PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRIES

Pursuits of Reason

Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell

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Positivism, p. 41). In 1832 already when Austria's most venerated poet, Franz Grillparzer, started to read Hegel's *Logic* he made the following entry into his diary: "Habe Hegels objektive Logik begonnen. Das Buch ist sehr schlecht geschrieben. Auch das System scheint mir hohl." This quotation is on p. 332 of Werner Sauer's *Österreichischen Philosophie zwischen Aufklärung und Reformation* (Amsterdam 1982).

KIERKEGAARD, WITTGENSTEIN, AND NONSENSE

JAMES CONANT

The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.

G. K. Chesterton[1]

I don't try to make you *believe* something you *don't* believe, but to make you *do* something you won't do.

Ludwig Wittgenstein[2]

There is a tradition of philosophical writing—one which can be traced back to Plato's dialogues—in which the form of the philosophical text is thought to be integral to its purpose. The form of the text is modeled on a *process* of discovery. The relation the reader is invited to enter into with the text mirrors a relation that he is called upon to enter into with himself. This mode of philosophical writing will often seem to be less concerned with imparting a specific doctrine to the reader and more concerned with introducing him to an intellectual discipline that holds forth the promise of transforming him. There is another tradition of philosophical writing—one that can also be traced back to Plato—in which the accent falls on putting forward substantive views by means of arguments. In reading such texts, an attention to the specific features of their literary form may often seem incidental to a proper appreciation of their content. Each of these traditions embodies a mode of conceptual accuracy and an aspiration to clarity. However, their respective conceptions of rigor can, at times, appear not only alien to, but even to go against the grain of, one another. In our contemporary Anglo-American philosophical culture, the prevailing practice of textual interpretation has evolved primarily out of an engagement with the latter of these traditions. When confronted with a text, our impulse is often simply to cut through all the rhetorical dross and to try to extract and evaluate the central chain of reasoning. The questions we bring to the text are "What is its view?" and "What are its arguments?" Such questions, when pressed too hard upon certain authors, can lead to disastrous misunderstandings. Two such authors, I believe, are Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. In this essay, I will mostly be puzzling over the *form* of their work—their mode of philosophical presentation.

It is interesting to note in passing that Wittgenstein had a tremendous regard for Kierkegaard. He is reported to have remarked, for example, that "Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century."[3] Such a remark is all the more striking given that Wittgenstein is not someone who is generally known for his generous assessment of the work of other philosophers. Indeed, as far as I know, there is no other philosopher on whom he was prepared to lavish the kind of hyperbolic praise that he reserved for Kierkegaard.[4] He even went so far as to learn Danish in order to be able to read Kierkegaard in the original.[5] This raises a rather perplexing question: what was it that Wittgenstein,

one of the central figures in the development of analytic philosophy, found to be of such importance in Kierkegaard? One's sense of perplexity deepens if one turns to the currently existing body of secondary literature in English on Kierkegaard, where one learns that Kierkegaard is supposed to have held a wildly subjectivistic theory of truth. After even a cursory glance through this literature, this sense of perplexity is likely to bloom into something akin to the bafflement and consternation that Bertrand Russell expressed in his letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, when he wrote her on 20 December 1919 that he "was astonished" to find that Wittgenstein "reads people like Kierkegaard!"[6]

Encouraged, however, both by Wittgenstein's euphoric avowals of admiration for the Danish thinker, and, more importantly by the pervasive extent to which Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* appears to echo Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, a number of scholars have attempted to argue that Kierkegaard in fact exerted a substantial influence on Wittgenstein's early thought. The parallel moment in the two works that has excited the most attention in this regard is summarized in the *Postscript* by the formula that "what can be indirectly communicated cannot be directly communicated," and in the *Tractatus* by the famous and equally cryptic remark that "what can be shown cannot be said." The parallel is generally made out along something like the following lines: each of these works argues for a distinction between that which can be said (or directly communicated) and that which cannot be said (or directly communicated), and each work undertakes to exhibit the unsayable through a delimitation of the sayable. I have argued elsewhere that this doctrine that there are truths which cannot be expressed in language (yet, nonetheless, can somehow be gestured at through language) is neither a very coherent one nor one that is able to account for certain central features of each of these texts.[7] I am not going to rehearse those arguments here. For the present, I will simply assert, without arguing for it, that the standard way of explicating the parallel between the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus* succeeds only at the cost of attributing strikingly unattractive views to each of them. It will emerge that I, nonetheless, retain more than a little sympathy for the attempt to account for the uncanny degree to which these two texts do seem to echo one another. My own view is that the central parallel between them lies not in their sharing some mystical doctrine of ineffable truth, but rather in their sharing a common twofold project of exposing the incoherence of any such doctrine and diagnosing the sources of its attraction. I therefore also remain broadly in sympathy with the thought that a proper understanding of Kierkegaard's *Postscript* may help to illuminate some of the more puzzling features of Wittgenstein's notoriously elusive early work—not, however, because I think Wittgenstein adopted certain of Kierkegaard's philosophical *doctrines*. Rather, I believe that what Wittgenstein took from Kierkegaard (and modified in his own way) was a certain conception of philosophical *authorship*. The suggestion that it is in some shared conception of how one should *write* philosophy that the connection between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein should be sought is made by Stanley Cavell in his essay "Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy":

> Both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard see their worlds as labouring under illusion. Both see their function as authors to be the uncovering or diagnosing of this illusion, and freeing us from it. . . . In both, the cure is for us to return to our everyday existence. . . . [T]his emphasis on diagnosis and cure continues the early image of the philosopher as the physician of the soul, and it also aligns these writers with the characteristic effort of modern thought to *unmask* its audience. . . . And the effort to unmask requires a few masks or tricks of its own. . . . [N]ot just any way of addressing and audience will leave them as they are, leave them alone,but transformed. . . .
>
> And in both writers the cure seems no cure. All we are given is the obvious, and then silence. . . . Yet they both claim that obviousness and silence provide *answers*, and moreover that nothing else does, that is, not to *their* questions.[8]

Cavell's topic was the comparison of Kierkegaard's *Postscript* and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. In this essay, it will primarily be the connection between the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus* that will be on my mind. If Cavell's remarks turn out to apply equally well to what I have to say about that connection—and if that, in turn, seems to suggest a stronger continuity between early and later Wittgenstein than it is presently fashionable to suppose—that, as far as I am concerned, is all to the good.

Before embarking upon an examination of the *Postscript*, I should say briefly where I see the most interesting (as well as the most neglected) parallel between these two books: namely, in their respective closing moments. Each culminates in a gesture of *revocation*. I am inclined to think that one will not be in a position to understand either of these books until one has a satisfying account of the spirit in which, in each case, this revocation is intended. In the penultimate section of the *Tractatus* (#6.54), Wittgenstein writes:

> My propositions are elucidatory in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

The reader who *understands* him will recognize his propositions as *nonsensical*—what is Wittgenstein saying here? A great deal has been written on the *Tractatus*, but very little of it comes fully to terms with this question. Most solutions to the problem (as to why the book declares itself to be nonsense) rely ultimately upon the assumption that Wittgenstein does not really mean what he certainly appears to be saying here. The tendency is to try to dilute the sense in which Wittgenstein is saying his book contains nonsense—to attempt to distinguish between mere nonsense and deep philosophical nonsense—where the latter is supposed to be revelatory of a certain category of ineffable truth(s). One can certainly see why many commentators have felt driven to assume that any workable interpretation of the *Tractatus* must presuppose the integrity of such a distinction. The unstated premise of their interpretations generally runs roughly as follows: Wittgenstein must have thought one could make sense of the idea of intelligible nonsense, otherwise how could he have concluded his book by declaring that it consists of nonsense *and* that his reader should, nonetheless, persevere in his attempts to "understand" it. If one argues, however, as I have, that the *Tractatus* undercuts a distinction between kinds of nonsense, then one will be forced to embrace what

might, at first, appear to be an intolerable conclusion: namely, that when Wittgenstein says "nonsense" he means *plain nonsense*, and when he says "throw the ladder away," he means *throw it away*. But how can a reader be asked to "understand" a work of nonsense? What is the point of giving him a book that he is asked to throw away? What would be the point of writing such a book? It is in order to solve this problem that a doctrine of showing has been pressed into service. The idea being roughly that, although the work does not "say" anything, it does "show" something. Stated this vaguely, it is difficult to quarrel with such a description of the aim of the work. However, the question lingers: what is shown? Under the pressure of this question, commentators have usually interpreted the doctrine to be that there are certain features of reality which, though they cannot be expressed in language, are made manifest through certain forms of nonsensical language.[9] There has been little consensus among commentators, however, on how it is exactly that nonsense can show something or what it is that is so shown.[10] Most standard attempts to soften the apparent incoherence of the view (that sentences that fail to say anything can nonetheless convey truths) have generally failed to account for the conditions of their own intelligibility. How is it that these commentators are able to do the very thing the *Tractatus* held could not be done? How is it that in their expositions of Wittgenstein they are able to put into words precisely what the *Tractatus* declared could not be said?

Speaking more generally, commentators who attempt to offer a sympathetic exposition of the *Tractatus* tend to fall into four groups: 1) Those who simply ignore the final gesture of revocation and who explicate the work as if it were an ordinary philosophical treatise. 2) Those who acknowledge the problem of the work's nonsensicality but in their own interpretive practice end up treating it as a mere technicality—conceding that perhaps, strictly speaking (given Wittgenstein's peculiar way of distinguishing between sense and nonsense), the propositions of the work might all be nonsense, yet believing that it still remains perfectly clear what at each juncture is being said. 3) Those who take the gesture very seriously and insist that the important things are truly ineffable, but who then nonetheless go on to tell us what those things are. 4) Those who insist upon the ineffability of the work's teaching and who then quite consistently, but also quite unhelpfully, have nothing further to say on the matter; except perhaps to offer an exclamation of hushed awe, betokening that their further silence is pregnant with meaning.

