Climacus then turns his project on its head by challenging “the very terms in which the [the confused reader] is tempted to pose [the] question” of what further empirical evidence or knowledge is needed to secure one’s faith.²⁸⁹ Drawing parallels with Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigation, Conant thinks Climacus’ challenge involves marking “categorical distinctions”, which aims to show the confused reader “that appeals to evidence have no role to play of the sort that he imagines in the logic of religious concepts such as faith and revelation”.²⁹⁰ In other words, the challenge is to show that the reader is speaking *nonsense* when they deploy religious terms in epistemic contexts, for the terms become devoid of its proper meaning or ethico-religious character.

But here comes the further twist, Conant reveals, for rather than “[remaining] faithful to his own claim that all he is doing is marking categorical distinctions”, Climacus proceeds to propound the mismatch between Christianity and disinterested objective thought and inquiry as *his* thesis.²⁹¹ And in Conant’s view, there is a trickery here on Climacus’ part, as Climacus asserts what should be by Climacus’ own lights, a categorical (or following Wittgenstein, ‘grammatical’) truth as his own *thesis* or his epistemological discovery – as Conant writes:

²⁸⁸ Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 208-09.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. 208.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. 209-10.

²⁹¹ Ibid. 210.

Climacus himself is therefore driven in his polemic against the [confused reader] to *insist* upon something that by his own lights is a grammatical truth. He ends up by representing what is a mere truism as his own intellectual discovery, *his* contribution to knowledge.²⁹²

And by asserting what should be a categorical truth as his own discovery, Conant thinks, Climacus is essentially *mirroring* his readers who confusedly take what is a categorical distinction as an epistemological discovery. In mirroring his readers' confusion, Climacus ends up spewing what is by his own lights, nonsensical – as Conant asserts:

Rather than simply showing the philosopher that he has run the categories together in a fashion that has led him to speak nonsense, Climacus offers his thesis in the form of the negation of the philosopher's claim. But the attempt to negate a piece of nonsense results in another piece of nonsense.²⁹³

And by spewing the kind of nonsense mentioned above, the aim of the *Postscript* is to provocatively show its confused readers that when they call themselves Christians or speak about their faith, they are really speaking nonsense, since they live their Christian lives purely disinterestedly.

And so, on Conant's interpretation, the *Postscript* causes the confused reader to pause in their tracks and engage in self-examination in double-reflection, *not* by presenting swathes of arguments on why and how the readers have confused the categories, but by presenting itself as a *mirror* to the readers. And the work mirrors its readers' confusion by the work presenting itself as a serious philosophical treatise; that the author even participates in the readers' illusion by engaging in a disinterested investigation on what it means to be a Christian, all of which sets the reader up to expect some extraordinary doctrine or thesis to emerge when what ends up happening is the work collapsing on itself in plain nonsense. The goal here is to provoke the reader into catching themselves in Climacus' own confusion, thus generating a 'that's like me!' moment.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

Now that I have reconstructed Conant's interpretation, I will reconstruct Muench's interpretation of the *Postscript* as a contrasting picture to Conant's in the next section.

3. Muench's Interpretation of *Postscript*: Climacus as Socratic Exemplar

Whilst Muench admires "Conant's attempt to be responsive to the unusual form of the *Postscript*", Muench thinks that,

[Conant's] picture of Climacus' activity in the *Postscript* tends to foster what we might call a *hermeneutic of suspicion*, leading Conant (and those who follow his approach) to be unduly suspicious of some of Climacus' philosophical activity and resulting in...a radical misapprehension of Climacus' philosophical aim in this work and how he goes about trying to realize that aim.²⁹⁴

In other words, whilst Muench appreciates Conant's emphasis on the *form* of the *Postscript*, Muench's concern is Conant runs the risk of being overly suspicious of Climacus' philosophical reflections. Muench brings out his concern by way of mentioning Wayne Booth's discussion on "the difficulty of detecting irony".²⁹⁵ According to Booth, there are essentially "two obvious pitfalls in reading irony – not going far enough and going too far".²⁹⁶ Muench obviously thinks that Conant falls into the latter pitfall. And so, against Conant's interpretation, Muench sets out to offer an interpretation of the *Postscript* in which Climacus is understood as a Socratic exemplar, who bears the task of exemplifying a mode of thought and inquiry that is appropriate for ethico-religious matters, a mode of thought and inquiry in which the thinker is first-personally present with themselves *qua* existing agent. In what follows, my task is to unpack how Muench arrives at his interpretation.

Muench begins by spelling out his general agreement with Conant's understanding of the *Postscript*'s target audience: that the audience are those who have forgotten what it is to exist as a human being, that is, they are detached from themselves *qua* existing agents.

However, Muench disagrees with Conant's construal of Climacus' audience as those who,

confusedly thinks that philosophy can help her to decide whether she should become a Christian (while it actually provides her with a way to delay making such a decision).²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Paul Muench, "Understanding Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist (de Gruyter, 2007), 428-29.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 428.

²⁹⁶ Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (University of Chicago Press, 1974), 169; Muench, "Understanding Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*," 428.

²⁹⁷ Muench, "Understanding Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*," 430.

In Muench's view, Conant's above construal leads to a misunderstanding of "how Climacus hopes to engage his reader and what specifically he aims to accomplish by means of this engagement".²⁹⁸ As we have seen, Conant thinks that Climacus engages his readers by indulging in the readers' confusion; the aim is to *mirror* the readers' confusion, hoping to provoke the reader into catching himself in Climacus. Muench contests this view by flagging *two* concerns, one of which we have already mentioned in the introduction to this section, namely, Conant risks treating,

...any activity that Climacus engages in that looks like reflection as itself inherently suspect, as something he is doing at best in order to mirror back to the reader her own evasive behavior.²⁹⁹

The implication behind Muench's concern is, of course, that not all of Climacus' reflection should be treated as nothing beyond negative provocation. And so, whilst Muench entirely agrees with Conant that Climacus is in the business of exposing the illusoriness of the illusion, Muench thinks there is some value and substance in Climacus' reflective activities.³⁰⁰ This conviction is indeed a key driving force in Muench's interpretation: that in reflecting upon what it means to be a Christian or how to become a Christian, Climacus is at once exemplifying a mode of thought and inquiry that is apt for such matters. To see how this plays out, it is crucial that we also look at the other worry Muench has with Conant's interpretation.

Muench's other concern has to do with the *effectiveness* of Climacus' strategy on Conant's interpretation of what this strategy involves. Here, Muench's worry is that to conceive Climacus as an author who indulges in the audience's confusion might backfire on the aim of dispelling the illusion – for rather than enabling the reader to catch his own confusion through Climacus' own confusion, the reader might be led to indulge in the confusion even more, as Muench asserts:

²⁹⁸ Ibid. 426.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 429.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. 432.

Doesn't this behavior [i.e., contemplating disinterestedly on how to become a Christian] dramatically exemplify precisely what is wrong with the reader? Doesn't it (at least initially) hold out to her what she most desires, namely a way to delay and postpone having to make genuine ethical and religious commitments while fostering the illusion that by indulging her desire to reflect rather than to act she is actually making real ethical or religious progress?³⁰¹

So, as a way of overcoming the above concern, Muench first proposes the following reconsideration of Climacus' target audience: that rather than someone who thinks philosophy can help them decide whether they should be Christians or not, Climacus' target audience should be understood as,

...someone who imagines herself already to have made the decision to become a Christian and who thinks that ethically and religiously attending to herself is a relatively straightforward matter. Basically, such a reader thinks that being a Christian is easy and certainly not something that requires much effort on her part.³⁰²

And as evidence for his understanding of Climacus' target audience, Muench quotes Climacus' understanding of his own authorship as that of "making it difficult for people to become a Christian...".³⁰³

Supposing Muench is right about Climacus' target audience, Climacus' reflection on what it means to be Christian should then *not* be viewed as a means of indulging the readers' confusion (as per Conant), but rather as a "*corrective* to the hasty, impatient reader who is unwilling to spend any time attending to herself and whose chosen manner of doing philosophy leads her to forget herself".³⁰⁴ In other words, Muench thinks, it is Climacus' aim "to reacquaint [the reader] with just how difficult and strenuous such a task [i.e., of becoming a Christian] can be".³⁰⁵ And the way in which Climacus executes this, Muench submits, is by

³⁰¹ Ibid. 429-30.

³⁰² Ibid. 430.

