CONSTRAINED SPONTANEITY:
KIERKEGAARD AND RULE-FOLLOWING

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PhD Thesis
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February, 2003

ABSTRACT

This thesis interprets certain passages in Kierkegaard with reference to a problem for the theory of judgement. The problem is generated by powerful considerations to the effect that rule-governed thought essentially involves spontaneous activity. This goes against the grain of many accounts of what thoughts are, and what it means to think.

Yet the notion of 'constrained spontaneity' is paradoxical – for how can one and the same act be both spontaneous and determined by rules? I explore how this puzzle informs Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegel in ways that both anticipate and can be used to interpret Wittgenstein's so-called rule-following considerations. Whilst Kierkegaard's critique has often been seen to trade on a crude view of Hegel, I show how in this respect it survives the sophisticated 'non-metaphysical' readings developed by many contemporary commentators.

I proceed to examine whether Kierkegaardian conceptions of 'the leap', indirect communication and imagination can furnish an understanding of constrained spontaneity. In these connections, I (i) advance an 'Inseparability Thesis' about the relation between acts and objects of thought; (ii) adumbrate a form of argument I call the *rhetorical reductio*, the aim of which is to elicit spontaneous agreement; and (iii) defend a 'direct imagist' account of the role of imagination in rule-following.

In a Prologue to the thesis, I mediate between 'content-' and 'form-based' approaches to Kierkegaard's texts by appeal to the art of caricature. In an Epilogue, I assess parallels and disanalogies between judgement and faith in Kierkegaard's work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

(Full details are given in the bibliography.)

BA	*Fear and Trembling / The Book on Adler*, W. Lowrie (trans.).
BBB	*The Blue and Brown Books.*
CA	*The Concept of Anxiety*, R. Thomte & A. B. Anderson (ed. & trans.).
CI	*The Concept of Irony; Schelling Lecture Notes*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
COR	*The Corsair Affair and Articles Related to the Writings*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
CUP	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
CUP (Lowrie)	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, D. F. Swenson & W. Lowrie (trans.).
CV	*Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright & H. Nyman (eds.), A. Pichler (ed.), P. Winch (trans.).
DK	*The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, P. Rhode (ed. & trans.).
EO	*Either/Or*, Vols. I and II, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
EO (Hannay)	*Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (abridged), A. Hannay (ed. & trans.).
FT	*Fear and Trembling; Repetition*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
FT (Hannay)	*Fear and Trembling*, A. Hannay (trans.).
FT (Lowrie)	*Fear and Trembling / The Book on Adler*, W. Lowrie (trans.).
HL	*Hegel's Logic: Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, W. Wallace (trans.).
JP	*Journals and Papers*, 7 Vols., H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
JP (Dru)	*The Journals of Kierkegaard*, A. Dru (ed. & trans.).
JP (Hannay)	*Papers and Journals: A Selection*, A. Hannay (ed. & trans.).
OC	*On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright (eds.), D. Paul & G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.).
PC	*Practice in Christianity*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).

PF	*Philosophical Fragments; Johannes Climacus*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
PH	*The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree (trans.).
PG	*Philosophical Grammar*, R Rhees (ed.), A. Kenny (trans.).
PI	*Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.).
POV	*The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (trans.).
PR	*Philosophical Remarks*, R. Rhees (ed.), R. Hargreaves & R. White (trans.).
PS	*Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V Miller (trans.).
REP (Lowrie)	*Repetition*, W. Lowrie (trans.).
RFM	*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees & G. E. M. Anscombe (eds.), G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.).
SL	*Science of Logic*, A. V. Miller *(trans.)*.
SLW	*Stages on Life's Way*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
SUD	*The Sickness Unto Death*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.).
TLP	*Tractatus Logic-Philosophicus*, D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuiness (trans.).
WL	*Works of Love*, H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong (ed. & trans.), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
Z	*Zettel*, G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright (eds.), G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

General Introduction

This thesis is not a direct contribution to scholarly work on Kierkegaard's texts. Rather, the topic is a problem for the theory of judgement that it is the purpose of Chapter One to introduce in quite general terms. In Chapter Two, however, I argue that this problem is central to certain criticisms of Hegel advanced in Kierkegaard's work. And in Chapters Three and Four, I show further how the pervasive Kierkegaardian themes of 'the leap', 'indirect communication' and the imagination are germane in this context. The aim is to show that Kierkegaard's work furnishes a distinctive contribution to on-going debates about rule-following.

My primary motivation for appealing to Kierkegaard in this context is therefore an external one. I wish to 'use' his texts to clarify and explore what I hope to show are genuine and important issues. This does not mean, however, that I wish to abuse these texts. On the contrary, it is a secondary aim of this thesis to contribute to an understanding of them. For this reason, I owe some preliminary account of how Kierkegaard's work can be used without abuse. The following Prologue is an admittedly programmatic response to this demand, but its provisional conclusions shall be supported by arguments in the body of the thesis.

Prologue
Caricatures:
Form and Content in Kierkegaard

> You have come to a halt at the destroying of
> illusions, and since that is something you have done
> in all possible and imaginable ways, really you have
> worked yourself into a new illusion: the illusion that
> one can come to a halt there. Yes, my friend, you are
> living in an illusion and you accomplish nothing.
> (Judge William)

> ...someone caricaturing another person does not
> originate anything himself but only copies the other in
> the wrong way.
> (Johannes Climacus)

It is a truth, almost universally acknowledged, that an academic in want of an understanding of Kierkegaard is confronted by singularly acute problems of interpretation. One is hardly encouraged, for example, by the following entry in Kierkegaard's *Journals*:

When I am dead there will be something for the university lecturers to poke into. The abject scoundrels! And yet, what is the use, what is the use? Even though this be printed and read again and again, the lecturers will 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".[1]

What exegetical, hermeneutic or heuristic norms could possibly govern the discussion of texts that seem precisely designed to be impossible to teach? What rationale is there for so much as perpetuating that discussion? And yet the vast secondary literature is perhaps testimony to the fact that an author is never so seductive as when he repels.

In this essay, I shall offer a simple twofold classification of approaches to Kierkegaard's texts.[2] According to the first strategy, which I call the *content-based* approach, the content of these texts is treated as prior to their form. Conversely, the *form-*

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[1] *JP* (Rhode), pp. 147-8.

[2] In this essay, 'Kierkegaard's texts' means the pseudonymous works. Whilst for tactical reasons the focus shall be on works attributed to Johannes Climacus, the model I shall propose is supposed to shed light on other pseudonymous texts. I shall have nothing to say about Kierkegaard's 'upbuilding discourses'.

based approach treats form as prior to content. It is arguable that the bulk of expository work could be squeezed into this taxonomic straight-jacket. The burden here, however, is the conceptual (rather than bibliographical) task of delimiting and assessing possible interpretative strategies. I shall characterise the choice between content- and form-based approaches as a dilemma and suggest a way of avoiding it.[3]

I first introduce the two types of approach, illustrating these by special reference to the work of C. Stephen Evans and James Conant respectively (Sections 1 and 2). I then outline some general problems with Conant's reading (Section 3). The upshot of this discussion is that both approaches tend to over-simplify the complex interplay between theory and rhetoric, seriousness and jest, content and form in Kierkegaard's work (Section 4). Finally, I advance a model for capturing this complexity based on an analogy with the art of caricature (Section 5). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to properly apply the model sketched here, the aim is to indicate how my work might fit within a wider context of debates about Kierkegaard's texts.[4]

1. Philosophical Treatises

Content-based approaches take many forms. They range from readings that display a crass insensitivity to the formal properties of Kierkegaard's texts, to highly nuanced accounts of the theoretical basis that purportedly explains these properties.[5] But in order to count as content-based, an interpretation must operate on the assumption that certain theories, doctrines, viewpoints, arguments and the like can be extracted from Kierkegaard's work. The guiding idea is that the propositional contents of the texts can in principle be abstracted from the literary forms in which they are embedded.

So, for example, whilst exponents of the content-based approach dispute the meaning and plausibility of the 'doctrine that truth is subjectivity', as this is found in

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[3] Compare Patrick Goold's attempt to 'rescue Kierkegaard both from muggings by 'rigorous' philosophers and from the morganatic embraces of Post-Modernists' (Goold (1990), p. 304).

[4] I should emphasise that the present piece is not a *preface* in the sense that a preface anticipates the main body of a text. I have called it a 'Prologue', where this roughly means a piece of writing that sets a particular context for the main body of a text. It is offered in the spirit of: 'Here's a way of looking at the general landscape that justifies the particular route I shall pursue'.

[5] For a recent example of the former kind of reading, see Anderson (2000).

Concluding Unscientific Postscript, they share the assumption that there is a doctrine here, and that this can be isolated from the formal conditions of that work as a whole.[6] Or again, whilst there are numerous different takes on what David Swenson once called 'the doctrine of the stages', it is presupposed that some kind of theoretical machinery is at work behind multifarious uses of the terms, 'aesthetic', 'ethical' and 'religious'.[7]

Whilst bluntly doctrinaire readings are customarily polemicized against, the content-based approach has long enjoyed the status of orthodoxy. Thus George Connell could locate his *To Be One Thing: Personal Unity in Kierkegaard's Thought* (1985) within a firm tradition of interpretative practice in the following terms:

> ...the method adopted is that most commonly used in current Kierkegaard scholarship: a synoptic approach seeking a single anthropology, philosophy, and/or theology that drives the authorship as a whole.[8]

The synoptic method is clearly one species of what I am calling the content-based approach. And, even whilst attempts to map individual works onto an overarching theoretical scheme are increasingly viewed with suspicion, more modest attempts to distil the 'essential content' from particular texts (or groups of texts) continue to proliferate. Now, whilst Connell frankly admits that his synoptic method 'has the great disadvantage of failing to take Kierkegaard's employment of pseudonymity seriously'[9], many content-based interpretations go to considerable lengths to give such formal features their due. The work of C. Stephen Evans is exemplary in this respect, and I shall briefly illustrate the general approach by reference to his *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (1983).

Evans proposes to treat the texts under discussion as 'philosophical treatises'.[10] By this gesture, he means to distance himself from those who would view them as rhetorical exercises in self-conscious nonsense (i.e. form-based approaches – see below). On the contrary, Evans attests to the thematic coherence and conceptual clarity of these works.

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[6] I present a reading of this 'doctrine' in the Epilogue.

[7] See Swenson (1983), Ch. 6. For a systematic treatment of the 'theory of stages' see Liehu (1990).

[8] Connell, (1985), p. xix.

[9] Idem.

[10] Evans (1983), p. 5.

Yet Evans also wishes to distance his own work from 'certain other books that have dealt with the intellectual content of Kierkegaard's works' – viz. those that neglect formal aspects altogether (i.e. crude forms of content-based approach).[11] Noting that Kierkegaard explicitly and vigorously distances himself from the views of his pseudonymous authors, Evans goes so far as to concede that 'the literary form of his authorship has an essential relation to its content'.[12]

Now this latter statement may seem to cast doubt on the classification of Evans' work as content-based. But that the kind of 'essential relation' Evans has in mind is consistent with – indeed depends upon – the priority of content over form is intimated by the programmatic inference he draws from this claim: 'I will therefore try to pay special attention to that form, and to the use of humour and irony, so as to see how the content is related to, and reflected in, the form'.[13]

As becomes clear in the course of a closely argued and illuminating book, what this program amounts to is an attempt to show how the content of Kierkegaard's thought is *reflected* in the form of his writing.[14] The relation between form and content is essential, it turns out, in the rather minimal sense that the former is not accidentally or arbitrarily related to the latter. But in order to show how the content is thus reflected in the form, it must be possible to discuss *in abstracto* the concepts, theories, doctrines, and so on that provide the rationale for the literary forms in which they are embedded.

Thus, for instance, Evans proceeds in his introduction to sketch how 'the theory of indirect communication' – a univocal statement of which, he claims, is supplied by both the pseudonymous texts in question and, elsewhere, by Kierkegaard himself – is inflected in the pseudonymous form of the works. It is, Evans argues, precisely *because* Kierkegaard believes that 'existential issues' can only be addressed by means of a peculiar form of communication, for example, that his works assume the peculiar form they do. The primary interpretative task is therefore to sympathetically reconstruct the theory behind the practice. But it is just this commitment to the logical priority of content

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[11] Idem.

[12] Idem. Cf. *CUP*, p. 626.

[13] Evans (1983), p. 5.

[14] For many nice examples of this kind of form-content relation see Hofstadter (2000).

– as providing reasons, explanations, justifications for the forms of Kierkegaard's production – that renders Evans' work a species of the content-based approach.

Evans' is a sophisticated strategy that avoids many of the stock criticisms of cruder forms of the genre.[15] But there remain *prima face* grounds for worrying whether any such approach is adequate to the peculiar problems posed by the form of Kierkegaard's works. Consider, for just one example, a footnote in the *Postscript*, in which its author, one Johannes Climacus, discusses a German review of the 'pamphlet' to which he now writes a postscript. The review is, Climacus says, 'accurate and on the whole dialectically reliable, but now comes the hitch':

...although the report is accurate, anyone who reads only that will receive an utterly wrong impression of the book...The report is didactic, pure and simply didactic: consequently the reader will receive the impression that the pamphlet is also didactic. As I see it, this is the most mistaken impression one can have of it. The contrast of form, the teasing resistance of the imaginary construction to the content, the inventive audacity (which even invents Christianity)...the indefatigable activity of irony, the parody of speculative thought in the entire plan, the satire in making efforts as if something *ganz Auszerordentliches und zwar Neues* [altogether extraordinary, that is, new] were to come of them, whereas what always emerges is old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity – of all this the reader finds no hint in the report.[16]

The import of this self-commentary seems quite unambiguous: *Philosophical Fragments* is a work that, according to its author, simply cannot be properly understood as a philosophical treatise since, *as a whole*, it embodies a 'parody of speculative thought'. And, *pace* Evans, Climacus insists that, far from the form of this work harmoniously *reflecting* its contents, it involves some kind of 'teasing resistance' between its form and its contents.[17] But if the 'indefatigable activity of irony' flatly precludes the abstraction of transferable principles, doctrines, theories, view-points, arguments and so forth, then it is quite difficult to see how a content-based approach to this text, at least, can so much as get off the ground.[18] For how can one show that an ironic form is essentially justified by the content of a work that is shot through with irony from start to finish?

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[15] Roger Poole's dismissal of Evans' work as exemplifying a 'blunt reading' of Kierkegaard is therefore too blunt. See Poole (1998), p. 61.

[16] *CUP*, fn. p. 276.

[17] Compare Climacus' remark that *Repetition* involves a 'confusing contrastive form' (*CUP*, p. 263).

[18] It might be thought that since Climacus is referring here to *Fragments*, his claims are not to be extended to other works. That *Postscript*, for one, also involves a 'parody of speculative thought', however, is suggested by its subtitle alone, *'A Mimetic-Pathetic-Dialectic Composition'*. The most plausible candidate

2. Swiftian Parodies

It is considerations of this kind that have led some commentators to abandon the orthodox approach altogether. Again, form-based approaches are diverse, but share the *descrimen* of denying that the content of Kierkegaard's works can be extracted from their form. Some exponents of the strategy bite the bullet and deny that these works have a meaningful content at all. The exegete is therefore left to focus exclusively on their rhetorical or aesthetic features. Others offer 'deconstructive' readings, in which the alleged absence of univocal meanings in these texts is taken to licence a kind of hermeneutic free-play.[19] Still others restrict their heuristic endeavours to proving that the deepest meanings of these texts are untranslatable – that, in a far stricter sense than usual, no secondary text can substitute for one's engagement with the primary material.[20]

In a series of seminal articles, James Conant develops a particularly lucid form-based approach.[21] Noting that '[i]n our contemporary Anglo-American philosophical culture, the prevailing practice of textual interpretation...is often simply to cut through all the rhetorical dross and to try and extract the central chain of reasoning', Conant's point of departure is the conviction that this practice leads to 'disastrous misunderstandings' in the case of an author such as Kierkegaard.[22]

Conant is tireless in flagging up these disasters – especially in connection with the commonly affirmed parallels between Kierkegaard and the early Wittgenstein, which he sees as resting on the mistaken notion that these authors share a 'mystical doctrine of ineffable truth' or 'significant nonsense'. Rather, Conant argues, what we can justly ascribe to Kierkegaard (and what, if anything, Wittgenstein inherited from his

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for what this work 'mimics' is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* – albeit in inverted form. For an exploration of this possibility see McDonald (1997).

[19] See, e.g., Norris (1983) esp. pp. 85-106; Bigelow (1987); Agacinski (1988); Agacinski (1998); Derrida (1998).

[20] This sometimes seems to be Michael Weston's position. See Weston (1994), esp. Ch. 8.

[21] See Conant (1989a); Conant (1993); Conant (1995). For developments and extensions of Conant's approach see Mulhall (1994); Mulhall (1999); Mulhall (2001); Weston (1999).

[22] Conant (1993), p. 195. Compare Kierkegaard's own commentary: 'The reason why *Concluding Postscript* is made to appear comical is precisely that it is serious – and people think they can better the cause by taking separate theses and translating them into pieces of dogma, the whole thing no doubt ending in a new confusion where I myself am treated as a cause, everything being translated into the objective, so that what is new is that here we have a new doctrine, and not that here we have personality' (*JP* X 2 A 130 1849 (Hannay), p. 436).

sympathetic reading of these texts) is 'a certain conception of philosophical *authorship*'.[23] That is, Conant urges an interpretation according to which the form of Kierkegaard's self-styled 'authorship' is treated as conceptually prior to its content.

In practice, this approach appears to turn largely on the Principle of Charity.[24] Since, on Conant's view, any attempt to extract the doctrinal core from a work such as *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* results in highly implausible doctrines (such as that of ineffable truth), we ought to search for a more charitable interpretation. This of course lays down the gauntlet to practitioners of the content-based approach to defend the substance of Kierkegaard's works against particular criticisms.[25] But Conant also makes much of passages in which Kierkegaard or his pseudonymous authors comment on the form of their own writings, in which, so to speak, form becomes content. Of these, perhaps the most striking is the 'revocation' that occurs in an appendix to *Postscript* entitled 'An Understanding with the Reader'. Having declared that 'I have no opinion, wish to have none and am satisfied and pleased with that', Climacus writes,

> Just as in Catholic books, especially from former times, one finds a note at the back of the book that notifies that everything is to be understood in accordance with the teaching of the holy universal mother Church, so also what I write contains the notice that everything is to be understood in such a way that it is to be revoked, that the book has not only an end but a revocation to boot.[26]

Climacus goes on to imagine and eulogise that 'most pleasant of readers' who can understand that 'to write a book and to revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it'.[27] So just what is the 'certain conception of philosophical authorship' that Conant takes to be the residual import of such self-subverting gestures?

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[23] Conant (1993), p. 196.

[24] For a defence of this Davidsonian principle in the context of the interpretation of philosophical texts see, e.g., Carruthers (1989), Ch. 1. Conant does not explicitly appeal to this principle, however. (In fact, he claims that a bloody-minded commitment to charitable interpretation is what blinds many commentators to the role of parody (see Conant (1993), p. 215)).

[25] Thus, for example, John Lippitt has defended Climacus' use of the distinction between plain nonsense and merely apparent nonsense by appeal to the notion of 'stages' of religious development (see Lippitt and Hutto (1998)), and Anthony Rudd has defended Climacus' conception of 'passionate rationality' against ironic interpretations (see Rudd (2000)).

[26] *CUP*, p. 619.

[27] Ibid., p. 621.

According to one formulation, what is undertaken in the *Postscript* is 'the twofold project' of exposing the incoherence or illusory nature of certain philosophical postures and 'diagnosing the source of [their] attraction'.[28] Now, whatever specifics this project turns out to involve, it is evident from this bare schema alone that there is a sense in which it is entirely *negative*. It displaces without replacing; it dissolves without solving; it offers diagnoses without remedies.[29] Indeed, Conant is relentless in his insistence that, appearances to the contrary, the 'literary undertaking' of the *Postscript* has nothing whatsoever to offer by way of positive doctrines, opinions, theories, solutions.

Conant readily admits that this claim is indeed contrary to appearances. For the *Postscript* can be seen to construct 'an elaborate theory concerning the subjective and passionate character of religious faith and the essentially disinterested nature of objective reasoning' – a theory that climaxes in Climacus' claim that the very unintelligibility of Christianity *qua* 'Absolute Paradox' is precisely suited to maximise religious passion.[30] Moreover, given Climacus' 'thesis' (the label is his) that truth is subjectivity, what we seem to be offered, *via* this theory, is a peculiar kind of apologetic for Christianity.[31]

With an eye, however, to the incessant activity of irony and Climacus' self-portrait as a 'humourist', Conant refuses to take all this at face value. Instead, and following Henry Allison, he proposes that we view the central argument of *Postscript* as 'an elaborate *reductio ad absurdum* of the philosophical project of clarifying and propounding what it is to be a Christian'.[32] Armed with an independent theory of the conditions of sense and nonsense, Conant proceeds to argue that strictly speaking, large

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[28] Conant (1993), p. 196.

[29] Compare Kierkegaard's description of the ironic stance embodied by Socrates as distinctively negative (e.g. *CA*, p. 12). Combined with numerous passages in which he expressed his kinship with Socrates (e.g., *JP* 46 VII I A 186 (Hannay), pp. 237-8; 50 X 3 A 315 (ibid.), pp. 503-4), this observation could be seen to support Conant's reading. However, several of Conant's critics have emphasised that Climacus is not an 'ironist' but a 'humourist', and that humour is not entirely negative for Kierkegaard. (See Cain (1990); Lippitt (1997); Lippitt (1999); Lippitt (2000a), esp. Ch. 4; Lippitt (2000b); Vipperman (1999)). The model I propose below fits naturally with an interpretation of *Postscript* as distinctively *humourous*.

[30] Conant (1993), p. 210. I wrote 'climaxes' because Conant makes great play of the ladder metaphor. See, e.g., Conant (1995), p. 291 and *passim*; Conant (1989b).

[31] Indeed, the *Postscript* is often mined for an alternative kind of Christian apologetic to that provided by the Thomistic tradition. See, e.g., Evans (1982); Evans (1994); Hamilton (1998).

[32] Conant (1993) p. 207. See Allison (1967). For another attempt to show that *Postscript* is an elaborate joke, see Pyper (1997).

swathes of the *Postscript* are sheer nonsense – rhetoric with an intended psychological impact, to be sure, but lacking any 'cognitive content' whatsoever.[33]

This, it is argued, is why the book 'not only has an end but a revocation to boot': having climbed with Climacus to the dizzy heights of Absolute Paradox, we are let in on the conceit and instructed to 'throw the ladder away'. According to Conant, the rhetorical *telos* of this ironic project is the dispelling of illusions – the illusions of the philosophers when they purport to address existential issues, the illusions of the denizens of Christendom when they lay claim to a religious form of life.[34] In line with Wilde's dictum that the best way to resist a temptation is to succumb to it, we are encouraged to indulge our attraction to certain forms of illusion in such a way that we come to see them as illusory. In short, *Postscript* turns out to involve a parody of Swiftian proportions.

3. Self-Subverting Readings

Conant's penetrating, if provocative, development of this reading raises all manner of textual and substantive issues. But a general misgiving is as follows. To take seriously the proposal that a text is meaningless is surely to deny oneself any appeal to the 'content' of that text whatsoever. But then it is obscure how Conant can *justify* his claim, for example, to find a 'twofold project' of diagnosing and dispelling illusions in *Postscript*. (It is surely a minimal requirement of the therapeutic value of a diagnosis that it is meaningful.) For Conant's findings, it might be argued, *depend* on his having assimilated the ideas that support Climacus' characterisation of certain positions as illusory – his highly theorised distinctions, e.g., between existential problems and philosophical solutions, indirect and direct communication, concrete and abstract

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[33]This 'independent theory' is based on a reading of Wittgenstein developed most fully by Cora Diamond. (See Diamond (1991); and Diamond (2000)). According to this view, the concept *nonsense* does not permit of degrees and arises (not by one's positively combining incompatible categories but) just in the absence of a (Fregean) sense. On these issues see also Conant (1989b); Conant (2000); Moore (1997); Reid (1998); McGinn (1999). Nothing I shall say here depends on the truth or otherwise of this thesis.