Now commentators on Kierkegaard's *Postscript*, faced with a similar exegetical problem, also tend to fall into roughly the same four groups. Only here, what is mostly at issue is the problem of the so-called "pseudonymity" of Kierkegaard's major philosophical works. The *Postscript* is one such work, authored, in this case, by the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. Appended to the *Postscript* is a document entitled "A First and Last Declaration." Unlike the body of the text (which we are given to understand is not authored by Kierkegaard but rather by Johannes Climacus), this document is, indeed, signed by "S. Kierkegaard." Confusingly, however, the document begins with Kierkegaard apparently exhibiting a willingness to acknowledge his authorship of the *Postscript* (along with a host of other works):

> Formally and for the sake of regularity, I acknowledge herewith (what in fact hardly anyone can be interested in *knowing*) that I am the author, as people would call it, of . . .[11]

And then Kierkegaard goes on to list all of the works that he pseudonymously "authored." In declaring that he is, as it were "the author, as people would call it," of the works, he takes himself to be conceding a legal or bureaucratic point. He wishes to emphasize that the point of his strategy of pseudonymity is not to conceal the identity of (something you might be tempted to think of as) the "real" author. The next sentence of the document is interrupted by a long parenthesis which goes on to clarify that the strategy was not employed

> . . . for fear of a legal penalty, for in this respect I am confident that I have committed no misdemeanor, and at the time the books were published, not only the printer but the censor, as a public functionary, was officially informed who the author was . . .[12]

A little later he says: "in a juridical and a literary sense, the responsibility is mine." All he is conceding here is that he is (as he puts it later in the same document), "responsible in a civil sense" for these works.[13] The document's central declaration, however, (the one that the long parenthesis interrupts), runs as follows:

> My pseudonymity or polynymity has not had a casual ground in my *person* . . . but it has an *essential* ground in the character of the *production*.[14]

The implication here is that these works would not be the kind of works they are unless Kierkegaard were able to insist in each case upon a sharp distinction between the bearer of the pseudonym and himself (the latter being, only in an attenuated sense "the author, as people would call it"). It is the pseudonym, he wishes to insist, who is rightly to be considered the author, if any one is. Kierkegaard wishes to be able to maintain that in anything other than a legalistic sense of "author," he is not the author of these works—that it is somehow incoherent to suggest that he might be. He suggests he could not lay claim to anything in one of these works even if he wished to:

> One single word of mine uttered personally in my own name would be an instance of presumptuous self-forgetfulness, and dialectically viewed it would incur with one word the guilt of annihilating the pseudonyms.[15]

To mix his own voice with that of one of the pseudonyms would be, he says, "an instance of presumptuous self-forgetfulness"—it would involve his becoming completely confused about the character of the literary undertaking in which he is involved. The declaration continues:

> [I]n the pseudonymous works there is not a single word which is mine, I have . . . not the remotest private relation to them.[16]

All this suggests that if we wish to go into the business of interpreting one of these works, we would somehow be involved in a confusion if we were to ascribe (as, in fact, most commentators do) any assertions or arguments in the work to

Kierkegaard. But what sort of confusion are we involved in here? This question is apparently considered by most scholars of Kierkegaard's work to be an insignificant one. It is standard practice to rely upon the *Postscript*, or any of Kierkegaard's other pseudonymous productions, as unproblematic expressions of Kierkegaard's own philosophical commitments. A commentator will typically preface a quotation from one of these works with the words "as Kierkegaard says" and will then proceed to quote an excerpt. Well, why shouldn't he—Kierkegaard *did* write the work, after all, didn't he? So what's all the fuss about? Nonetheless, in this same document, Kierkegaard makes it quite clear that he feels compelled to require of his readers that they be as fussy as he is about his relation to these works:

> My wish, my prayer, is that, if it might occur to anyone to quote a particular saying from the books, he would do me the favor to cite the name of the respective pseudonymous author.[17]

Now, as I stated earlier, Kierkegaard scholars tend to fall into four groups with respect to how seriously they take admonitions such as the one above: 1) Those who completely ignore all the warnings and dispense with (what they take to be) the superfluous formality of attributing the doctrines (apparently) set forth in each of these works to the pseudonymous author in question. They simply interpret the work as if it were an ordinary philosophical treatise.[18] 2) Those who obediently observe the formality of invoking the name of the appropriate pseudonym at the appropriate juncture, though the point of this practice remains a mystery. This group of scholars actually divides into two subgroups: those who simply have no account of what the point of the formality is, and those who view it as a technicality that serves to register slight nuances of difference in opinion or status between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms.[19] 3) Those who fasten on Kierkegaard's remark that each pseudonymous work represents an "indirect communication" and interpret this to mean that direct quotation is ruled out here because nothing has been directly communicated. Like their counterparts in the scholarly community who write on the *Tractatus*, after they explain that the content of these works cannot be communicated directly, they then, nonetheless, go on to communicate to us what it is that these indirect communications are unable to communicate. 4) Those who retreat to a radically esoteric reading and proclaim that only to the truly religious reader will the hidden content concealed in these works become manifest.

As in the case of the *Tractatus*, I am inclined to think that all four of these responses fail to come to grips with the problem. But rather than going over what is intrinsically unsatisfying about each of these four alternatives, I am going to press on with the task of sketching my own reading of the *Postscript*. A good place to begin is with the final section of the body of the *Postscript* proper—the conclusion of the portion of the work that is signed by Johannes Climacus. It is entitled "Appendix: For an Understanding with the Reader." It is called an "appendix" to signal that it, too, is in some way external to the body of the work. Here, in the frame of the work, the pseudonymous author permits himself to communicate relatively directly with his reader. The Appendix begins as follows:

> The undersigned, Johannes Climacus, who has written this book, does not give himself out to be a Christian; he is completely taken up with the thought how difficult it must be to be a Christian; but still less is he one who, having been a Christian, has ceased to be such by going further. He is a humorist.[20]

The *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* begins as a work that aspires to clarify the question: how does one become a Christian? It appears to be engaged in an attempt to elucidate what is involved in living a Christian life by means of providing a philosophical account of the character of the truth of Christianity. Yet it emerges that the author, Johannes Climacus, insists that he is not prepared to call himself a Christian. Well, what is his relation to his subject? Is he simply offering us a disinterested account of what would be involved in his becoming a Christian were he to undertake to become one? That would seem to involve him in a fundamental irony insofar as he will also insist that it is essential to a concern with the matters that preoccupy him in this treatise that one be interested in them in the right way—that one's relation be one of "infinitely passionate interestedness." He goes to great pains to explain that the difference between what he calls a merely "aesthetic" (and therefore confused) conception of Christianity and a genuinely religious conception is one that is reflected in the character of one's concern with the question "what is it to be a Christian?" —it is a difference that reflects itself in a person's everyday practice and the kind of commitment that it exhibits.[21] Yet he insists that he, Johannes Climacus, in preoccupying himself with the guiding question of the work, "how does one become a Christian?," is himself far from being a Christian. What is he? And what is the nature of his concern with the question? He says he is a "humorist." Such a description should cause us to carefully consider what sort of conviction he has in the doctrines he sets forth. Part of what he wants to insist upon, no doubt, in saying that he is not a Christian is the *difficulty* of becoming a Christian. Yet we will want to look more closely at the sort of difficulty he thinks is involved here.

The Appendix goes on to say that the work cannot aspire to be a contribution to knowledge—something he thinks will be expected of it in our "age of speculative philosophers and great men with peerless discoveries"—and that many will therefore consider the book to be "entirely superfluous."[22] Climacus does not exactly dispute this. Instead, he writes:

> So then the book is superfluous; let no one therefore take the pains to appeal to it as an authority; for he who thus appeals to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood it.[23]

He who appeals to it has *eo ipso* misunderstood it? How can the sheer fact that one appeals to a book serve as a criterion that one has misunderstood it. If to appeal to the work—regardless of how or when one appeals to it—is to misunderstand it, what means are left by which one could indicate that one *has* understood it? It appears now that it is a sign that one has misunderstood the book not only if one invokes Kierkegaard's name, but even if one restricts oneself to an appeal to the persona of the pseudonym. Climacus goes on to say: "To be an authority is far too burdensome an existence for a humorist."[24] This suggests that even if we scrupulously ascribe the arguments of the work only to Johannes

Climacus, we have somehow gone astray as long as we take the book to be forwarding anything like a doctrine—as long as we imagine that it offers us a teaching that we can quote approvingly. Climacus continues:

> Above all, may heaven preserve the book and me from every appreciative violence which might be done it—that a billowing partisan might quote it appreciatively and enroll me in the census.[25]

To so much as quote the work appreciatively, to take it to be a partisan of some particular view, is a further sign that one has misunderstood it. Again, what are we to make of this? For the body of the work appears to contain an elaborate argument in support of a substantive conception of Christianity and a conception of the kind of truth that is appropriate to it; and yet, here in the Appendix, Climacus writes that if you wish to quote the book you have misunderstood it, "for I have no opinion and wish to have none."[26] If the parallel with the *Tractatus* is not evident yet, it becomes so in the next sentence of the Appendix:

> As in Catholic books, especially those of an earlier age, one finds at the back of the volume a note which informs the reader that everything is to be understood conformably with the doctrine of the Holy Catholic Mother Church—so what I write contains also a piece of information to the effect that everything is so to be understood that it is understood to be revoked, and the book has not only a Conclusion but a Revocation.[27]

This last sentence refers to the fact that the preceding section of the body of the work is titled the "Conclusion." The Appendix follows it and functions (as do the preface and the final sections of the *Tractatus*[28]) 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. As Wittgenstein does at the close of his work, Climacus specifies in the final Appendix what his reader must come to understand in order to have understood what sort of book it is he is reading. He must:

> . . . understand that to write a book and revoke it is something else than not writing it at all; that to write a book that does not claim importance for anybody is something else than leaving it unwritten.[29]

This is therefore what we need to understand if we aspire to be readers of this work: How it is that "to write a book and revoke it" is "something else" than not to write it at all? What is Climacus's aim in writing such a book? He calls himself a "humorist." In the Appendix he identifies the characteristic virtue of the humorist to be a certain species of sincerity:

> . . . a sincerity which . . . in turn comforts and arms me with an uncommon sense for the comic and a certain talent for making ludicrous what is ludicrous . . .[30]

The suggestion here is that the project of the body of the book involves an effort to bring out the ludicrousness of something. The distinctive characteristic of the humorist, we learn earlier in the work, is his ability to discern contradictions and expose them:

> The humorist constantly . . . sets the God-idea into conjunction with other things and evokes the contradiction—. . . he transforms himself into a jesting and yet profound exchange-center for all these transactions . . .[31]