³⁰³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 321; Muench, "Understanding Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus in the Postscript," 430.

³⁰⁴ Muench, "Understanding Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus in the Postscript," 431.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 431.

taking on “the appearance of a loafer”.³⁰⁶ Crucially, this idea of taking on appearances brings us to the core of Muench’s interpretation of Climacus as a Socratic exemplar.

According to Muench, there are essentially *three* key characteristics to Climacus’ Socratic exemplarity. Firstly, Climacus is a Socratic figure in that he uses himself ‘experimentally’. As Muench explains, “what this means in practice is that Climacus, a pseudonymous author, adopts or enacts different character roles in each of his books as a way of Socratically engaging his reader”.³⁰⁷ According to Muench, Climacus in *Philosophical Crumbs* takes up the “stance or persona of an ‘ignorant person’ ...who sets out to see if he can hypothetically discover something that genuinely ‘goes beyond the Socratic’”, whilst in the *Postscript*, Climacus takes up the dual stance of someone who denies being Christian, and the character of a loafer who deliberately takes time in thinking “how one becomes a Christian”.³⁰⁸ In what follows, let us look at how Muench thinks these personas play their part in dispelling Climacus’ readers’ illusion, or how these personas enable the reader to engage in self-examination in double-reflection.

In the case of *Crums*, Muench thinks that Climacus’ persona enables Climacus to execute a two-step strategy. The strategy first begins by luring the “speculatively-inclined reader” by promising such reader “the prospect of some wonderful new philosophical discovery”.³⁰⁹ And the fact that an ignorant person is making such promise, Muench asserts, “provisionally grants that the reader is more knowledgeable than [Climacus] is”, which in turn lowers the reader’s suspicion that the work is other than what it claims to be.³¹⁰ Then comes step two of the strategy, which essentially involves shaking the reader’s conviction that they know or are done with understanding what it means to be Christian. As Muench explains, the

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. 437.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. 437-39.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. 437.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

second step is executed by “presenting the traditional Christian teaching in an unusual form” such that “[the] reader can hardly recognize what he himself has done with long ago”.³¹¹

Now, how about the *Postscript*? As we have mentioned in passing earlier, Muench thinks that Climacus in the *Postscript* takes up the appearance of a ‘loafer’. The question then, is how the loafer persona play its part in dispelling the readers’ illusion. Now, as Muench explains, the loafer persona is basically intended to exemplify a kind of self-restraint that is characteristic of a “Socratic style of doing philosophy”.³¹² This notion of self-restraint takes us to the second characteristic of what it means, in Muench’s view, to present oneself as a Socratic exemplar. As mentioned before, Muench claims that Climacus’ readers are those who think they are already Christians, and that “ethically and religiously attending to [oneself] is a relatively straightforward matter”.³¹³ The significance of Climacus’ loafer persona and the connection this persona has with exemplifying a more Socratic way of thinking is this: that Climacus adopts the loafer persona to purposefully prolong the investigation on what it means to become a Christian in order to frustrate the readers’ conviction that being Christian is a trivial matter, and that in following through with Climacus’ investigation, the reader exercises self-restraint in real-time as they progress in their reading of the *Postscript*.

But unless we misunderstand self-restraint here in terms of reading speed, Muench clarifies that self-restraint vis-à-vis thought and inquiry on what it means to be Christian has to do with the readers’ basic *attitude* or *orientation* towards the question of what it means to be a Christian – that the call for self-restraint is aimed at correcting the readers’ conviction “that being a Christian is *easy* and certainly not something that requires much effort on her part” (Compare Climacus’ satire of the wife).³¹⁴ But more so than just rectifying the confused

³¹¹ Ibid. 438; Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 231fn.

³¹² Ibid. 432.

³¹³ Ibid. 430.

³¹⁴ Muench, "Understanding Kierkegaard’s Johannes Climacus in the Postscript," 430.

readers' complacent attitude towards the matter of being a Christian, Muench thinks that the kind of self-restraint exemplified by the loafer Climacus is also intended to keep the reader's first-personal awareness of their agency constantly in view. Muench asserts:

...in the *Postscript* Climacus seems instead to produce a long, drawn-out work that is designed precisely to keep the reader from indulging in the sort of speculative, philosophical reflection that tends to lead her to neglect herself. Repeatedly, just when the reader may start to imagine that Climacus has finished with his seemingly trivial investigation of how one becomes a Christian (which the reader already imagines herself to be), thus allowing her (finally!) to get back to speculating, Climacus introduces something further that needs to be thought through, thereby providing the reader with yet another opportunity to engage in a form of philosophical reflection that requires her to employ the first personal "I" and so keep herself in view.³¹⁵

As Muench explains, Climacus will keep raising problems in his investigation on what it means to be Christian such that the reader is given opportunities to engage in a mode of thought and inquiry where the reader is first-personally present.

Here, the emphasis on the first-personal 'I' brings us to the third and final characteristic that Muench sees as essential to Climacus' Socratic exemplarity. And at this juncture, Muench's disagreement with Conant comes to the fore again, for unlike Conant who sees Climacus as engaging in disinterested investigation of what it means to be Christian as a way of *mirroring* of the readers' confusion, Muench thinks that Climacus is genuinely *first-personally* interested in pursuing what it means *for him* to become a Christian, even though Climacus is an outsider to Christianity. Muench writes:

Climacus does not in fact set out to investigate the question 'How does one become a Christian?' but instead seeks to answer the question, 'How do *I*, Johannes Climacus, become a Christian?' I take it that Climacus' use of the first person here is critical and indicates that he does not wish to pursue this question in a strictly disinterested fashion. While it is true that he remains an outsider to Christianity (and regularly denies that he is a Christian), his goal is not to approach this topic in a manner that mirrors the disinterested approach of the speculative philosopher, but instead to remind her of a type of philosophical reflection that properly employs the first personal 'I'.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Ibid. 439.

³¹⁶ Ibid. 434-35.

As the passage above makes clear, Muench's thought is that in pursuing what it means to become Christian interestedly in the first-person, Climacus is at once reminding his confused readers of a mode of thought and inquiry in which one is first-personally present with oneself, thus making such mode of thought and inquiry apt for contemplating ethico-religious matters, like what it means to be Christian. And so, unlike Conant's Climacus who participates in the illusion, and thereby, shares likeness with the deluded readers, Muench's Climacus is obviously *different* from the deluded readers, for Muench's Climacus engages seriously in first-personal thought and inquiry on what it means *for him* to be Christian. Understood this way, Muench's Climacus essentially generates a 'That's not like me, but that's who I should be!' moment in the reader, which should, in Muench's view, lead the reader to examine themselves in relation to how they live their lives as Christians or how they take up the question of what it means to be Christians.

Now that we have both Conant's and Muench's interpretation in place, the next will critically compare and assess both critics' interpretations. In doing so, my aim is to work out my own interpretation of the double-reflection and art that is at work in the indirect communication of the *Postscript*.

4. A Critical Assessment of Conant and Muench's Interpretation of the *Postscript*

As mentioned at the end of the previous section, the burden of this section is to critically compare and assess the interpretations advanced by Conant and Muench. The goal of my investigation here is twofold. Firstly, I shall assess the compatibility of Conant's and Muench's interpretation with the features highlighted concerning the double-reflection and art of indirect communication. Secondly, I shall bring out the shortcomings of their interpretation with the prospect of articulating my own interpretation on how the *Postscript* exemplifies indirect communication understood as a doubly-reflected mode of communication, and the artistry involved in executing such communication. In light of the twofold goal, this section will be split into two subsections accordingly.

Now, to assess the compatibility of Conant's and Muench's interpretation against the features highlighted concerning the double-reflection and art of indirect communication, I want to direct our attention once again to the table provided at the end of the first section to remind ourselves of the features involved. This will make it easier when we come to assess both interpretation's compatibility. The table runs as follows:

The Double-Reflection in Indirect Communication	The Artistry
Involves combining qualitative opposites in unity, such that the communication can be interpreted in equally opposing ways (e.g., as both attack and defence, or as both in jest and in earnestness).	Involves the indirect communicator's <i>incognito</i> .
The notion of a 'Dialectical Knot' does not immediately preclude the containment of communicative content (e.g., concepts and propositions) in indirect communication, only that the primary aim of indirect communication is not to impart some knowledge or information to the reader.	The indirect communicator's <i>incognito</i> is made possible by deceiving the recipient into truth, which in turn involves engaging with the deluded reader on their own terms by taking up the matter of being Christian disinterestedly. The deception also involves denying that one is a Christian.