[34] Conant's evidence for this characterisation of the rhetorical teleology of Kierkegaard's work is largely drawn from Kierkegaard's *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. Conant cites Kierkegaard's remark, for example, that 'a direct attack only strengthens a person in his illusion' (Conant (1995), p. 273).

thinking, Christian Atonement and Hegelian mediation.[35] Surely the rhetorical punch of the *Postscript* derives, partly, on the plausibility of the arguments therein to the effect that speculative philosophy cannot accommodate the existential significance of Christianity. If so, it seems Conant is engaged in the problematic business of arguing on the basis of the particular contents of a text that it has, on the whole, no content.

It is not hard to see that this danger of self-stultification, of cutting the exegetical ground from under one's feet, inheres in form-based approaches. For we are surely right to demand of a reading of a particular text that it stands in a discursive relation to that text – or else there is nothing to distinguish responsible from irresponsible readings.[36] To be sure, a sensitive response will appeal to *more* than the discursive content of a text such as *Postscript*. But the upshot of Conant's refusal to 'chicken out' of attention to formal structures seems to be that he *ought* to do no more than confess what psychological impact some cleverly disguised nonsense happens to have had on him.[37]

Three lines of defence are suggested by Conant's work. Each of these effectively qualify the claim that the *Postscript* is devoid of content, and might therefore be seen to establish a discursive basis for Conant's reading. Firstly, he distinguishes between 'grammatical truths' and 'philosophical doctrines'. As an example of the former, he cites Climacus' remark that 'an approximation is essentially incommensurable' with the 'infinite personal interest' that characterises religious faith. Insofar as this remark merely calls attention to a certain feature of the life of faith – roughly, that having faith is altogether different from forming tentative beliefs on the basis of evidence – Conant

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[35] More orthodox readers of Kierkegaard are only beginning to mount a reposte to the challenge posed by Conant's work. Alastair Hannay, for one, gives short shrift to commentators who 'read *Postscript* against its own text, a project which may excite today but which assumes quite arbitrarily that the counter-currents are there' (Hannay (2000), p. 3). This is surely unfair to Conant, who does in fact go some way to expose the counter-currents. But the issue is how he can *demonstrate* that his approach is indeed grounded in the texts given his apparent commitment to their lack of significant content.

[36] This is true even of parodies such as Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, which uses language perfectly meaningfully, but in order to expose certain positions as absurd or meaningless. Of course to understand such a parody one has to go *beyond* what is given in the text – but a minimal condition of this is that one understands what the text literally means. According to Conant, however, Kierkegaard's texts literally mean nothing and only seem to mean something. For more on these issues, see below.

[37] In practice, Conant offers far more than this. The point is that his much-advertised commitment to the priority of form makes it (as I shall argue, unnecessarily) difficult to account for the important insights afforded by his own interpretative practice.

seems to approve.[38] As mere 'reminders' of what we mean by the concept of faith, Climacus' distinctions are meaningful and helpful. Apparently, however, it is the way these conceptual truths get transformed into 'theses' that gives the game away:

> It becomes clear that Climacus' remark about the "essential incommensurability" of faith and objective reasoning will be invoked as a thesis, contesting the philosophers' 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...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 to negate a piece of nonsense results in another piece of nonsense.[39]

Now it is very natural to treat Climacus' writings as comprising claims about the relations between concepts (I shall consider his treatment of the concept of faith in the Epilogue). But it is obscure what mistake is involved in 'insisting' on a conceptual truth.[40] Surely, if 'the philosophers' need reminding what it means to have faith, Climacus is right to insist upon the point. And it is one thing to insist upon a conceptual truth in the face of some thesis that embodies a failure to acknowledge it, quite another to assert an antithesis.

Suppose, for example, some philosopher asserted that faith in Christ is unjustified since there is insufficient evidence for his resurrection. To insist that, as formulated, this thesis is misguided because it simply assimilates the very different concepts of faith and evidence-based belief is not thereby to offer a *defence* of faith in Christ. And, to my knowledge, nowhere in the *Postscript* or anywhere else does Climacus mount any such defence. On the contrary, he prominently and consistently eschews any such substantive project, purporting merely to clarify the distinctive roles of ethical and religious concepts.[41]

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[38] Note that this is already in tension with Conant's official position that the *Postscript* involves a parody of any attempt to clarify what it means to have faith.

[39] Conant (1993), p. 210.

[40] Conant sometimes suggests that the mistake involves treating that which is merely 'truistic' as though it were an epistemological 'discovery' (see, e.g., idem). Even if this is a sustainable distinction, it is not at all clear in what sense Climacus is supposed to flout it. (On the contrary, he seems very keen not to represent his own contributions as substantive discoveries.) Even less clear is in what sense merely flouting this distinction is a sufficient condition of speaking nonsense.

[41] See, for just one example, the 'Moral' of *Fragments*, in which the author says that whether the conceptual possibility he has defined against 'the Socratic' is *true* is 'an altogether different question, one that cannot

If Conant's point is simply that Climacus sometimes attaches the label 'theses' to his conclusions, these are hardly grounds for suspicion. For there is nothing obviously incoherent about formulating a grammatical truth as a thesis. Indeed, Climacus' claim that faith is not a kind of belief surely is a kind of thesis about the distinctive role of the concept, *faith*. At any rate, it is utterly obscure how simply *stating* the point in this way is sufficient to transform a helpful distinction into a piece of nonsense. At a glance, then, the distinction between conceptual truths and doctrines fails to provide a clear or plausible criterion for distinguishing between serious and ironic parts of the text.[42]

Secondly, Conant distinguishes between what he calls the 'frame' and the 'body' of a text.[43] Accordingly, it is in the frame of the *Postscript* that we receive instructions for how to read the main body of the work. So, for example, it is in an *appendix* that Climacus finally revokes the book – and we must take this gesture seriously if we are to understand the ironic project in which he has been engaged for the preceding six hundred or so pages. This distinction thus allows Conant to claim both that the bulk of the *Postscript* is nonsense, and that its author meaningfully signals this fact.

Now a clear frame-body distinction may apply to some books. But Kierkegaard's works are hardly neat examples. In *Postscript*, for instance, we have a 'Preface'; an 'Introduction'; a 'Part One' that seems to serve as a kind of prologue for the sixteen-times as long 'Part Two'; an 'appendix' to Chapter II of Section II of Part Two in which we receive 'a Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature'; a 'Division 1' of Chapter IV ('for orientation in the plan of Fragments'); an 'Appendix to B' at the end of Division 2; a 'Conclusion' in Chapter V followed by a further two subsections; an 'Appendix' entitled 'An Understanding with the Reader'; and an 'Appendix' entitled 'A first and Last Explanation'.[44] And the book as a whole is readily seen to provide a frame to the work to which it is a postscript. This surely casts immediate doubt on whether the

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be decided in the same breath...' (following *PF*, unpaginated). That *Fragments* is a hypothetical exercise, an experiment with concepts, is prominent throughout.

[42] I am not denying that there is any plausible distinction to be made between grammatical truths and doctrines, only that this distinction cannot be made to do the work Conant wants it to. As I have mentioned, it is very plausible to attribute to Climacus a distinction between an investigation of religious concepts and a defence of religious doctrines.

[43] See for example, Conant (1995), p. 285.

[44] On the formal structure of the *Postscript*, see Burgess (1997).

frame-body distinction can provide a clear criterion for distinguishing between serious and ironic parts of this text. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the impression that its author went to considerable lengths to ensure no such distinction could be imposed.[45]

Thirdly, Conant brings external evidence from the corpus to bear. He cites, for example, Kierkegaard's remark in his *Journals* that '[h]ypocrisy is quite as inseparable from being human as sliminess is from being a fish' and invites us to compare this with Climacus' sense of philosophy as 'somehow reinforcing a particular form of blindness as to the character of one's own life'.[46] Putting two and two together, it starts to look plausible that Kierkegaard intended Climacus himself to exemplify the very forms of self-blindness he so sharply spies out in others. By appealing to Kierkegaard's stated views in his *Journals* and *Papers* and such self-commentaries as *The Point of View*, Conant thus hopes to anchor his claim that the *Postscript* is intended ironically.

There are issues here about the 'innocence' of this external evidence, i.e. the extent to which it can itself be taken seriously. For several critics have argued that Kierkegaard is never so unreliable as when he engages in self-commentary, and urge instead a wholesale adoption of what Sylvia Walsh has called 'the hermeneutic of suspicion'.[47] There are also worries about appealing to Kierkegaard's 'authorial intentions', given that making such items bear the weight of an interpretation is often said to involve a kind of fallacy (a view Kierkegaard himself seems to have endorsed).[48] But a less involved worry is simply that the external evidence cuts both ways.[49] In many places in his *Journals and Papers*, for example, Kierkegaard appears to take quite seriously the very claims Conant views as most ironic.[50] (A parallel situation would arise in relation to *A Modest Proposal* if Swift had also written letters in which he advocates cannibalism.)

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[45] For a discussion of *Postscript* as a work in which the 'frame' takes center-stage, see Pyper (1997).

[46] Conant (1993), p. 204.

[47] Walsh (1994a), p. 11. Walsh cites and criticises the work of Henning Fenger and Joakim Garff as representative of this approach. (See Fenger (1980); Garff (1998)). For further criticism, see Emmanuel (1992). From the perspective of one who does not adopt the hermeneutic of suspicion, the worry is that Conant deprives himself of the resources to guard against it.

[48] This is, of course, the so-called 'intentional fallacy'. John Lippitt briefly raises this worry, and cites Kierkegaard's claim that he has no privileged access to the meaning of the pseudonymous work 'except as a reader' (*CUP*, p. 626). See Lippitt (2000a), pp. 67-8.

[49] See Evans (1983), pp. 237-240.

[50] For examples, see Lippitt (2000a), pp. 56-9.

In sum, there are good *prima facie* grounds for thinking that Conant has not supplied a workable criterion for distinguishing between what we should, and what we should not take seriously in the *Postscript*. The worry therefore is that he cannot make out his reading to be constrained by the text it seeks to illuminate; that he cannot account for the conditions under which his work can itself be shown to be felicitous.[51]

3. Dialectical Knots

That Kierkegaard's works resist both content- and form-based approaches is hardly surprising, in the light of certain passages within the corpus. Consider, for instance, how Climacus first explicitly formulates his conception of an indirect mode of communication. This, he says, not only conveys some particular content but is also designed with a view to how the content will be received. The contrast is with a purely 'objective' form of communication that is 'aware only of itself and is therefore no communication, at least no artistic communication'.[52] Climacus appends the following note to this claim that a merely objective communication – a use of words that pays scant attention to how they will be read or heard – is really no communication at all:

This is how it always goes with the negative; wherever it is unconsciously present, it transmutes the positive into the negative. In this case, it transmutes communication into an illusion, because no thought is given to the negative in the communication, but the communication is thought of purely and simply as positive. In the deception of double-reflection, consideration is given also to the negativity of the communication, and therefore this communication that seems to be nothing in comparison with that other mode of communication, is indeed communication.[53]

In other words: a 'positive' communication – e.g. a didactic treatise that posits truths for their own sake – is no *communication* at all. For, and here is Climacus' key assumption, a communication is a relation between *subjects*.[54] On his account, a text (for example) communicates only to the extent that a reader is appropriately engaged, and a would-be

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[51] That Conant himself feels the force of the kind of worry I am pressing is amply demonstrated by his intensely self-conscious paper, *Must We Show What We Cannot Say* (Conant, (1989)). In this paper, Conant writes the 'obituary' to the paper he intended to write but found he could not.

[52] *CUP*. p. 75-6.

[53] Ibid., fn. p. 76.

[54] That Kierkegaard shares this assumption is suggested by his characteristic dedications to 'my reader'.

author must therefore ensure that his text is designed in such a way as to engage his readers. (Whilst insisting that a propositional, doctrinal form is not appropriate to the communication of ethical or religious truths, Climacus is fully aware that in cases where merely intellectual engagement is appropriate, such a form can fulfil the requirement that a text engages its readers.[55]) But Climacus is careful to point out that this has the implication that a text that *seems* to be entirely negative – one that humorously revokes itself, for example – may well be of the essence of a positive communication.[56]

At the very least this should make us wary of readings of Climacus' own texts in which the conception of authorship they embody is viewed as entirely negative. A little later in the *Postscript*, we find that the ideal 'thinker' for Climacus is one who is 'just as negative as positive, has just as much of the comic as he has essentially of pathos'.[57] And he concludes his review of the review of *Fragments* quoted above as follows:

But the presence of irony does not necessarily mean that earnestness is excluded. Only assistant professors assume that. That is, while they otherwise do away with the disjunctive *aut* [or] and fear neither God nor the devil, since they mediate everything – they make an exception of irony; they are unable to mediate that.[58]

One thing is clear: for Climacus, there is a complex interplay between form and content (negativity and positivity, comedy and pathos, jest and earnestness, irony and

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[55] In the very next footnote, for instance, Climacus emphasises: 'It is always to be borne in mind that I am speaking of the religious...But wherever objective thinking is within its rights, direct communication is also in order, precisely because it is not supposed to deal with subjectivity' (*CUP*, fn. p. 76).

[56] Climacus is also keen to make related points in connection with certain other 'recent contributions to Danish literature'. For example, he says that whilst 'there is no didacticizing' in *Either / Or* 'this does not mean that there is no thought-content' (ibid., p. 254).

[57] Ibid., p. 80.

[58] Ibid., p. 277. It is perhaps significant that whilst Conant often cites the first part of the footnote, he invariably omits these concluding lines. Compare Kierkegaard's remarks on the same review in his *Journals*. Insisting that the review misses the irony. Kierkegaard is equally insistent on the 'seriousness' of the work and says that this means 'letting justice be done to Christianity' (*JP* 45 VI A 84 (Hannay), p. 190). Both Climacus and Kierkegaard seem keen to preclude the impression of an elaborate joke

transparency) in more profound forms of communication.[59] That Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus agrees is amply illustrated by the following:[60]

...it is indirect communication to place jest and earnestness together in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot – and then to be a nobody oneself. If anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself.[61]

This figure of a 'dialectical knot', arising from serious and non-serious threads being thoroughly intertwined, amounts to a diagnosis of the weakness of both content- and form-based approaches. In short, if the former are liable to render Kierkegaard's work implausibly positive, as comprising serious treatises, the latter are liable to render it implausibly negative, as comprising self-subverting parodies. One moral is: judge for yourselves! Yet in so far as we wish to write in anything like an academic register about Kierkegaard's texts, it seems that what we need is a model that can better handle the knotty complexities of their form-content relations.[62]

3. Caricatures

Consider the art of caricature. A good caricature is both significant – it manifests and illuminates important features of its subject – and yet it is also humorous – it presents these features *as* exaggerated, distorted, comic, absurd in a way which may or may not have some rhetorical purpose (such as satire). At first blush, the art of caricature is to distort the subject enough to achieve a comic effect but not so much as to render the

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[59] Cf. *CUP*, p. 87: 'The pathos that is not safeguarded by the comic is an illusion; the comic that is not safeguarded by pathos is immaturity'. And p. 525: 'it is just as questionable, precisely just as questionable, to be pathos-filled and earnest in the wrong place as it is to laugh in the wrong place.' The clear implication of such passages, in so far as they have an application for Climacus' own authorship, is that it would just as mistaken to take his works as elaborate jokes as it would be to take them as earnest treatises.

[60] Quidam, a character in *Stages on Life's Way*, seems to be another. He says that 'true earnestness is the unity of jest and earnestness' (*SLW*, p. 365) and that Socrates exemplifies this unity in the sense that 'his earnestness was concealed in jest' (ibid., p. 366). And compare Kierkegaard himself: 'I was of the opinion that the most difficult thing was to deal with the comic in fear and trembling, to maintain ethical and religious seriousness and at the same time to delight in jest' (*COR*, p. 178).

[61] *PC*, p. 133.

[62] Certain remarks in *Either / Or* seem germane here. Having combated an undue emphasis on the importance of subject-matter for making a good poem, for instance, Kierkegaard's aesthete goes on, 'There was a school of aesthetics which by one-sidedly stressing the importance of form can be accused of occasioning the opposite misunderstanding' (*EO*, (Hannay) p. 63-4).

content unrecognisable as a depiction of the subject – indeed, in such a way that salient features are revealed. The trick is to clarify by distorting, to jest in earnest.

A caricature thus sets up a fruitful tension between its form (how it depicts) and its content (that and what it depicts). As Climacus puts it:

Caricature is comic. By what means? By means of the contradiction between likeness and unlikeness. The caricature must resemble a person, indeed an actual specific person. If it resembles no one at all, it is not comic but a direct attempt at a meaningless fantasy.[63]

Most people who have thought much about caricatures are drawn to similarly paradoxical formulations. Stephanie Ross, for instance, writes that a caricature 'effects easy identification through false description'.[64] Or, to annex a formula Kierkegaard applied to myths, we might say that a caricature is subjunctive in the indicative mood: that is, it purports to significantly represent whilst drawing attention to itself as a misrepresentation.[65] Unlike realistic portraits, which are self-effacing in relation to what they depict, caricatures also make play of their status *as* pictures.

Now if there is one clear lesson of the problems attendant on reductions either to content or form, it is that the search for a single interpretative key such that might unlock the treasures of Kierkegaard's works is chimerical. There can be no reductive approach to these rich and varied texts. The following is therefore to be taken in the spirit of a 'research program', motivated primarily by the weaknesses of existing approaches. My suggestion is that the art of caricature does provide a helpful model for understanding some of the complexities of Kierkegaard's works, and in such a way as to avoid the Charybdis of reductions to content and the Scylla of reductions to form.

According to this proposal, one of the things we are offered in Kierkegaard's works are a series of 'literary caricatures' – of Christianity, of Hegel, of Christendom, of

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[63] *CUP*, fn. p. 517.

[64] Ross, (1974), p. 286. Compare also Robert Hopkins' discussion of a caricature of Tony Blair: '...if we are to see in the caricature Blair with an enormous mouth, it seems we must do two irreconcilable things. We must see Blair in it, so we must see it as resembling him in outline shape. But we must also see an enormous-mouthed thing in it, and to see it as resembling *that* in outline shape. Unfortunately these two things differ considerably in outline shape' (Hopkins, (1998), p. 96). It should be said that, as with the case of the quote from Ross, Hopkins is setting up a problem here rather than offering a considered view.

[65] Cf. *JP* 36 1 A 300 (Hannay), p. 58.

the Romantics, of Socrates, of Abraham and so on.[66] To the extent that these caricatures are successful, they bring into prominence important, contentful, significant features of their subjects. The repeated depiction of Christianity as 'the Paradox', for example, is not to be taken as nonsense, a mere joke. It is to be taken in earnest as integral to an attempt to clarify the difference between genuine and counterfeit appropriations of Christian concepts (to unmask 'the misunderstanding between speculative philosophy and Christianity').[67] Along the way, Kierkegaard's texts enunciate numerous claims – about such topics as faith, reason, God, thought, authorship, humour, subjectivity and so on – claims that whilst not directly attributable to Kierkegaard, can be discussed, criticised, developed. To this extent, Evans is right to reject the form-based approach.

There is a disanalogy with a Swiftian parody here. In such a work – where to take any of its 'proposals' seriously would be to miss the whole point – a particular perspective is more or less successfully expressed. A good parody of this kind would be one in which the author's view of what it parodies is expressed (rather than articulated) in a way that illuminates what it is like to be possessed of that view. But a minimal condition of finding such a parody illuminating in this way is that one rightly infers that it is a parody of such-and-such – where the conceit is that this information is not given in the text itself. Moreover, this inference is rather complex. It is not, for example, simply a matter of ascribing to the author the opposite views as those advanced in the text. As Wayne Booth describes the situation in relation to Swift's *A Modest Proposal*:

Nothing here can simply be reversed, once the irony is discovered. If the speaker's position is that he will save the children and the kingdom by butchering the children, Swift's position cannot be simply that 'we should *not* butcher them': nobody...had ever proposed that we should, and to write an essay attacking such a position would be absurd.[68]

In the case of a good caricature, on the other hand, one does not need to make any kind of *inference* to see that and what it parodies – the picture just *is* a parody of its subject. In

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[66] In at least one place, Kierkegaard explicitly characterises his writing in terms of caricatures. Of *Stages on Life's Way*, he says that '[t]he purpose of the five speakers 'In Vino Veritas', all of whom are *Caricaturen des Heiligsten*, is to throw essential yet false light on women' (*JP* 44 V A 110 (Hannay), p. 183-4). The allusion is to a book by Heinrich Steffens entitled *Carikaturen des Heiligsten* [Caricatures of the Most Holy] which Kierkegaard says he read with 'great enthusiasm' (cited in Hannay (2001), p. 163).

[67] For a reading of *Fragments* that emphasises the roles of caricature and 'acoustical illusions' as means of clarifying important aspects of Christianity see Walsh (1994b).

[68] Booth, (1974), p. 105. Cited in Lippitt (2000a), p. 170.

this sense, a caricature, unlike a Swiftian parody, stands in an immediate and direct relation to what it parodies.[69] To view Kierkegaard's works on this model is therefore to allow that they provide the conditions for their own interpretation – where this implies that it is not necessary either to make artificial distinctions between the serious and the non-serious parts or to indulge extra-textual speculations about Kierkegaard's authorial intentions. In other words, on this model, there is a good sense in which we *are* to take the texts at face value – for how else should one take caricatures?

On the other hand, however, Christianity-as-Paradox is no more to be taken as a sober theory than a mere joke – for it emphasises incongruency for rhetorical effect, and draws attention to itself as a distortion.[70] The 'thought-experiment' undertaken in *Fragments*, for example, is plausibly read as inverting the image of a (Plato-inspired) caricature of Socrates in a way that turns out also to be a caricature of Christianity. And this project may well *involve* a parody of any attempt to reduce Christianity to an intellectual system.[71] (Where the lesson is that Christianity calls for an existential, rather than a merely intellectual, reproduction– i. e. a reproduction in one's life.) Kierkegaard's presentation is, as he says, a *'corrective'* for an age in which Calvary has been relocated within the city walls, in which the crucified god has become an intellectual play-thing, in which the Passion is the peep-show of bloodless voyeurs.[72]

It remains true therefore that to view a Kierkegaardian caricature of Christianity as straightforward depiction – a theory, a doctrine – is 'the most mistaken impression one can have of it'. (To take a political cartoon for a realistic portrait would perhaps be more

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[69] Someone might object that, in the case of a caricature, one does have to do a kind of inferring: namely, by locating and reversing the exaggerated aspects in order to yield a faithful representation. But, this is a very dubious account of what is involved in making sense of a caricature. According to Ross, for example, 'there is no computation by which the exaggeration can be reversed to recover a subject's 'actual appearance' (Ross, (1974), p.186) – and, even if there were, it is highly implausible that this would be necessary for perceiving a caricature as of a given subject.

[70] Climacus, the humourist, is explicit that 'humour, when it uses Christian categories, is a false rendition of Christian truth, since humour is not essentially different from irony, but is essentially different from Christianity, and is essentially not different from Christianity otherwise than irony is' (CUP, p. 271).

[71] Compare here Freud's remark that '[i]t might be maintained that a case of hysteria is a caricature of a work of art, that an obsessional neurosis is a caricature of religion and that a paranoid delusion is a caricature of a philosophical system' (cited in A. Cohen (1982), p. 119).

[72] Under the head, 'My productivity regarded as a corrective to the establishment', Kierkegaard notes that 'the person who is to supply the 'corrective' must make a close and thorough study of the weak sides of the established – and then one-sidedly deploy the opposite' (JP 49 X I A 640 (Hannay), p. 408). To object that the 'corrective' is one-sided, he argues, is to miss the point. See Lønning (1981)

mistaken than to take it for a satirical fiction.) Rather, it is an education into thinking about Christianity in 'the mood that properly corresponds to its concept'.[73] (Consider here how a caricature differs from a mechanical distortion such as a fish-eye photograph – whereas the latter would affect every face in the same way, the former is purposefully distorted 'so as to give a new insight into, a new vision of, the face'.[74]) To this extent, Conant's work offers an invaluable corrective to content-based orthodoxies.

So whereas Evans' model of the philosophical treatise sits uneasily with the self-negating structures of Kierkegaard's texts, and Conant's model of the Swiftian parody uneasily accounts for their positive insights, the model of the literary caricature *prima facie* avoids these problems. On the one hand, such formal properties of the texts as the 'indefatigable activity of irony' and the 'parody of speculative thought' are properly acknowledged as precluding their interpretation as straightforward treatises. On the other hand, these features are not taken to entail their reduction to rhetoric.