The humorist's vocation lies therefore in bringing contradictions to the surface. The role of humor in his activity is to bring out the ludicrousness of certain contradictions. The contradictions that particularly preoccupy Climacus arise when the neo-Hegelian speculative philosophers of his day attempt to comprehend and clarify the nature of Christianity. His aim in the work, he tells us, is: "to discover where the misunderstanding lies between speculative philosophy and Christianity."[32]

Aside from the Appendix, there are a number of other places in the book where Climacus attempts to provide further indications as to what sort of endeavor it is in which he is engaged. For example, there is another "Appendix"—only this one is located in the middle of the work. It is entitled "A Glance At A Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature." The fact that it is also an "Appendix" signals that it, like the final section, is appended to the body of the work—that it functions as part of the frame. In this section Climacus remarks on works by (Kierkegaard's) other pseudonymous authors. These remarks, I submit, are meant to illuminate the character of Climacus's own undertaking. For example, in commenting on *Either/Or*, he remarks that the contradictions that are inherent in the structure of that work are left for the reader to discover. The work is constructed as a mirror in which the reader can recognize his own confusions. The work will not have the transformative effect upon the reader to which it aspires unless the task of recognizing the relevant contradictions is left to him. Hence, Climacus writes:

> It is thus left to the reader himself to put two and two together, if he so desires, but nothing is done to minister to the reader's indolence.[33]

Concerning another pseudonymous work, *Repetition*, Climacus writes:

> In this book there is no dogmatizing, far from it; this was precisely what I had wished, since it was in my view the misfortune of the age to have too much knowledge, to have forgotten what it is to exist, and what inwardness is. Under such circumstances it is desirable that an author should know how to withdraw himself, and for this purpose a confusing contrast-form is always usable.[34]

In this remark, Climacus is implicitly referring back to a constant refrain of the first half of his own book—one which he summarizes at one point as follows:

> My principal thought was that in our age, because of the great increase of knowledge, we had forgotten what it means to *exist*, and what *inwardness* signifies, and that the misunderstanding between speculative philosophy and Christianity was explicable on that ground.[35]

The emphasis on "forgetfulness" is a pervasive theme of the *Postscript*. It is as if Climacus saw the speculative philosopher's fundamental malady to be a form of amnesia and his task in the *Postscript* to be one of assembling certain sorts of reminders.[36] If one puts these two passages together and lets the one interpret the other, we are offered the following suggestion: if what one seeks is a mode of writing that can help the philosophically-inclined reader to overcome his "forget-

fulness," then what is required is a literary form which will avoid "dogmatizing" and which allows the author "to withdraw himself" in such a manner that the reader is left to confront himself. The idea that the philosopher in our age has "forgotten what it means to exist" is a formula for summarizing Climacus's central topic: that in his philosophizing about what goes into the ethical or religious life the philosopher tends to fail to bring his own life properly into imagination—he is unable to recognize the disparity between how he actually lives and what he says about how one should live. Kierkegaard's general term for this contradiction between one's life and how one describes one's life is *hypocrisy*. It is by no means a problem that he holds to be peculiar to philosophers. Indeed, he writes: "Hypocrisy is quite as inseparable from being human as sliminess is from being a fish."[37] Nonetheless, Climacus sees philosophy as somehow reinforcing a particular form of blindness as to the character of one's own life.

What Climacus's comments on the other pseudonymous works in this appendix indicate is that his own work is also one in which there is no "dogmatizing," one in which the author seeks to "withdraw himself" from the reader, and one in which "a confusing contrast-form" is employed. In a long footnote, for example, Climacus discusses a review (which has just appeared in a German theological periodical) of the *Philosophical Fragments*.[38] The *Fragments* is also "authored" by Climacus and, indeed, it is the book to which the *Postscript* is meant to be a postscript. In the review the reviewer furnishes an abstract of the book. Climacus comments:

> The abstract is accurate, and as a whole dialectically reliable, but here is the point: in spite of the accuracy of the abstract, everyone who reads that only is bound to get an entirely false impression of the book . . . The abstract is doctrinizing, pure and unadulterated doctrination; the reader will get the impression that the book is also doctrinizing. Now this is in my view *the most distorted impression of the book it is possible to have* [my emphasis].[39]

The complaint that Climacus directs here against this reviewer could be levelled equally well against most contemporary commentaries on the work—commentaries, that is, which attempt to summarize the doctrine that the work (allegedly) propounds and to scrupulously explicate what are perceived to be the arguments marshalled in its favor. Yet Climacus charges that this impulse to simply extract the basic argumentative structure of the book leads to "the most distorted impression of the book it is possible to have." But how could a clear summary of the argument of a work result in the greatest possible distortion of its content? Because, Climacus says: "the reader will get the impression that the book is . . . doctrinizing." It will give the impression that the argumentative structure of the work is meant to culminate in something like a set of theses. But this raises the question: what is it, which is of such essential importance, that this dialectically accurate review leaves out? Climacus answers:

> The contrast of the form; the challenging opposition between the experiment and the content; . . . the unwearied incessant activity of the irony; the parody on speculative philosophy involved in the entire plan of the work; . . . of all this the reader of the review gets not the slightest intimation.[40]

Here in a footnote to an appendix to the *Postscript*, Climacus allows himself to be quite explicit on a matter concerning which otherwise, throughout the main body of his work, he simply offers hints (hints, for example, about how he is really a "humorist" and hence neither a philosopher nor a Christian). Again, Climacus's remarks here on his own earlier work are clearly intended to apply to the *Postscript* as well. One has not attained an accurate impression of this work until one has recognized the presence of "the *parody* on speculative philosophy involved in the entire plan of the work." But why is Climacus engaged in a parody, and why keep the fact that it is a parody something of a secret? The footnote continues:

> [T]he book is written for informed readers whose misfortune is that they know too much. Because everybody knows it, the Christian truth has gradually become a triviality, of which it is difficult to secure a primitive impression. This being the case, the art of *communication* at last becomes the art of *taking away*, of luring something away from someone.[41]

The problem is not one of teaching the reader something he does not know but rather one of showing him that, with respect to the activity of becoming a Christian, there is nothing further he needs to *know*. His quest for knowledge is an evasion of the task of achieving (what one of Kierkegaard's other pseudonyms will call) "existential resolution."—the task, that is, of living a certain sort of life. Wittgenstein, in a famous and much-discussed letter, wrote concerning the *Tractatus* that "the point of the book is ethical."[42] This should be interpreted against Kierkegaard's remark that his pseudonymous authorship has a fundamentally *ethical* purpose. Ethically, he says, all one person can do for another is to show him that he is not living the life he thinks he is living or wants to be living. Kierkegaard's various pseudonyms present different sorts of mirrors in which different sorts of readers may recognize themselves.[43] Climacus is to serve as a mirror for the philosopher who imagines that he is making progress on the problem of how one becomes a Christian. Kierkegaard's aim is to show him that where he takes there to be a problem there isn't one. The solution to what he takes to be the problem of life is to be found in the vanishing of the problem.[44] The philosopher is particularly prone, on this view of him, to convert 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. The task of becoming a Christian, in the philosopher's hands, becomes the problem of formulating a set of philosophical categories which are appropriate to the task of answering the question: "How does one become a Christian?" Consumed by an appetite for knowledge, Climacus suggests there is only one type of difficulty that strikes us (that is, the philosopher in each of us) as worthy of our attention:

> [W]hat everyone does not know, so that it counts as differential knowledge, that is a glorious thing to be concerned with. What everyone knows on the other hand, so that the difference is merely the trivial one of *how* it is known, that is a waste of effort to be concerned about—for one cannot possibly become self-important through knowing it.[45]

If there is a difficulty, the speculative philosopher assumes it must be a function of the inadequacy of our knowledge. The philosopher, in his quest for

knowledge, tends to deprive himself of a clear view of what is otherwise ordinarily visible to anyone. Climacus asks: "Is it not the case that what is most difficult of all for the wise man to understand, is precisely the simple?"[46] His eagerness to be able to represent his knowledge to himself as an intellectual achievement forces the philosopher to come to know "the simple" (i.e., what we otherwise all already know) by means of a reflective detour. Climacus's aim is to guide that process of reflection back to its point of departure, to reveal to the philosopher that for the simple task at hand no special application of his intellect is required. Hence Climacus writes:

> [T]he difference between the wise man and the simplest human being is merely this vanishing little distinction, that *the simple man knows the essential*, while the wise man little by little learns *to know that he knows it* . . .[47]

The problem with speculative philosophy, in Climacus's 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 upon 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. The purpose of Climacus's parody on speculative philosophy is to underscore what he takes to be the ludicrousness of the philosopher's attempt to advance our understanding of what it means to become a Christian. Climacus represents his literary task as one of "taking away" insofar as his aim is to *deprive* the philosopher of the illusion that a well-conducted speculative inquiry will equip him with a deeper understanding of what it is to be a Christian. The long footnote continues its account of what eluded the reviewer concerning the conception of communication underlying the work:

> [T]he art of *communication* at last becomes the art of *taking away*. . . . This seems very strange and ironical, and yet I believe that I have succeeded in expressing precisely what I mean. When a man has his mouth so full of food that he is prevented from eating, and is like to starve in consequence, does giving him food consist in stuffing still more of it in his mouth, or does it consist in taking some of it away, so that he can begin to eat? And so also when a man has much knowledge, and his knowledge has little or no significance for him, does a rational communication consist in giving him more knowledge, even supposing that he is loud in his insistence that this is what he needs, or does it not rather consist in taking some of it away?[48]

The analogy here is not quite as neat as Climacus makes it at first sound, however. For his description of the philosopher as possessing too much knowledge, and hence gagging upon it, is intended ironically. It depends upon the philosopher's image of himself as successfully advancing our understanding of Christianity, whereas Climacus sees him caught in the grip of an illusion of understanding. What suffocates the philosopher, in Climacus's view, is not a surfeit of knowledge, but the compulsiveness of his appetite for knowledge. The philosopher interprets the task of becoming a Christian to require the cultivation and application of his understanding, postponing the claim that the Christian teaching makes upon his life, deferring the insight that what is required is the engagement of his will—the achievement of resolution. Climacus's task is to find

a mode of writing that shatters the illusion that what is required is further knowledge, that there is something the philosopher needs to know that he does not know, that the difficulty of Christianity is a function of its intellectual complexity. The tendency of the age is to think that if something is not difficult to understand, then it is not a difficulty at all. The pseudonymous work therefore presents the difficulty in a form in which it appears as if it were one of the understanding—it attempts to engage the philosopher on his own ground.