4.1 Points of Compatibility

Straightaway, with respect to the art of indirect communication, both critics' interpretation clearly incorporates Climacus' denial of being a Christian into their accounts. But in addition to Climacus' denial of being a Christian, Conant also incorporates the idea that Climacus engages the deluded reader on their own terms, as when Conant claims that Climacus engages in disinterested thought and inquiry on what it means to be a Christian. This idea of engaging the deluded reader on their own terms is missing in Muench's interpretation, since Muench's concern is precisely that in engaging the deluded reader on their terms (i.e., by engaging in disinterested thought and inquiry on what it means to be Christian), there is a possibility of encouraging the readers to indulge further in the illusion: that the reader will continue to confusedly live their Christian lives disinterestedly.

Now, let us turn to consider the double-reflection in indirect communication. On Conant's interpretation, the clashing of form and content can be readily seen as the dialectical interplay between the opposing qualities of 'attack and defence', and 'jest and earnestness' – that the *Postscript* appears to take on the form of an earnest or serious philosophical investigation on what it means to be Christian, which could also be taken as a defence of the illusion, but that the work turns out to be written in jest, as the work collapses in plain nonsense, which is also at once an attack on the illusion. And untying this dialectical knot involves paying heed to the structure of the work, in which one receives instructions in the frame of the work (i.e., the appendices) to revoke the work as nonsensical. Clearly, on Conant's interpretation, the *Postscript qua* indirect communication does not didactically impart any knowledge or information, not even implicitly. In this way, Conant certainly does well in upholding Kierkegaard's schema for distinguishing cases of indirect from direct communication. However, Conant clearly goes further than the idea of not imparting

knowledge or information – for Conant takes it that the (body of the) *Postscript* contains *no* intelligible content at all. I will return to critically engage with this in the next subsection.

Muench's interpretation, on the other hand, lacks the dialectical knottiness that exuberates in Conant's interpretation. That is, Muench's interpretation lacks the interpretative tension (attack and defence, or jest and earnestness) that is supposed to constitute the double-reflection in indirect communication. But perhaps we could defend Muench here by putting out the following suggestion: that the combination of jest and earnestness lie in the clash between Climacus' loafer persona (which is the jest) and his seriously engaging in first-person thought and inquiry on what it means to be Christian (which is the earnestness). And whilst it is possible to salvage Muench's interpretation in this way, the salvaging clearly hangs on the assumption that Climacus *is* seriously engaging in first-personal thought and inquiry on what it means for him to be Christian. I disagree with Muench on this, but I will come to this in the next subsection.

So, to conclude this subsection, although both critics have incorporated the idea of denying oneself as Christian into their interpretations, I think Conant's interpretation clearly has the upper hand, for Conant's interpretation incorporates most of the features that are essential to the double-reflection and art in indirect communication. That being said, there is one major concern with Conant's interpretation, of which Muench is also clearly wary of, namely, that Conant's interpretation risks losing any sense of communication in indirect *communication*, for Conant takes seriously that (the body of) the *Postscript* contains no intelligible content; that there is nothing beyond a purely negative provocation. This brings me to the next subsection, where I will begin by critically engaging with Conant's interpretation.

4.2 Some Objections to Conant's and Muench's Interpretation

In what follows, I will begin by taking issue with Conant's understanding of Climacus' call to revoke the *Postscript*. As I argue, the call to revoke is not a call to regard the work as plainly nonsensical. Rather, the call to revoke is Climacus' way of severing himself from bearing authority on ethico-religious matters. On this note, I will also draw attention to the idea of a 'dialectical knot' – that a dialectical knot does *not* preclude the containment of communicative content (e.g., concepts and propositions). Then, I will take issue with Muench's understanding of the character of Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*. Contrary to Muench, I think Climacus' loafing in the *Postscript* should be taken as part of Climacus' character, not as a persona that Climacus puts on. And on an importantly related note, I also provide reasons to suggest why we should *not* take Climacus' first-personal thought and inquiry on what it means to be Christian seriously. Thirdly, and finally, I will critically discuss and address Muench's concern with Conant's interpretation: i.e., that in construing Climacus as one who indulges in the same confusion as the readers, there is a possibility of encouraging the reader to indulge further in the confusion. Whilst I think Muench is right in flagging such concern, I will point out how a similar concern is applicable to Muench's interpretation. Additionally, I also want to show that Conant is not ignorant of Muench's concern, only that Conant does not address the issue adequately. I will then address Muench's concern, by drawing attention to Kierkegaard's claim that the pseudonymous pieces are *limiting* aesthetic-intellectual productions. And so, with the aim of this subsection in place, I will now critically engage with Conant's interpretation.

As we have seen, central to Conant's interpretation is the parallel he draws **parallels** with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* – that just as the *Tractatus* instructs readers to revoke itself as nonsensical, so too with Climacus' *Postscript*. And whilst I acknowledge that there is a call from Climacus to revoke the work, I disagree with Conant's idea of what it means to revoke

the work. As I argue, something Conant does not take into consideration is that after Climacus' call to revoke, Climacus adds a sentence which supplements what he means to revoke the work. The relevant sentence I have in mind runs as follows:

...to write a book and revoke it is something else than not writing it; that to write a book which does not claim importance for anyone is something else than leaving it unwritten".³¹⁷

Notice Climacus' supplementing sentence, that writing a piece of work to be revoked is to write a work that does not claim to be *important* for anyone, not a work that is to be revoked as nonsensical. In other words, the revocation should be read as a gesture towards Climacus' denial of being a figure of authority. Now, what this denial of authority amounts to, I think, is the denial of having any say on what it means to be Christian, or claiming to impart knowledge on what it means to be Christian. The implication here is that the *Postscript* should not be read as a didactic piece which promises to impart readers with answers or doctrines on what it means to be Christian (I am in agreement with Conant on this point).

Following from above, I want to turn to consider critic John Lippitt's objection against Conant's interpretation of Climacus' revocation. Lippitt also charges Conant for not considering the sentence that supplements Climacus' understanding of what it means to revoke the *Postscript*: that to revoke the *Postscript* is not to deny the piece of *containing* communicative content, but it is the author's denial of having authority on ethico-religious matters like what it means to be Christian.³¹⁸ But as Lippitt adds, the issue is not simply due to Conant's negligence of the supplementing sentence, but also with how Conant understands Climacus' self-characterisation as a humourist. Firstly, as Lippitt points out, since being "an authority is much too burdensome an existence for a humorist", the mood of the revocation

³¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 523.

³¹⁸ Please see, John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (Macmillan, 2000), 59.

should really be received in the following way: “That’s how I see it, but you don’t have to listen to a mere humorist like me”.³¹⁹

Here, I think Lippitt’s re-consideration of Climacus’ call to revoke the *Postscript* helpfully bring out the following point: that it is *not* the case that Climacus being a humourist means he says nothing communicatively intelligible or sensible (as per Conant’s view). Rather, what is said concerns Climacus himself only, and should therefore, not be taken as a doctrine on how one should think and inquire on what it means to be Christian. This is compatible with Climacus’ declaration at the appendix after the conclusion that “the whole book is about [himself]”.³²⁰ A potentially helpful analogy here would be the example of a personal diary or journal. Although a diary or journal is typically personal and therefore, typically non-didactic, this does not absolve the diary of containing intelligible content.

And as further evidence for the above, I want to draw attention to the notion of a ‘dialectical knot’ As I have suggested, the term ‘dialectical’ can be seen to invoke the idea of something conceptual and propositional. And supposing this is the case, the implication is that works like the *Postscript*, which is a piece of indirect communication, contain concepts and propositions, or ideas and thoughts of which readers can critically discuss, develop, and engage with. Furthermore, as if to ward off Conant-style interpretations of indirect communication, Anti-Climacus even makes explicitly clear, that “the combination of jest and earnestness must not be lunacy either, because then there is no communication”.³²¹ In other words, *pace* Conant, although the notion of a dialectical knot means that the communication becomes an interpretative puzzle, this is not tantamount to saying that the communication ends up in nonsense or lunacy. That is, although the communication does *not* aim at didactically imparting any communicative content (which Conant is right about), indirect

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 520.

³²¹ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 125.

communication *does contain* communicative content insofar as it is still a form of communication.