Now it might be objected that since the form of a caricature is only accidentally related to its content – for the caricatured subject can always be depicted in other ways – this model remains vulnerable to criticisms of content-based approaches. At one level, this charge is quickly dismissed by observing the distinction between the content and the subject of a caricature. The content of a caricature of Winston Churchill, for example, is not Winston Churchill himself. Whilst Winston Churchill can be depicted in many ways, the content of a caricature of him is the particular instantiation of a particular form of depiction. Similarly, the fact that Hegel can be treated in all manner of ways other than that of the *Postscript* has no bearing whatsoever on the relationship between significant and rhetorical aspects of the critique of Hegel in that work.

Yet there may be a more serious worry here to the effect that the proposed model intensifies the puzzle of why Kierkegaard chose to use the literary forms he did (especially since, as he was acutely aware, the strategy is so open to misinterpretation[75]). For why, if Christianity can be treated more accurately, for example, did Kierkegaard

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[73] Cf. *C.I*, p. 14.

[74] Ross (1974), p. 290.

[75] Kierkegaard regularly complained of being misunderstood. In fact, '[p]eople understand me so little that they even fail to understand my complaints that they do not understand me' (*JP* 36 I A 123 (Hannay), p. 49).

persist in a perverse form of depiction? After all, 'caricature' often carries negative connotations – e.g. 'Kierkegaard attacked a mere caricature of Hegel, a straw man'. Why then did he not write straightforward philosophical or theological treatises? More particularly: if Kierkegaard's works do purport to say something significant as well as to dispel illusions, why do they not say it more prosaically? It still seems we owe a non-trivial explanation of why these works assume the form they do.

The model of the literary caricature can go some way to furnishing this account by reference to both rhetorical and substantive considerations. For one thing, this model does not commit us to hyphening off large portions of the texts as nonsense and therefore licences the appeal to passages in which, whether explicitly or implicitly, their rhetorical purpose is discursively explained and justified.[76]

So, for instance, if John Lippitt is right that throughout his writings Kierkegaard advances a theory of humour that emphasises subjective engagement – e.g. what it is to 'get' a joke – and if, as is very plausible, Kierkegaard's conception of authorship also emphasises subjective engagement, we can see how his own uses of humour are grounded in these conceptions. Such theoretical underpinnings, whilst rarely the main focus of the works, are perfectly explicit in the works (they are not, for example, neatly confined to footnotes or appendices or prefaces) and we need make no apologies for attributing them to Kierkegaard. Nonetheless, unlike content-based approaches, the proposed model also has a way of accounting *by reference to form* for why these underpinnings are explicit – why the works are, in Alastair Hannay's words, 'as much a disquisition on humour as a humorous disquisition'.[77] The reason is that it is of the nature of caricatures to draw attention to their humourous form.

Similarly, I shall (in Chapter Four) attribute to Kierkegaard a theory that affords a fundamental role to imagination in thinking and understanding – something that may go some way to accounting for the deployment of a form such as caricature. For consider how a caricature invites a certain way of imagining a face – and how variously, as Ross

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[76] Such appeals are not however unproblematic. For, as should become clear, the proposed model does demand a sorting out of the purely rhetorical aspects of Kierkegaardian caricatures from their significant contents and these from their theoretical underpinnings. There are no quick solutions here, and readings must be developed on a passage-by-passage basis.

[77] Hannay (2000), p. 11.

puts it, 'a person is perceived by his lover, by a photographer, by an orthodontist'.[78] (I am assuming that a literary, no less than a pictorial, caricature works on the imagination.) Or again: a central argument of Chapter Three is that Kierkegaard's sense of the role of spontaneity in judgement – his 'theory of the leap' – provides a discursive basis for very much the kind of mimetic parody Conant finds so prominent in the *Postscript* (what I shall call the *rhetorical reductio*). The proposed model, however, allows us to view such parodies as details within the broader canvasses of these texts – canvasses that comprise caricatures with significant content.

Since this latter notion of a parody that is a detail of a caricature is obscure, let me illustrate. Suppose you view a caricature of Tony Blair. The white teeth, broad grin, pleading eyes and bristling quiff effectively convey their subject. These correspond to the contentful aspects of a Kierkegaardian caricature – they are the features of the depiction that signify ('posit'), clarify, illuminate their subject (albeit in a comic form). But suppose further that Tony Blair is depicted as suspended in mid-air (as a satire of 'Blue Skies Thinking' perhaps) or as attempting to forge a 'Third Way' when it is clear only two routes are possible. Plainly, such features are not to be taken as describing some actual state of affairs, in which Tony Blair really does fly or forge unforgable paths. Rather, they are ironic attempts to expose Blairite jargon as empty, illusory, absurd – mere 'spin'. These correspond to the purely rhetorical aspects of a Kierkegaardian caricature. It is in this sense that Conant's sense of self-subverting parody can be accommodated by the proposed model, without implying a global reduction to form.[79]

Secondly, it is worth at least mooting the possibility of cases in which the subject captured by a caricature is best – even only – captured by a caricature. In such cases it would not hold true that a more balanced or prosaic representation is desirable or even possible. Here, the use of caricature is essentially grounded in the subject-matter at hand.

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[78] Ross (1974), p. 285.

[79] Admittedly, this implies that there are *aspects* of Kierkegaardian caricatures that do permit of an analogy with a Swiftian parody in that, in both cases, any competent reading goes beyond the literal meaning of a text and infers that and what it is sending up. To this extent, Conant is right to draw attention to the strictly *ironic* aspects of Kierkegaard's texts. Nonetheless, by viewing such uses of irony as 'details' of caricatures, rather than as a condition of the texts as a whole, we can resist the conclusion that these texts are entirely self-subverting. (Of course, Conant wants to resist that conclusion by taking the 'frame' seriously.)

For example: one sometimes meets particularly flamboyant persons. If one wanted to depict or describe such a person, it may well be that the *least* distorting approach would be to represent the person *as* larger-than-life. This seems to be a clear case in which a caricature is invited by a certain kind of subject. (Here we have an application for the concept of a distorted image that does not distort reality.)

Or suppose one wanted to write about Fascism *qua* ideology. Arguably, Fascism is such a heterogeneous rag-bag of inchoate ideas, theories, traditions, associations that any attempt to reconstruct this movement as a coherent intellectual system would result in serious distortions. In other words: Fascism is itself a caricature of an ideology – an ideology, to be sure, but a grotesque, over-simplified, distorted, incongruent form of ideology. If so, it may well be that a mode of writing that gave prominence to these features would be the least distorting approach – where this would involve resisting the temptation to depict Fascism as though it were a well-formed ideological position. (Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, for example, surely demands a very different mode of exposition than, say, Marx's *Das Capital*.) Arguably, it is the duty of the intellectual historian not to make Fascism appear more coherent than it is.[80]

Supposing, further, than one wanted to *criticise* Fascism, it may well be that the satirical possibilities of caricature would provide the most effective plan of attack, since any critique that assumes Fascism to be a serious intellectual proposal might be seen to have already granted too much.

It is at least coherent, then, that a literary caricature is invited or even required by certain topics. Here it is not just that a non-prosaic form stands in a non-arbitrary relation to certain theories or doctrines that can be stated prosaically (as in Evans' reading of Kierkegaard) but that a perspicuous presentation of certain subjects requires that form. Similarly, it may well be that Climacus' humorous depiction of Christianity-as-Paradox is essentially grounded in the content of Christianity (in the larger-than-life person of

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[80] Of course, the historian may simply *assert* that Fascism is less coherent than (say) socialism or conservatism. But the issue is how the particular form of this incoherence is to be manifested. (And here the intellectual historian may be confronted by the fact that nonsense has, as it were, no *gist*.)

Christ), rather than solely a ploy for dispelling illusions.[81] Paradoxically, it may well be that 'the message of the cross' is distorted unless it is presented as 'foolishness to the Greeks and an offence to the Jews'.[82] After all, and despite the history of Christian art, the image of a crucified god is no oil painting.[83]

On the proposed model, a central interpretative task is therefore to explore in what sense Christianity-as-Paradox 'rings true' of Christianity, and what rhetorical purpose it might serve. In the case of the 'problem of pseudonymity', the task is to detail how and why Kierkegaard used, e.g., a 'humourist' (= caricaturist?) to articulate the out-look of one on the very brink of a Christian perspective. Or to take a topic of more direct relevance to this thesis: the issue is whether Climacus' satirical treatment of Hegel is grounded in the kind of project in which Hegel engaged. The expository task is therefore to show what features of that project (if any), and what theoretical commitments, justify the claim that 'Hegel and Hegelianism are a venture in the comic'.[84] (This is the topic of Chapter Two.) Or again, the task is to show in what sense de Silentio's depiction of Abraham in terms of a 'teleological suspension of the ethical' illuminates, and in what sense it manipulates, the Genesis narrative.[85]

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[81] In the course of a Conant-inspired reading of *Fragments*, Stephen Mulhall appears to concede as much. In order to register this concession, Mulhall shifts from his typical characterisation of Climacus' project in terms of a 'blasphemous parody' to one in terms of caricature:

After all, a caricature is not an entirely inaccurate portrait of someone; a good caricature exaggerates the true features of its subject, and may even give a clearer picture of it than a more faithful representation can convey.

We must therefore ask how Climacus' intellectualized caricature of the god might nevertheless indirectly convey the true existential challenge embodied in Christian vision and terminology – might contain at least an echo of the voice of the god as it is reflected by the offended understanding. (Mulhall (2001), p. 346.)

[82] Cf. I Corinthians 1: 23-4. Francis Dauer claims that a picture 'cannot be seen as a straight portrait' when 'the portrayed actualizes the depictionally impossible' (Dauer (1993), p. 285). Dauer illustrates 'depictionally impossible' by reference to a side-portrait of a man – 'his face unhardened by the burdens of time, his eyes filled with the innocence and optimism of youth...' (ibid., p. 272). Dauer says that whilst we might readily imagine that, on the unrevealed side of the face, some ruffled hair touches the man's forehead, it is depictionally impossible that the unrevealed side has a large disfiguring boil. Much in Kierkegaard suggests that Christianity actualizes what we naturally find depictionally impossible.

[83] George Pattison has explored at length the Kierkegaardian theme of the inadequacies of art *vis-à-vis* Christianity. See, for example, Pattison (1999), esp. Ch. 6.

[84] *CUP* p. 34.

[85] Mulhall argues that, far from providing a decent justification of this idea, de Silentio ironically subverts it in the 'subtext' of *Fear and Trembling* (see Mulhall (2001), pp. 354-388). According to Mulhall, this subtext hints at a distinctively Christian – i.e. typological – interpretation of the Genesis narrative. I should like to argue that Mulhall overcooks the egg here. On the present model, we need not deny that de Silentio's ostensible argument captures something important about Abraham *qua* hero of faith in order to

It seems to me that, if the current polarisation of content- and form-based approaches is not to ossify, these tasks call for heuristic work beyond direct exegesis. What is needed is an independent understanding of the (possible and actual) targets of Kierkegaard's literary projects such that these can be explained, justified, criticised – that is, academics need an external vantage-point from which to 'poke around' in texts whose import is non-academic.[86] If Kierkegaard ultimately eludes 'the lecturers', his work can be (philosophically, theologically, historically) contextualised. If Johannes Climacus, for example, embodies an attempt to implode the philosophical tradition from within, the *rationale*, means and scope of this attack can be reconstructed, reapplied and critically examined.[87] (This might be called a 'target-based approach'.) Such, at any rate, is the kind of interpretative work to which this thesis might contribute.

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acknowledge that this is only part of the Christian story. (After all, the tradition of viewing Abraham as an exemplar of faith *as well as* the Father of Faith goes back to the New Testament – see Hebrews 11:11.)

[86] This is very much the strategy of Michael Weston's *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy* (Weston, 1994). This ambitious work is vulnerable to the criticism that the vantage-point Weston provides is unfocused – comprising, for example, the work of Plato, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Levinas, Derrida. I should like this thesis, however, to be seen as filling in some details of Weston's claim for Kierkegaard as a powerful critic of the third-person perspective endemic to the philosophical tradition.

[87] Much may hang on the slight distinction between self-subverting and self-imploding. Compare Kierkegaard's claim that 'every development first comes to end in its own parody', citing the pharisaical nature of Judaism at the time of Christ (*JP* 20 Nov. 36 1 A 285 (Hannay), p. 57). It seems fairly clear that the point here is that Judaism contained the seeds of its own destruction (a claim Kierkegaard explicitly applies to philosophy (cf. ibid. p. 40)). Conant comes close to acknowledging this sense of parody when he writes, in a footnote, that the *Postscript* merely 'culminates' in nonsense. (Conant (1993), fn. p. 223) But this is clearly inconsistent with his erstwhile claim that the *body* of this text comprises 'plain nonsense'.

CHAPTER
ONE   Rule-Following:
The Argument from Regress

> There is nothing so unthinkable as thought,
> unless it be the entire absence of thought.
> (Samuel Butler)

> ...reflection has no kind of primacy over the
> consciousness reflected-on. It is not reflection which
> reveals the consciousness reflected-on to itself. Quite
> the contrary, it is the non-reflective consciousness
> which renders reflection possible.
> (Jean-Paul Sartre)

The story is told of a Chairman who opened a meeting of the Society of Logicians with the question, "Before we put the motion: 'That the motion be now put', should we not first put the motion, 'That the motion: 'That the motion be now put' be now put'?" It seems that, insofar as the members had reason to assent to the first motion's being put, they also had reason to assent to the second. And so on, as they say, *ad infinitum*. Supposing that, as keen logicians, they wanted their meeting to begin, they might have called this a *vicious infinite regress*.

This chapter tells a similar story. In place of the unspecified original motion, is an Objectivist Theory of Judgement (OTJ). In place of the second-order motion, is a thesis advanced by the OTJ to the effect that rule-following essentially involve acts of reflection (Section 1). In place of the Chairman's proposal, is an argument to show that this thesis is similarly regressive, that it implies a Regress of Judgements (Section 2). And in place of the frustrated logicians, is an objection to the effect that this renders rule-following impossible (Section 3). The aim is to see just what this objection amounts to, whether it can be sustained, and where it leaves us in relation to the OTJ (Sections 4 and 5).

The morals to be drawn are broadly as follows. The problem implicit in the objection from regress is genuine and important; it is distinct from, and more fundamental than, certain regresses of justification and interpretation; it is a central but critically

neglected aspect of Wittgenstein's so-called rule-following considerations; and it is best characterised as a 'Paradox of Constrained Spontaneity'.

1. The Objectivist Theory of Judgement

It is plausible to distinguish between two senses of *thought*. I think that I have my dressing gown on as I write this. What makes this thought true is not my thinking it, but the fact that I do indeed have my dressing gown on. On the other hand, this thought is also rational, and I hope it will play a causal role in determining what I do before leaving the house. What is rational (in this sense) is my thinking it.[1] We can say that what I think is an 'object of thought' and that my thinking it is an 'act of judgement'.[2] And we can say that an act of thinking is *intentional* in so far as it is directed towards an object of thought (where the object may or may not be actual).[3] In these terms, it is the task of a theory of judgement (i) to provide a general account of the objects of thought; and (ii) to describe the relation between these and the acts of which they are intentional objects. What I shall call the Objectivist Theory of Judgement (OTJ) is a broad reconstruction of what, in the analytical tradition, is an orthodox set of responses to this challenge.[4]

The OTJ characterizes thought and judgement in terms of the following four features. The first pair are features of content (they apply to the objects of thought); the second pair are features of form (they describe the relations between objects of thought and between these and acts of judgement). Since I shall be concerned primarily with the latter two features, the following brief over-view may suffice here.

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[1] The point is not that ascriptions of rationality only apply to acts of thinking and not to objects of thought. Nor do I intend to say anything about the distinction between truth and rationality. These concepts are only mentioned by way of introducing the very basic distinction between acts and objects of thought.

[2] Plainly, some instances of my thinking, such as when I merely entertain a thought, are not accurately captured by the term 'act of judgement', but I shall be concerned here only with attitudes that judge the truth or rationality of thoughts.

[3] For a defence of the thesis that all ('episodic') thought is intentional in this sense, see Knowles (1981).

[4] The following is better considered as a general theoretical framework than a particular theory. My characterisation of the OTJ, however, owes much to the theory of judgement David Bell has attributed to Frege (see D. Bell (1979); (1987a)).

(i)   *Thoughts are representational*:

Thoughts represent possible states of affairs, in virtue of which they can be true or false and judged as such. Whilst offering widely divergent accounts of the representation relation, OTJ theorists agree that it is this feature that essentially distinguishes thoughts from other mental phenomena. Thus, for instance, Frege distinguishes between Ideas and Thoughts – where, crudely, the former are the stuff of 'mere' psychology ('creations of imagination, of sensations, of feelings and moods'[5]) and the latter are propositional contents ('something for which the question of truth or falsity can arise at all'[6]).

(ii)   *Thoughts are directly communicable*:

Since the identity-conditions of thoughts are, on the whole, non-indexical, two or more subjects can have one and the same thought. The thinker-independence of thoughts accounts, in turn, for the fact that they are directly communicable. As Michael Dummett puts it, '...I can convey to you exactly what I am thinking...I do more than tell you what my thought is like – I communicate to you that very thought'.[7] If this were not so, basic communication would not be possible, for people would not be able to converse about the same things.[8]

(iii)   *Thought can be reflexive*:

One of the things an act of thinking can be about is another thought. Thoughts are thus 'objective' in the precise sense that they can become objects of thought (a sense in which unicorns are objective); and 'reflexive' in the sense that they can be directed towards other thoughts. My thought that the mouse is broken, for example, can figure not only as the content of an initial act but also as the object of a subsequent act – that it was triggered by the need for an example, say. (Simply by registering it, one objectifies a thought in this way – an observation that lends *prima facie* support to theories that treat

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[5] Frege (1984), p. 360.

[6] Ibid., p. 355.

[7] Dummett (1978), pp. 116-7.

[8] Jonathan Cohen writes: 'When the doctor converses with another doctor about the pain, each has her own idea of the pain, but neither idea will be identical with the thought about the pain. It is in virtue of the latter, which they share, that they talk and think about the same thing' (Cohen (1998), p. 47).

reflexivity as the mark of consciousness.[9]) Moreover, in accordance with Kant's dictum that every object must be given to us in a particular way, thoughts that are the objects of other thoughts can be presented in different ways: instead of directly articulating it, I might refer to my thought about the mouse by a description such as, 'the thought I expressed two sentences ago'. Or I could give it the name 'T_1'.

Note the difference between trivial and significant reflexivity. An example of trivial reflexivity would be 'fighting a fight'. This is normally a mere cognate accusative rather than a genuine *relatum*. 'Fighting a fight' just is the activity of fighting – the object of fighting is not itself a fight but rather is the opponent being fought. (Conceivably, a pacifist might be said to fight a fight in a nontrivial sense – but this, I think, is not a genuine example of reflexivity (see Section 3 below).) According to the OTJ, the potential for significant reflexivity is an essential feature of thought. (Note that this is not to say that all acts of thinking are directed towards thoughts, but that it is distinctive of acts of thinking that they *can* be so directed.)

(iii)   *Thoughts are rule-governed*:

Thoughts have internal structures and bear logical relations to each other. If I think that the mouse is broken, for instance, I ought not to think that it is not broken. Some OTJ theorists argue that I could not do so if I wanted to: thus, according to Manley Thompson, 'when we accuse someone of illogical (and not just irrational) thought, what we mean is that the person's efforts at thought have completely failed'.[10] At any rate, we can do as well here with the weaker notion of logical constraints or rules: as David Bell puts it, 'thoughts are gregarious things, they come in trains, they get together to form arguments, they stand together in relations of compatibility, incompatibility, relevance and entailment'.[11] Notice that, on this definition, all thoughts are 'rule-governed' – both in the sense that the internal structure of any given thought is determined by rules, and in the sense that this structure determines its relation to other thoughts.

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[9] For such a theory see, e.g., Carruthers (1992).

[10] Thompson (1981), p. 471.

[11] D. Bell (1987b), p. 225.

Now it should be fairly clear why this is called an 'objectivist' theory. Thoughts represent reality (feature (i)); they are thinker-independent (feature (ii)); they can be intentional objects (feature (iii)); and they are governed by objective rules (feature (iv)). Whilst there is an obvious sense in which thoughts are also 'subjective' – after all, thoughts are had and judged by thinkers – the OTJ theorist will typically view this fact as of limited interest to philosophy, a matter for empirical psychology. The OTJ does, however, have something to say about the relation between subjective acts and objective thoughts. This may be introduced by considering the relationship between the four 'objective' features. The OTJ, as envisioned here, further advances the following three theses which describe the interdependence of (i)-(iv):

A: Mental acts are directly communicable only if they have representational content.

B: Mental acts have representational content only if they are rule-governed.

C: Mental acts are rule-governed only if they are reflected upon.

For present purposes, the briefest attempt to motivate Theses A and B may suffice: our focus shall be on Thesis C.[12] Consider a non-representational content such as my feeling of nausea. Now you may well have experienced a qualitatively indistinguishable feeling, but however directly I attempt to express my feeling of nausea – by exclaiming 'ugh!' perhaps – you will not have the same experience just in virtue of that utterance. The contrast is with my thought about the mouse, say, which I can communicate directly such that you think one and the same thought. Hence the claim that representationality is a *sine qua non* of that which is directly communicable (Thesis A).[13]

As for the claim that being rule-governed is distinctive of that which is representational, consider my perceptual awareness of the mouse on my desk.[14] On a traditional account, this awareness is immediate and direct.[15] It is not necessary that I

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[12] Nothing in the main argument of this chapter turns on the plausibility or otherwise of Theses A and B. These are introduced solely for the expository purpose of situating Thesis C.

[13] This might be taken to support the further claim that the identity conditions of feelings are essentially indexical – but there may be other ways of accounting for this difference between thoughts and feelings.

[14] Here, and in the following, 'is a necessary condition of', 'is an essential condition of' and 'is distinctive of' are used synonymously to describe the relation *X only if Y*. As I suggest below, however, there is a sense of essential conditions or distinctive marks that is not synonymous with necessary conditions.

[15] 'On a traditional account' because the very notion of immediate awareness has come under sustained attack in recent years. Donald Davidson, Wilfred Sellars, John McDowell and others object to 'scheme-

reflect on my experience in order to have it. And I cannot be wrong about it *qua* awareness. The contrast here is with my *judgement* that the mouse is on the desk: in order to represent ('re-present') my perceptual awareness so as to judge it I must select between possible representations (e.g. *the mouse is under the desk*); and in order to do that, I must have reflected on the relative merits of the representation I did in fact select. In short, I must think about a representation in order to judge it: an example of significant reflexivity. But such choices are surely reason-dependent, and choosing between representations would not be possible were they not logically constrained.[16]

Thesis C is thus implicit in the idea that performing judgements involves a prior process of rule-governed reflection on possible representations. (Note the primary status of C vis-a-vis A and B: together, these say that reflexivity is distinctive of rule-governed acts, which are in turn distinctive of representational content, which is in turn distinctive of that which is directly communicable.) Moreover, the explicit claim that mental acts are rule-governed only if they are reflected upon can itself seem very compelling, even truistic. The claim is simply that in order for a mental act to count as an act of rule-following it must be *based on* or brought into conformity with rules, and that one must reflect on one's acts in order so to regulate them.

This claim is compelling inasmuch as human thinkers follow rules not just in sense that that they *conform* to them but also in the sense that they are *guided* by them. Being guided by logical norms is surely an essential condition of what it means to think. But the notion of one's being guided by a rule certainly seems to involve the subjective matter of one's being, as it were, in a position to heed the guidance. Consider an analogy. According to a venerable philosophical tradition, moral action requires not only one's conforming to the rules of morality, but also one's acting on the basis of those rules. It is not good enough to do the right thing for the wrong reason. As David Bloor puts it:

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content dualism' and the so-called 'Myth of the Given' on the grounds that all content is conceptually mediated (see, e.g., Sellars (1956); Davidson (1984); McDowell (1994)). The point here is merely to set up a sharp contrast with judgement for the purposes of exposition and no suggestion that the OTJ is committed to any particular theory of perception is intended.