Climacus's complaint with the reviewer's dialectically accurate abstract of his book is that it fails to attend to the *form* of the work and to recognize how the form is essential to its purpose:

> When an author communicates a portion of the knowledge that such a well-informed man has, in a form which makes it seem strange to him, it is as if he took his knowledge away from him, at least provisionally, until by having overcome the opposition of the form he succeeds in assimilating it. . . . When an age has systematically and rote-recitingly finished the understanding of Christianity and of all difficulties, so that it jubilantly exclaims how easy it is to understand the difficulty, it is impossible not to entertain a suspicion. For it is better to understand that something is so difficult that it cannot be understood than that a difficulty is so very easy to understand; for if it is so very easy, then perhaps it is not a difficulty at all; since a difficulty is precisely recognizable by the fact that it is hard to understand. When a communication, recognizing the existence of such an order of things, does not aim to make the difficulty any easier, then it becomes a process, of taking away. The difficulty is clothed in a new form, in which it really is difficult.[49]

The aim of the work therefore is to present something that has the form of an intellectual difficulty, inviting the philosopher to grapple with it, and leading him to the point where the terms in which he was tempted to pose the difficulty come apart on him. The aim is to expose the roots of his compulsion always to reflect upon the task of living (a certain sort of life) rather than to attend to the task itself. Earlier in the *Postscript*, Johannes Climacus writes:

> [M]oved by a genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I conceived it as my task to create difficulties everywhere.[50]

The difficulty for the reader in understanding this authorship is to recognize that the author's main concern is not to provide him with further food for thought. The work, nevertheless, presents itself to the reader initially as one that is difficult to understand. The difficulty lies in grasping the contradiction inherent in the relation between the work's form and its content. The feature of the form that the philosophical reader will be inclined to neglect, Climacus says, is the way in which "the entire plan of the work" embodies a "parody on speculative philosophy." But how does *the entire plan* of the work do this? My suggestion is that the work as a whole represents an elaborate *reductio ad absurdum* of the philosophical project of clarifying and propounding what it is to be a Christian.

The first book of the *Postscript* appears, however, to be engaged in precisely such a project of clarifying and propounding what it means to be a Christian. In particular, it appears to be concerned to argue that the truth of Christianity cannot be established on objective grounds and hence that there is a confusion involved in any attempt to provide objective reasons why one should believe in the

Christian articles of faith. It is argued that no form of historical knowledge can provide an adequate basis for a genuinely religious faith, neither testimony derived from the Holy Scriptures, nor from the Church itself, nor from the accumulation of any additional evidence provided by those who have borne witness over the centuries. The specific structure of Climacus's argument here admittedly rests upon some debatable assumptions. Within the polemical context of the period, however, they were not likely to have appeared controversial. It is important to bear the *ad hominem* character of the design of the work as a whole in mind. The most notable such assumption runs as follows: "the greatest attainable certainty with respect to anything historical is a mere approximation."[51] Climacus's argument here essentially consists of a recapitulation of the central argument of (what was then) a famous essay by Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power" which consists of a succinct rejection of all historical proofs for the truth of Christian religious teachings. The central claim is that with respect to any fact based upon historical or other forms of empirical evidence, no matter how firm, doubt can never be entirely excluded. Lessing argued that historical evidence can never yield the kind of necessity that traditionally had been claimed on behalf of the truths of Christianity. Faith in the Christian teachings if it is to be fully unconditional, cannot be rationally grounded upon historical testimony. Following Lessing, Climacus concludes: "it is impossible in the case of historical problems to reach an objective decision so certain that no doubt can disturb it."[52] Genuine religious faith is, Climacus insists, essentially incompatible with doubt. It appears here at first, therefore, as if Climacus were advancing an epistemological argument to the effect that any form of objective reasoning or objective knowledge cannot attain the pitch of certainty that is appropriate to religious faith. The form of the argument invites the reader to picture religious faith as *continuous* with ordinary forms of belief, though somehow fortified with an epistemologically more secure foundation—as if it were a stronger form of one's ordinary cognitive relation to the object of one's belief. Yet upon closer examination it emerges that Climacus wishes to challenge the very terms in which the philosopher is tempted to pose this question. The philosopher will be inclined to read Climacus's analysis as forwarding an epistemological discovery (namely that faith must be a peculiar sort of epistemic relation in which one's level of subjective certainty lacks an appropriately secure objective foundation). This way of posing the issue, Climacus thinks, is a symptom of the fact that the philosopher is preoccupied by the question: what kind of *knowledge* is involved here? He therefore mistakes for an epistemological discovery what is actually something Climacus will term a "categorical distinction." The philosopher is involved here in what Climacus calls a case of "dialectical confusion." The procedure Climacus employs for unravelling such confusions he calls "qualitative dialectic." In his unduly neglected essay "Kierkegaard's *On Authority and Revelation*," Cavell illuminates Climacus's procedure by highlighting its similarity to the procedures of Ordinary Language Philosophy:

> Very generally, a dialectical examination of a concept will show how the meaning of that concept changes, and how the subject of which it is the concept changes, as the context in which it is used changes. . . .[53]

The indictment of the philosopher here lies in the charge that he not only fails to command a clear view of his life, but also of the language he draws upon to describe it. He fails, according to Climacus, to attend to the decisive change in meaning a concept undergoes as its employment shifts from an aesthetic, to an ethical, to a religious context. A religious inflection of certain concepts (such as authority, obedience, faith, silence, revelation) only has a sense, he thinks, within the context of a certain kind of life. Unable to make sense of the religious employment of concepts such as "faith" and "revelation," the philosopher sees them as raising perplexing questions concerning what kind of *evidence* is appropriate to certain sorts of beliefs. The philosopher, Climacus argues, entangles himself here in a conceptual confusion. He overlooks the "essential incommensurability" between the immanent or secular use of such notions and the transcendental or religious use. When he discovers that evidence does not play the role (in the case of concepts such as faith or revelation) in a religious context that it would in an ordinary context, the philosopher concludes that evidence must play *a peculiar role* (and he will try to argue that unconditional faith must be based on an objective uncertainty) or he concludes that a peculiar *kind* of evidence must be involved (and he will try to distinguish between a "direct" and an "indirect" revelation). Climacus's aim is to show the philosopher 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. The later Wittgenstein might have called such a procedure a "grammatical investigation."[54] Remarks such as the following could be thought of as being, in Wittgenstein's sense, "grammatical remarks": "Religious faith excludes doubt," "one must *become* a Christian," "Christianity is not plausible."[55] The philosopher tends to convert remarks such as these into questions of evidence, mistaking what is a categorical truth for an empirical fact—or, to put the point in terms that bring out the analogy with the later Wittgenstein more clearly: the philosopher confuses a grammatical truth (concerning the proper employment of certain religious concepts) for an epistemological discovery (concerning the relevant quantity or quality of evidence). He 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. Climacus says that in our reflective age we have simply "forgotten" what it means to be a Christian—we no longer have a religious use for these terms. Yet we continue to employ a term such as "faith" in purportedly religious contexts as if we knew what we meant by it. In such a pseudo-religious employment, the term no longer has any clear meaning. We do not realize that we have failed to give the term a clear sense, for we are not aware that we have lost our hold on any religious sense it might once have been able to have. Indeed, it might be that in *our* lives we will never have a use for the religious

concept once associated with that word. (This is, in fact, what Climacus suspects.)[56]

But why does he call his procedure a *qualitative* dialectic? Again Cavell is helpful:

> There is one dialectical shift which is of critical importance . . . that which moves from "immanent" to "transcendent" contexts. . . . [W]hen he is speaking of this shift . . . he characteristically speaks of a *qualitative* . . . difference in meaning. The procedure is this: he will begin with an immanent context, appealing to ordinary contexts in which a concept is used, . . . and then . . . he will say that these concepts are decisively or qualitatively different when used in a transcendental sense, when used, that is, to characterize our relationship to God. . . . Sometimes . . . he will describe what the life of a man will look like . . . which can only be understood in terms of—which (as he sometimes puts it) *is lived in*—Christian categories. . . . As if to say: in that life, and for that life, the Christian categories have their full, mutually implicating meaning, and apart from it they may have any or none.[57]

Examples of the procedure of qualitative dialectic run throughout the first chapter of the *Postscript*; for example, when Climacus writes: "an approximation is essentially incommensurable" with the "infinite personal interest" that characterizes religious faith.[58] What status is an assertion such as this supposed to have? What sort of work is it supposed to do? As the *Postscript* progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that remarks such as these will be asked to support the weight of an elaborate theory concerning the relationship between the subjective and passionate character of religious faith and the essentially disinterested nature of objective reasoning. Climacus, therefore, does not remain faithful to his own claim that all he is doing is marking categorical distinctions—assembling reminders that bring to the philosopher's attention what, in some sense, he cannot help but already know. It becomes clear that Climacus's remark about the "essential incommensurability" of faith and objective reasoning will be invoked as a thesis, contesting the philosopher's counter-thesis that ordinary belief and religious faith represent commensurable kinds of cognitive states—different points, as it were, along a single spectrum of possible degrees of epistemological certainty. Climacus himself is therefore driven in his polemic against the philosopher to *insist* upon something that by his own lights is a grammatical truth. He ends up representing what is a mere truism as his own intellectual discovery, *his* contribution to knowledge. 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. For this reason, as well as because of Climacus's incessant warnings that what he is up to cannot be taken at face value, our suspicions should be alerted as we notice that Climacus's arguments in Chapter One build towards the following overarching thesis: an infinite personal interest, insofar as it is essentially incommensurable with ordinary forms of rational justification, requires a leap of faith—an act of resolve that closes its eyes to the objective probability of the article of faith. It would appear that Climacus has arrived here at a result—a conclusion about the nature of Christian faith and what its relation to reason is.