Now, returning to Lippitt's objection against Conant, Lippitt claims that more than denying authority on having say on what it means to be Christian, Climacus' self-characterisation as a 'humourist' also signifies the "lack [of] a sense of urgency".³²² Lippitt thinks this understanding of Climacus' self-characterisation as a humourist is evident in at least *two* places. First is in Climacus' confession of finding himself in the fortunate situation of being "born precisely in this speculative, theocentric century" wherein he can find solace in relying on those who are "able and willing to be authorities".³²³ The second is in Climacus' rather lengthy disclosure on how he came about writing the *Postscript*.³²⁴ From both pieces of textual evidence, Lippitt claims that what we see is *not*, as Conant would have it, a writer who is keen to issue "vehement warnings about the work's peculiar character".³²⁵ Rather, what we see is an individual whose "activity was nevertheless only a sort of brilliant inactivity"; an individual who spends his time "loafing and thinking, or thinking and loafing"; and who, as Lippitt points out, finds "relighting his cigar... a more pressing demand than continuing his train of thought".³²⁶ All this, Lippitt thinks, "indicates a person who is, to say the least, in no great hurry", which in turn indicate "some distance from what Conant detects: Climacus as an issuer of 'vehement warnings' as to how his work should be read".³²⁷

Now, at this point, we might raise the following thought against Lippitt: that just because Climacus is an author who is also at once a loafer, this does not necessarily preclude the possibility of Climacus including instructions on how to read the work; for it is entirely

³²² Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*, 60.

³²³ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 520-21; Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*, 60.

³²⁴ Please see, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 155-58.

³²⁵ Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense," 216; Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*, 60-62.

³²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 156; Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*, 62.

³²⁷ Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*, 62.

possible for a loafing author to care about how readers read his work. Crucially, I think it is important to acknowledge that Lippitt never claims that Climacus empties himself of any care on how people read his work, or that being a loafing author means not caring enough to provide instructions on how readers should read the *Postscript* properly. Rather, as I understand it, the force of Lippitt's appeal to Climacus' character as a loafer is to bring to our awareness that Climacus does not, on the one hand, see the urgency in being understood by his readers, which is different than not caring whether he is understood or not; and secondly, and more importantly, that Climacus is *not* an author with a grand mission of bettering his readers through his works. Consider, for instance, Climacus' dissociation with the 'benefactors of the age':

... who know how to do favours to mankind by making life more and more easy, some with railways, others with omnibuses and steamships, others with the telegraph, others through easily grasped surveys and brief reports on everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age, who by virtue of thought make spiritual existence systematically easier and yet more and more important.³²⁸

Here, the last sentence concerning Climacus' dissociation with the "true benefactors of the age" signifies Climacus' dissociation with those who claim to have authority on ethico-religious matters, including of course, the matter of what it means to be Christian.³²⁹ In the *Postscript*, these 'true benefactors' (as Climacus ironically calls them) find numerous other titles, such as the positive thinkers/prattlers, the *privat-docent*, the teaching assistants, the lecturers, the "town criers of inwardness", and more.³³⁰ Roughly, by all these various titles, Climacus is referring to those who claims to impart or *posit* knowledge or wisdom concerning what it means to be human and how one ought to live as a human, hence the title of 'positive thinkers' (as mentioned, Climacus takes it there are many in his day who are willing to be authoritative on such matters). And so, in dissociating himself with these figures of authority,

³²⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 156.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ *Ibid.* 56, 61-66, 70-72.

Climacus is also at once alleviating himself the burden of benefacting his readers concerning ethico-religious matters. Crucially, however, denying the burden of benefitting others does not necessarily preclude the possibility of benefitting others by accident. This, I think, harks back to Kierkegaard's idea of helping another stand alone in relation to ethico-religious matters: that the indirect communicator helps the recipient without being recognised as such; that insofar as one is somehow benefitted by Climacus' "loafing and thinking, or thinking and loafing", one is *not* indebted to Climacus.³³¹

The above brings me to critical engagement with Muench's interpretation, which in my view, precisely misconstrues Climacus as one who is writing the *Postscript* with the grand mission of benefacting his readers through the exemplification of a mode of thought and inquiry that is suitable for ethico-religious matters. As we have seen, Muench presents an alternative to Conant's interpretation, claiming that Climacus' strategy is to take on the *appearance* of a loafer, deliberately stalling in his investigation on what it means to be Christian with the prospect of exemplifying what, according to Muench, is a more Socratic style of philosophising that "places a premium on the power of self-restraint and the correct employment of the first personal 'I'".³³² Now, crucial to Muench's interpretation is of course, the idea that Climacus is taking on an *appearance* of a loafer, thus implying that Climacus is *not*, in Muench's view, a loafer. Indeed, as we have seen, Muench's Climacus is anything but a loafer, for he is first-personally invested in what it means for him, Johannes Climacus, to be a Christian. Recall Muench's following claim,

I take it that Climacus' use of the first person here is critical and indicates that he does not wish to pursue this question [of what it means to be Christian] in a strictly disinterested fashion.³³³

³³¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 156.

³³² Muench, "Understanding Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus in the Postscript," 439.

³³³ *Ibid.* 434.

In other words, when Climacus is investigating on what it means for him to be Christian, Climacus is not in fact just “loafing and thinking, or thinking and loafing”, but that he himself (i.e., his existence and his way of living), is at stake in this investigation.³³⁴

To my understanding, Muench’s interpretation Climacus’ character derives from his take on what it means for Climacus to use himself experimentally – that in Muench’s view, Climacus’ using himself experimentally means putting on appearances or being in character.³³⁵ And from this, Muench claims that Climacus is taking on the appearance of a loafer. However, contrary to Muench, I am inclined to think of Climacus’ using himself experimentally to mean that Climacus is using his first-personal ‘I’ non-seriously (hence, experimentally). In other words, when Climacus poses the question of: “how do I become a Christian?”, Climacus is not in fact genuinely first-personally interested in this question.³³⁶

In support of my understanding, I want to draw attention to *three* considerations. That firstly, in the appendix titled ‘An understanding with the reader’, which comes after the conclusion to the *Postscript*, Climacus makes the following assertion:

In the seclusion of the experiment, the whole book is about myself, solely about me. ‘I, Joh. Cl., now thirty years old, born in Copenhagen, a plain, ordinary human like most, have heard tell of a highest good in prospect, which is called an eternal happiness, and that Christianity wants to bestow it on one on condition of adhering to it. Now I ask, how do I become a Christian?’ (cf. the Intro.). I ask solely for my own sake, yes, certainly, or rather, I *have* asked about it, for that indeed is the content of the work.³³⁷

Here, notice in the first sentence that Climacus explicitly casts his investigation or his book as an *experiment*. And supposing there is continuity in the character of Johannes Climacus from the *Philosophical Crumbs* to the *Postscript*, experiment here presumably means as it does in *Crumbs*, a ‘thought-experiment’ or a ‘thought-project’.³³⁸ Now, typically, the thinker who conducts a thought-experiment does so in a detached or disinterested manner, in which the

³³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 156.

³³⁵ Ibid. 437.

³³⁶ Ibid. 520.

³³⁷ Ibid. 520-21.

³³⁸ See for instance, Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, 88.

thinker's existence and agency is *not* at stake and does not need to be. Putting this into perspective, consider for instance, popular moral thought-experiments like the 'Trolley Problem'. Such thought-experiments certainly generate much heated discussion, but it is not imperative for the thinker to conduct the thought-experiment in relation to his own existence and agency. That is, the thinker does not need to think and inquire in the first-person. This takes me to my second point, which is that the possibility of using one's 'I' in a third-personal detached way is attested by Kierkegaard's warning against merely attaching or saying 'I' when reading God's Word; the worry here is that one could just say 'I' "in distraction, in an absentminded moment".³³⁹

Thirdly and finally, I find Muench's construal of Climacus deprives Climacus and the *Postscript* of its aesthetic-intellectual character. Recall that, according to *Point of View*, it is integral to indirect communication's artistry is that the pseudonymous works from *Either/Or* to *Postscript* are aesthetic-intellectual productions designed to engage the deluded recipient on their own terms: i.e. that just as those in grip of the illusion takes up the matter of being Christian as an aesthetic-intellectual matter, Kierkegaard (through his pseudonyms) will do the same. However, to construe Climacus as one who is genuinely in the business of exemplifying a first-personal thought and inquiry on what it means to be Christian runs counter to the confused readers' way of thinking and inquiring about the matter, which is to take up the matter purely third-personally and disinterestedly. Understood this way, Climacus is clearly *not* engaging the deluded confused readers on their own grounds, which is ingredient to the artistry of indirect communication.