[16] Of course the word 'choice' here is not supposed to imply that acts of representing are under the direct control of the will. On the contrary, the point is that (according to the OTJ) the mind must select from different possible interpretations and that this process of selection is rule-governed.

Long before rigorists talked of the categorical imperative, irreverent street urchins would have been making a version of the same point. 'Get out!', orders the voice of authority: 'I was going anyway', comes the reply. This is not only impertinent, it is philosophically astute. If you are going anyway (i.e. going of your own volition and in accordance with your own purposes), then you are not going because of the order. An order to do X is only obeyed if X is done, and done only because of the order and with the intention of obeying it.[17]

Noting Wittgenstein's appeal to an analogy between following a rule and obeying an order (e.g. *Philosophical Investigations* §206), Bloor goes on to endorse a 'conscientiousness condition', according to which a rule is followed if and only if 'the actors bring about the conformity of their behaviour with the rule by intending to follow it. They must, as it were, have the rule before their mind as their guide and goal'.[18] That is, according to Bloor, rule-following essentially involves acts of reflection.

Similarly, Phillip Pettit argues that two plausible assumptions – that the rules that govern thought are normative or action-guiding and that these are capable of being followed by humans – generates the following requirement:

...not only should a rule be normative over an indefinite variety of applications, it should be determinable or identifiable by a finite subject independently of any particular application: the rule-follower should be in a position to identify the rule in such a manner that he can sensibly try to be faithful to it in application. If the rule were identified by reference in part to how the subject responded in a given case, then the subject could not see the rule as something to which he should try to be faithful in that case. He could not see it as a normative constraint for him to try to respect there. [19]

According to the OTJ, then, we cannot so much as make sense of the idea of one's following an action-guiding rule unless one has the capacity to determine and identify the rule in advance of one's 'trying to remain faithful' to it.[20]

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[17] Bloor (1997), pp. 43-4.

[18] Ibid., p. 44.

[19] Pettit (1990), p. 3. In this paper, Pettit develops an approach that aims both to satisfy this requirement and avoid the problem introduced below. Pettit is therefore not in general a good representative of the OTJ, which I am setting up as innocent of attention to that problem. Nonetheless the quoted passage does nicely articulate the motivation for the problematic thesis. Whether Pettit does satisfy his requirements is of course another matter.

[20] Compare also Alexander Miller's claim that being guided by rules is 'what distinguishes me from some machine that, by some cosmic accident, churns out tokens of 'red' in the presence (and only in the presence) of red things' (Miller (2000), p. 172); and Saul Kripke's claim that rules 'should tell me what to do in each new instance' (Kripke (1982), p. 24); and Tomoji Shogenji's claim that rule-following involves both conformity and 'subscription' to a rule (Shogenji (2000), p. 503).

There is an important caveat here. For it might be thought that the motivation for Thesis C depends on a version of internalism (and therefore implies the falsehood of externalism). Externalists typically reject the principle that my judgement *that p* is justified or rational if and only if I judge that my judgement *that p* is justified or rational. So perhaps an externalist would deny what Thesis C asserts, namely, that in order for a mental act to count as an act of rule-following it must be reflected upon by a thinker?

The externalist might deny this. But her theory of justification at least does not commit her to doing so. For it is entirely consistent with this epistemological doctrine that we do reflectively form beliefs in accordance with rules, and that such reflection is of the essence of rule-following. The externalist need only deny the relevance of this kind of reflection to the ascription of the epistemic status of justification or rationality to objects of belief; her claim is that it is possible to be justified by a rule that is not internally followed. But she need not – she should not – deny that a plausible theory of judgement must account for rule-*following* and that it must therefore articulate the conditions for acts of thinking, as well as objects of thought, being rule-governed. (All the same, it is worth noting that externalists do generally have problems in accounting for how *agents*, as opposed to beliefs, are justified or rational.[21])

But Thesis C provides an obvious response to precisely that demand – namely, that acts are rule-governed just in case they are regulated by other acts. On this well-motivated view, then, the fact that thoughts can be the objects of other thoughts plays an essential role in rule-following.

2. The Regress of Judgements

Hopefully, the foregoing is sufficient to indicate the elegance and plausibility of a broadly 'objectivist' theory of judgement. Yet there is a problem with Thesis C that threatens to undermine the whole edifice. Ostensibly, the worry is straightforward. According to Thesis C, if one is to perform a rule-governed judgement one must first take

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[21] Linda Zagzebski cites the example of Tolstoy's Oblonsky who 'adhered firmly to the views of the majority, as expressed by his paper, and changed them only when the majority changed theirs; or rather he did not change them – they changed imperceptibly of their own accord'. On the assumption that Oblonsky's liberal paper is a reliable source of truth, the externalist / reliabilist seems committed to the counter-intuitive view that Oblonsky is paradigmatically rational. See Zagzebski (1996), pp. 305-6.

that judgement as an object of thought. But then, by parity of reasoning, in order to take the rule-governed act as an object of thought one must first take the act-of-which-the-rule-governed-thought-is-its-object, as an object of thought and so on *ad infinitum*. If T(x) is the act of thinking about x and t is a rule-governed object, the regress is represented thus:

$$\ldots T(T(T(t)))\ldots T\ (T(t))\ldots T(t).$$

Notice first that this regress is distinct from two other kinds of regress, more often invoked in connection with rule-following. First, there is the Regress of Rules. This arises in the context of questions of the form, 'On *what basis* should such-and-such a rule be followed?' If the answer to such questions comes by way of a second-order rule for evaluating candidates for the first-order rule, or for stipulating its correct application, it looks as though we need a third-order rule, and so on. This regress has long constituted a defining problematic within epistemology and is intimately linked with the ubiquitous Regress of Justifications. (To see the link, witness Descartes' claim that whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true: this criterion is supposed to secure a foundation for knowledge but it raises the question on what grounds it is justified.)

Second, there is the Regress of Interpretations. This arises in the context of questions of the form, 'In virtue of what should such-and-such a rule be applied thus-and-so?' If the answer to this comes by way of an interpretation of the rule – as it seems it must – it looks as though we need an interpretation of the interpretation, and so on. The Regress of Interpretations is most often associated with the work of the later Wittgenstein and is perhaps most vividly introduced by his example of the awkward pupil who applies the rule '+2' up to 1000 but subsequently proceeds, '1004', '1008', '1012'... Wittgenstein asks: In virtue of what does this pupil go wrong?[22] In Section 3 below, I shall make some remarks about the relation between these regresses; and in Section 4, I shall bring certain of Wittgenstein's remarks to bear. For now, we can simply note that the present regress – call it the Regress of Judgements – arises in the context of questions of the form, 'What kind of subjectivity is implied by the concept of rule-following?'

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[22] Cf. *PI* §185.

The pressing question is just in what sense the Regress of Judgements is supposed to be vicious. The rich vein of infinite regress arguments in diverse philosophical contexts suggest the following three options:[23]

(a) *Medical Impossibilities*:

The basic idea here is that human subjects are finite – i.e. temporally or causally limited – and therefore cannot perform infinitely many or complex acts. In a paper on regresses of justified belief, for instance, John Williams claims that whilst 'it may be logically possible...to perform an infinite number of tasks in a finite time' this feat is not 'humanly' or 'psychologically' possible.[24] This is because 'the human mind is finite' and 'it is contingently true that there is a minimum time in which a man could consider a proposition'.[25] Williams is clearly appealing to what, in another context, Russell dubbed 'medical impossibilities' in showing what is vicious about a justificatory regress.

(b) *Explanatory Impossibilities*:

To explain X in terms of Y where Y demands the same explanation as X is to explain nothing. A theory that does this is 'circular' or 'question-begging'. Patterson Brown, for instance, has forcibly argued that this is the nub of cosmological arguments for the existence of God.[26] Brown notes that these arguments depend on two assumptions: the transitivity of certain causal relations and a 'quasi-legalistic' reading of 'cause'. This latter assumption is the sense of a cause as responsible for, as opposed to its being merely concomitant of, its effect. Then the argument is roughly that an adequate explanation of a given effect must refer to a cause for which the question of what is responsible for it does not arise – and the only cause which fits this bill is supposed to be God.

Whatever we make of the substance of this argument it is surely formally correct that, given that something demands a certain kind of explanation, it is question-begging to invoke something else which demands that very same kind of explanation.[27] To object to

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[23] The following is not intended as an exhaustive taxonomy of infinite regress arguments. For attempts to provide such a taxonomy, see Stanford (1984); Day (1987).

[24] J. Williams (1981), p. 85.

[25] Ibid., p. 86.

[26] See Brown, (1966)

an 'explanation' of this kind is also sometimes referred to as an objection from 'infinite postponement': as Henry Johnstone puts it, 'a series of postponements begins, or shortly becomes, a series of repetitions, and repetitions adumbrate nothing – they amount to no more than an inane stammering'.[28]

(c) Logical Impossibilities:

A third way to demonstrate that a given regress is vicious is to argue that infinite regresses are, ipso facto, logically absurd. To show that a theory implies an infinite regress is, on this account, to produce a reductio ad absurdum. Witness a famous argument of Ryle's:

> By the original argument, therefore, our intellectual planning process must inherit its title to shrewdness from yet another interior process of planning to plan, and this process could in turn be silly or shrewd. The regress is infinite, and this reduces to absurdity the theory that for an operation to be intelligent it must be steered by a prior intellectual operation.[29]

Unfortunately Ryle does not intimate just why the regress 'reduces to absurdity' the theory he is attacking.[30] But the thought is readily supplied in terms of the logical (rather than medical) impossibility – of finite beings completing an infinite process. Presumably, the absurdity lies in calling one and the same thing both finite and infinite.[31]

So which of these options supports an objection to the OTJ from the Regress of Judgements? Option (a) is far too weak. The mere observation that humans cannot, as a matter of fact, perform infinitely many tasks is of rather limited philosophical interest,

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[27] David Armstrong describes what makes a regress vicious in these terms, citing the analogy of a man without funds who writes cheques to cover his debts, ad infinitum. See Armstrong (1978) pp. 19-21.

[28] Johnstone (1996), p. 96. A related but different way of showing that a regress is vicious on explanatory grounds simply appeals to Occam's Razor. George Schlesinger, for example, claims that a regress of physical or metaphysical entities is vicious because we should '...avoid the ontological extravagance involved in admitting the chain of entities, for whose existence there is no independent evidence' (Schlesinger (1983), p. 221, cited in Day (1987), p. 156).

[29] Ryle (1949), p. 31-2.

[30] In fact, this passage is sometimes read in terms of infinite postponement rather than logical absurdity. See, for instance, M. Williams (1980), p. 213.

[31] There may, however, be other ways of cashing out the alleged logical impossibility here. J. P. Moreland, for instance, refers to the logical impossibility of traversing an actual infinite, illustrating this claim by inviting us to count down from infinity (i.e. $\aleph_0$) (see Moreland (2001), p. 25). Compare also Roderick Chisholm's claim that '[o]ne is confronted with a vicious infinite regress when one attempts a task of the following sort: Every step needed to begin the task requires a preliminary step' (Chisholm, (1996), p. 53.)

given that philosophers typically take their theories to stand independently of empirical research.[32] At any rate, this 'empirical' claim relies, as Williams admits, on 'the intuition that the human mind is finite'.[33] If this is reducible to the genuinely empirical claim that humans die, this leaves wide open whether humans can perform infinitely many acts within their lifetimes (not to mention whether there is life before or after death). On the other hand, if Williams' intuition is supposed to have a more deeply philosophical content, we have stopped dealing with medical impossibilities. In short, this is the question whether it is *logically* possible for finite beings to perform an infinite number of acts (i.e. a question that falls under option (c) above) – a possibility Williams admits.

Option (b) certainly looks more promising. Notice first, however, the putative distinction between a demand for understanding or analysis and a demand for explanation or genealogy.[34] It is plausible that an adequate *explanation* of any θ or the act of θ-ing, however otherwise construed, is not reducible to the correct analysis of the concept θ or the act of θ-ing. For example: I might be able to correctly supply criteria for headaches without being able to give an adequate explanation of how head-aches come about. Arguably, then, the OTJ theorist need make no pretensions to a full-blooded genealogy of rule-governed acts: Thesis C, for example, does not purport to *explain* rule-governed acts in terms of prior acts of reflection, but rather to analyze the concept of rule-following in terms of such acts. Yet we might in any case formulate (b) in terms of understanding rather than explanation so that the claim would be that the Regress of Judgements renders the performance of rule-governed acts unintelligible. In principle, the charge of infinite postponement would still hold.

Now of course the OTJ theorist may well point to objective features other than rule-governed acts in his analysis of those acts. He may, for example, require not only that such acts are governed by acts of reflection, but also that they satisfy certain truth- or assertability-conditions (i.e. features that accrue from the relations between objects of thought). But the problem is how the OTJ theorist is to make sense of the particular

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[32] Of course, the emergence of 'cognitive science' and 'evolutionary psychology' in recent years represents a brake with this tradition. Suffice it to say here that many philosophers continue to operate within the tradition that concepts, rather than empirical data, comprise the domain of philosophical research.

[33] J. Williams (1981), p. 85.

analysis embodied by Thesis C. One strategy might be to argue that truth- or assertability-conditions somehow stop the regress, in much the way that 'self-evident' or 'properly basic' beliefs are supposed to stop the justificatory regress in foundationalist epistemologies. But clearly the notion that there is some point in our thinking at which we directly intuit truth- or assertability-conditions would be tantamount to rejecting Thesis C – less a counter-objection than a capitulation.
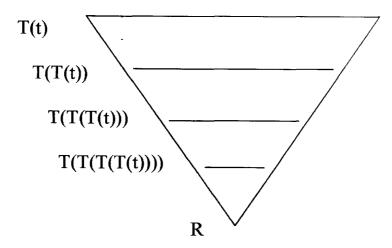
There is, however, a line of argument that purports to show that the OTJ can account for the performance of rule-governed acts in terms of objective features, even though the theory does indeed imply infinitely many acts. In other words, this argument aims to show that the regress is benign rather than vicious. Consider an argument of Peirce's. In a section on 'Whether there is any cognition not determined by a previous cognition', Peirce develops the following 'aid to thinking', to show that there is not:

Now let any horizontal line represent a cognition, and let the length of that line serve to measure (so to speak) the liveliness of consciousness in that cognition. A point, having no length, will on this principle represent an object quite out of consciousness. Let one horizontal line below another represent a cognition which determines the cognition represented by that other and which has the same object as the latter. Let the finite distance between two such lines represent that they are two different cognitions. With this aid to thinking, let us see whether "there must be a first". Suppose an inverted triangle to be gradually dipped into water. At any date or instant, the surface of the water makes a horizontal line across that triangle. This line represents a cognition. At a subsequent date, there is a sectional line so made, higher upon the triangle. This represents another cognition of the same object determined by the former, and having a livelier consciousness. The apex of the triangle represents the object external to the mind, which determines both these cognitions.[35]

Translating Peirce's terms into those with which we are dealing is fairly natural. Substitute talk of objects 'quite out of consciousness' and 'external to the mind' with thinker-independent rules, and represent one of these by 'R'; replace 'cognition' with 'act of judgement', represented by the schema 'T(x)'; and define relative 'liveliness of consciousness' in terms of the relative distance between an act of judgement and its primary object so that, e.g., a judgement of the form T(t) is more lively than one of the form T(T(t)). Then we get the following adaptation of Peirce's Triangle:

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[34] It is debatable whether this distinction applies to philosophical theories. For defence of the claim that it does see Blackburn (1984), esp. p. 210 and *passim*; Price (1988).

[35] Peirce (1958), p. 37.
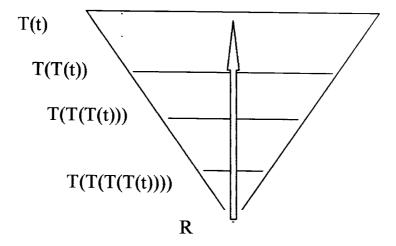
T(t)

T(T(t))

T(T(T(t)))

T(T(T(T(t))))

R

Peirce goes on to point out that the claim that there must be some cognition of an object which is not determined by any previous cognition is like saying that, when the triangle is dipped into water, there must be a line made by the surface of the water lower than which no other line can be made. But there is reason to think there is no such line:

> ...draw the line where you will, as many horizontal lines as you please can be assigned at finite distances below it and below one another. For any such section is at some point above the apex, otherwise it is not a line. Let this distance be a. Then there have been similar sections at the distances $\frac{1}{2} a$, $\frac{1}{4} a$, $\frac{1}{8} a$, $\frac{1}{16} a$, and so on as far as you please. So it is not true that there must be a first.[36]

Peirce asserts that the 'logical difficulties of this paradox...are identical with those of the Achilles'. (That is, I take it, the paradox associated with Achilles – viz. how is it possible to get form A to B, given that distances are infinitely divisible – is analogous to the problem Peirce takes himself to be treating – viz. how it is possible to successfully perform a judgement, given that this requires an infinite series of mental acts.) But he says that for the purposes of denying that 'there must be a first' he does not much care how we handle such puzzles: 'Deny motion if it seems proper to do so: only then deny the process of determination of one cognition by another... The point here insisted on is not this or that logical solution to the difficulty, but merely that cognition arises by a process of beginning, as any other change comes to pass'.[37] Adding an arrow to the triangle, to indicate the conditions on the possibility of T(t), yields this:

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[36] Ibid., p. 38.

[37] Idem.

So, on this picture, even though there is indeed an infinite series of conditions on the possibility of T(t) – represented in the diagram by the gap between R and T(T(T(T(t)))) – the condition that counts, for the purposes of understanding, is whatever R it is that governs t, the apex of the triangle. For just as Achilles can pass through infinitely many distances, the argument might go, so a rule can extend across infinitely many acts. Exactly how it is possible for finite beings to perform an infinite number of acts will depend on how we explain Achilles. One thing is clear: just as our account of how it is possible for Achilles to get from points A to B must ultimately assume a determinate point B, so our account of how a rule-governed act is possible must ultimately make reference to the rule itself ('R' in the diagram), *qua* thinker-independent relation between objects of thought. (Note that this is where the alleged regresses of Rules and Interpretations kick in: these can be taken to show that there is, as it were, no apex.)

The Peircian-style counter-objection to the charge that OTJ renders rule-following unintelligible because it implies a regress of judgements, then, is that the regress only renders rule-following as problematic as motion – and to the extent that there is a way of understanding motion even though distances are infinitely divisible, a similar understanding is available to the OTJ theorist.

Now one may well object here that Zeno's paradoxes do seriously undermine those (atomistic) theories that support the claim that space is infinitely divisible and that therefore conceive motion as an infinite process. After all, Zeno is usually held to have devised the paradoxes precisely in order to show that we ought to reject such theories. And Peirce's gesture towards a 'process of beginning' surely requires further explication. But this is not the place to discuss possible solutions to the paradoxes of motion. So, for

the sake of argument, I shall simply grant the counter-objection and assume that the Regress of Judgements is, from an explanatory point of view, benign.

In this light, we may be tempted by the stronger claim of (c): viz. that any theory that implies an infinite regress is *eo ipso* objectionable because infinite regresses are logically absurd. Unfortunately, this claim cannot be taken for granted, even in its most general form. Consider the following argument derived from a formulation of Dale Jacquette's, which purports to prove that it is too strong:[38]

(1) A theory is objectionable on the grounds that an infinite regress is logically absurd iff the theory nontrivially implies an infinite regress.
(2) A conclusion is logically absurd iff it is implied by inconsistent premises.
(3) Inconsistent premises never nontrivially imply an infinite regress.
(4) So, no theory is objectionable on the grounds that an infinite regress is absurd.

The key notion here is the distinction between a trivial and a nontrivial regress. Here, according to Jacquette, is a trivial regress:

p and not-p
Therefore: q, not-q, r, not-r, s, not-s,...,

This argument is classically valid: a contradiction implies any and every proposition. Now (1) of Jacquette's argument says that if a theory is to be objectionable on the grounds of infinite regress the 'regress' cannot be of this kind. This is partly because it would be pointless to criticize a theory on the grounds of its implying an infinite regress if this were the result of a logical contradiction, since showing that it is contradictory is enough. But it is also incoherent to fault a theory for implying an infinite regress in terms of logical impossibility if the regress is logically necessary. Premise (2) simply embodies the classical interpretation of valid inference: consistent assumptions are jointly true in some possible world and logically absurd conclusions are false in every possible world. Premise (3) may seem ambitious, but is supposed to merely make explicit the fact that a logical inconsistency – of the form *p and not-p* – implies any and every proposition. If a theory really is logically inconsistent, any implied regress will be analyzable to the 'regress' above; i.e. one that trivially implies any and every proposition.

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[38] See Jacquette (1996).

There are several ways in which one might quibble with this argument. An immediate worry, for example, is that a contradiction does not give rise to a *regress*, not even a 'trivial' one, but rather an infinite list of consequences. For the repetition of some common form or pattern between one step and the next seems part and parcel of the very notion of a regress.[39] Another worry might be that Jacquette simply assumes (in (3)) that all logically inconsistent premises are of the form *p and not-p* and thus begs the question whether infinite regress constitutes an independent form of inconsistency. Or, *contra* the orthodox view, it might be argued that since a pseudo-statement of the form *p and not-p* is strictly senseless it makes no sense to infer its 'consequences'. Or one might try to find counter-examples to (3).

I propose, however, to grant Jacquette's counter-objection to the global kind of objection to theories that imply an infinite regress in category (c) above. (This concession seems especially judicious given that, even if Jacquette's argument fails, the claim that there is a logical absurdity in calling one and the same thing both finite and infinite is far from unproblematic.) This not only has the dialectical virtue of conceding ground for the sake of argument but also, as it turns out, the heuristic advantage of allowing us to uncover the root of the problem with Thesis C above. For I shall argue that the problem *indicated* by the Regress of Judgements does not in fact *consist in* its being a regress.

3. The First Step

Even granted that (a)-(c) offer no quick way to show that the Regress of Judgements is vicious, I believe that it does raise a genuine conceptual puzzle. To see why, we need to formulate the objection a little more carefully:

(1) An act governed by a given rule, θ, is successfully performed iff it stands in an irreflexive relation R to a θ-governed act.
(2) There are θ-governed acts.
(3) There is a sequence of infinite range of θ-governed acts, each of which stands in relation R to its successor. (From (1) & (2)).
(4) There is no such sequence (on the grounds of options (a), (b) or (c) above).

[39] Jacquette might look to Thomas Aquinas for support for the notion of a trivial regress. Aquinas distinguished *per se* from *per accidens* regresses partly in terms of the former comprising not just a list of members, but an ordering of members in the sequence, and argued that *per se* regresses are vicious whereas *per accidens* regresses are not (see Moreland (2001), p. 25).

(5) There both is and is not such a sequence.
(6) Either (1) or (2) is false.
(7) The OTJ implies both (1) and (2).
(8) Therefore, the OTJ is false.

Let's start with (7). According to Thesis C, it is only in virtue of a θ-governed act's being an object of other acts that it can be successfully performed. This generates the irreflexive relation: *A is a prior condition of the possibility of B.* (That this relation is irreflexive is important for (3) because reflexive relations imply circularity rather than regression.) It follows that a subject's successful performance of a θ-governed act presupposes her having performed a second-order act of which the first-order act is its object. But the point surely is this. This second-order act is a token of the same type: that is, as (1) makes explicit, both acts are θ-governed. For, to perform an act of which a θ-governed act is its object (the prior, second-order act which, according to Thesis C is necessary for the first-order act to count as rule-governed) is surely just to perform a θ-governed act.

This is the first step of the regress, but we already have a deeply paradoxical situation: namely, that one must already have performed a θ-governed act in order to perform a θ-governed act. Take, for instance, my judgement that 5+2=7 is a correct application of the rule '+2'. If this is a rule-governed act, as it surely is, and if reflective appraisal is necessary for it's successful performance, then in order for me to make this judgement I must have already judged that the judgement that [5+2=7 is a correct application of the rule '+2'] is a correct application of the rule '+2'. (The person who claims he can think about the thought that 5+2=7 but cannot actually perform the operation '+2' is simply confused.) A regress looms. But that is not really the problem at all. The problem is that I must already have correctly applied the rule '+2' in order so much as to begin to apply it.