Our suspicions should deepen as we turn to Book II of the *Postscript* which is entitled "Something About Lessing." The canniness of this transition has gone unnoticed because scholars have neglected to ponder the significance of the fact that the argument of Book One (concerning why religious faith cannot be founded on historical evidence) is drawn straight from Lessing. In a chapter in Book II entitled "Theses Possibly or Actually Attributable to Lessing," Climacus cites the essay of Lessing's mentioned above and makes it explicit that it (apparently) advances a thesis broadly similar to the one advanced by Climacus himself in Book One. The irony embedded in the title of the chapter lies in the fact that the attribution of "theses" to Lessing will prove to involve, on Climacus's reading of Lessing, a misunderstanding—it fails to take into account Lessing's employment of a strategy of irony. Once again, Climacus is providing his reader with directions for how to read the book before him. The passage from Lessing that Climacus comments on runs as follows:

> If on historical grounds I have no objection to the statement that Christ raised to life a dead man; must I therefore accept it as true that God has a son who is of the same essence as himself? What is the connection between my inability to raise any significant objection to the evidence of the former and my obligation to believe something against which my reason rebels? . . .
> But to leap with that historical truth to a quite different class of truths, and to demand of me that I should form all my metaphysical and moral ideas accordingly . . . if that is not an instance of a "transition to another realm of thought," then I do not know what Aristotle meant by this phrase . . .
>
> That, then, is the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap. If anyone can help me over it, let him do it, I beg him, I adjure him. He will deserve a divine reward from me.[59]

Lessing's argument here—concerning the impossibility of a rational transition from purely historical (or empirical) grounds to the metaphysical and moral truths associated with the Christian teaching—is broadly parallel to the one outlined by Climacus in the opening portion of the *Postscript*. Climacus focuses on Lessing's final remarks here, however, and argues that they are drenched with irony. He fastens, for example, on Lessing's saying that the ditch is "broad," pointing out the implicit categorical confusion such a description involves, given that Lessing's own argument turns on the idea that the chasm between where he stands and where he needs to leap is infinitely wide.[60] Climacus also focuses on Lessing's saying "I cannot get across . . . however *earnestly* I have tried to make the leap."

> [I]t is a bit of cunning on Lessing's part to make use of the word *earnestly* . . . [T]he reference to earnestness is droll . . . because it stands in no relation, or in a comic relation, to the leap; for it is not externally the width of the chasm which prevents the leap, but internally the dialectical passion which makes the chasm infinitely wide. To have been very near doing something has in itself a comic aspect, but to have been very near making the leap is absolutely nothing, because the leap is the category of decision—And now to have tried with the utmost earnestness to make the leap—aye! That man Lessing is indeed a wag; for it is in no doubt rather with the utmost earnestness that he has endeavored to make the chasm wide—does it not seem as if he were making fun of people?[61]

Climacus's commentary on Lessing's essay is to be applied to Climacus's own work. Each purports to advance a philosophical doctrine concerning the nature of Christianity. Climacus suggests, however, that if one scratches the surface of Lessing's essay one finds, concealed within it, a parody of the philosophy and theology of his day. One must grasp that Lessing is what Climacus calls "an ironical personality"—that his references to earnestness are droll, that under the guise of advancing a doctrine he is making fun of people. Climacus underscores this claim by reviewing the final conversation that took place between Lessing and Jacobi. The relevant stretch of this (once) famous conversation runs as follows:

> *Jacobi*: Even the greatest mind will hit upon absurd things when he tries to explain everything and make sense of it according to clear concepts.
>
> *Lessing*: And who does not try to explain things?
>
> *Jacobi*: Whoever does not want to explain what is inconceivable but only wants to know the borderline where it begins: he will gain the largest space for human truth.
>
> *Lessing*: Words, dear Jacobi, mere words! The borderline you want to fix cannot be determined. And on the other side of it you give free reign to dreaming, nonsense and blindness.
>
> *Jacobi*: I believe that the borderline can be determined. I want not to draw it, but only to recognize what is already there. And as far as dreaming, nonsense and blindness are concerned . . .
>
> *Lessing*: They prevail whenever confused ideas are found.
>
> *Jacobi*: More where false ones are found. Someone who has fallen in love with certain explanations will blindly accept every consequence . . . As I see it, the first task of the philosopher is to reveal, to disclose existence. Explanation is only a means, a way to this goal—it is the first task, but it is never the last. The last task is what cannot be explained: The irresolvable, immediate and simple.[62]

Notice that the position which Jacobi defends here strikingly resembles the one generally attributed to the *Postscript*: the task of the philosopher should be to disclose the nature of existence, revealing its essential character to lie beyond the reach of rational explanation or justification. The philosopher's task is not to explain what is inconceivable but rather only to demarcate the borderline where it begins. As one presses on in the *Postscript*, Climacus appears to be engaged in precisely such a project of delineating the point at which Christian faith begins by exhibiting the specific junctures at which it eludes the grasp of reason. Moreover, Jacobi's published writings, for the most part, are devoted to an impassioned defense of faith, very similar to the one most commentators have claimed to find in the *Postscript*. In particular, in his famous public controversy with Mendelssohn, Jacobi argues that only faith can play the role of serving as an ultimate touchstone of truth—a role which Mendelssohn wishes to reserve for reason.[63] Jacobi further resembles the prevailing stereotype of Kierkegaard in that he advances a doctrine in which the achievement of faith ultimately rests upon a decisive and, (from the standpoint of reason) irrational act of the will—what he terms a *salto mortale*.[64] The significance of the similarity between the doctrine that Jacobi champions and the one that is generally attributed to and apparently espoused by, Climacus lies in the following important detail: In his commentary on the

dialogue, Climacus applauds Lessing, siding with him against Jacobi. This is initially obscured by Climacus's references to Jacobi as "the inexhaustible spokesman for enthusiasm" and to "the subtle Lessing" as a "catechumen"[65]—i.e., a neophyte receiving rudimentary instruction in the basic doctrines of Christianity. This suggests that Jacobi is the teacher and Lessing the learner. But Climacus's commentary on the final portion of their dialogue repudiates such a view. Their dialogue continues with Lessing commenting on Jacobi's last remark:

> *Lessing*: Good, very good, I can use all that; but I cannot follow it in the same way. In general, your *salto mortale* does not displease me . . . Take me along with you if it works.
>
> *Jacobi*: If you will only step on the elastic spot from which I leap, everything else will follow from there.
>
> *Lessing*: Even that would demand a leap which I cannot ask of my old legs and heavy head.[66]

Lessing's saying to Jacobi "Take me along with you if it works" echoes the sentence (quoted above) from his famous essay: "If anyone can help me over it [the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across], let him do it." Climacus comments: "Here Lessing's irony beautifully reveals itself."[67] For if one is to perform this leap, one must do it oneself.[68] Jacobi's philosophy unwittingly represents itself as somehow assisting one in performing this task. It aspires to offer assistance where no one can ease the burden of another. Jacobi does not notice the peculiarity of Lessing's request. Rather he suggests that he is in a position to mark out the point of departure for such a leap so that "everything else will follow from there." Climacus comments that Jacobi's formulation here betrays his inclination (despite Jacobi's constant protestations that the leap is a fundamentally subjective act) "to transform the leap into something objective, and to interpret the act of the leap in analogy with finding the Archimedean point."[69] Jacobi's form of expression reveals his temptation to picture the right philosophical analysis of faith as serving for the aspiring believer as a springboard upon which he can step and then the leap of faith itself will follow automatically.[70] The irony in Lessing's final response appears in his suggestion that even the tiny step he is invited to make onto Jacobi's philosophical springboard is more than he can manage. Climacus's attention is directed throughout his commentary to the *manner* in which Lessing and Jacobi express themselves—here is where the decisive difference between them can be discerned. Despite his constant disparagement of reason, Jacobi's form of expression is symptomatic of the way in which his project (of determining the boundaries of reason in order to demarcate the scope of faith) is ultimately impelled by the same temptation that fuels the project of the rationalist theologian he so opposes. Precisely, this same criticism will apply to the pseudo-doctrine that Climacus will go on to propose in the Postscript - his own philosophical attempt to explicate the nature of the opposition between Christianity and reason. Jacobi attempts to offer an objective argument for why objective reasoning should transcend itself and embrace the rationally inassimilable content of Christian faith. Climacus summarizes his critique of Jacobi by saying:

> The last thing that human thinking can will to do, is to will to transcend itself in the paradoxical.[71]

Remember Lessing's response to Jacobi:

> Words, dear Jacobi, mere words! The borderline you want to fix cannot be determined. And on the other side of it you give free reign to dreaming, nonsense and blindness.[72]

The same charge, I submit, is to be directed against Climacus's own dialectical construction in the *Postscript*. Climacus goes on, in the subsequent chapter, to drive a firm wedge between subjective and objective thought, arguing that only the former is appropriate to religious faith and that an admixture of the latter can play no role. In subjective thought, Climacus argues, the accent falls on "the how" rather than on "the what"—it is directed towards the character of one's relation to the object of faith rather than to the object itself. As the argument progresses, however, it becomes evident that this distinction, if firmly insisted upon, has some rather unattractive consequences. Climacus writes:

> [I]f only the mode of the relationship is in truth, the individual is in the truth, even if he should happen to be related to what is not true.[73]

The argument therefore moves towards the conclusion that it is only the authenticity of the commitment that matters here—*how* one is committed to the object of one's belief—and it is of no importance *what* it is to which one is committed. Such an argument obviously threatens to license grisly forms of fanaticism. Indeed, this is the most common criticism made against what many commentators have perceived to be Kierkegaard's teaching. The secondary literature is primarily preoccupied with the question as to whether Kierkegaard is opening the floodgates of irrationalism and, if so, whether one should mind. Someone who clearly minds, Walter Kaufmann, writes:

> It would be an understatement to say that no safeguard whatever remains against fanaticism: fanaticism and the lack of a sensitive intellectual conscience are made the proof of authority, and Kierkegaard wistfully deplores his own intelligence.[74]

Climacus, however, appears to be concerned later in the *Postscript*, to head off just such an objection by distinguishing between genuine faith and what he calls "subjective madness." Genuine faith requires that the object of one's interest admit of an "infinitely passionate interestedness," something Climacus argues no finite object can support. He takes Don Quixote as "the prototype" of "a subjective madness in which the passion of inwardness embraces a particular finite fixed idea."[75]