Now, in spite of the above objections I raised against Muench's interpretation, I think Muench's interpretation is very much motivated by an important concern, a concern which Muench takes Conant to be ignorant of, namely, would the project of dispelling the readers'

³³⁹ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination / Judge for Yourself!*, 32.

illusion not backfire on itself if Climacus is construed as one who partakes and indulges in the recipient's confusion? Muench's worry here is that Climacus' partaking in the readers' illusion might push the reader to indulge in their illusion further. It is out of such consideration that Muench propounds an understanding of *Postscript* which does not see its author as engaging the recipient on their own terms. We could bring out Muench's concern by way of using Katherine Ramsland's example of the woman with a nervous laughter. Here, the parallel risk would be that rather than provoking the woman with a nervous laughter to self-examination in double-reflection, the sister's nervous laughter might only encourage the woman to continue laughing nervously. For instance, rather than thinking to herself: 'Oh no! Is that how I laugh?', the woman might simply think to herself: 'What a wonderful laughter my sister has!'. And so, similarly with Conant's interpretation, Muench's concern here is the potential intensification or further encouragement of the deluded reader to continue in their illusory way of life.

Against Muench's charges, we could defend Conant's interpretation by drawing attention to a number of points. While Muench's concern is a legitimate one, it still does not rule out the possibility that one might be provoked to self-examination upon the presence of an object of comparison that is similar to oneself. Of course, the converse is also true – that just as it is possible to provoke the other to self-examination by mirroring, so mirroring might also encourage the other to further indulge in their illusion. In this connection, it is crucial to acknowledge, I think, that neither Conant nor Ramsland assume that there are any guarantees of success with respect to mirroring. Moreover, it is also worth mentioning Kierkegaard's claim that indirect communication is *not* fool-proof, for even upon successfully provoking the deluded recipient to judge or examine himself in double-reflection, the recipient might judge the opposite of what Kierkegaard (or any indirect communicator) intends.³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 50.

But in Muench's defence, I think Muench's concern goes beyond that of securing a guarantee of success. In fact, Muench's concern goes deeper, for he picks up on a concern that is not specific to Conant's interpretation *per se*, but with a more general concern with Kierkegaard's conception of indirect communication's artistry. To see how this is the case, let us reformulate Muench's concern as follows: *how* can an aesthetic-intellectual piece possibly enable its readers to engage with ethico-religious matters first-personally as they should, especially since Kierkegaard's target audience are aesthetic-intellectually intoxicated?³⁴¹ An analogous worry would be like trying to cure an addict with the very substance that they are addicted to – e.g., serving alcohol to an alcoholic.

Crucially, Conant is *not*, as Muench would have it, ignorant to such danger. Conant's awareness is evident in his critical engagement with, and reformulation of, Josiah

Thompson's concern:

How can the production of an aesthetic work be the expression of a religious vocation? Or, to focus the worry more sharply: How can a merely aesthetic treatment of the ethical or the religious so much as engage its intended object? Purged of its confusions and misunderstandings, this seems to me to be the real concern behind Thompson's worry.³⁴²

And although Conant is undoubtedly aware of the substance of Muench's concern, Conant's response, I think, does not adequately address this concern. To see why, let us turn to consider Conant's response, which goes as follows:

The sense in which Kierkegaard understands his purpose in the aesthetic works to be a religious one has to do with the task of clearing up confusions about what sort of life a religious life is (and thereby clearing certain obstacles from the path of his readers if they wish to embark upon such a life).³⁴³

Essentially, Conant's response is to assert that although the *Postscript* is an aesthetic-intellectual production, the *Postscript's* aim is *not* to indulge the readers' illusion, but "to lead the captive of the illusion to the point where he himself is able to recognise that that which he

³⁴¹ I borrow this imagery of aesthetic-intellectual intoxication from Kierkegaard, *Either/Or - Part II*, 16.

³⁴² Conant, "Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors," 258.

³⁴³ *Ibid.* 279.

is attracted to *is an illusion*".³⁴⁴ Conant, as we have already seen, argues that Climacus achieves the above aim by participating in the readers' illusion. But the above simply puts us back at square one, for Conant's response above is precisely what Muench is concerned with. More importantly, as I understand it, Muench has no issue agreeing with Conant concerning the *Postscript*'s purpose: namely, that it is intended to clear up any confusions on what it means to be Christian by dispelling the illusion of Christendom. Muench's concern, rather, is *how* the *Postscript* as an aesthetic-intellectual production can fulfil the above purpose without going the opposite way of encouraging the reader to engage in disinterested contemplation.

Now, before I proceed to address Muench's concern in the next section, I want to critically discuss one further point: that just as Conant's interpretation might be readily seen as fostering disinterested thought and inquiry, so too with Muench's. To see this, it is important to remind ourselves how Muench's Climacus stands in antithetical relation to Conant's Climacus – that the former, unlike the latter, does not partake in the readers' illusion, but instead, exemplifies the mode of thought and inquiry that is appropriate for ethico-religious matters by taking up the question of what it means to be Christian in a first-personally interested way. Putting the above point in another way, while Conant's Climacus shares resemblance with his reader, Muench's Climacus is one who is essentially *different* to his reader.

What Muench leaves unaddressed is the conditions under which the reader can perceive the difference between Climacus and himself in such a way that enables the reader to examine himself in relation to this difference; or to pose my concern in another way, what makes it such that the reader does not merely respond disinterestedly to the difference between himself and Climacus (e.g., 'Johannes Climacus takes up the question of what it means to be a Christian in a quite different way to how I do, far more thoroughly. How

³⁴⁴ Ibid. 274.

curious and admirable!'), but turn inwardly towards himself and responds to the difference in a first-personally interested way (e.g., 'Is that how I should take up the matter of what it means to be a Christian? Have I been doing that? What have I been doing?')? The possibility of the former route is attested by Climacus' comment on admiration of exemplars: that rather than beholding the exemplar as presenting a possible course of existence and agency for oneself, one might instead, as Climacus put it, "[transform] the [exemplar] in question...into the rare exception. [That one] admires him and says: But I am too humble to do anything like that".³⁴⁵ And crucially, as Climacus presents it, admiration is a form of disinterested objective contemplation, since one contemplates the admired object (in this case, the exemplar) as "a spectator, an admirer, an evaluator", rather than contemplating the exemplar in concrete relation with one's existence and agency.³⁴⁶

So, what conclusion are we to draw from the above? That no exemplars can or should be given concerning ethico-religious matters? I think not: such exemplars can be given.³⁴⁷ But what is missing from Muench's interpretation, I think, is the element of *provocation*, which Conant's interpretation clearly contains. In fact, rather than provoking, I find the opposite to be the case, where Muench's Climacus is like a benevolent therapist who takes the reader by the hand, gently showing the reader the right way to think and inquire ethico-religious matters by himself exemplifying the appropriate mode of thought and inquiry. However, the element of provocation is undoubtedly integral to Kierkegaard's conception of indirect communication, for otherwise, Kierkegaard would not have anticipated the recipient's

³⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 300-01.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 301.

³⁴⁷ Consider the following quote from Kierkegaard's journals: "In [Christendom], assisted by the despicable dishonesty of mediocrity, we have reached the point of having completely lost the exemplars. It was the exemplars who should be reintroduced, made recognizable, which can only be done by means of Either/Or: Either you have a quality in common, or you are of a different quality—but not this ["]also sort-of["]", ["]well, not entirely, but nevertheless also sort-of.["]". Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks Volume 10, Journals NB31-NB36*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. (Princeton University Press, 2018), 104.

infuriation upon compelling the recipient to judge or examine himself in double-reflection: recall, in Chapter One, we saw how Kierkegaard compared indirect communication with martyrdom.³⁴⁸

And so, insofar as indirect communication involves the presentation of an exemplar, that exemplar must provoke. And it is through the exemplar's provocation, I argue, that enables the beholder to resist admiration and instead engage with the exemplar in a first-personally interested way, or in a way where the beholder puts the exemplar in relation to themselves in a process of self-examination. Importantly, an exemplar's provocation works, I suggest, when the exemplar is not *merely* presented as different (as per Muench's model), but presented as *maximally* or *radically* embodying an ideal, such that the exemplar puts the beholder in a position to experience a kind of shame in which it compels the beholder to examine himself in relation to the exemplar.³⁴⁹ The possibility of this kind of exemplar is attested by Kierkegaard's understanding of his pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, a character who Kierkegaard describes as pushing the "requirement for being a Christian...to a supreme ideality" in order that readers might be compelled to judge and examine themselves, seeing that they fall short of Christianity's requirements and their need for God's grace.³⁵⁰

Returning now to address Muench's concern with Conant's interpretation, which is the problem of how pseudonymous 'aesthetic' works like *Postscript* can enable Kierkegaard's deluded audience to examine themselves in such a way as to obtain a first-personal awareness of how they live, without pushing the recipient in the opposite direction? To this, I want to begin by drawing attention to a discussion on this issue led by Aumann, whose work we critically engaged with previously. Now, with respect to Muench's concern, Aumann suggests

³⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 50.