At this point, it might be suggested that the OTJ need not even imply the first step of the regress. For, can we not postulate a single act that judges itself, rather than a distinct, prior, second-order act that judges the primary judgement?[40] Now it is worth noting that this would require a modification of Thesis C. The original claim was that, in order for an act to be rule-governed, a subject must have thought about that very act: now

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[40] In the next Chapter, I shall show how certain strands of Hegel's thought can be construed as attempting to adopt something like this strategy of responding to a regress of judgements.

the requirement is that the subject must have thought about that very act *without this involving the performance of any other act.* Is this requirement even coherent?

We noted before a sense of 'fighting a fight' that might be significant; namely, the pacifist who fights against fighting. Now this is a rather paradoxical characterisation of the pacifist: in fact, it only makes sense if we interpret the first instance of 'fight' in, 'to fight a fight', in a different way to the second. Were this not so, the pacifist's activity would be pragmatically self-stultifying; he would be undermining his own aims. What this shows is that 'fighting a fight', even if it can be given a significant interpretation, is not a genuine reflexive relation. But the reason why it is not reflexive also points to what is wrong about the idea that there might be a single act that judges itself; namely, that such an act would cancel itself out. For, given the basic act-object model, an act that has itself as its own object would not be a judgement at all – it would have nothing judgeable left to judge. Indeed, this follows directly from the OTJ's definition of thoughts as acts directed towards representations; an act that is not so directed is not a judgement. Such an act has lost the *raison d'être* of a judgement, just as 'This is a statement' has lost the *raison d'être* of a statement. It is as though one were trying to fish for one's own net.[41]

This way of revealing what is wrong with the Regress of Judgements bears out a striking remark of Wittgenstein's:

> The reasoning that leads to an infinite regress is to be given up not 'because in this way we can never reach the goal' but because here there is no goal; so it makes no sense to say "we can never reach it".
>
> We readily think that we must run through a few steps of the regress and then so to speak give up in despair. Whereas its aimlessness...can be derived from the starting position [42]

In this light, we can see that, strictly speaking, steps (3)-(6) of the objection from regress are redundant. According to Jacquette, 'the challenge for opponents of infinite regress is to pinpoint the logical absurdity in the assumptions of infinitely regressive theories under

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[41] Compare here Wittgenstein on 'the Liar':

...He might have written "This proposition is false" instead of "I am lying". The answer would be: "Very well, but which proposition do you mean?" – "Well *this* proposition". – "I understand, but which is the proposition mentioned in *it*?" – "*This* one" – "Good, and which proposition does *it* refer to?" and so on. Thus he would be unable to explain what he means until he passes to a complete proposition. – We may also say: The fundamental error lies in one's thinking that a phrase e.g. "This proposition" can as it were allude to its object (point to it from far off) without having to go proxy for it (Z §691).

[42] Z §693. Peter Geach paraphrases this remark as follows: '...often when philosophers *think* the trouble is a vicious regress, the *real* trouble arises already at the first step: if it is rightly diagnosed there, we can forget about the regress' (Geach (1979), p. 100).

criticism, and if they cannot do so satisfactorily, for the time being at least, to withhold criticism'.[43] Well, it appears that the OTJ implies the following:[44]

(1') If S began to follow rule R at time t_1, then S followed R at some earlier time, t_{-1}

To echo Wittgenstein, the problem is not so much that the OTJ implies that the goal of performing an rule-governed act can never be reached, but that the theory cannot so much as coherently characterize the goal – its aimlessness can be derived from its starting position. This is surely enough to show that there is indeed a logical or conceptual problem with Thesis C, not a mere medical impossibility or explanatory deficiency due to its regressive quality.

The general kind of problem here is nicely illustrated by a little cameo in Jostein Gaarder's novel, *Maya*. Frank is accustomed to drinking a little gin to help him get to sleep. One night, he is shocked to find Gordon the gecko clinging stubbornly to his only bottle. Frank dislikes reptiles and muses as follows:

> I could almost certainly have conquered the smidgen of repugnance I felt at coming into contact with that conscious reptile if I'd first been able to take a few stiff pulls at the gin. But the nicety here lay in the very sequence of events. I had to imbibe the bottle's contents *before* I dared to raise it to my mouth. The situation was at deadlock, and this little horror drama was to last much longer than I had imagined; I was tired and I hadn't the courage to lie down and sleep next to a gecko before I'd had some of my sleeping-draught.[45]

Just as Frank needs to have had a dram of his gin in order to get to his gin, so Thesis C implies that one needs to already have followed a rule before one can begin to follow it.

Now, if the OTJ implies (1) of the argument from regress, it should be clear that it also implies (2); that there are, in fact, rule-governed acts is admitted by the OTJ. Notice that the objection shows that either (1) *or* (2) is false: either it is not the case that

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[43] Jacquette (1996), p. 117.

[44] Strictly speaking, the OTJ only implies (1a) if it admits the possibility of the antecedent of this claim. That is, I'm assuming here that the OTJ must account for the possibility that subjects begin to follow rules at certain times (where the fact that it implies (1a) shows that it cannot). Admittedly, the Peircean-style counter-objection discussed above might be seen to challenge this assumption, roughly on the grounds that cognitive beginnings are infinite processes rather than discrete acts. Whilst granting, for the sake of argument, this way of legitimising explanations that invoke an infinite regress of acts, however, I have not granted that the idea that subjects begin to follow a rule at a certain time is incoherent. But if this is so much as a coherent possibility then any theory of judgement must account for its being so. In any case, it is surely highly plausible that, *pace* Pierce, we do indeed begin to follow rules at certain times.

[45] Gaarder (2001), p. 89.

reflection is necessary for rule-governed acts or there are no rule-governed acts. It is interesting to note in this connection that the regresses of Justifications and Interpretations (see Section 1 above) are commonly taken to undermine (2).

Saul Kripke's famous 'sceptical solution' to the puzzle raised by the Regress of Interpretations, for example, aims to save (2) by replacing a truth-conditional account of rule-following with one based on assertability conditions.[46] Happily, the details of this solution need not detain us here.[47] The present point is a dialectical one: viz. the structure of the argument from regress shows that, even if (2) can be rescued in the way Kripke proposes, there remains an intractable problem for any theory committed to (1). To be sure, if the upshot of Kripke's solution were a theory of judgement that did not imply (1), then Kripke would have disarmed the Regress of Judgements. But, to my knowledge, Kripke advances no such theory.

Arguably, then, the Regress of Interpretations, which has been the focus of the greater part of work on rule-following to date – where many of Kripke's many critics share his basic problematic – is parasitic on the Regress of Judgements. For, even if there is a way of interpreting a thought or linguistic sign as rule-governed, it remains obscure how we are to account for its successful judgement. To flesh out this claim about the dialectical status of the Regress of Judgements a little further: let $T(x)$ be the act of thinking about x and let t be a rule-governed thought; let J mark the irreflexive relation '(...) justifies (...)'; let I mark the irreflexive relation '(...) interprets (...)'; and let C mark the irreflexive relation '(...) is a prior condition of the possibility of (...)'. Then we get the following representations of the three regresses:

$$\dots, (T(t_n)) \ J \ (T(t_{n-1})), \dots, (T \ (t_1)) \ J \ (T(t)). \ \text{[The Regress of Rules.]}$$

$$\dots, (T(t_n)) \ I \ (T(t_{n-1})), \dots, (T(t_1)) \ I \ (T(t))). \ \text{[The Regress of Interpretations.]}$$

$$\dots, (T(T(T(t)))) \ C \ (T(T(t))) \ C \ (T(t)). \ \text{[The Regress of Judgements.]}$$

My point is simple. All three regress, whatever else they are regresses of, are regresses of judgements. That is, they are all essentially of the form,

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[46] See Kripke (1982).

[47] I shall, however, have something to say about Kripke's position in Chapter Four.

...T(t)...T(t)...T(t)...

So, if our diagnosis of the problem raised by the Regress of Judgements is right, it follows that any epistemology that implies a Regress of Justifications cannot account for the performance of justified acts; and any theory that implies a Regress of Interpretations cannot account for the performance of acts of interpretation. In the former case, this chimes with a point sometimes made in connection with justificatory regresses: namely, that if any judgement is justified by an infinite regress all judgements are justified and since not all judgements are in fact justified none are justified by an infinite regress.[48] In the latter case, it certainly echoes Wittgenstein's own formulation of the problem: 'This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule'.[49]

The upshot is that a solution to the problem raised by (or implicit in) the Regress of Judgements is prerequisite of a solution to the problems raised by those regresses more often discussed in the contexts of epistemology and rule-following.

4. Wittgenstein's Paradox

There are in fact very good textual grounds for thinking that Wittgenstein's so-called rule-following considerations at least include an engagement with the Regress of Judgements – even that his sustained puzzlement about rules hinges on this basic problematic. Indeed, this theme is one of the many continuities that gives the lie to any crude division between 'early' and 'late' work. Consider, for example, how the notion of an 'elucidation' is introduced in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

The meanings of primitive signs can be explained by means of elucidations. Elucidations are propositions that contain the primitive signs. So they can only be understood if the meanings of those signs are already known.[50]

Wittgenstein does not spell out exactly why the meaning of primitive signs can only be interpreted by means of those very signs, but the point is surely that if this were not so,

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[48] For this kind of point see, e.g., Post (1980).
[49] *PI* §201
[50] *TLP* 3.263.

then understanding any given sign would require the prior understanding of some other

sign *ad infinitum*. A passage in *Philosophical Remarks* displays the same sensitivity:

> ...any kind of explanation of a language presupposes a language already. And in a certain sense, the use of language is something that cannot be taught, i.e. I cannot use language to teach it in the way in which language could be used to teach someone to play the piano.[51]

The sense in which language is 'something that cannot be taught' is precisely the sense in

which understanding a language cannot ultimately be a matter of the reflective regulation

of acts of judging in accordance with rules. As Baker and Hacker put it, 'explanations

presuppose a background of prior understanding, a partial linguistic competence'.[52]

Nonetheless, it is not until the later writings that the problematic nature of this

requirement really comes to the fore. In *The Blue Book*, Wittgenstein discusses an

example in a way that sets the scene for much subsequent writing. 'Our problem', he

writes, 'is analogous to the following:'

> If I give someone the order, "fetch me a red flower from that meadow", how is he to know what sort of flower to bring, as I have only given him a *word*? Now the answer one might suggest first is that he went to look for a red flower carrying a red image in his mind, and comparing it with the flowers to see which of them had the colour of the image. Now there is such a way of searching and it is not at all essential that the image we use should be a mental one. In fact the process may be this: I carry a chart co-ordinating names and coloured square. When I hear the order "fetch me etc." I draw my finger across the chart from the word red to a certain square, and I go and look for a flower which has the same colour as the square. But this is not the only way of searching and it isn't the usual way. We go, look about us, walk up to a flower and pick it, without comparing it to anything. To see that the process of obeying the order can be of this kind, consider the order "*imagine* a red patch". You are not tempted in this case to think that *before* obeying you must have imagined a red patch to serve you as a pattern for the red patch which you were ordered to imagine'.[53]

Wittgenstein allows that there is such a thing as reflecting on a rule and then applying it.

But, he argues, this cannot always be the case: for then a second-order reflection would

be needed in order to interpret the first-order reflection. And that way leads to the

madness that no action can be made out to accord with a rule because every action can be

so interpreted. No, at some point in our rule-following the relation between application

and rule must be immediate and direct – more like walking straight up to something (or

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[51] *PR* §6 (p. 54).

[52] Baker and Hacker (1980), p. 31

[53] *BBB*, p. 3

someone[54]) than following a map. At this basic level, there can be no intermediaries between us and the application of a rule, whether platonic logical objects or psychological phenomena or whatever.[55] That is to say, rule-governed judgement essentially involves spontaneous activity.

This theme takes centre stage in the *Investigations*. Early on, we are told that in case of a child learning to talk, 'the teaching of language is not explanation, but training'[56], where this is clearly supposed to contrast with the picture of language-acquisition articulated by Augustine.[57] And when Wittgenstein begins his most sustained discussion of rule-following, the explicit aim is to explore what the transition to 'understanding' a rule consists in. Thus, we are invited to consider what is involved in teaching someone the series of natural numbers, where 'the *possibility of getting him to understand* will depend on his writing it down independently' (original emphasis).[58] One provides examples, guides the pupil's hand, emphasises patterns and the like,

And now at some point he continues the series independently – or he does not. – But why do you say that? *so* much is obvious! - Of course; I only wished to say: the effect of any further *explanation* depends on his *reaction*.[59]

For Wittgenstein, the possibility that, after all explanations have been exhausted, a pupil might still react abnormally just goes to show that 'understanding' does not ultimately consist in a process of reflecting on explanations.[60] The rule-following considerations are thus, in the first instance, considerations about *how* subjects learn to follow rules – in particular whether this is adequately conceived as involving reflective processes.

To be sure, Wittgenstein is exercised by the further problem how to characterise (the relations between) the *objects* of thought – for example, whether Frege is right to

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[54] Cf. Ibid. §§ 455, 457.

[55] Phillip Dwyer writes: 'The fundamental thing in rule-following is ones *action*. There is no gap between a rule and its application. A rule does not transcend its application, or, to adapt Wittgenstein's previous point about definition, we may say: a rule does not act at a distance (cf. *RFM* VII–60: '*nothing* stands between the rule and my action')' (Dwyer (1989), p. 53-4).

[56] Ibid. §5.

[57] Cf. ibid. §1.

[58] Ibid. §143.

[59] Ibid. §145.

compare a concept with a fixed 'area' of space, or whether we ought rather to think of concepts as having 'blurred edges'.[61] But this is indeed a further problem and arises out of issues concerning the subjective conditions of learning and following rules. (It is in Augustine's conception of how we *learn* a language, Wittgenstein claims, that 'we find the roots of the idea' that each word has a fixed meaning.[62])

To see the connection between these two sets of issues – those concerning the relation between acts and objects of thought on the one hand, and the relations between objects of thought on the other – consider how Wittgenstein responds to the suggestion that we grasp the meaning of a word such as "cube" by reflecting on a mental picture:

Well, suppose that a picture does come before your mind when you hear the word "cube", say the drawing of a cube. In what sense can this picture fit or fail to fit a use of the word "cube"? – Perhaps you say: "It's quite simple; – if that picture occurs to me and I point to a triangular prism for instance, and say it is a cube, then this use of the word doesn't fit the picture." – But doesn't it fit? I have purposely so chosen the example that is quite easy to imagine a *method of projection* according to which the picture does fit after all.[63]

Now many commentators take the crux of such passages to be that since, as Donna Summerfield has emphasised, it is logically possible for a sign (such as a picture of a cube) to be interpreted ('projected') in different ways, no such sign can serve as a unique means of determining the meaning of a word.[64] This is then taken to open the floodgates to a kind of 'meaning-scepticism', according to which *no* rules fix the meaning of words (where this is usually extended to the case of the content of thoughts[65]), since the question of interpretation arises for whatever candidate is proposed.[66]

But the argument is surely quite the other way around. Wittgenstein's point is that it is incoherent to hold that understanding a rule consists in one's capacity to regulate

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[60] This moral is particularly clear in the following: 'To begin by teaching someone "that looks red" makes no sense. For he must say that spontaneously once he knows what "red" means, i.e. has learnt the technique of using the word' (*Z* §418).

[61] Cf. *PI* §71.

[62] Ibid. §1.

[63] Ibid. §139.

[64] See Summerfield (1990).

[65] Colin McGinn has questioned this extension, arguing that meaning-scepticism does not straightforwardly imply 'concept scepticism' since linguistic signs are syntactically isolatable in a way that concepts are not (see, e.g., C. McGinn (1984), pp. 144-147). For a forceful critique see Joseph Sartorelli (1991).

[66] Compare Kripke's reference to 'the incredible and self-defeating conclusion that all language is meaningless' (Kripke (1981), p.273).

one's behaviour by means of comparing a mental content with the use of a word, since this leads to the situation that one has to know how to apply the rule *before* one can learn to do so. But since this is incoherent we must acknowledge that '[o]nly the application of language can show how it is to be applied'[67] and that 'there is, for any rule, a way of taking it which is *not an interpretation*'.[68] For Wittgenstein, it is *because* the picture theory (for instance) is inadequate to account for rule-governed acts that it throws into question the very possibility of meaningful thought and language.

The dialectical point about the primacy of the Regress of Judgements can thus also be made as an interpretative point. For, on this reading, Wittgenstein's so-called 'sceptical paradox' is best read as a *reductio* of the assumption that meaning involves reflecting on a mental content.[69] Very plausibly, this is why it is said (at §201) that the paradox that accrues from a Regress of Interpretations – which Kripke takes to constitute such a serious problem that it requires a 'sceptical solution' – rests on a 'misunderstanding'. The misunderstanding is to suppose that understanding essentially involves reflection on a linguistic sign or mental content. But once this confusion is unmasked *that* paradox simply cuts no ice. The more recalcitrant problems arise, I will suggest, just when the role of spontaneity *is* properly respected.

The tendency in the secondary literature to major on the objective conditions of thought or meaning – i.e. on the problem articulated by the Regress of Interpretations – and to underplay the subjective conditions of thinking or understanding results not merely in imbalance, therefore, but distortion. For, to reiterate, it is only certain conceptions of what is involved in *how* human beings think and speak that give rise to incoherent conceptions of *what* thoughts and meanings are.[70] In particular, it is a mechanistic view of the former – i.e. the idea that understanding fundamentally involves ratiocination – that gives rise to a 'mythological' picture of the latter – i.e. the notion that thoughts and meanings are somehow detached from human forms of life and practice and fixed by

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[67] MSS, Vol. VI, p. 70. Cited in Baker & Hacker (1980), p. 40.

[68] *PI* §201.

[69] John McDowell has gone some way towards such a reading. See McDowell (1984), esp. pp. 338-9. See also McGinn (1984), p. 68; Minar (1994).

[70] In chapters Two and Three, I shall show how the distinction between the 'what' and the 'how' of judgement plays a central role in Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegel. In the Epilogue, I shall show how the same distinction is at work in Kierkegaard's stance on issues in the philosophy of religion.

immutable laws. The Regress of Judgements thus taps a deep current of Wittgenstein's thought: viz., a sense of the need to recover our sense of what it means to be a human being. As we shall see in Chapter Two, a sense of the urgency of this reminder marks one of the most profound affinities between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard.

Perhaps, however, the relative neglect of Wittgenstein's discussion of the psychology of learning and following rules can be explained in terms of a widespread sense of dissatisfaction with this aspect of his work. Concerning the pervasive feature of the later work that it 'gives prominence to how speakers *learn* to use expressions', Baker and Hacker register a telling observation:

This fact is widely noted but little understood. Current philosophers are apt to see it as a defect in at least one of three ways. First, it infects semantics with a primitive learning-theory. Wittgenstein's account of language-learning was arm-chair speculation and has long been superceded by advances in psychology based on detailed empirical experimentation. Secondly, it introduces empirical data which are in principle irrelevant to philosophical theories of meaning. In particular, it conflates genetic investigations (the natural history of concept acquisition) with concept-analysis. Thirdly, it is a sophisticated form of psychologism and therefore illegitimate.[71]

Yet we surely have the resources to respond to such objections.[72] The problem, I have argued, is that the natural account of the concept of rule-following furnished by Thesis C – namely that rule-following necessarily involves reflecting on rules – cannot be right. But this negative conclusion is not reached on the grounds of any speculation about (or indeed observation of) the facts of psychology; on the contrary, it is reached on the grounds that Thesis C is incoherent. If we want to understand what it *means* for humans to follow rules (and this is *very* different to wanting a story about the casual or neurological processes involved) we had better look elsewhere:

Am I doing I doing child psychology? – I am making a connection between the concept of teaching and the concept of meaning[73]

The connection, I take it, is that teaching does not, in the first instance, consist in the transferal of mental items ('meanings' or 'thoughts') to be grasped by occult

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[71] Baker & Hacker (1980), p. 29.

[72] I shall examine a related criticism of Kierkegaard in Chapter Two. Ironically, Baker and Hacker can themselves be seen to misread the importance of spontaneity for Wittgenstein when articulating their sense of an 'internal relation' between rules and applications. See Chapter Three of this thesis, n. 63.

[73] Z §412.

psychological processes, but rather in eliciting certain forms of immediate action and reaction. The empirical fact, if it is such, that children typically acquire linguistic competence by means of training or drilling rather than explanation or interpretation is merely invoked to illustrate the conceptual claim that the concept of rule-following has its natural home in cases where acts of reflection or interpretation are clearly absent.

This conceptual claim has very far-reaching implications for Wittgenstein. In *On Certainty*, for instance, it is brought to bear on a whole gamut of epistemological issues. Here again we are liable to distort the hackneyed dictum that reasons, justifications, explanations 'must come to an end somewhere' – as though this expressed some kind of impatience with philosophical inquiry. And we are liable to misunderstand Wittgenstein's concomitant attempt to locate those 'hinge propositions' that furnish the non-rational framework from which the (important) business of giving reasons, explanations and justifications in response to doubts and perplexities derives its sense. For all this appears to turn on the far from original claim that knowledge and proof rests on certain ungrounded assumptions about the world.

On the contrary, Wittgenstein is at pains to stress that the idea that our knowledge of the world is based on presuppositions or assumptions or unsupported hypotheses or primitive conceptual schemes or common sense or whatever, is precisely the conception under attack.[74] Consider three typical remarks:

...As if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting.[75]

You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to speak unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable).
  It is there – like our life.[76]

I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.[77]

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[74] The notion that knowledge is based on certain kinds of ungrounded *assumption* appears to be have been Moore's position. And Moore is the explicit and sustained target of *On Certainty*.

[75] *OC*, §110. Cf. §204.

[76] Ibid. §559.

[77] Ibid. §475.

On Certainty is plausibly read as working through the claim that thought and language-use depend on non-rational, non-discursive, non-reflective activity. For to advance that claim is precisely to deny that thought and language-use depend on the mediation of reflection, whether this is rational or irrational, reasonable or unreasonable, justified or unjustified. Rather, it implies that there must be some point in our thinking and judging at which the relation between acts and objects of thought is immediate and direct, and therefore not regulated by reasons, justifications, explanations.

5. The Paradox of Constrained Spontaneity

The dialectical status of the Regress of Judgements – as well as its Wittgensteinian credentials – only renders the need for a solution more pressing. For we appear to face a dilemma: either deny the possibility of rule-following altogether or deny the plausible account embodied by the OTJ. 'Whenever I use a word', Humpty Dumpty is reported to have said, 'it means just whatever I choose it to mean'. I take it that few others would want to grasp the first horn. And yet, insofar as the OTJ in general – and Thesis C in particular – is compelling, the second horn is hardly more comfortable.

Perhaps, however, there is a middle path to be forged here: what we need is an account that does justice to the OTJ but does not imply (1) of the objection from regress.[78] By way of a conclusion, I shall outline three general requirements I believe such an account must satisfy and which circumscribe the broad strategy of this thesis.

Firstly, there can be no question of rejecting out of hand the basic conception of thought described in Section 1 above. That is, the OTJ is right to characterise the class of thoughts as distinctively objective, rule-governed and directly communicable – in contrast, say, to feelings or impressions. (But note that the notion of a 'distinctive mark' can be taken in a weaker sense than that of a necessary condition, i. e. in the sense that X is distinctive of Y is consistent with there being a Y that is not an X.[79]) And the OTJ is therefore right to reject subjectivist or psychologistic theories that reduce thoughts to private psychological occurrences. It is worth noting that, notwithstanding his vigorous

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[78] Compare John McDowell's characterisation of Wittgenstein as aiming to steer a middle course between the Scylla of viewing rule-following as a matter of acting on interpretations, and the Charybdis of denying that we follow rules at all. See McDowell (1984), p. 342 and *passim*.

assault on the picture of logic as a 'crystaline purity'[80] comprising a rigid system of immutable laws, Wittgenstein conceded that 'following a rule is FUNDAMENTAL to our language-game'[81] and insisted just as strongly that meaning is not to be conceived as a 'gaseous medium'[82] or 'atmosphere'[83] accompanying acts of thinking or language-use. In short, the objectivity of thought must not be thrown out with the objectivist bathwater.