One can distinguish between faith and such forms of madness, Climacus says, because only one sort of "what" can appropriately correspond to the "how" of true inwardness—one that fully accentuates the opposition between subjective belief and objective thought. True subjectivity turns out on this analysis to have an objective correlate! In the case of genuinely subjective truth, Climacus argues, "The conceptual determination of the truth must include an expression for the antithesis to objectivity."[76] What began as an argument for the claim that the infinitely interested character of religious faith is incompatible with the essentially

disinterested nature of objective thought now culminates in the considerably more radical claim that, from the standpoint of objective thought, the object of faith must be maximally indigestible to reason. Climacus attempts to argue that the more repellent to reason the object of one's faith is, the greater one's passion will be spurred. Climacus concludes:

> Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty.[77]

Where Kant had wished to draw limits to reason in order to make room for faith, Climacus argues that faith, in order to attain the appropriate decisiveness of commitment, must be continuously involved in running up against the limits of reason. This leads Climacus through a series of arguments that propose to determine what object of belief would be intrinsically the most repellent to reason. He attempts to demonstrate that the paradoxical content of Christian doctrine can only be embraced at the cost of an absolute "crucifixation of the understanding": a complete sacrifice of one's reason. This is appropriate, Climacus argues, for nothing else will generate the requisite pitch of passion. Faith therefore involves believing directly against the grain of one's understanding.[78] The central contradiction embedded in the dialectical structure of the *Postscript* lies in the fact that Climacus's argument also seems to require that the believer *retain* his understanding in order to be able to use it to discriminate between the objective absurdity of Christian doctrine and less repulsive forms of nonsense.[79] Climacus writes:

> Nonsense . . . [the believer] cannot believe against the understanding, for precisely the understanding will discern that it is nonsense and prevent him from believing it.[80]

Climacus's analysis therefore commits him to a distinction between mere absurdity and "objective absurdity"—a category of deep nonsense which is supposed to be qualitatively more repellent to reason than ordinary nonsense. The Christian paradox is then proposed as the highest possible instance of such incomprehensibility—it is not merely incomprehensible but objectively incomprehensible.[81] Climacus's parody on speculative philosophy reaches its climax with the following obvious problem: Why reach for the absurdity of Christian doctrine at this juncture rather than some other absurdity?[82] Can we make sense of the idea of a maximally paradoxical belief? Can we rank incomprehensible "thoughts" by the degree of their absurdity? Does absurdity come in a spectrum of degrees? A surprising number of commentators have tried to dutifully water down and clean up Climacus's argument here in the *Postscript* (to the effect that it is precisely on account of the unique extremity of its absurdity that Christian doctrine should be adopted as the object of faith). While completely ignoring the form of the work, many scholars have attempted to be as charitable as possible in interpreting its content—doing their best to keep the work from ending up looking anything like a parody of serious philosophy. When approaching the *Postscript*, a scholarly commitment to adhere at all costs to such a principle of sympathetic textual interpretation—while systematically neglecting what Climacus calls the "incessant activity of irony" in the work—will lead one astray. Indeed, this has been the fate

of all of the standard attempts to extract the argument of the work while ignoring Climacus's vehement warnings about the work's peculiar character—in particular, his remark at the end that the book was written in order to be revoked.

"Climacus" is the latinized form of the Greek word for ladder. The dialectical ladder of the *Postscript* culminates in a demonstration and declaration of the nonsensicality of its doctrine. Its doctrine turns out to be a pseudo-doctrine. It is a ladder which once we have climbed up it, we are asked to throw away.

Wittgenstein writes in #6.54 of the *Tractatus*: "My propositions serve as *elucidations* in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them." It is significant that Wittgenstein speaks here of "anyone who understands *me*": we cannot understand his *propositions* (for they are nonsense), but we can come to understand *the author* and what sort of activity he is engaged in[83]—one of showing that we suffer from the illusion of thinking we mean something when we mean nothing. The aim therefore is to undo our attraction to various grammatically well-formed strings of words that resonate with an aura of sense. The silence that both the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus* wish to leave us with at the end is one in which nothing has been said and there is nothing to say (of the sort that we imagined there to be). To recognize it *as* a silence requires recognizing that this book does not aspire to say anything. It is a silence they see as produced by an attempt to assert philosophical truths of a certain sort. It is not a silence that is opened up through a procedure of delimiting the sayable and hence which is exhibited only once we have reached the conclusion of the philosophical discourse. The silence is itself a symptom of the philosophical discourse. It is therefore not a silence the work itself confers upon us, but rather one it discovers us in—one that we mistake for meaningful speech in our attraction to words that fail to assert anything. That we are subject to such attractions is what these works hope to show. They aspire to serve as a mirror in which we can recognize our own philosophical inclinations. The silence we are left with is not the pregnant silence that comes with a censorious posture of guarding the sanctity of the ineffable. (The standard Pears & McGuinness translation of the final passage of the *Tractatus*—"What we cannot speak about we must *pass over* in silence"—with its implication that there is *something* to pass over loads the text in favor of a notion of pregnant silence.) One can call this activity of unmasking nonsense a kind of "showing," as long as one remains clear that there is no "it" (which cannot be said) that is shown. One piece of nonsense may (or may not) show that another (less self-evidently nonsensical) piece of nonsense *is* nonsense—and that is all nonsense can show. This is the assumption upon which the construction of these ladders is based. It is an insight into the *emptiness* of its predecessors that each successive rung of the ladder hopes to trigger about the sentences put forward in each of the rungs that come before it.

The preface and the conclusion of the *Tractatus* serve, I have said (following Cora Diamond), as the frame in which we are provided directions for how to read that book. It is in the preface that Wittgenstein first tells us that what lies beyond

the limit of what can be said is *einfach Unsinn*—simply nonsense. The preface begins with the following words:

> This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it—or similar thoughts. It is not a work of doctrine. Its purpose would be achieved if it affords satisfaction to someone who reads it with understanding (my translation).

Wittgenstein's insistence here that what he has given us is not a work of *doctrine* goes with his later remark that "philosophy," as exemplified in the *Tractatus*, comprises "not a body of doctrine but an activity.[84] Naturally, I wish to interpret this insistence against the background of Climacus's parallel warning that his work should not be read as presenting doctrine—that, indeed, that would constitute *the greatest possible misunderstanding* of his work. When interpreted in this light the first sentence of Wittgenstein's preface is initially puzzling: for what we learn by the conclusion of his book is that part of what he means in saying that it is not engaged in propounding doctrine but rather in a certain kind of activity (of elucidation) is that the work contains no thoughts—no thoughts are expressed in it. But the point here is not that the work contains thinkable thoughts that one could share with the author, but that one must share (or have shared) with the author the experience of mistaking its (pseudo-) propositions for thoughts that one takes oneself to be thinking. So the implicit distinction we saw in the penultimate section of the *Tractatus*—between understanding *the propositions* of the book (which is impossible) and understanding *the author* (by recognizing his "propositions" to be nonsensical)—parallels the implicit distinction in the first sentence of the preface between understanding what one reads *in the book* (which turns out to be nonsense) and understanding *the book* (by grasping its point: that in the end we have to throw it away). This parallel is recapitulated in the third sentence of the preface in the implicit distinction between someone who reads the book (imagining himself to be) *understanding what it says* (in which case its purpose would *not* be achieved) and someone who reads it *with understanding*. This distinction rests upon the idea that, although there is no such thing as understanding the propositions in the book, there is such a thing as the illusion of understanding them. The guiding assumption of both the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus* is that the philosopher (typically) suffers from an illusion of understanding, from the projection of an illusory sense onto a (pseudo-)proposition which lacks a (clear) sense. The task therefore is not to refute what he thinks, but to show him that there is nothing of the sort that he imagines himself to be thinking.[85] Kierkegaard writes about his pseudonymous works:

> [A]n illusion can never be destroyed directly, and only by indirect means can it be radically removed. . . . A direct attack only strengthens a person in his illusion. There is nothing that requires such gentle handling as an illusion, if one wishes to dispel it. . . . That is what is achieved by the indirect method, which . . . arranges everything dialectically for the prospective captive, and then shyly withdraws.[86]

The method employed in both the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus* relies upon the thought that under such circumstances the only procedure that will prove

genuinely elucidatory is one that attempts to enter into the philosopher's illusion of understanding and explode it from within. In this respect, Wittgenstein's description of his method in the *Philosophical Investigations* applies equally well to both the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus*: "My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense" (#464).[87] The distinction implicitly drawn in section 6.54 of the *Tractatus* between understanding the propositions in the book (which we are not asked to do) and understanding *the author* of the book (which we are asked to do) depends on this idea that although we cannot understand what an utterer of nonsense says, we can understand the utterer—i.e., enter into the point of view from which this piece of nonsense appears to say something.[88] To speak here of "understanding the utterer" is, in one sense, misleading: it invites the idea that there is a definite semantic content to be grasped. Wittgenstein's words in the preface are that we should read the work *mit Verständnis* ("with understanding")—as, for example, in English we might speak of treating someone in difficulty "with understanding," i.e., with appreciation and compassion for their plight. The goal here is not to grasp *what* the other says, but to make his *impulse* to these particular words humanly intelligible to oneself. The criterion of our having successfully performed this act of imaginative identification with the utterer of nonsense is that we are able to successfully anticipate the (apparent) logical relations that he will imagine obtain between the nonsensical string in question and other (pseudo-) propositions. Wittgenstein's aim in the *Tractatus* is to lead the philosopher from the original "disguised" piece of nonsense (to which he is attracted) through this network of (apparent) logical relations to some more patently nonsensical (pseudo-)consequence. The criterion of our having understood the author of the *Tractatus*, our having both grasped his elucidatory strategy and worked through the consequences of his pseudo-doctrines—our having climbed, that is, all the way up the ladder—is, as he says that we ("eventually") recognize his "propositions" as nonsensical and throw them away. Some such distinction between understanding the character of the work and understanding the content of the doctrine it appears to propound is, I believe, essential to illuminating the central exegetical puzzle that has plagued commentaries on both the *Postscript* and the *Tractatus*: namely in what sense can the reader be called upon to "understand" these works, if they consist of nonsense and hence fail to advance doctrine?—as well as the related puzzle: in what sense can the propositions of each work be said to form the structure of a ladder?—i.e., how can one piece of nonsense follow from, or entail, another? According to the readings I have attempted to sketch in this paper, we are not asked, at the end of each of these works, to understand the theses each of these authors appears to advance, but we are asked to try to understand what they are up to in constructing such an appearance, and the sign that we have succeeded in doing so, they tell us, is that we are no longer tempted to advance such theses ourselves—that we throw them away.[89]