³⁴⁹ For an interesting discussion of such exemplar, please see, James Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of 'Schopenhauer as Educator'," in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future*, ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 181-257; Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*, 33-39.

³⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 7.

that one hypothesis is to see the pseudonymous works working in tandem with the religious discourses, thus forming what Aumann calls a ‘bait-and-switch’ tactic.³⁵¹ As Aumann explains, the idea here is that a pseudonymous work like “*Either/Or* is the bait. The switch to the religious then occurs in the *Two Upbuilding Discourses*”, which was published three months after.³⁵² Then, as Aumann points out, support for this hypothesis can be found in an anecdote given in Kierkegaard’s *Point of View*. Aumann writes:

The anecdote concerns an acquaintance who, presumably after reading *Either/Or*, came to believe that Kierkegaard was witty and clever. Hoping for more of the same, the acquaintance bought the *Two Upbuilding Discourses*. However, he encountered something quite unexpected: the religious.³⁵³

In other words, on this hypothesis, although the pseudonymous works are aesthetic productions, they are also followed by the religious discourses, which act as the provocation to self-examination in double-reflection.

Crucially, Aumann rejects the above model of understanding Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works on the basis that this model assumes readers saw through Kierkegaard’s pseudonymity, which Aumann thinks was something Kierkegaard “worked so very hard to prevent”.³⁵⁴ Instead of the above, Aumann vouches for a different model, one that sees the bait-and-switch as happening entirely within the pseudonymous works – that each pseudonymous work has this ‘bait-and-switch’ tactic embedded. Like Aumann, I also reject the above hypothesis in favour of seeing the ‘bait-and-switch’ as occurring within each of the pseudonymous works, but for a reason different than Aumann’s.

In my view, Kierkegaard gives us reason to see that although the pseudonymous works are aesthetic-intellectual pieces, they are *limiting* aesthetic-intellectual pieces. Consider the following passage:

³⁵¹ Aumann, “Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication, the Crowd, and a Monstrous Illusion,” 319.

³⁵² Ibid. 320.

³⁵³ Ibid. See also, Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, 9; 36.

³⁵⁴ Ibid. 321.

So when in Christendom a religious author whose total thought is the task of becoming a Christian wants to make it possible to make people aware (whether it will succeed is of course something else), he must begin as an esthetic author and to a certain point he must maintain this possibility. But there must be a *limit*, since it is being done, after all, in order to make aware.³⁵⁵

As Kierkegaard makes clear in the passage above, although the strategy of deceiving the deluded recipient into truth involves writing pieces in which one can engage with disinterestedly, there must be a *limit* to how much these pseudonymous pieces allow the reader to engage in disinterested contemplation. What this means, I take, is that in so far as the pseudonymous works are to be considered as aesthetic-intellectual pieces, they should be considered as distinct cases of aesthetic-intellectual pieces wherein their discussion of ethico-religious matters *frustrate* a purely disinterested mode of thought and inquiry, and to frustrate it in such a way that also positively draws attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that is suitable for ethico-religious matters.

Crucially, I am not alone and definitely not the first in drawing attention to the above. Here, consider critic Daniel Watts' interpretation of the *Philosophical Crumbs* as a "limiting case of aesthetic-intellectual representation".³⁵⁶ Essentially, Watts' idea of a limiting case follows the Kantian "contrast between a limitation and a limit or boundary".³⁵⁷ As Watts explains with reference to Kant's *Prolegomena*, while the concept of a limitation denotes an arrival at the maximum, the concept of a limit or boundary "has a positive character by virtue of sharing features both with entities within the domain it bounds and also with what lies beyond".³⁵⁸ In other words, a boundary or a limiting case does not only possess characteristics of that which it circles in, but it also shares characteristics with that which lie outside the circle. Consider a borderline drawn across the ground, marking what lies within and beyond one's territory; that line is at once on one's territory and on land that lie beyond one's

³⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. Emphasis mine.

³⁵⁶ Watts, "Kierkegaard and the Limits of Thought," 101.

³⁵⁷ Ibid. 98.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

territory. Applying this concept of a limiting case to the *Crumbs*, Watts' thought is that the work not only concretely determine that which lie within the category of the aesthetic-intellectual, but that it also discloses the ethico-religious character of the matters at hand, such that it positively paves way for one to think and inquire ethico-religious matters properly in the first-person – as Watts put it, such limiting aesthetic-intellectual pieces are “apt not only to delimit the aesthetic-intellectual as such but further, and positively, to open us towards our own ethical actuality”.³⁵⁹

By understanding the pseudonymous pieces such as the *Postscript* as a *limiting* aesthetic-intellectual production, we have, I argue, the following dual advantage: that on the one hand, we can put Muench's concern at ease, since the *Postscript* is an aesthetic-intellectual piece that is designed to *frustrate* a purely disinterested mode of thought and inquiry in its discussion of ethico-religious matters. And on the other, since the idea of a limiting aesthetic-intellectual production also positively draw attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that is suitable for ethico-religious matters, we at once avoid the problem present in Conant's interpretation, where the *Postscript* is conceived as frustrating disinterested contemplation but only because the work collapses on itself in plain nonsense, resulting in the work as containing nothing intelligible or sensible beyond a purely negative provocation.

Now, before I conclude this section and move on to the next, where I will present and defend my own interpretation of how I think the *Postscript* exemplifies indirect communication *qua* doubly-reflected mode of communication, and the artistry that executing such communication involves, I would like to consolidate and list out the key points of this subsection, both as a summary and as a way out outlining the features that my interpretation of the *Postscript* should (or should not) have. The key points are listed as follows:

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

- The *Postscript*'s call to revoke is *not* a call to regard the piece as devoid of communicative content (i.e., plainly nonsensical). Rather, the revocation should be understood as Climacus' denial of authority – that he does not claim to impart any knowledge or information on ethico-religious matters. Climacus even denies that he is Christian.

- The notion of a dialectical knot, indicating something conceptual or propositional; but they are entangled in such a way that the communication becomes an interpretative puzzle. This does not, however, mean the communication is nonsensical or lunacy.

- Climacus *is* a loafer, not pretending to be one; he uses his first-personal 'I' experimentally (i.e., in a detached manner).

- The *Postscript* engages its deluded readers by the author engaging in disinterested thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters. However, the *Postscript* is a *limiting* aesthetic-intellectual production – it frustrates a purely disinterested mode of thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters, whilst also positively drawing attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that is appropriate for ethico-religious matters.

5. Climacus' Provocation: 'That's Like Me *and* Not Like Me!'

In this final section, I will offer my own interpretation of how I think the *Postscript* exemplifies indirect communication *qua* doubly-reflected mode of communication, and the artistry that is involved. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, my view is that Climacus provokes by serving as an occasion for the reader to undergo an experience of *uncanniness*, whereby the reader simultaneously finds something familiar and unfamiliar; relatable and unrelatable; similar and dissimilar in Climacus. That Climacus engages in disinterested thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters as his readers would, he is *not* (as Conant claims) just a mirror image of his deluded readers, for I think he is certainly dissimilar. However, Climacus is not dissimilar because he embodies a mode of thought and inquiry that is exemplary for ethico-religious matters (as Muench claims). Rather, Climacus is dissimilar in that he repeatedly runs against the limits of a purely disinterested mode of contemplation on ethico-religious matters, and he runs against the limits in such a way that also positively draws attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that is first-personal and thus, appropriate for ethico-religious matters. And in this moment of dissimilarity, an unsettling tension arises, namely, that this loafer and outsider to Christianity is somehow closer to Christianity than his supposedly Christian readers, who take seriously that a disinterested approach to Christianity *is* the essentially Christian. It is in this moment of dissimilarity that the deluded reader is provoked to examine himself in relation to how he lives as a Christian, or how he orientated to the matters of what it means to be a Christian.