Secondly, however, the inescapable upshot of the Regress of Judgements is that, *pace* the OTJ, there must be some point in our thinking at which the relation between act and object of judgement is immediate and direct. On pain of incoherence, any theory of judgement must account for a class of non-reflective acts of rule-following. In other words, the theory must respect what, in the context of Kantian exegesis, Bell calls the Principle of Spontaneity:

If the performance of an act of type Φ is learned or rule-governed, then it cannot be a general requirement of my performing an arbitrary act of type Φ that I have already performed an act of that type or, indeed, of any other type that in its turn requires the prior performance of an act of type Φ. [84]

One very general consequence of this principle is that an objectivist picture is wrong insofar as this envisages human subjects standing in an *external* relation to systems of thought fixed by immutable laws. In a slogan: objects of thought cannot be severed from acts of thinking. (I shall deal with these issues most fully in Chapter Three.)

Thirdly, however, the motivation for Thesis C may not simply be jettisoned. To be sure, one might well say that at some level we follow rules 'blindly' in the sense that we have no *reflective* justification for proceeding in the way that we do. But we still face a problem. For the OTJ theorist is surely right to demand an account of how we gain access to rules, and what it means to heed their guidance. Any appeal to 'blind' responses or 'primitive reactions' must somehow show how these non-reflective acts can be conceived (not as arbitrary or merely rule-conforming but) in terms of one's *thinking* in an objective,

[79] Cf. Canfield (1996), p. 478.

[80] *PI* §107.

[81] *RFM.* VI–28 (p. 330).

[82] *PI* §109.

[83] Ibid. §117.

[84] D. Bell (1987b), p. 225.

systematic, constrained way.[85] Thus, if Wittgenstein is right that the concept of rule-following is at home in cases of spontaneous activity, the OTJ theorist is owed an account of how rules can be action-*guiding* in such cases.

In other words, to avoid the incoherence of Thesis C by postulating a substrate of non-reflective rule-governed acts is to face the further demand for an account of how one and the same act can be both spontaneous and constrained by rules. This is indeed a conceptual problem, not least because 'constrained spontaneity' just appears to be an oxymoron. I shall therefore call it the Paradox of Constrained Spontaneity (PCS). Any plausible theory of judgement must not only respect the objectivity of thought and the Principle of Spontaneity but must (therefore) also account for the PCS.

The PCS is comparable with the so-called Antinomy of Taste in the theory of aesthetics. Are judgements of beauty constrained by universal rules or are they the arbitrary products of subjective responses? The former option invites the counter-intuitive conclusion that the one who mechanically churns out correct judgements is paradigmatic of aesthetic sensibility. But the latter option appears to have the no less counter-intuitive consequence that aesthetic judgements are not judgements at all but mere expressions of taste. Kant, of course, aimed to show that this is a false dichotomy by adumbrating a form of judgement that is both spontaneous and constrained.[86] The import of the PCS is that, in this respect, aesthetic judgements are not a special case.[87]

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I have argued that the Regress of Judgements reveals – even if it does not comprise – a genuine and important problem, central to Wittgenstein's so-called rule-following considerations, and best characterised as a puzzle about how acts of thinking can be spontaneous yet constrained by rules. In the next chapter, I show how a closely related paradox arises in the context of Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegel. The hope is that the problem articulated in this chapter provides a heuristic prism through which the more parochial idiom of these criticisms may be clarified and extended.

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[85] Wittgenstein certainly acknowledged that the concept of rule-following involves more than blind mechanical conformity: 'One follows the rule *mechanically*. Hence one compares it with a mechanism "Mechanical" – that means: without thinking. But *entirely* without thinking? Without *reflecting*' (*RFM* VII–60 (p. 422)). In these terms, the challenge is to account for a class of non-reflective acts of thinking.

[86] See Kant (1952), esp. Part I.

CHAPTER
TWO   The Paradox of Beginning:
Hegel, Kierkegaard and Systematic Inquiry

> ...."for it might end, you know" said Alice to herself, "in my
> going out altogether like a candle. I wonder what I should be
> like then?" And she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle
> is like after it is blown out, for she could not remember ever
> having seen such a thing.
> > (Lewis Carroll)

> It is so difficult to find the *beginning*. Or, better: it is difficult
> to begin at the beginning. And not to try to go further back.
> > (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

To say that Kierkegaard did not agree with Hegel's philosophical work would be awkwardly prosaic. More resonant is the image of the 'knight of faith' riding out against the collective forces of the Hegelian 'World Spirit'; or the stubborn remnant of 'Unhappy Consciousness', refusing to be mediated into a more harmonious form of life; or the angst-ridden 'Individual', resisting the tidy categories of a socio-political or intellectual system. Yet oppositions of such epic proportions are not readily reducible to matters of precise theoretical disagreement. And any such reduction would surely loose something of the colour and romance of the clash between Hegel and Kierkegaard.

To be sure, Kierkegaard's texts hardly lend themselves to close analytical commentary, composed as they are of aphorisms, stories, parables, jokes, caricatures, polemics, parodies, allusions, satires, revocations. Yet if the virtue of melodramatic portrayals of the struggle between 'existentialism' and 'the System' is that they capture something of the tone and intensity of Kierkegaard's antipathy to Hegelian philosophy, the danger is that they forfeit any precise account of its content. We are left, at best, with an irredeemable gulf between two more or less coherent *Weltanschauungen*, at worst with a sense that it all boils down to little more than a clash of personalities.[1]

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[1] The following off-hand remark is all too typical of secondary work on the 'debate' between Kierkegaard and Hegel, where this rarely goes beyond what might be called the 'Tweedle-Dum / Tweedle-Dee' mode of commentary: 'It seems not unjust to say Hegel might consider [Kierkegaard's] concept of the single individual prideful and Kierkegaard considers [Hegel's] concept of the system superficial' (Bertman

The argument of Chapter One was that the Paradox of Constrained Spontaneity (PCS) is a genuine and important problem in the theory of judgement. In this chapter, I show how some of the most pervasive criticisms of Hegel in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* can be faithfully and fruitfully interpreted as articulating that problem. The aim is thus to magnify a key moment in the opposition between Hegel and Climacus, and thereby to display a central motivation for the latter's broadly anti-systematic stance. Hopefully, this strategy will also manifest the non-parochial nature of these criticisms; the sense, that is, in which they are not confined to Hegel's peculiar methods and ambitions.[2] Nonetheless, the aim is to give a more perspicuous account of, rather than to qualify, the profound divergence between Hegel and Climacus.[3]

So as to gain a reasonably sympathetic view of Climacus' target, I first introduce some of the motivations behind Hegel's conception of systematic inquiry (Section 1). In this connection, I draw on recent work in which a 'non-metaphysical' reading of this conception is defended. I then locate a central problematic in this connection, viz. 'the paradox of beginning' (Section 2) and outline two ways in which Hegel attempts to respond to this paradox; first, *via* the strategy of 'immanent critique' as this is worked out in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and, second, *via* the concept of an 'immediate beginning' as this is adumbrated in the *Science of Logic* (Section 3).

All this should prepare the ground for an examination of a pivotal passage in *Postscript*, the explicit focus of which is the 'dialectic of beginning' (Section 4). I show that Climacus' objection is essentially that Hegel cannot solve the paradox he articulates, even if successful in his own terms, since he overlooks an important feature of this

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(1990), p. 120). Later in the same paper, Bertman goes on to suggest that the debate does indeed boil down to a matter of personal preference when he declares that 'though Kierkegaard presents his dogmatic stance as the alternative to Hegel and philosophy...I don't find it convincing as a psychological portrait of my own experience. It doesn't ring true as a psychological phenomenology. And since Kierkegaard's approach depends on a sympathy of experience there is little more to be said' (ibid, p. 124).

[2] Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegel are often viewed as highly parochial. James Collins, for instance, declares that many of these are 'of little more than historical interest, as proof of Kierkegaard's close acquaintance with the fine points of post-Hegelian controversy' (Collins (1983), p. 119). Collins concedes that the 'major contentions...can even be applied to more recent versions of absolute idealism' (idem).

[3] In this respect, this chapter aims to take up the gauntlet laid down by Paul Ricoeur when he urged the need to get beyond a 'naïve' version of the conflict between Kierkegaard and Hegel – 'the existence of which is of course beyond doubt' – to the task of 'learn[ing] how to *think* it as a significant disagreement, a disagreement with a *meaning*' (Ricoeur (1998) p. 18). I shall not, however, follow the recent trend of

problem. This feature concerns the relation between human subjects and the objects of their thoughts and is, I argue, a version of the PCS. Finally, I compare Climacus' worries about Hegelian systematicity with the Wittgensteinian worries about rule-following discussed in Chapter One (Section 5).

1. Points of Departure

Ten years ago, Karl Ameriks reported that 'Hegel's contribution to practical philosophy no longer requires rehabilitation'.[4] Ameriks went on to observe that 'Hegel's theoretical philosophy, however, continues to be highly suspect'.[5] This latter finding will come as little surprise to sympathetic readers of the *Postscript*. For that work is deeply suspicious of what it calls the 'one, two, three, hocus pocus' of Hegelian dialectics.[6]

Now Climacus' polemic has often been seen to trade on a 'metaphysical' reading of Hegel's systematic approach. On this view of Hegel, a monistic ontology of 'Absolute Spirit', for instance, is taken to underpin his peculiar conception of the goal of philosophy as the systematic 'mediation' of ontological differences. Or again, it is because Hegel believes in a version of metaphysical idealism – 'the recent principle that thought and being are one'[7] – that he believes his system of thought somehow reveals (perhaps even determines) the metaphysical structure of reality.

Thus, according to a conventional way of setting up the polemical target of the *Postscript*, Climacus is suspicious of 'the system' because he is suspicious of the metaphysical claims on which it is founded. Two foci of Climacus' suspicion are particularly emphasised. First, there is the worry that Hegel's reductionist ontology flies in the face of irreducible differences between thoughts and things, eternity and time, words and objects, God and humans, essences and existents.[8] Second, there is the related

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attempts to qualify the disagreement between Hegel and Kierkegaard (see, e.g., Ricoeur (1998), Connell (1985), M. C. Taylor (1980)).

[4] Ameriks (1992), p. 177

[5] Idem.

[6] Cf. *CUP*, p. 117.

[7] Cf. *CA*, fn. p. 78.

[8] Thus, according to J. Heywood Thomas, 'Hegel's claim is that it is the very nature of our thought to imply an identity of thinking and being, and this is what Kierkegaard rejects on the ground that as long as we remain in the realm of pure thought the difference between them cannot be seen' (J. Thomas (1971), p. 4).

worry that Hegel's metaphysical speculations transgress the limits of finite human thought by attempting to attain a 'God's-eye perspective'. As Merold Westphal summarises Climacus' stance, 'God, but not Hegel, can be a Hegelian'.[9]

Now metaphysical readings of Hegel's theoretical philosophy are far from the preserve of Kierkegaardians. From the early reception of Hegel by Marx through to Russell's less ambivalent response, Hegel has been criticised for the alleged implication of his idealism that 'everything ends in thought' (Marx) and for its source in a conflation of predication with identity (Russell).[10] Many others have owned the suspicion that Hegel never offers so much as an intelligible formulation of, let alone a persuasive argument for, his peculiar brand of metaphysical idealism.

Even less hostile commentators continue to foster the idea that Hegel's theoretical edifice depends on a highly tendentious metaphysics. Thus a generally sympathetic Charles Taylor characterises Hegel's most basic doctrine as the claim that 'nothing exists which is not a manifestation of the Idea, that is, of rational necessity'[11] and Michael Rosen saddles Hegel with the view that 'mind and nature are not heterogeneous but emerge as 'moments' in a unified process'.[12] Of course, there are some who want to show that Hegel does have good arguments for such doctrines. But it is clear that to the extent his systematic approach as a whole depends on these claims, this approach will remain 'highly suspicious' to anyone who is suspicious either of metaphysical doctrines in general, or to those attributed to Hegel in particular.

To be sure, it is not difficult to find apparent textual support for a broadly metaphysical view of Hegel's theoretical philosophy. Having offered as a reason for studying the *Logic* 'the fact that man is capable of metaphysical thought – i.e. is capable of thinking that aims at the ultimate foundation of thought and being', one recent commentator goes on to cite a characteristic simile.[13] 'A cultured nation without metaphysics', Hegel declared, is 'like a temple richly ornamented in other respects but

[9] Westphal (1998), p. 117. Compare Stanley Rosen's remark that Hegel is '[l]ike other geniuses' in 'confusing himself with God' (S. Rosen (1974)), p. 130.

[10] On Marx's critique of Hegel see Ameriks (2000); for Russell's see Russell (1993).

[11] C. Taylor (1975), p. 110.

[12] M. Rosen (1982), p. 174.

[13] Harnack (1998), p. xi.

without a holy of holies'.[14] Such rhetoric gives credence to the idea that Hegel's system is supposed to articulate gnomic insights into a metaphysical 'holy of holies' in which the hidden nature of reality is revealed.[15] The impression is confirmed when Hegel characterises his *Logic* as 'the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and the finite mind'.[16] And even if, as I shall argue, Climacus' critique aims at more interesting targets than such obscurities, there can be little doubt that much of his sparkling satire on 'the bewitched speculative thinker' feeds on this kind of quasi-mystical rhetoric – rhetoric that was certainly taken seriously in his own day.

Yet many will complain that principles of charity have been violated here, and that Hegel's over-blown rhetoric has been over-emphasised. For contemporary scholars are at pains to show that, far from depending on gnomic insights, Hegel's systematic approach trades on some quite exoteric and plausible motivations. Indeed, David Stern has discerned a 'sufficient consensus among a variety of recent interpreters to warrant the identification of a decided trend in interpretation', which he locates in terms of 'finding in Hegel not the consummate metaphysician, but a subtle and systematic critic of metaphysical thought'.[17]

Participants in this consensus converge around the need for a so-called 'non-metaphysical' reading of Hegel.[18] This means many different things at the level of exegetical detail, but a common thread is the claim that Hegelian systematicity does not depend on any metaphysical claims at all. Rather, it is argued that Hegel's approach is motivated by *methodological* considerations. The upshot of these readings is that one

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[14] *SL*, p. 25.

[15] According to Russell, Hegel's metaphysics 'must have come to him first as mystic 'insight'' (Russell (1979), p. 702)

[16] *SL*, p. 50.Compare Hegel's claim that the categories of his *Logic* 'may be looked upon as definitions of the Absolute, as the *metaphysical definitions of God*' (*HL* §85). Compare also his identification of logic with '*metaphysics, the science of things set and held in thoughts* – thoughts accredited able to express the essential reality of things' (ibid. §24) and his claim that '[t]o know God by means of reason is the highest task of Science' (ibid. §36 trans. modified).

[17] D. S Stern (1990), pp. 19-20.

[18] For diverse 'non-metaphysical' readings of Hegel see Findlay (1958); Hartmann (1972); Lamb (1980); Bubner (1981); White (1983); Winfield (1984); Winfield (1987); Winfield (1990); Winfield (1991); Winfield (1999); Pinkard (1988); Pippin (1989); D. S Stern (1990); D. S Stern (1993); Houlgate (1986); Houlgate (1991); Houlgate (1998); Houlgate (1999); Maker (1987); Maker (1990); Maker (1993a); Maker (1993b); Maker (1994); Maker (1998). For criticism see, e.g., M. Rosen (1993).

does not need to be a metaphysical idealist of any kind to appreciate the force of a Hegelian conception of systematic inquiry.

In what follows, I shall extract some of the considerations stressed by these commentators. The aim is less exegetical than to indicate the (methodological) pressures towards a broadly Hegelian approach. My reasons for adopting this strategy are as follows. First, it should allow the broad rationale behind Hegel's project to come to the fore, whilst side-stepping a morass of interpretative detail. Second, it should track the intended scope of Climacus' attack – the way, that is, in which he aims to undermine Hegel's project as a whole and not merely to fault its local executions. Third, to the extent that there *are* interesting and accessible motivations for Hegel's theoretical project, Climacus' criticisms should appear less obscure. In particular, focusing on issues about systematicity as such will show up the sense in which Climacus' target is not confined to a peculiar brand of idealistic metaphysics. And fourth, this focus should reveal the subtlety of Climacus' critique by showing that it does not, as a whole, depend on the kind of caricature that most contemporary Hegelians would disown.

The motivation for Hegel's emphasis on systematicity might be characterised in terms of two *desiderata* of a philosophical inquiry. It is desirable, namely, that a philosophical theory is (i) critical and (ii) reflexive. I shall consider these in turn.

Firstly, a philosophical inquiry should be *critical*, where a theory is critical if and only if for any claim on which it implicitly or explicitly relies, that claim is offered as a candidate for rational appraisal. Examples of uncritical claims are that homosexuality is wrong or that angels exist when these are asserted on the basis of Biblical revelation or Church dogma. Note that it is not that in order to count as critical a theory must be based on good reasons, only that it must be offered as a candidate for rational appraisal. The religious believer is uncritical just to the extent that she takes a sacred text or papal edict or whatever to be a source of authority that lies beyond the remit of rational appraisal.

Now few philosophers would deny that critical thinking is desirable in this sense.[19] And of course Hegel's contemporaries saw it as the gateway to the brave new

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[19] There is a strong case that Kierkegaard should not be excluded from this generalisation. As I hope to show, his critique of Hegel is far subtler than his reputation as a dogmatic irrationalist would suggest. And his approach to biblical and ecclesiastical authority is very far from uncritical (see, for example, the remarks on biblical interpretation in *The Concept of Anxiety* (e.g., *CA*, p. 40); and his polemics against the

world of Enlightenment. For Hegel, however, this *desideratum* is far more demanding than it might at first appear. Following Kant, he believed that to take seriously the ideal of a critical inquiry requires nothing less a radical rethinking of philosophical methodology. For not only does it require the rejection of explicit appeals to religious dogma, it also requires the rejection of more modern and more insidious forms of uncritical thought.

According to many commentators, the chief suspect for Hegel in this respect is methodological foundationalism. This programme is characterised by the attempt to show that certain commitments are so obvious or inevitable that they can be legitimately taken as the foundations on which to base what is in other respects a critical theory. The most familiar application of the foundationalist strategy in philosophy is epistemological. For there is a long pedigree, within both rationalist and empiricist traditions, of theories that treat certain 'self-evident ideas' or 'immediate sense-data' as the proper termini of any justificatory chain of beliefs. For Hegel, however, this simply will not do. Insofar as self-evidence or immediate experience are appealed to as 'given', such appeals are uncritical and therefore undesirable. More specifically, they are undesirable in epistemology because, in John McDowell's phrase, 'the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications'[20] – that is, to simply appeal to brute givens is to evade rather than to address the central demand of epistemology that our beliefs are rationally justified.

So, for example, Hegel distinguishes between Scholastic metaphysics and modern, post-Reformation metaphysics but charges both with an illicit reliance on uncritical foundations. Stephen Houlgate crisply outlines the position as follows:

> Scholastic metaphysics, Hegel argues, has as its primary task the proof of theological doctrine; it is therefore subordinated to the positive authority of the Church. Modern metaphysics, on the other hand, is more autonomous. In accordance with what he sees as the Reformation notion that truth is available to all and not the 'property' of an authoritarian institution, Hegel says that modern metaphysics looks for its content within reason itself, rather than in the doctrines of the Church. Yet that content is found in the form of definitions and principles which still serve as the given foundation of thought. Although modern philosophy seeks a content within itself which is

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established Church in the later writings). What Kierkegaard does bluntly reject is a culture in which the tendency 'to bring fundamental assumptions under discussion' has the consequence that 'a marvelous number of men in the mass get on their feet and open their mouths all at once in the game of discussion' thereby revealing themselves to be 'the most insignificant twaddlers' (*BA*. p. 137).

[20] McDowell (1994), p. 8.

fully rational and therefore fully its own, that content is not *developed* out of thought and thus remains as external to the free process of reasoning as were the religious presuppositions of mediaeval metaphysics.[21]

An equally subtle form of uncritical philosophy for Hegel is the practice of assuming the validity of our ordinary forms of understanding. Thus philosophers are liable to launch into a discussion of 'subjects' and 'objects', for example, without pausing to consider whether this distinction is as unproblematic as it seems. In fact, Hegel believed that our 'prejudices' about subjects and objects in particular are wholly pernicious:

> ...These views on the relation of subject and object to each other express the determinations which constitute the nature of our ordinary, phenomenal consciousness; but when these prejudices are carried out into the sphere of reason as if the same relation obtained there, as if this relation were something true in its own self, then they are errors the refutation of which throughout every part of the spiritual and natural universe is *philosophy*, or rather, as they bar the entrance to philosophy, must be discarded at its portals.[22]

Commentators are of course divided about how exactly Hegel does want us to view 'the relation of subject and object to each other'. But the important point here is his insistence that we must begin without prejudice in such arenas. For Hegel, a genuinely critical theory would be one that relied neither on 'self-evident' truths nor on unexamined forms of thought. And for Hegel, the desirability of such a theory is readily displayed by the notorious failure of philosophy to make progress with respect to its central concerns.

Secondly, it is desirable that a philosophical theory is *reflexive*, where an inquiry is reflexive if and only if the subject-matter of inquiry just is the very process of reasoned inquiry. An example of a non-reflexive inquiry would be any scientific investigation that applies a certain method, such as observation, to a circumscribed domain, such as the digestive system of rattlesnakes. Clearly, the process of scientific observation is a very different topic to the digestive processes of rattlesnakes. And it is quite proper that a biologist takes the latter to be the arena of his research. By and large, the scientist *applies* but does not directly investigate scientific methodologies.[23] But, as we shall see, it is

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[21] Houlgate (1986), p. 103.

[22] *SL*, p. 45.

[23] Of course, scientists *may* delve into the philosophy of science but the point is that they need not do so to count as proper scientists.

arguable that, whilst this is a perfectly appropriate way to proceed within the natural sciences, it is a serious mistake to construe philosophical inquiry on this model.

Plainly, reflexivity is a less intuitive ideal than critical appraisal. But at least part of its appeal derives from that value. For, in order to be comprehensively critical, a theory must presumably be critical about its own methods and procedures. So, whilst it is quite legitimate for biologists to assume the validity of observation, philosophers cannot simply take for granted the tools of their trade. In a word, philosophy ought to be *self-critical*. Yet there is an independent point to the ideal of reflexivity. For the idea is not only that the process of reasoning should be *included* within the domain of inquiry but that the process of reasoning should *uniquely* determine this domain. This is desirable because, again unlike the natural sciences, the domain of philosophical theory cannot be uncontroversially stipulated. Whilst it is quite in order for the biologist to stipulate that his inquiry concerns the digestive system of rattlesnakes, the Platonist, for example, cannot simply stipulate that his inquiry concerns super-sensible phenomena without begging the question against the naturalist. The promise of a theory whose subject-matter is the very process of reasoning, then, is that it would avoid arbitrary and controversial assumptions about what philosophical theories are theories about.

Richard D. Winfield reconstructs this motive of Hegel's project thus:

A discipline that addresses a subject matter distinct from its own thinking cannot help but presuppose its own method. Since such a discipline investigates what its topic is, which is something different from the procedure by which it is uncovered, the method is not established by the investigation but must be employed by it as something independently furnished. Moreover, in order to have a specific topic to address with its given method, such a science must presuppose some minimal identity for its subject matter. Otherwise, it has nothing determinate to consider. By contrast, logic [i.e. philosophy on a Hegelian model] can presuppose neither method nor subject matter. Because what logic thinks is indistinguishable from its thinking of it, if logic were to begin with any preconception of its method or topic the identity of valid thinking would be taken for granted instead of being established as the outcome of logical investigation. To avoid begging the question, logic must therefore begin without any determinate method or content.[24]

Thus, according to Hegel, philosophy should aim not only to be self-critical but also to be *self-determining*. We may assume neither what is to be evaluated in advance of the process of evaluation (such as, say, the sensible world) nor what means we have for evaluation (such as, say, the verification principle). On the contrary, Hegel insists that

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[24] Winfield (1999), p. 37.

philosophical science must determine both its subject-matter and its method as it proceeds, 'for what this subject-matter is...will be explicated only in the development of science and cannot be presupposed by it as known beforehand'.[25]

A further way in which reflexivity can be seen to be desirable trades on a certain conception of the *goal* of philosophical inquiry. For Hegel, one of the chief goals of philosophy is to demonstrate that 'Reason' is a stable and self-sufficient source of authority. Robert Stern, for instance, describes Hegel's intellectual milieu in terms of a sense of dislocation:

> ...Hegel was clearly responding to the sense of dislocation shared by many of his contemporaries, both with his immediate circle (such as Schelling and Hölderlin) and beyond. This dislocation was felt at many levels, as it appeared that the Enlightenment had shaken old certainties but put nothing substantial in their place. Thus, reason was seen as leading to scepticism, science to mechanistic materialism, social reform to bloody revolution, humanism to empty amoralism and crude hedonism, and individualism to social fragmentation. There was therefore a felt need on all sides to find a way forward, to 'begin again' in a manner that did not lead to these unhappy consequences.[26]

If this modern condition of dislocation is to be overcome, and traditional sources of value and authority replaced, Reason must somehow be shown to be worthy of confidence. But it seems this can only be achieved if Reason subjects herself to rational appraisal, if the very process of reasoning becomes the subject-matter of inquiry – in short, if philosophy assumes a genuinely reflexive form.