NOTES

1. From "The Maniac," Chapter Two of *Orthodoxy*, in *G. K. Chesterton: Collected Works, Vol. I*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press (1986), p. 222.
2. Quoted by Rush Rhees in *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (1970), p. 43.
3. Maurice O'C. Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (1981), ed. by R. Rhees, Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 102.
4. Take, for example, his remark in a letter to Norman Malcolm that "Kierkegaard is far too deep for me"; cited in Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, (1984), p. 106.
5. H. D. P. Lee reports: "He told me that he learned Danish in order to be able to read Kierkegaard in the original, and he clearly had a great admiration for him"; "Wittgenstein 1929-1931," *Philosophy* 54; p. 218.
6. Quoted by the editor in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, ed. with an introduction by G. H. von Wright, with B. F. McGuinness, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press (1974); p. 82.
7. See my "Must We Show What We Cannot Say," in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, edited by Richard Fleming and Michael Payne, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press (1989), pp. 242- 283; and my "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder," *The Yale Review*, Vol. 79, No. 3.
8. *Themes Out of School*, San Francisco: North Point Press (1984), pp. 217, 218, 220, 225.
9. The most lucid presentation of such a reading that I know of is Peter Geach's essay "Saying and Showing in Wittgenstein and Frege," in *Essays in Honour of G. H. von Wright*, J. Hintikka, ed., *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 28, pp. 54-70.
10. Candidates for what it is that is shown include the logical structure of language, the logical structure of the world, the sheer existence of the world, the nature of the Ethical, and the mystical.
11. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by David Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1941), p. 551. Kierkegaard insisted that a "First and Last Declaration" be appended to the end of the *Postscript* without pagination to emphasize the discontinuity between it and the work by Climacus of which it was in no way to form a part. Princeton University Press in the English edition of the *Postscript* has scrupulously observed Kierkegaard's wishes. In the reckless interests of scholarly convenience (since the *Postscript* ends on p. 550), I shall refer to the four pages of the document as pages 551, 552, 553, and 554.
12. *Postscript*, p. 551.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 552.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 551.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 551.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 551.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 552.
18. This first group forms a much larger percentage of the community of Kierkegaard scholars than is the case with the corresponding group of *Tractatus* scholars. *Tractatus* scholars have, by and large, felt that they should have *something* to say about the peculiar status of the work.
19. A relatively clear-minded justification of this conception of the authorship is provided by C. Stephen Evans in the opening chapter of his book *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*; Adantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press (1983).
20. *Postscript*, 545.
21. Compare Wittgenstein's strikingly Kierkegaardian remarks on religious belief in *Lectures on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, edited by C. Barrett; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press (1967); pp. 53-59 .
22. *Postscript*, p. 546.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 546.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 546.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 546.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 547.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 549.

28. This observation concerning the structure of the *Tractatus* can be found in Cora Diamond's invaluable essay "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the *Tractatus*" (forthcoming in *Wiener Reihe: Themen der Philosophie*, Band 5, edited by Richard Heinrich and Helmuth Vetter, Vienna: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1991).
29. *Ibid.*, p. 548.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 549.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 451.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 264-5. Wittgenstein writes: "I ought to be no more than a mirror, in which my reader can see his own deformities so that, helped in this way, he can put it right." (*Culture and Value*, translated by Peter Winch, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; p. 18.)
34. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
36. Cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, #127.
37. The remark occurs in *The Last Years: Journals, 1853-1855*, edited by Alexander Dru, and is quoted in John Updike's essay "The Fork," collected in *Kierkegaard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Josiah Thompson; Garden City, NY: Doubleday (1972), p. 165.
38. The anonymous review is reprinted under its original title "Philosophische Brocken oder ein Bisschen Philosophie," collected in *Materialien zur Philosophie Soren Kierkegaards*, edited by Michael Theunissen and Wilfried Greve, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp (1979), pp. 127-131.
39. *Postscript*, p. 245n. This theme is also sounded when Climacus comments on the works of the other pseudonymous authors:

> It has never been a mystery to me why the pseudonymous authors have again and again asked to be excused from being reviewed. Since the contrasting form of the presentation makes it impossible to report the content in an abstract, because the abstract takes away the feature of greatest importance and falsely transforms the book into a doctrinizing treatise, the authors are fully justified in contenting themselves with a few actual readers, rather than being misunderstood by the many who by means of a review have found something they can run with (p. 252).

40. *Postscript*, p. 245n.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 245n.
42. "Letters to Ludwig von Ficker," edited by A. Janik, translated by B. Gillette; in *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, edited by C. G. Luckhardt, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press (1979), pp. 94-95.
43. This is perhaps the place to emphasize that the reading sketched in this paper—insofar as it takes seriously the idea that the entire plan of Climacus's work embodies a parody on speculative philosophy—is proposed only as an account of the structure of the three works authored by Johannes Climacus: the (unfinished) *De Omnibus Dubitandem*, the *Philosophical Fragments*, and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. These works are designed to engage, exhibit, and defeat the form of temptation (to evade the demands of the religious life) which Kierkegaard sees as typical of the philosopher: namely, the temptation to construe every difficulty as requiring the application of one's intellect. Climacus can, in this sense, be thought of as Kierkegaard's *philosophical* pseudonym. The other pseudonymous works are designed to engage, exhibit and defeat other forms of temptation and evasion. The different pseudonymous works all share a common structure only in a very general sense: namely, each serves as a mirror (though each kind of pseudonymous work in a different way) in which a certain kind of reader can recognize himself—in this sense they all employ what Kierkegaard calls "a strategy of indirection." It would be a mistake, however, to look for an exact analogue to the ladder-structure of Climacus's works in the writings of the other pseudonymous authors.
44. Cf. *Tractatus* #6.521.
45. *Postscript*, p. 80.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 143. Climacus makes it explicit later on that it is specifically against the temptations of "the wise man" that his authorship is directed:

> It is not for the simple-minded that this introduction undertakes to make it difficult to become a Christian. . . . [E]very essential existential task puts human beings on a level with respect to it, the difficulty . . . is thus equally difficult for the wise and for the simple, and perhaps more difficult for the wise, because the wise man's reflection will serve him with many evasions (p. 342).

48. *Ibid.*, p. 245n. This analogy between liberating someone from a surfeit of knowledge and liberating him from a surfeit of food occurs at an earlier juncture within the body of the text:

> [E]ven though my effort may be misunderstood, I am convinced nevertheless that it is just as noble as that of the others. When at a banquet, where the guests have already overeaten, one person is concerned about bringing on new courses, another about having a vomitive at hand, it is perfectly true that only the first has interpreted correctly the requirement of the guests, but I wonder whether the other might not also say that he is concerned about what their requirement might be (p. 166).

49. *Ibid.*, p. 246n. The footnote continues: "This then becomes a real communication—to one who has already found the difficulty easy to understand." The enduring misunderstanding here, for Climacus, is the philosopher's assumption that the difficulty calls primarily for the offices of the understanding. To simply say this to the philosopher, however, simply invites the idea that *this* is what he needs, above all, to understand:

> If men had forgotten what it means to exist religiously, they had doubtless also forgotten what it means to exist as human beings; this must therefore be set forth. But above all it must not be done in a dogmatizing manner, for then the misunderstanding would instantly take the explanatory effort to itself in a new misunderstanding, as if existing consisted in getting to know something about this or that. If communicated in the form of knowledge, the recipient is led to adopt the misunderstanding that it is knowledge that he is to receive, and then we are again in the sphere of knowledge. Only one who has some conception of the enduring capacity of a misunderstanding to assimilate even the most strenuous effort of explanation and still remain the same misunderstanding, will be able to appreciate the difficulties of an authorship where every word must be watched, . . . (p. 223).

This enduring capacity of the philosopher to misunderstand the problem (by devoting himself to an understanding of his misunderstanding in a fashion that precisely enacts his original misunderstanding) is summed up by Kierkegaard in the following entry in his journal:

> Even though this be printed and read again and again, the lecturers will still make a profit out of me, teach about me, maybe adding a comment like this: "The peculiar thing about this is that it cannot be taught" (*The Diary of Soren Kierkegaard*, edited by Peter Rohde, Seacaucus, NJ: Citadel Press (1960), pp. 147-148).

50. *Postcript*, p. 166. This should be connected, however, with Climacus's later qualification: "My purpose is to make it difficult to become a Christian, yet not more difficult than it is" (p. 495).
51. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
53. *Must We Mean What We Say?* pp. 169-170.
54. I owe this observation to Cavell; *Ibid.*, p. 169.
55. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 169.
56. I am borrowing here from my "Must We Show What We Cannot Say?" *op. cit.*, pp. 255-256.
57. *Must We Mean What We Say?* p. 170.
58. *Postscript*, p. 26.
59. *Lessing's Theological Writings*, translated by Henry Chadwick, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (1956), pp. 54-55.
60. Cf. *Postscript*, p. 90.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

62. The translation of the piece of the dialogue I am relying on here is by Frederick C. Beiser and is provided in his *The Fate of Reason*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1987), p. 67. A complete English translation of the text can be found in *The Spinoza Conversations between Lessing and Jacobi*, translated by G. Wallace, J. B. Lawson, and C. G. Chapple (University Press of America: Lanham, 1988).
63. Cf. Beiser, p. 89.
64. Cf. Beiser, p. 66.
65. *Postscript*, p. 92.
66. Beiser, pp. 67-68.
67. *Postscript*, p. 932.
68. Climacus's full commentary on Lessing's remark to Jacobi that "your *salto mortale* does not displease me . . . take me along with you if it works" runs as follows:

> Here Lessing's irony beautifully reveals itself, since he is presumably aware that when one is to leap, one must be alone about it, and hence also alone about understanding its impossibility. One cannot help admiring his urbanity, and his affectionate predilection for Jacobi, and the conversational art which so politely says: "*nehmen Sie mich mit—wenn es angeht*" (p. 93).

69. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
70. Climacus comments:

> When one is indisposed to make the leap, so indisposed that this passion makes the chasm infinitely wide, then the most ingenious contrivance for the purpose will help one not at all. Lessing sees very clearly that the leap, as being decisive, is subject to a qualitative dialectic, and permits no approximating transition. His answer is therefore a jest. It is very far from being dogmatic, it is entirely correct dialectically, and it is personally evasive (p. 94).

71. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
72. Lessing's response here appears to agree with the criticism of Jacobi's *salto mortale* offered by Mendelssohn which Climacus closes his discussion of Jacobi by quoting approvingly (p. 95). The full passage from Mendelssohn to which Climacus alludes at this juncture runs as follows:

> To doubt if there is something that not only transcends, but also lies completely outside the sphere of our concepts is what I call a leap beyond myself. My *credo* is: doubt about what I cannot conceive does not disturb me. A question I cannot answer is to me as good as no question at all (Beiser, p. 71).

Mendelssohn's response here would appear to parallel Lessing's perfectly. The difference between them, however, is that Mendelssohn wishes to oppose Jacobi's thesis (that the content of religious faith cannot be rationally conceived or justified) by affirming its negation. Mendelssohn simply ends up with the polar opposite of Jacobi's doctrine. Hence Mendelssohn writes:

> My religion recognizes no obligation to resolve doubt other than through rational means; and it commands no *mere* faith in eternal truths (Beiser, p. 79).

Lessing, on Climacus's reading of him, sees Jacobi's anti-rationalism and Mendelssohn's rationalism as dialectical twins—the apparent integrity of each conferred upon it through participation in its quarrel with the other, each feeding on and sustaining the other. Lessing's achievement, on this view of him, is to achieve a form of expression that resists the reader's temptation to assimilate him to either one of these two poles. Rather than seeking to participate in their quarrel, he seeks to help the reader achieve a perspective from which the very terms of the quarrel might appear suspect.

73. *Postscript*, p. 178. This line of thought attains its most radical expression in the following passage:

> If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol (*Postscript*, pp. 179-180).

74. *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, Garden City, NY: Anchor (1960), p. 181.
75. *Postscript*, p. 175.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
78. Climacus writes:

> Every man, the wisest and the simplest, can qualitatively . . . distinguish just as essentially between what he understands and what he does not understand, . . . and he can discover that there is something which is [absurd], in spite of the fact that it is against his understanding and way of thinking. When he stakes his life upon this absurd . . . he is essentially deceived in case the absurd he has chosen can be proved to be not the absurd. In case this absurd is Christianity, he is a believing Christian; but if he understands it as not the absurd, he is *eo ipso* no longer a believing Christian . . . until he annuls his understanding again as an illusion and a misunderstanding, and relates himself to the Christian absurd (pp. 495-496).

79. Climacus explains:

> So the believing Christian not only possesses but uses his understanding, . . . in relation to Christianity he believes against the understanding and in this case also uses understanding—to make sure that he believes against the understanding (p. 504).

80. *Ibid.*, p. 504.
81. This concept of objective absurdity—absolute paradoxicality—paves the way for the transition from the penultimate rung of the ladder of the *Postscript* (Religiousness A) to the final rung (Religiousness B).
82. This observation also serves as the central pivot in the reading of the *Postscript* offered by Henry E. Allison in his excellent article "Christianity and Nonsense" (*The Review of Metaphysics*, March 1967, Vol. XX, No. 3).
83. I owe this observation to Diamond, *op. cit.*
84. This activity is further specified as one of *elucidation*: "A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. The result of philosophy is not a number of philosophical propositions,' but that propositions become clear" (#4.112). It should be evident from the weight that I am asking them to bear that I view these remarks here (in the precise middle of the book) as also functioning as part of the frame of the work.
85. This parallel between the structure of the *Tractatus* and that of the *Postscript*, however, has its limits: whereas the author of the *Tractatus* identifies virtually all of the sentences in his book as "plain nonsense," the author of the *Postscript* identifies only the final doctrine, with which the work reaches its climax, as an "absurdity." Therefore, whereas the reader who understands the author of the *Tractatus* needs to recognize (virtually) *all* of the book's sentences as nonsense (with the exception of those sentences which comment on the overall elucidatory strategy of the work), the reader who understands the author of the *Postscript* needs to see only that the author's earlier propositions are marshalled in support of an argument that eventually *culminates* in a piece of nonsense. So, whereas the entire body of the Tractatus forms a continuous train of nonsense, the entire body of the Postscript does not. In the latter work, the level of unintelligibility gradually rises to a shriller and shriller pitch as it moves from propositions for which a clear sense can be given (depending upon whether we construe them aesthetically or religiously), to ones which teeter on the brink of sense (when mere truisms are *insisted* upon) to sheer nonsense (an affirmation of objective absurdity).
86. *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, New York: Harper and Brothers (1962), pp. 24-26. At the level of generality at which Kierkegaard speaks here, it is proper to speak therefore (despite the qualification offered in the preceding footnote) of an overarching analogy between the *procedure* of the *Tractatus* as a whole and that of the *Postscript* as a whole; both works employ an "indirect method" in which the author "arranges everything dialectically for the prospective captive,

and then shyly withdraws." But whereas the author of the *Tractatus* wishes to exhibit the *nonsensicality* of the philosophical claims with which his book begins, the author of the *Postscript* wishes to exhibit the *ludicrousness* of the philosophical claims with which his book begins. The author of the *Tractatus* attempts to lead his reader from the latently nonsensical to the patently nonsensical. The author of the *Postscript* attempts to lead his reader from the latently ludicrous to the patently ludicrous (and hence barely sensical), and then on to the patently nonsensical. Where the *Tractatus* begins directly with nonsense, the *Postscript* begins first with "ludicrousness" which it then elaborates into nonsense in the guise of an attempt to make it philosophically respectable. The disanalogy is therefore that the latter work employs a strategy of *parody* (with its concomitant devices of irony and humor) that the former does not. The analogy is that both works culminate in patent nonsense and hence both are—as each declares at its conclusion—written in order to be revoked.

87. The relation between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* is therefore misconceived, in my view, if one pictures the *Investigations* as attacking doctrines (e.g., the picture-theory of meaning) that the *Tractatus* was concerned to propound. The tendency has been to read the doctrines that Wittgenstein attacks in (especially sections #65-105 of) the *Investigations* back into the *Tractatus*—as if the relation between the two books could be comprehended by seeing the one as repudiating the theses affirmed in the other. Both works are self-avowedly concerned to show (many of) the same doctrines to be nonsensical. Furthermore, the conception of nonsense at work in both is in many respects the same. (This conception is nicely summarized in section #500 of the *Investigations* where Wittgenstein says that it is not (what we are tempted to call) "the sense" of a nonsensical proposition that is nonsensical. A nonsensical proposition is simply devoid of sense—although it will generally be the case that, if we try, we will be able to find a use, and therefore a sense, for it. In the *Tractatus* this point concerning nonsense is summarized in section #5.4733: "[I]f it has no sense, this can only be because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts. (Even if we believe that we have done so.)") In neither work is there room for the idea of an intrinsically nonsensical proposition—one which has, as it were, a nonsensical sense. In the *Tractatus* this thought is summed up in the remark that "We cannot give a sign a wrong sense" (#5.4732). The difference between these works cannot be grasped therefore by saying that what the *Tractatus* conceives of as instances of deep and intelligible nonsense, the *Investigations* sees as mere nonsense. For mere nonsense is the only kind of nonsense either of these works allows for. The difference in their respective teachings lies not so much in *what* they each diagnose as nonsense, but in *how* they do so. At the level of what can be captured in one or two metaphilosophical slogans, these two works cannot be easily distinguished from each other. For example, section #4.112 of the *Tractatus*—"Philosophy is not a body of docurine but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations "— applies as aptly to Wittgenstein's later as to his early work. The decisive shift in his thought lies, for the most part, not in his coming to repudiate certain clearly formulated philosophical views or in his coming to see philosophy as an activity which eschews doctrine, but rather in his understanding of what sort of activity philosophy must be if it is to hold forth the promise of proving genuinely elucidatory.

88. The distinction I am relying on here is drawn by Diamond, *op. cit.*

89. I am indebted to conversations with Steven Affeldt, Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, Arata Hamawaki, John McNees and Lisa Van Alstyne, to comments on an earlier draft by Hilary Putnam and Martin Stone, to criticisms made in the discussions that followed readings of earlier versions of this paper at Santa Barbara and the University of Pittsburgh, and finally to Peter Winch for suggesting the epigraph from Chesterton.

SKEPTICISM AND THE INTERPRETATION OF WITTGENSTEIN

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> It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man. Ever afterwards we suspect our instruments. We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are, or of computing the amount of their errors.
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> Emerson

> We began to philosophize through pride, and so destroyed our innocence; we discovered our nakedness, and since then we philosophize out of the need for our redemption.
>
> Fichte

I take human culture generally to consist of human forms of self-understanding. Philosophy has always claimed a special role in human culture for it claims to bring these forms of self-understanding to consciousness and to subject them to critical reflection. (Of course it may claim to be doing *more* than that.) The question of from what perspective such philosophical reflection can be undertaken has itself become thematic in the history of philosophy. I take the history of philosophy to be dialectical, in a relatively non-technical sense of that much disputed term. I mean by this that a work defines itself as philosophical by its relation to a tradition of texts. (How this tradition is defined, I leave unconsidered here.) This, of course, does not mean that the relation to tradition must be one of acceptance. Far from it. The tradition of philosophy familiar to us is one of rejection of tradition—of attempts to re-found this mode of human self-understanding.

There seems to me to be at least two quite different styles of trying to go on philosophically: the first attempts a new presuppositionless beginning, the second attempts to achieve a new interpretive understanding of what has hitherto presented itself as "philosophy." Descartes's philosophy might serve as a paradigm of the former approach, Hegel's of the latter. My claim that the history of philosophy is dialectical entails that both of these styles—the former as well as the latter—are equally involved in the web of philosophical texts. Each style has well known difficulties some of which I shall mention but not rehearse here. The ideal of a presuppositionless philosophy is widely regarded as an illusion, in part because of the history of the attempts to establish such a view. One central form such attempts have taken has been what I shall call *epistemological foundationalism* which involves the claim that for anything to count as knowledge it must be a part of a unified structure every part of which can be shown to be based ultimately on a foundation of what is known directly and with certainty. Descartes's philosophy can, again, serve as a convenient paradigm. As is well known, epistemological foundationalism has come under attack from a wide variety of philosophers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, e.g., Hegel and Kierkegaard, Peirce and Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, Quine and Derrida. The problem for all of these attackers has been to find a way to attack philosophy philosophically, i.e.