Now, in order to test my interpretation, I want us to consider *two* instances of Climacus' reflection. The first one sees Climacus engaging in disinterested thought and inquiry on the matter of mortality. As we shall witness, Climacus will come to realise that he has run against the limits of a purely disinterested mode thought and inquiry, which then draws attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that is appropriate for ethico-religious

matters. The second instance is slightly peculiar, as Climacus engages in disinterested thought and inquiry on the matter of how one can participate in Christianity's promise of an eternal happiness through those who also engage in disinterested thought and inquiry on the matter. That is, there is a sense in which Climacus is acting as a spectator on those who are also spectators to the matter at hand. Ironically, being a spectator himself, he draws attention to the limits of a purely disinterested (or spectatorial) mode of thought and inquiry on the matter.

With the above in mind, let us now turn to Climacus' disinterested reflection on what it means to be mortal:

I know what people ordinarily know about this: that I shall die if I take a dose of sulphuric acid, and also if I jump into the water, sleep in an atmosphere of coal gas, etc. I know that Napoleon always had poison on hand, and that Shakespeare's Juliet took poison, that the Stoics regarded suicide as a courageous act and others consider it cowardly. I know that one can die from a trifle so ridiculous that even the most serious-minded person cannot help laughing at death, that it is possible to escape certain death, etc. I know that the tragic hero dies in the fifth act, and that here death acquires in pathos an infinite reality that it lacks when a bar-tender dies. I know that the poet's variations of mood in interpretations of death can verge on the comic; I pledge myself to producing in prose the same diversity of effects in mood. I also know what the clergy customarily say; I am familiar with the usual themes dealt with at funerals. If nothing else stands in the way of my passing over into world history, I am ready. I need only buy some black cloth for a clerical gown and I shall preach funeral sermons as well as any ordinary clergyman, for although I gladly admit that those with a velvet front do it more elegantly, this difference is no more essential than that between five and ten rix-dollars for the hearse.³⁶⁰

Noticeably, Climacus' reflection here is not only disinterested (for never once does he think about death in relation to his own existence and agency), but that it clearly shows a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of what mortality is or what it means to be mortal – that he knows the causes of death; that he can identify instances of death in both non-fiction and fiction; that he knows the various attitudes people have towards death, and so on. But despite his wealth of knowledge on mortality, Climacus concludes that “[he] can in no way consider death something that [he has] understood”.³⁶¹ And so, just as Climacus endeavours to engage in more reflection on mortality, an unsettling thought suddenly interrupts him:

³⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 138-39.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.* 139.

“Suppose death were so devious as to come tomorrow!”³⁶² And as Climacus confesses, this unsettling thought concerning the possibility of his *own* death (and not just what death itself is) makes him question whether engaging in further disinterested contemplation on what it means to be mortal, he is “beginning upon something that is [even] worth starting on”.³⁶³

In other words, Climacus here runs up against the limits of a purely disinterested mode of thought and inquiry concerning the matter of mortality. And in running up against the limits of a purely disinterested mode of thought and inquiry, Climacus draws attention to the idea that being entrenched in disinterested contemplation on ethico-religious matters misses what is characteristic about ethico-religious matters, that these matters in fact hold an essential relation to one’s existence and agency as a human being. The idea here is that each person’s own mortality is not something to be thought and inquired disinterestedly in general terms, for each individual is not “a human being in general”.³⁶⁴ And through Climacus’ reflection, readers might be drawn to see that such matters in fact *require* one to engage with it in a mode of first-personal thought and inquiry.

Turning now to Climacus’ disinterested pursuit of those who disinterestedly pursue the matter of how one can participate in Christianity’s promise of an eternal happiness. Now, admittedly, it might not immediately be obvious that the *Postscript* contain instances in which Climacus is disinterestedly spectating on spectators of Christianity (i.e., those who engage in disinterested thought and inquire about Christianity). However, I think such a picture is quite in order, especially when we take into consideration the following: that Climacus declares himself an outsider to Christianity; that he is a loafer who engages in the thought-experiment of what it means to be Christian (using himself as the subject); that he even denies being a Christian from beginning to end. All of this, I think, indicate not only a lack of genuine first-

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid. 139-40.

personal interest with the matter at hand on Climacus' part, which makes Climacus a spectator, but also a clean separation from his readers who uncritically claim to be Christians, from those who consider themselves as taking Christianity seriously. The irony here, of course, is that in being detached from their own existence and agency *qua* human, these readers are in fact moving in the opposite direction of what Christianity requires – that one engages with it first-personally. Understood this way, these readers consequently stand in relation to themselves and to Christianity merely as spectators. And so, we have the strange image of a spectator spectating on spectators who are spectating on something that should not, by its own lights, be taken up in spectatorial fashion.

Now, how does the above play out in the *Postscript*? To answer the former, we shall turn to consider Climacus' discussion of biblical scholarship, which is located in Chapter One, Part One of *Postscript*. Driving the discussion is the assumption that one can base one's eternal happiness on biblical scholarship – i.e., to enter into Christianity's promise of eternal happiness via biblical scholarship. Biblical scholarship, as Climacus introduces it, is an objective disinterested form of investigation in which “one deals with matters such as whether particular books belong in the canon, their authenticity and integrity, the author's trustworthiness...”.³⁶⁵ Now, crucially, it is immediately clear from the first two pages that it is not Climacus who is engaging in biblical scholarship, nor is it Climacus who assumes that one's eternal happiness can find its ground on biblical scholarship. Rather, Climacus' discussion follows “the investigator” who engages in biblical scholarship with the prospect of allowing others to base their eternal happiness on his findings. Climacus writes:

...[this is] precisely what learned critical theology does: when finished – and until then it holds us *in suspenso* [Latin: in suspense] but with this prospect in view – it concludes: *ergo*, now you can base your eternal happiness on these writings.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, 22.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 23.

Following Climacus' discussion, readers might at first think Climacus is an ally of biblical scholarship when he writes,

One sometimes hears uneducated or half-educated people, or pompous geniuses, scoff at this critical working with ancient writings. They foolishly belittle the learned scholar's concern with the least detail, which is precisely to his credit, that scientifically he considers nothing to be insignificant.³⁶⁷

Here, one gets the sense that Climacus is defending biblical scholarship from those who might attack it. However, it quickly becomes clear that this is not the case: for, as we follow Climacus' discussion, he turns to clarify that his defence above is reserved for "philological scholarship".³⁶⁸ But as for biblical scholarship or "critical scholarship in theology", Climacus claims that "its whole effort suffers from a certain conscious or unconscious duplicity".³⁶⁹ But why?

Crucially, Climacus' criticism does not derive from any motivations to defend Christianity, or to proclaim the way to be Christian. We must bear in mind that Climacus is an outsider to Christianity; a loafer and a humourist who finds it too much a burden to be an authority on ethico-religious matters. And so, without claiming to know what it means to be Christian, Climacus' criticism derives simply from the following assumption: that if Christianity "presupposes precisely in the individual himself this infinite interest in his blessedness as *conditio sine qua non* [Latin: necessary condition]"; that the condition to enter into Christianity's promise of an eternal happiness consists *precisely* in having a first-personal interest in one's own eternal happiness, then the whole endeavour of basing one's eternal happiness on an objective disinterested investigation like biblical scholarship is simply not possible, since it is precisely one's "infinite, personal, impassioned interest" that "one gives up in order to become objective".³⁷⁰ Here, in keeping with a humourist's "talent for ridiculing

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. 24.

what is ridiculous”, Climacus draws attention to the limits of a purely disinterested mode of thought and inquiry on the matter at hand, by bringing out the ridiculousness of basing one’s eternal happiness on biblical scholarship, a form of objective disinterested investigation.³⁷¹

So, what significance does the above play in relation to the provocation at work in *Postscript*? Moreover, in what way does the above exemplify the double-reflection and art in indirect communication? As I argue, in both instances, Climacus proceeds as his deluded readers would by taking up ethico-religious matters disinterestedly. In this way, Climacus not only engages with his readers on their own terms (which is part of the artistry), but he also comes across as one who is on the side of the readers (the defence, which is one strand of the dialectical knot). However, unlike his readers, Climacus is acutely aware of the limits of a purely disinterested mode of thought and inquiry on ethico-religious matters, since he comes up against the limits of such mode of thought and inquiry in such a way as to draw attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that is appropriate. But what makes this provocative is that the above is made apparent by a loafer and an outsider to Christianity (the denial of being Christian, which is the other part of the artistry). This strangely puts the loafer/outsider closer to Christianity than his supposedly Christian readers, who assume that a disinterested approach to Christianity *is* the essentially Christian (the attack, which is the other part of the knot). It is worth noting here that Kierkegaard himself anticipates such provocation, as when he apologises for the pseudonyms offending “any respectable person in any way whatever”.³⁷²

³⁷¹ Ibid. 524.