Plausibly, it is considerations of this kind that undergird Hegel's characterisation of his project in terms of 'thought thinking itself' or an 'immanent' science of 'self-determining determinacy'. According to Hegel, we must

> combine in our process of inquiry the action of the forms of thought with a criticism of them. The forms of thought must be studied in their essential nature and complete development: they are at once the object of research and the action of that object.[27]

Even the remark about the thought of God before the creation of the world can be understood in these terms as a metaphor for Hegel's insistence that his system applies to nothing but the process of thinking and reasoning. Those who interpret Hegel in this vein

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[25] *HL* §1.

[26] R. Stern (2002), p. 14.

[27] *HL* §41.

are keen to stress the Kantian sources of this self-conception. 'It is an infinite merit of the Kantian philosophy', Hegel declared, 'to have given impetus to the restoration of logic and dialectic in the sense of the examination of the *determinations of thought in and for themselves.*'[28] Where philosophers had previously conceived of their theories as investigating some external domain (such as platonic objects or natural kinds or whatever), Hegel learnt from Kant to understand philosophical inquiry as an immanent 'critique of reason by reason itself'.[29]

Reflexivity is a more obviously problematic ideal than rationality. But it should at least be clear that neither of these *desiderata* depend on any obscure metaphysical thesis. According to recent commentators, such considerations reveal the extent to which Hegel's project is of continuing importance. We are to see that Hegel was no speculative metaphysician who 'attempts to foist on us a system that is as unintelligible as it is devoid of argument'.[30] On the contrary, William Maker, for one, argues that the distinctive virtue of Hegel's theoretical philosophy is that it can accommodate both the modernists' faith in reason and the anti-modernists' mistrust of metaphysics and foundationalism.[31] At any rate, the ideals of rationality and reflexivity are surely laudable. Even Hegel's most unforgiving critic acknowledged as much: 'To turn Hegel into a rattlebrain', Climacus writes, 'must be reserved for his admirers. An attacker will always know how to honor him for having willed something great and having failed to achieve it.'[32]

2. Preliminary Problems

Hegel's prescription for addressing the modern condition of dislocation, then, is the transformation of philosophy into a true *science*, a *Wissenschaft*, a fully critical and

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[28] *SL*, p. 833.

[29] Hegel's objection to Kant in this respect is that he assumes an unwarrantably subjectivist conception of reason – i.e. as a mental capacity – and therefore conceives the critical project as a critique of human capacities. Hegel likens this attempt to clear the ground for metaphysics by first assessing our mental capacities to Scholasticus' resolution not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim. (Cf. *HL*, §41). Yet, on the reading on which I am drawing, what is distinctive about Hegel's position in this respect is not a return to pre-Kantian metaphysics but the idea of a self-investigation of rational thought *as such* (rather than *qua* mental capacity).

[30] Maker (1994), p. vii.

[31] See Maker (1987); Maker (1994).

[32] *CUP* fn. p. 109.

reflexive form of inquiry. Philosophy must abandon its piecemeal approach to local problems conducted on the basis of dogmatic or foundational principles and adopt an absolutely systematic form. Only then might the human capacity for rational thought become fully autonomous, free from unstable sources of value and authority.

Now one of the more pressing questions raised by the idea of an absolute or systematic inquiry, and one that Hegel was acutely aware of, is where and how to begin. For if 'absolute' means anything when predicated of an inquiry, it surely means that the inquiry must not assume or presuppose anything that might turn out to be relevant to it. In other words, a systematic inquiry must not prejudice the issue at the outset. Indeed, as we have seen, avoiding the temptation to begin with a conceptual or empirical 'given', is part of Hegel's rationale for systematicity in the first place. But immediate questions arise concerning how a groundless inquiry is, as it were, to get off the ground.

To be sure, there is nothing especially problematic or paradoxical about the ambition of systematicity *per se*. Many inquiries within the natural sciences, for instance, have some claim to be systematic in the sense of encompassing all the relevant data within a unified methodology. But the problem arises for an inquiry with pretensions to *absolute* systematicity. As we have seen, Hegel takes this to mean that he cannot so much as prejudge the proper domain of his inquiry. But this is problematic: to say that we must begin without an assumed starting point seems rather close to saying that we must begin without beginning. And that *does* sound paradoxical. Hegel formulates this problem with uncharacteristic concision:

> We can assume nothing and assert nothing dogmatically; nor can we accept the assertions and assumptions of others. And yet we must make a beginning: and a beginning, as primary and underived, makes an assumption or rather is an assumption. It seems as if it were impossible to make a beginning at all.[33]

The worry here is that, even if a presuppositionless inquiry were possible in every other respect, the mere act of beginning such an inquiry would itself constitute a kind of assumption; namely, I take it, that *this* is an appropriate way to begin.[34] But just that

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[33] *HL*, §1.

[34] Compare Kuno Fischer's commentary on Hegel on beginning: 'The beginning of logic and philosophy generally finds itself in a dilemma that even the Skeptics had recognised and declared insoluble. Either the beginning is mediated or it is immediate...In the first case we have a proof without a beginning, in the

presupposition seems enough to scupper any pretensions to absolute systematicity. The paradox of beginning, then, is this:

Any beginning involves an assumption of some kind, but an absolute inquiry must begin without making an assumption of any kind.

Before considering Hegel's strategy for solving this problem, let me briefly draw out some further motivation for the claim in the first clause that any beginning involves an assumption of some kind.

Consider a famous story of Lewis Carroll's.[35] Achilles has just finished his race-course of infinitely diminishing distances. 'Well now', says the Tortoise, 'would you like to hear of a race-course, that most people fancy they can get to the end of in two or three steps, while it *really* consists of an infinite number of distances, each one longer than the previous one?' The fool-hardy Achilles agrees and is instructed to jot down the premises and conclusion of an apparently valid syllogism, calling the two premises 'A' and 'B' respectively, and the conclusion, 'Z'. The Tortoise says that he will grant the truth of A and B, but demands the right to resist the inference from these to Z until Achilles has jotted down, 'C: if A and B then Z'. Achilles soon finds himself writing 'D: if A, B and C then Z'. 'Plenty of blank pages?' inquires the Tortoise cheerily.

Now one thing this story reveals is that question-begging is context relative. Arguments normally rely on there being some common ground: minimally, the validity of deductive inference. But an absolutely comprehensive argument, such as Hegel would have his system embody, must not assume any such common ground. Notice just how demanding this constraint is – it is as if Hegel sets himself the task of proceeding as though his interlocutor were as stubborn as Carroll's tortoise.

Quite how Hegel sets about solving his paradox of beginning is one of the most vexed issues of Hegelian scholarship. A full account would require a deeply involved interpretation of a large body of notoriously impenetrable work. The following presentation must therefore be highly schematic. But since I shall interpret Climacus as claiming that this strategy is inadequate *whether or not* it is successful in its own terms,

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second a beginning without a proof, and in neither is the science able to begin' (cited in Thulstrup (1984), p. 226).

[35] See Carroll (1895).

this should not detract from the force of Climacus' criticisms. The important question, for our purposes, is how Hegel *conceives* a solution to the Paradox of Beginning, how he aims to solve it, not whether he can in fact make good these ambitions.

The essential structure of what, in the next section, I shall characterise as a two-pronged strategy might best be introduced in terms of the following two constraints on an inquiry which seeks an absolute beginning, and which Hegel purports to respect:

(1) The inquiry must begin with that which is immediate.
(2) The inquiry must spontaneously establish its own beginning.

Note the different domains of reference. Firstly, whereas (1) applies to the content of the inquiry – it constrains *what* the inquiry must begin with – (2) applies to the form or method of inquiry and regulates *how* the beginning is to be established. And secondly, whereas (1) uses a sense of 'beginning' as logically primitive or prior, (2) uses a sense of 'beginning' as the ultimate justification or ground or rationale of the inquiry. (We should take 'established' here to mean 'grounded' or 'legitimated' or 'justified'.)

Notice also, however, the conceptual similarity at the level of what *kind* of constraint is imposed. For 'immediacy' and 'spontaneity' are closely related concepts – in fact, for present purposes, we can define these synonymously as freedom from external mediation or prior determination. So (1) says that we must begin with conceptual content that is free from the mediation of, or prior determination by, another content, and (2) says that our inquiry must establish its own methodological foundation without the aid of any external or pre-determined method. Hegel combines these two constraints as follows:

> Thus the beginning must be an *absolute*, or what is synonymous here, an *abstract* beginning; and so it may not presuppose anything, must not be mediated by anything or have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science. Consequently, it must be purely and simply *an* immediacy, or rather immediacy itself.[36]

The motivation for (1) and (2) should already be fairly clear. Philosophical inquiry must begin with a conceptual content that is freestanding towards other content because an absolute science must not presuppose any content. And the inquiry must establish its own standards of justification because it must not presuppose any predetermined logical or

methodological constraints on its development. Ostensibly at least, a theory that satisfied both constraints would therefore disarm the paradox of beginning.

3. Getting Off the Ground

The very formulation of constraints (1) and (2), however, gives rise to a problem that seems only to deepen the paradox. For these are, surely, *methodological* constraints: they show us how to proceed if we want to make an absolute beginning. But (2) says precisely that an absolute beginning must not presuppose any methodological constraints. It appears therefore that (2) is self-stultifying: it is a constraint against all constraints, a presupposition of presuppositionlessness.

Hegel himself apparently acknowledges this problem. At the beginning of his *Logic*, he tells us that this work will begin entirely without presuppositions and that it presupposes the results of his earlier work, the *Phenomenology*.[37] Very broadly, his response to the obvious charge of self-contradiction here is this: it is only on a certain view of the nature of philosophical inquiry that it is so much as a coherent possibility that such an inquiry could proceed *without* conforming to (1) and (2). Thus if Hegel can show that this conception is incoherent in some way, then he can show that we need not take (1) and (2) on trust, but will nonetheless proceed in accordance with them because there simply is no other coherent way to proceed. Then he will have shown that (1) and (2) are spontaneously generated by a rational inquiry – rather than being imposed, as it were, from outside – and may consistently claim that (2) satisfies its own demands.

According to Hegel's 'non-metaphysical' readers this project is indeed the *raison d'être* of the *Phenomenology*.[38] For these commentators – and *contra* the orthodox

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[36] *SL*, p. 70.

[37] Cf. *SL*, p. 48.

[38] A particularly clear textual justification for attributing this strategy to Hegel is the following from the Preface to the *Phenomenology*:

Among the various consequences that follow from what has just been said, this one in particular can be stressed, that knowledge is only actual, and can only be expounded, as Science or as *system*; and further, that a so-called basic proposition or principle of philosophy, if true, is also false, just because it is *only* a principle. It is, therefore, easy to refute it. The refutation consists in pointing out its defect; and it is defective because it only the universal or principle, is only the beginning. If the refutation is thorough, it is derived and developed from the principle itself, not accomplished by counter-assertions and random thoughts from outside (*PS*, p.13).

reading of this work as a positive attempt to furnish the metaphysical basis for Hegel's system – the *Phenomenology* performs a *via negativa* of revealing the inadequacy of uncritical and non-reflexive forms of life and thought. And this role is what constitutes the sense in which the *Phenomenology* forms an 'introduction' to systematic philosophy, as Hegel insists it does. Before we are ready to begin Science proper (i.e. Hegel's *Logic*), the *Phenomenology* would have us observe the incoherence of theories that attempt to begin without conforming to (1) and (2). In short, this prolegomenon to philosophical science would diagnose just what it is that goes wrong with philosophy when it fails to make an absolute beginning; the results of which might also explain the tendency of philosophy to end in *aporiai* and *impasse*. The hope is that this would provide the necessary impetus to motivate (1) and (2), without simply assuming these in such as way as to contravene their own stipulations. It would do so by showing that there simply is no coherent way to proceed without them.

Consistently enough, Hegel insists that his preliminary inquiry itself proceed without presupposition. It must therefore offer no more than an 'immanent critique' of its targeted theories, that is, it must show these to be internally incoherent rather than false or inadequate according to some presupposed criterion of truth or success. As Terry Pinkard reconstructs the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, 'since we must start somewhere, it seems that we must simply take whatever standards of evaluation we happen to have and subject them to some kind of internal test'.[39]

Unlike its systematic successor, on the other hand, the preliminary inquiry *would* have a fixed and limited subject matter; it would study, namely, any philosophical starting-point – any 'formation of consciousness' – that violates the constraints on an absolute beginning. Happily, this means that the *Phenomenology* would itself be free from the burden of having to make an absolute beginning; for it may simply observe what happens when other inquires do not. It would be a kind of phenomenology of philosophy itself; an exposé of the ways in which various presuppositions result in incoherence just by dint of their status as presuppositions. If successful and sufficiently comprehensive, it would show that philosophical inquiry is impossible in lieu of an absolute beginning.

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[39] Pinkard (1996), p. 6.

According to Houlgate, 'the *Science of Logic* presupposes the *Phenomenology*, therefore, not by inheriting from it any determinate conclusions or premises, but rather by inheriting a task'.[40] The task, I take it, is that of developing a form of inquiry that does respect constraints (1) and (2) and thereby fulfills the *desiderata* of a fully critical and reflexive form of inquiry.

Fortunately, the details how the *Phenomenology* is supposed to accomplish this work need not detain us here. We can simply take it on trust that Hegel has provided an incisive and comprehensive critique of philosophical theories that fail to make an absolute beginning. But the question remains how philosophical inquiry *should* begin if it cannot so much as determine its proper domain of inquiry in advance of the process of inquiring. How does the immanent science of 'self-determining determinacy' get underway once it has been shown, *via negativa,* to be necessary?

Well, according to the ideal of reflexivity, philosophical inquiry is supposed to proceed *via* an investigation of the very process of reasoning. And it seems fairly clear that this process involves the employment of various concepts or thoughts. But *what* conceptual structures should we take to be primitive to the process of reasoning? What should we treat as logically prior? It is here that constraint (1) kicks in, that is, the requirement that we begin with 'that which is immediate'.

This requirement clearly rules out taking complex conceptual structures as primitive, in so far as these structures are determined by ('mediated' by) simpler structures. (Of course one might begin *in time* with a complex structure and work back to simple structures, but this would not be to begin with complex structures in the sense of treating them as primitive.) But is there a perfectly simple conceptual structure, a 'logical atom' as it were, the investigation of which does not presuppose the mediation of other concepts? If Hegel could locate the 'beginning' of all rational inquiry in such a simple, unmediated thought, it seems his inquiry could get underway without bringing any more complex conceptual tools to bear.

Ultimately, it may well be an implication of Hegel's holism that there are no such logical atoms; that each and every thought can only be fully articulated in terms of its relation to other thoughts; that there is no such thing as immediate content *simpliciter*;

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[40] Houlgate (1986), p. 29.

and that, strictly speaking, constraint (1) is therefore too strong.[41] But Hegel begins (at least in the sense of beginning in time, beginning his book on philosophy) with a putative candidate of immediate content. This, it turns out, is the very concept of 'immediacy' itself. This concept is held up as a putative candidate of immediate content because the bare notion of '*is-ness*', of unspecified being, is said not to depend on any other conceptual determination. For it can seem that one does not have to know what particular things there are or even what *kinds* of beings there are in order to grasp the thought of being *in abstracto*. This utterly primitive thought, stripped of all concrete applications, might therefore be seen as free-standing *vis-à-vis* ontological theory. Indeed, it appears we do not need access to any more complex conceptual structures whatsoever to grasp the bare notion of 'is-ness'. Houlgate summarises this aspect of Hegel's strategy thus:

If thought is to determine its own necessary characteristics and presuppose no determinate categories or principles in so doing, it must begin by abstracting from and suspending all given, determinate thoughts and must think a thought in which nothing determinate is thought, a thought which is thus utterly *indeterminate*. For Hegel that thought is the indeterminate, empty thought of *being*.[42]

By beginning with the concept of immediacy, Hegel thus provisionally respects the constraint that we begin with that which is immediate, whilst leaving it an open question whether or not this constraint can ultimately be satisfied.[43] Arguably, what ensues in the unfolding of the *Science of Logic* purports to 'sublate' this methodological stricture itself, in a way that is supposed to make sense of the notion of a 'mediated immediacy'.[44] But that unfolding, and its strange dialectic of cancellation and preservation, is another story.

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[41] According to Hegel, '[t]he True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it truly what it is' (*PS*, p. 11). As Michael Rosen has detailed, this view is highly problematic from a hermeneutic perspective since, for one thing, it seems to imply that only the one who has completed the Hegelian system is 'in a position to fully comprehend (and hence to justify or criticize) the method by which it was reached' (M. Rosen (1982), p. 23).

[42] Houlgate (1991), p. 50.

[43] The obvious objection here is that the attempt to think about 'unconceptualised being' fails since an utterly indeterminate thought is no thought at all. Arguably, Hegel's claim that pure being collapses into nothing is an acknowledgement of just this point, which is why his attempt to begin with immediate content is only provisional. The *Logic*, on this interpretation, proceeds by making a series of 'false starts' but in a way that gradually approximates to an adequate conception of what is essential to the process of thinking and reasoning. What is not provisional is the insistence that we begin without dogmatic assertion.

[44] According to Justus Hartnack, 'the beginning of logic is both mediated and immediate' (Hartnack (1998), p. 8).

In summary, then, Hegel conceives of a solution to the paradox of beginning in terms of (a) an immanent critique of theories that fail to satisfy the constraints on an absolute beginning; and (b) an investigation of the basic units of thought, which proceeds from the simple concept of immediacy to more complex conceptual structures. The first part of the strategy aims to ensure that no methods are dogmatically presupposed, the second that no concepts are left unexamined. If the strategy works, Hegel might just have found a way of getting off the ground without making an assumption of any kind.

4. 'From the Papers of One Still Living'[45]

Søren Kierkegaard – alias Johannes Climacus – deals with what he calls the 'dialectic of the beginning' at some length in Book Two, Part One, Chapter Three, Section Four of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.[46] Due to the self-consciously unsystematic nature of this eccentric work, Climacus' remarks are typically fragmentary, often funny and satirical, rarely closely argued. For instance, Climacus raises an objection about how the comparative reflection in talk amongst Hegelians of 'the most immediate of all' might be dangerous for an absolute beginning and adds in a footnote:

> To show how would become too prolix here. Frequently it is not worth the trouble either, because, after a person has laboriously advanced an objection sharply, from a philosopher's rejoinder he discovers that his misunderstanding was not that he could not understand the idolized philosophy but rather that he had allowed himself to be persuaded to believe that the whole thing was supposed to be something – and not flabby thinking concealed by the most overbearing expressions.[47]

The pattern of alluded objections collapsing into satire and abuse is, from an analytical point of view, all too common. And this mischievous, irresponsible, style has the (thoroughly intended) effect of making the real substance behind the jibes frustratingly elusive.[48] But real substance, I believe, there is. The objection I want to pinpoint – for

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[45] This is of course the title of Kierkegaard's early review (1838) of Hans Christian Andersen's semi-autobiographical novel *Kun en Spillemand* [*Only a Fiddler*]. The review is collected in *Early Polemical Writings*.

[46] The over-the-top sectioning of *Postscript* is itself part of the parody of 'scientific' philosophy.

[47] *CUP*, fn. p. 111.

[48] 'Thoroughly intended' because Climacus, *qua* self-styled 'humourist', wants to show that if the proper response to errors in thought is careful critique, the proper response to illusions of thought is laughter. Thus Climacus writes that the problem with 'modern speculative thought' after Hegel is 'not a *false* proposition

there are several distinct objections in this section – is to the effect that Hegel's constraints on an absolute beginning are rather too lenient. Climacus says that Hegel is 'quite correct' about the need to begin with that which is immediate, but that he completely overlooks a rather important corollary of this very constraint:

> The system begins with the immediate and therefore without presuppositions and therefore absolutely. This is entirely correct and has indeed also been adequately admired. But why, then, before the system is begun, has that other equally important, definitely equally important, question not been clarified and its clear implications honored: *How does the system begin with the immediate, that is, does it begin with it immediately?* The answer to this must certainly be an unconditional no....The beginning of the system that begins with the immediate *is then itself achieved through reflection.*
> Here is the difficulty, for if one does not let go of this one thought, deceptively or thoughtlessly or in breathless haste to have the system finished, this thought in all its simplicity is capable of deciding that...a logical system must not boast of an absolute beginning, because such a beginning is...a pure chimera.'[49]

Climacus wants to know just *how* we are to begin with that which is immediate. Presumably, if Hegel's second constraint is to be satisfied, we must begin immediate*ly*. For part of what it means for an inquiry to be self-determining or presuppositionless is that it is not determined, or in any way mediated, by the outcome of any prior process of reflection. Climacus complains that Hegel does not so much as properly consider the implications of this constraint, let alone meet them. Now, in the light of Hegel's concerted efforts to accommodate the second constraint, this criticism may seem at the very least exaggerated. Perhaps Hegel cannot ultimately meet this requirement, but it seems clear he wants to. As we have seen, he is acutely aware not only of the need to begin with immediate content but also in such a way that the form of the inquiry is immediately constituted, that is, without presupposing any prior conceptual or methodological machinery.

In this light, one contemporary Hegelian scholar has suggested that Climacus' 'equally important question' here can readily be accommodated within Hegel's own account of the beginning:

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but a *comic* presupposition, occasioned by its having forgotten...what it means to be a human being' (*CUP*, p. 120). On the role of humour and satire in Climacus' critque of Hegel see Lippitt (2000), esp. Ch. 1; Cloeren (1985), pp. 4-5.

[49] *CUP*, p. 112.

If philosophy begins with indeterminacy to be free of foundations and provide the only admissible commencement for a development determined by nothing but itself, then indeed, the indeterminate content with which philosophy begins is equally indeterminate in form, in so far as no determinate method can already be operative. Hence, *contra* Kierkegaard, the beginning not only begins with immediacy but begins immediately.[50]

Perhaps, then, Climacus has simply not read enough Hegel to know that the latter certainly does at least attempt to 'honour the implications' of the requirement that we not only begin with that which is immediate, but that our inquiries also assume an immediate form?[51] Well, Climacus says that this constraint needs to be clarified before its clear implications can be honoured. In fact, I think, he adds this third constraint, which is supposed to follow from the two Hegel plainly does recognise:

(3) The inquirer must begin immediately with that with which she begins.

Climacus' point is that constraint (2) – that the inquiry must begin immediately with that with which it begins – has an important implication for the *inquirer* as well as the inquiry; namely (3). And this is surely correct: if an inquiry is to spontaneously establish itself it must not in any way be mediated by the prejudices of any particular inquirer. That is, it must not depend upon the results of any prior reflection that an inquirer has made. But it is precisely this constraint that Climacus charges Hegel with not so much as recognising, let alone satisfying. More: he proceeds to argue that since this constraint cannot be satisfied, the very idea of an absolute beginning is a 'pure chimera'.

Between the dots in the passage quoted above, this argument impinges on a contrast between 'existence' and 'system', and on some claim about the priority of the former, an adequate interpretation of which would involve a careful reading of Climacus' technical use of the word 'existence' already in play here.[52] But, for present purposes, I

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[50] Winfield, (1990), p. 55.

[51] Niels Thulstrup reports that Kierkegaard's knowledge of Hegel's texts 'can scarcely be correctly described as particularly extensive or exhaustive' (Thulstrup (1980a), p. 13). James Collins, however, asserts that 'Kierkegaard gave special attention to the *Science of Logic* and especially to the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. The first or logical section of the latter work was studied more closely than any other Hegelian text' (Collins (1983), p. 105).