³⁷² Ibid. 531.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by providing an account of what it means for indirect communication to be conceived as a doubly-reflected mode of communication and the artistry that executing such communication involves. The main task was to show how the *Postscript* exemplifies the double-reflection and art in indirect communication, and what it means to properly interpret the text in this way. For this reason, I presented two interpretations of the *Postscript*'s indirect communication, one from Conant and one from Muench. I argued that although Conant offers an interpretation that is more compatible with the features ingredient to the double-reflection and art involved in indirect communication than Muench's, Conant's interpretation is problematic with respect to the question of whether there is still any sense of communication in indirect communication besides negative provocation. Against the problems present in Conant's interpretation, Muench offers an interesting alternative, which is to construe Climacus as an exemplar that positively shows readers how to think and inquire ethico-religious matters. However, as I have argued, the main problem with Muench's interpretation is that it misconstrues the character of Johannes Climacus. As a way of overcoming the problems present in both critics' interpretation, I offered my interpretation, which is to essentially see Climacus as one who serves as an occasion for the reader to undergo an experience of uncanniness. On this account, the text is designed in such a way that readers can find Climacus as one who is both like and not like themselves. Accordingly, although Climacus does engage in disinterested thought and inquiry in relation to ethico-religious matters (the point of likeness), he does so in such a way as to positively draw attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that is appropriate for ethico-religious matters (the point of unlikeness). And crucially, in the moment of dissimilarity is this unsettling tension which stings the deluded reader: that this Johannes Climacus who claims to be a loafer and an outsider to Christianity is somehow closer to Christianity than his supposedly Christian

readers, who take seriously that a disinterested approach to Christianity *is* the essentially Christian. This strategy is apt to provoke the reader to examine himself and, in this way, to communicate without imparting any information.

Thesis Conclusion

This thesis began by considering Kierkegaard's unpublished lecture notes on communication, where he lays out his schema for understanding the dynamics of human communication. According to Kierkegaard, there are *four* components that are constitutive of human communication: "1) the object, 2) the communicator, 3) the receiver [and] 4) the communication".³⁷³ However, Kierkegaard's fourfold schema here only applies to what he calls 'direct communication', in which one person imparts some information or knowledge to another. But in addition to direct communication, Kierkegaard argues that there are instances of our communication in which there is no 'object', that is, no communicative content. The name for this type of communication is 'indirect communication' or "the communication of capability".³⁷⁴ Now, the notion of a communication in which there is no 'object' or no communicative content, presents an immediate puzzle. Given that our natural and straightforward view of communication just *is* the imparting of some content from one party to another, how then could there be any communication without such content?

Against the problem above, my thesis sought to achieve three aims. Firstly, I clarified the notion of communication that lacks an object. I show that, while it does not rely on the possibility of forms of communication that contain no intelligible content, this notion does rely on there being ways of communicating that are strictly *non-didactic*, i.e., not aimed at imparting any knowledge or information. Secondly, I showed how variants of the standard interpretation misconstrue Kierkegaard's strict direct/indirect distinction, as a distinction between explicit and implicit ways of imparting content. Thirdly, I provided an alternative. Specifically, I submitted and defended the following: that indirect communication's purpose is to problematise the recipient's relation to that which he takes himself to already know. I

³⁷³ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 306.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

develop this alternative by re-examining Kierkegaard's conception of 'doubly-reflected' mode of communication, the artistry he thinks this involves, and its role in his overall communicative strategy.

To achieve the above aims. I divided my thesis into four chapters. In Chapter One, I presented and ruled out *three* interpretative stratagems for understanding indirect communication – they are:

- 1) The Religious Language Interpretation
- 2) The Religious Choice Interpretation
- 3) The Bypass Interpretation

As I have argued, both the Religious Language Interpretation (1) and the Bypass Interpretation (3) conceive indirect communication as a means of imparting knowledge or information in an implicit manner, thus construing indirect communication in terms of direct communication. As for the Religious Choice Interpretation (2), this interpretation attributes to indirect communication a goal that is essentially achievable by means of direct communication.

Then, in Chapter Two, I argued that Kierkegaard's motivation for using indirect communication cannot, as proponents of the Bypass Interpretation claim, be one of avoiding the recipient's offence. The underlying thought of the Bypass Interpretation is that Kierkegaard's target audience are self-deceived, for they *know* they are in an illusion when they call themselves Christians, and that they are motivated to remain in the illusion for fear of making changes and losing face upon having their illusion exposed. Against such characterisation of Kierkegaard's target audience and the illusion they suffer from, I argued that the illusion of Christendom is better understood as a case of self-blindness constituted by forms of self-estrangement (i.e., the confusion of categories and the lack of primitivity). To confuse the categories is to engage disinterestedly with that which requires one to engage in

first-personally interested way. To lack primitivity is to evade the burdens of being oneself, a human being who is given make commitments and take responsibility for one's existence and agency. For this reason, it is also characteristic of those who lack primitivity to stand at a remove from their agency, or to lack a *personal* interest in ethico-religious matters, deflecting such matters to popular or public opinion. Such condition calls for what Kierkegaard identifies as a more 'primitive thinking', which is a mode of thought and inquiry that can enable his audience to regain a more "primitive impression of [their] existence".³⁷⁵ Crucially, such mode of thought and inquiry finds fuller development in the concept of double-reflection, which is discussed most extensively by his pseudonym Johannes Climacus in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which constitutes the focus of the third chapter.

In Chapter Three, I have argued that double-reflection is *both* abstract, objective, third-personal *and* concrete, subjective, first-personal – for double-reflection involves a shift from the third-person to the first-person perspective. Such mode of thought and inquiry is exemplified by Socrates. Then, I have also argued that action in appropriation in the second moment of reflection in double-reflection is *not* to be understood in the crude sense of practicing some principles for living. Instead, I have shown with reference to Climacus' rendition of the Parable of the Good Samaritan that action is a person's identification or avowal of some possibility of existence or agency in which a person takes up such possibility as belonging to them. lastly, I have argued that direct communication is limited because it affords a third-person report to the recipient, which further estranges the recipient from themselves; and also, direct communication cannot enable the other to engage in self-examination in double-reflection, as direct communication engages the recipient to assent or not assent with what has been imparted, thus giving the recipient the impression that they are

³⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1: A-E*, 292.

invited to agree or disagree with the call to engage in self-examination in a process of double-reflection.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I began by highlighting the key features of indirect communication conceived as a doubly-reflected mode of communication, and the artistry involved. Part of the aim there was to clarify that although indirect communication does not aim at imparting knowledge or information, this does not absolve the communication of intelligible content. Then, I submitted and defended by own interpretation of the *Postscript* understood as a piece of indirect communication. I have argued that I argue that Climacus *provokes* the reader to engage in self-examination in double-reflection by serving as an occasion for the reader to undergo an experience of uncanniness, whereby the reader simultaneously finds something familiar and unfamiliar; relatable and unrelatable, in Climacus. The idea is that although Climacus engages in disinterested thought and inquiry in relation to ethico-religious matters (point of similarity), Climacus does so in such a way as to positively draw attention to a mode of thought and inquiry that is appropriate for ethico-religious matters (point of dissimilarity). And crucially, in the moment of dissimilarity is this unsettling tension which stings the deluded reader: that this Johannes Climacus who claims to be a loafer and an outsider to Christianity is somehow closer to Christianity than his supposedly Christian readers, who take seriously that a disinterested approach to Christianity *is* the essentially Christian.

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