[52] For a classic statement of Kierkegaard's various notions of 'existence' see Elrod (1975), esp. pp. 20-22.

think we can do without this involved excursion.[53] The basic structure of the objection becomes clearer as Climacus expands:

In other words, if a beginning cannot be made immediately with the immediate (which would then be conceived as a fortuitous event or a miracle, that is, which would mean not to think), but this beginning must be achieved through reflection, then the question arises very simply (alas, if only I am not put in the doghouse on account of my simplicity, because everyone can understand my question – and consequently must feel ashamed of the questioner's popular knowledge): how do I bring to a halt the reflection set in motion in order to reach that beginning? Reflection has the notable quality of being infinite. But being infinite must in any case mean that it cannot stop of its own accord, because in stopping itself it indeed uses itself and can be stopped only in the same way as a sickness is cured if it is itself allowed to prescribe the remedy, that is, the sickness is promoted.[54]

Essentially, Climacus wants to push Hegel into a dilemma here: either the beginning is made in a truly spontaneous manner, in which case it can only be conceived as utterly thoughtless ('a miracle'[55]), or it is made reflectively, in which case a regress looms. If Hegel grasps the first horn, he forfeits the resources to argue for a particular starting-point, however 'immanent' the critique in which his reasons are embedded. For, by definition, an immediate (= non-mediating) act cannot mediate between contents on the basis of reasons. If, on the other hand, Hegel goes for the second horn, he owes an account of how a process of reflection can culminate in a spontaneous act. Let me try to make a meal of what Climacus finds embarrassingly simple here.

In the previous chapter, it was noted that one of the things a thought can be about is another thought. The possibility of significant reflexivity is a general feature of thought. Now if Climacus' 'reflection' is read as a generic term for a series of reflexive acts of thinking it may be clearer why he should claim that reflection 'has the notable

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[53] It would also take us into metaphysical territory. It is undeniable that aspects of Climacus' critique trade on a metaphysical reading of Hegel. What I want to show, however, is that a very important part does not.

[54] *CUP*, p. 112.

[55] Cf. *CUP*, p. 188: '... when a systematician entertains us with a report that he became an adherent of the system through a miracle, something that seems to suggest that his systematic life and career do not have this in common with the system: to begin with nothing'.

quality of being infinite'.[56] Consider this proof of Dedekind's that at least one infinite set exists:[57]

Given some arbitrary thought s_1, there is a separate thought s_2, namely that s_1 can be an object of thought. And so on *ad infinitum*. Thus the set of thoughts is infinite.

Whether or not we take this to prove the existence of an infinite set of thoughts, we can surely give some sense to the 'and so on *ad infinitum*' here. And it is, at least, a natural way to read Climacus' claim that reflection is infinite; i.e. in just the sense that it is possible that an initial thought could 'set in motion' a self-perpetuating series of subsequent reflections.[58] Given that the search for an absolute beginning is also the search for an immediate, and therefore non-reflective, philosophical cognition, the worry is just how such a self-perpetuating series of reflexive acts is to be halted.

Roughly speaking, the regress arises as follows. Reflection on the *desiderata* of philosophical inquiry gives us reason to make an absolute beginning. So we reflect on how we might do that. We discover that we must begin immediately. So we reflect on how we might do that. But we discover precisely that we cannot do that whilst we are reflecting. So we reflect on that. And so on interminably. Each act judges of its object that it fails the requirements of an absolute beginning, just because it is a reflection. One thing, says Climacus, is clear: this sort of tail-chasing is not going to resolve itself into an absolute beginning. To attempt to reflect oneself out of reflection, he observes, is like attempting to cure oneself of a disease by promoting it. (Or compare the insomniac's attempt to escape wakefulness by reflecting on the need for sleep.)

Yet Hegel might be interpreted as arguing that the process of reflection is halted by an act that takes nothing but itself as its own object. For perhaps 'thinking pure immediacy', construed as an act of thinking that has no determinate object, is supposed to involve a kind of pure reflexivity. In this way, Hegel might want to claim that the process

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[56] Justus Hartnack, for one, seems to think this claim is deeply problematic: 'in the sense in which it is self-evident it is irrelevant, and in the sense in which it is relevant it is not correct that [reflection] is infinite' (Hartnack (1991), p. 125).

[57] Cited in A. Moore (1990), p. 113.

[58] Pat Bigelow offers the following description of Kierkegaard's use of 'reflection': 'Sometimes reflection means the reflected image and effect of the age in private, domestic and public life (the Danish *Reflex*), sometimes deliberation (the Danish *Reflexion*, meaning *Besindelse*, akin to Heidegger's *Besinung*)' (Bigelow (1987), p. 56 fn. 59).

of abstracting from all determinate thoughts results in a genuinely spontaneous act, that is, one that is unmediated by any prior acts. Recall that in Chapter One, we dismissed just this notion of an act that has nothing but itself as its own object on the grounds that such an act has lost the *raison d'être* of a judgment in the same way as 'This is a statement' has lost the *raison d'être* of a statement. Climacus appears to have a similar worry in mind when he reconstructs and probes the Hegelian position as follows:

> When a beginning with the immediate is achieved by reflection, the immediate must mean something different from what it usually does. Hegelian logicians have correctly discerned this, and therefore they define the immediate, with which logic begins, as follows: the most abstract remainder after an exhaustive abstraction. There is no objection to this definition, but it is certainly objectionable that they do not respect what they themselves are saying, inasmuch as this definition indirectly states that there is no absolute beginning. "How is that?" I hear someone say. "When one has abstracted from everything is there not then, etc.?" Indeed, *when* one has abstracted from everything. Let us be human beings. Like the act of reflection, this act of abstraction is infinite; so how do I bring it to a halt [?]...Let us even venture an imaginary construction in thought. Let that act of infinite abstraction be *in actu*; the beginning is not an act of abstraction but comes afterward. But then with what do I begin, now that there has been an abstraction from everything? Alas, at this point a Hegelian, deeply moved, perhaps would collapse on my chest and blissfully stammer: With nothing. And this is precisely what the system declares: that it begins with nothing. But I must pose my second question: How do I begin with this nothing?[59]

Climacus imagines his Hegelian interlocutor as responding to his initial goad about how reflection is to be halted by appealing to the concept of abstraction. Beginning to judge in accordance with a fully reflexive and rational system, a Hegelian might say, can only be achieved once we have abstracted from (i.e. put aside, bracketed) all determinate objects of thought in such a way that we are left with no other object of thought than the pure act of thinking itself. Given that this process of abstraction would itself be infinite, Climacus is worried whether this kind of bracketing is really possible for us ('Let us be human beings'). For the sake of argument, however, he is willing to imagine that someone has actually performed an 'act of infinite abstraction'. But what, he wonders, is left for this person to think after he has abstracted from all determinate objects of thought?

Climacus clearly has little time for the notion of an act of thinking that has nothing but itself as its own object. He continues,

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[59] *CUP*, p. 114.

The expression "to begin with nothing," even apart from its relation to the infinite act of abstraction, is itself deceptive... "The beginning is not" and "the beginning begins with nothing" are altogether identical theses, and I do not move from the spot.[60]

In other words, the only sense Climacus can make of the notion of beginning with nothing is the sense in which any beginning involves a new point of departure – the sense that to begin anew is to make a break with whatever went before. But this is very far from admitting any mysterious idea of an act of thinking that has nothing but its own nothingness as its object. Pure reflexivity, we might say, is a pure chimera.

Now Climacus' remarks on philosophical beginnings have often been seen to betray a rather naïve confusion. In a recent article, for instance, Rem B. Edwards makes the following, somewhat offhand, remark:

Kierkegaard failed to keep track of the distinction between temporal and epistemological termini, especially in his complaint that Hegel had no way of beginning immediately with immediacy. [61]

That Edwards declines to expand this objection any further is perhaps testimony to its received status amongst Kierkegaard's critics. To flesh it out a little more fully: According to Kierkegaard, a fully rational system of beliefs is impossible for human beings. This is supposed to be because, whereas such a system would be infinite, humans are finite, temporal beings who must therefore form their beliefs non-rationally. From this, Kierkegaard concludes that, since all belief-systems are founded on non-rational commitments, we are free to choose our basic beliefs. What Kierkegaard fails to see, however, is that how people happen to form their beliefs is quite irrelevant to the question whether their beliefs are justified. The former is a matter of contingent fact, the latter of epistemological principle. Kierkegaard thus commits the embarrassing mistake of identifying the genesis of a belief with the terminus of a justificatory chain.

Now Edwards is surely right to distinguish between sources and justifications. For example: I form my belief that it will rain tomorrow simply because I am inclined towards pessimism, but then consult a reliable forecast to see whether or not I am justified in so believing. But it is not at all clear that Kierkegaard is guilty of conflating the temporal moment of belief-formation and the logical moment of justification. On the

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[60] Ibid., pp. 114-5.
[61] Edwards (1985), p. 201.

contrary, Climacus is careful to distinguish between an epistemological 'beginning with immediacy' in the sense of beginning with a certain kind of content and a temporal 'beginning immediately' in the sense of a subject beginning in time to act in a certain way. Far from smudging this distinction, Climacus wants to show that problems surrounding the latter kind of beginning are philosophically important in their own right.

To reiterate: the basic structure of his objection takes the form of a dilemma. In so far as we begin immediately, we forfeit any reflective justification for beginning where we do. But as soon as we start a process of reflection in order to do that, we forfeit the possibility of beginning immediately. Either the inquiry cannot legitimate itself because it is founded on an arbitrary act or it cannot get started because it presupposes a self-perpetuating process of reflection. Climacus then sharpens the second horn by foreclosing the proposal that reflection is halted by a pure act that has no content other than its own activity. There is no such thing as a purely reflexive mental act, for Climacus – to think is to have a determinate thought. I take it that this dilemma, this 'simple thought', is from a dialectical point of view very powerful against Hegel. For it can 'grant' all of Hegel's solution – his provisions to ensure that his inquiry spontaneously grounds and generates itself – and still claim that he fails to satisfy his own *desiderata*. Certainly, this is what Climacus thinks he has shown:

This means that pure thinking is a phantom. And if Hegelian philosophy is free from all postulates, it has attained this with one insane postulate: the beginning of pure thinking.[62]

Baldly put, the objection is that the Hegelian vision of a fully reflexive and critical system comes to grief on the fact that thinking presupposes a thinker.[63] (Climacus is well aware that calling attention to this fact has the ring of the platitudinous. His objection is 'very plain and simple' and he is 'almost embarrassed to say it or to have to say it'.[64]) This is also the significance of the charge that Hegel illicitly attempts to 'smuggle movement into logic' – according to Climacus, there is only progress in thought to the

[62] *CUP*, p. 314.

[63] Geoffrey Hale puts the point succinctly when he characterizes Climacus' objection to the 'ideal objectivity' of Hegelianism thus: 'The moment one recognizes that there must be someone doing the thinking, this ideal objectivity falls apart' (Hale (2002), p. 180, n. 32). Compare also Niels Thulstrup: 'if the beginning of the allegedly logical system is determined by something other than the logical, then there is, in fact, a necessary presupposition for the beginning' (Thulstrup (1980b), p. 74).

extent that a thinking agent is active.[65] The dream of an absolute beginning is chimerical because such a beginning would require the possibility of a kind of 'thought thinking itself', a kind of pure reflexivity, in which no actual thinkers are involved.

Very plausibly, this is the significant content of Climacus' vicious caricatures of Hegel and the Hegelians. Thus, for example, he concludes his remarks on the dialectic of beginning in typically satirical vein:

.... a philosopher has gradually come to be such a marvelous creature that not even the most prodigal imagination has invented anything quite so fabulous...Whoever wants to be a philosopher will...above all not want to become a ludicrous creature by being transmogrified – *eins, zwei, drei, kokolurum* – into speculative thought. If the person occupied with logical thought is also human enough not to forget that he is an existing individual, even if he has finished the system, the fantasticality and the charlantry will gradually vanish.[66]

The 'fantasticality and the charlantry', I take it, derives from the Hegelian philosopher's pretensions to a kind of 'pure thought' which, because it necessarily requires both the absence of any determinate object of thought and the absence of any particular thinker, is a 'pure fantasy'.[67] Witness, for instance, one scholar's recent attempts to commend Hegel's conception of the role of the philosopher in systematic inquiry:

What happens in life is muddier, more confused, and less conscious than what happens in thought. The "science of experience" is much *clearer* than experience itself is (though it has not seemed so to most students of Hegel's text) precisely because it is *scientific*. This is "our contribution." Our task is to be scientific *observers*, and the philosophical science that we are concerned with is *logic*. Eventually our motion becomes the progression of human culture in historical time.

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[64] *CUP*, p. 116.

[65] The 'movements' in Hegel's *Logic* are notoriously difficult to account for. One scholar has recently suggested that the only way to account for 'Hegel's mysterious transitions' between *Begriffe* is in functional rather than deductive terms. On this view, each new *Begriff* in the system fulfills 'the functional purpose of providing depth and clarity to the preceding *Begriffe* and their subdivisions – a purpose which, from a narrative standpoint, is external to the conceptual content present at both key transitions' (Gaskins (1990), p., 405). Similarly, Michael Forster appeals to 'the drive to escape...self-contradictoriness' (Forster (1993), p. 146) and cites Hegel's reference to a 'drive to find a stable maning' (*HL* §87). Are these admissions of an extra-systematic teleology? From whence comes the 'drive'? Note, however, that Climacus' strategy (unlike Schelling's) is *not* to argue that this or that move within the system is illicit given their supposed necessity. Rather, he wants to undermine the very notion that concepts 'move', independently of the activities of any particular thinker.

[66] *CUP*, p. 117.

[67] Climacus writes: 'it seems a bit peculiar to me that there is this continual talk about speculation and speculation as if this were a man or as if a man were speculation. Speculation does everything – it doubts everything etc. The speculative thinker, on the other hand, has become too objective to talk about himself' (*CUP* p. 51).

The philosopher [who has read and understood the *Phenomenology*] is a singular shape of consciousness, and in her perfect appreciation of the great cycle of experience, she is logically the richest of shapes; but when she moves on to develop the Science of Logic from the threshold provided by the standpoint of speculative observation we have now achieved, she is "pure thinking" – and that is a shape no longer because "experience" is left behind.[68] [69]

It is this conception of 'our task' in philosophical inquiry as that of the 'scientific observer' who somehow gets free of the muddiness of life by being caught up first in 'the progression of human culture in historical time' and then in 'pure thinking itself' that Climacus finds wholly pernicious (not to mention ludicrous).[70] Hegel maintained that 'it is a matter of perfect indifference where a thing originated; the only question is: "is it true in and for itself?"'[71] 'Therefore one must be very cautious about becoming involved with a Hegelian', Climacus warns, 'and above all must ascertain who it is with whom one has the honour of speaking. Is he a human being, an existing human being?'[72]

5. Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein

Kierkegaard held a wildly subjectivist theory of truth. Wittgenstein conducted an all-out assault on the notion of privacy.[73] In the light of these caricatures it is somewhat curious to find the latter eulogizing the former as the 'most profound thinker of the nineteenth century'.[74] There is, in fact, a growing interest in the relationship between

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[68] Harris (1995), pp. 20, 93.

[69] Compare William Maker: '...there is no claim that as pure logical categories they [i.e. the components of Hegel's *Logic*] are the thought categories of the actual thinking subject (whose thought categories are what they are because of the relation of the subject to a world of objects)' (Maker, (1993b), p. 276). Compare also Willem de Vries' way of setting up the fundamental problematic of Hegel's *Logic*: 'How does one start doing logic? Since logic is the self-movement of the concept, it seems there is nothing that one *does* at all. How does one get concepts to move themselves?' (de Vries (1993), p. 236).

[70] Cf. *CUP*, p. 133: 'The objective orientation (which wants to turn everyone into an observer and at its maximum into such an observer that, almost like a ghost, he is easily confused with the prodigious spirit of ages past) naturally wants to hear nothing except that which stands in relation to itself'.

[71] *PH*, p. 331.

[72] *CUP*, p. 306.Compare Nietzsche's claim that 'the only thing of interest in a refuted system is the personal element' (cited in Houlgate (1986), n. 26, p. 261).

[73] On the apparent tension between Kierkegaard's association of 'spiritual integrity with a sense of the essentially private' and Wittgenstein's so-called private language argument, see Gurrey (1990).

[74] According to Maurice O'C. Drury, Wittgenstein made this declaration during a discussion after a meeting of the Moral Sciences Club (Drury (1981), p. 102). For an inventory of Wittgenstein's explicit references to Kierkegaard, see Creegan (1989), Ch. 1.

these two thinkers, largely from within the philosophy of religion.[75] Arguably, however, Climacus' remarks on the 'dialectic of beginning', mark a broader field of philosophical common ground.

For it should already be clear that there are close parallels between the issues discussed in Chapter One concerning rule-following and Climacus' worries about Hegelian systematicity. In both cases, the issue is how human subjects begin to think in accordance with systems or rules of thought. And in both cases, the problem is that this appears to require a role for spontaneous activity that is in tension with an obvious reading of what it means to *follow* a rule or to think systematically, namely, by means of acts of reflection, interpretation, reasoning, mediation. In other words, both cases involve versions of the Paradox of Constrained Spontaneity (PCS). Wittgenstein draws the lesson that it cannot be the case that following a rule requires a prior mental act of the kind postulated by some philosophers of mind. Climacus draws the lesson that it cannot be the case that human subjects perform an absolute beginning of the kind envisioned by Hegel.

Yet there is an important asymmetry between Wittgenstein and Climacus' concerns. For whereas we obviously do follow rules, it is far from clear that anyone has actually performed an absolute beginning. This raises the following problem. Climacus argues that Hegel's attempt to solve his paradox of beginning is inadequate on the grounds that it fails to address the PCS. But, according to the Wittgensteinian considerations explored in Chapter One, it appears this latter paradox is not unique to the Hegelian project. For any account of mundane acts of rule-following must somehow explain how one and the same act can be both spontaneous and constrained. So is Climacus in danger of unintentionally ruling out the possibility of rule-following *per se* by arguing that Hegel's conception of systematicity is incoherent on these grounds?

One possible solution to this problem is that Climacus simply fails to foresee the extent of the problem he articulates. In the following chapters, I shall show that, on the contrary, the central Kierkegaardian themes of 'the leap' and 'indirect communication' (Chapter Three), as well as the role of the imagination (Chapter Four), are all informed

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[75] See, e.g., Cavell (1969); Hustwit (1978); Cloeren (1985); R. H. Bell, (1988); Creegan (1989); Conant (1989a); Conant (1993); Conant (1995); Hannay (1990); Phillips (1992); Hall (1993); Ferreira (1994); Barrett (1994); Mulhall (1994); Roberts (1995). In very large part, the burden of these writers is to expand

by a wide-ranging engagement with the PCS. Indeed, we shall see how Climacus even insists on the intractability of the paradox, on a sense in which it cannot be solved. Climacus is therefore not committed to the crude position that any theory that implies a tension between spontaneity and systematicity is *ipso facto* nonsensical. And he certainly does not want to commit himself to the impossibility of logical, systematic thought *per se* – after all, the section in which he focuses his worries about absolute beginnings purports precisely to 'posit and expound' the possibility of a logical system.[76]

The truth is that the PCS plays a subtler role in Climacus' criticism of Hegel. Climacus' point is that if logical beginnings do indeed involve a kind of constrained spontaneity – what he calls a 'leap' (see Chapter Three of this thesis) – then they cannot be achieved by means of a wholly reflexive form of critical reflection. Thought – even abstract philosophical thought – cannot be detached from the spontaneous activity of existing human beings; systems of rules cannot be meaningfully abstracted from the extra-systematic activities of those who follow them. And here is the deep kinship with Wittgenstein. For both Climacus and (the later) Wittgenstein diagnose the kind of mistake characteristic of philosophers in the attempt to sever logic, thought and language from the interests, decisions and practices of actual human beings. Wittgenstein, too, once pleaded, 'Let us be human'.[77]

This kinship is evident, to briefly take one example, when Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein turn their attention to philosophers' doubts. *Johannes Climacus*, the unfinished novella also entitled, *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, is a sustained satire on the modern dictum that philosophy only truly begins once each and every assumption has been subjected to the test of doubt – an idea that clearly informs Hegel's method.[78] The piece revolves around a distinction between genuine doubt – the kind that humans

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on Cavell's proposal: 'The religious is a Kierkegaardian stage of life; and I suggest it should be thought of as a Wittgensteinian form of life' (Cavell (1969), p. 172).

[76] Julia Watkin is therefore right to distinguish between a Hegelian conception of absolute systematicity (which Climacus rejects) and a more modest conception of rule-governed thought (which Climacus upholds). Watkin, however, construes this distinction metaphysically in terms of an attempt to 'put all existence into a total logical *existential* system' on the one hand, and 'propositional logical systems' on the other, and therefore overlooks the non-metaphysical aspect of Climacus' critique (See Watkin (1997a), fn. pp. 96-7).

[77] *CV*, p. 36 (MS 119 83: 7.10.1937).

[78] Cf. Houlgate (1991), p. 48: '[Hegel] is insisting that 'science be preceded by universal doubt, or a total absence of presupposition''.

actually experience and struggle to overcome – and a sort of pseudo-doubt – the kind arguably displayed by the philosophers' claim to have doubted everything in the first few pages of their systems.[79] Thus the eponymous hero is humorously portrayed as an earnest youth whose attempts to take seriously the philosophers' injunction to 'begin with doubt' only end in despair of ever beginning to philosophize. Kierkegaard apparently intended to append the following epilogue:

Then the philosophers are worse than the Pharisees, who, as we read, impose heavy burdens but themselves do not lift them, for in this they are the same, but the philosophers demand the impossible. And if there is a young man who thinks that to philosophize is not to talk or write but in all quietness to do honestly and scrupulously what the philosophers say one should, they let him waste his time, many years of his life, and then it becomes clear that it is impossible, and yet it has gripped him so profoundly that rescue is perhaps impossible.[80]

So in what sense is the injunction to 'begin with doubt' worse than pharisaical? Again, the crux of the matter is the 'simple thought' that acts of doubting require, so to speak, a *bona fide* doubter. Thinking and doubting are simply not the kind of phenomena that occur in the absence of the interests and concerns of any particular thinker or doubter. The accent is thus firmly on the question: '*How does the single individual who enunciates* [the] *thesis* [that philosophy begins with doubt] *relate to it?*'[81] But just as the notion of an absolute beginning is seen to be incoherent when the role of spontaneity is respected, so we are to see that the notion of an all-encompassing kind of doubt such as might preface a philosophical 'science' appears quite absurd once this question is properly addressed.

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[79] Kierkegaard's choice of epigraph from Spinoza clearly signals the importance of such a distinction: 'I speak of real doubt existing in the mind, not of such doubts as we see exemplified when his mind does not really hesitate. The cure of the latter does not fall within the province of Method, it belongs rather to inquiries concerning obstinacy and its cure' (*JC*, unpaginated). Kierkegaard had made a similar distinction in his Masters' dissertation between 'speculative doubt and common doubt about this or that' (*CI*, p. 247). Compare also Judge William: 'one must distinguish between a personal and a scientific doubt. Personal doubt is always about something special, and a passion for annihilation of the kind one so often hears talk of leads at most to crowds of people venturing out without having the strength to doubt, or else ending in some half-measures which is certain failure just the same' (*EO* (Hannay), p. 433). For his part, Climacus ironically refers to the modern tendency '"to doubt everything" – at the lectern' (*CUP*, p. 365).

It is interesting to note that Johannes de Silentio spares Descartes himself from censure on the grounds that this 'venerable, honest, humble thinker' was not a 'bellowing street-watch' and was 'modest enough to allow that his method was important only for himself and sprang partly from his own earlier bungling with knowledge' (*FT* (Hannay), p. 41). In support, de Silentio quotes Descartes as avowing his aim 'not to teach the Method which everyone should follow in order to promote the good conduct of Reason, but only to show in what manner I have endeavored to conduct my own' (ibid., p. 42).

[80] *JP* III 3291 (Pap. IV B 6) n.d., 1842-3.

[81] *JC*, p. 151.

This, Climacus discovers, is not least because to take seriously the injunction to 'doubt everything' appears to have the unfortunate consequence that one has to withdraw one's assent from nothing whatsoever. To be sure, we can perfectly well make sense of one's withdrawing assent from this or that commitment in order to subject these to critical scrutiny. But this only makes sense in the case that one has commitments from which to withdraw. To suppose that, if we go on 'withdrawing' long enough, we can somehow get ourselves into a position in which we can 'start again' with a clean slate, on the other hand, is absurd. This is not because such a process would take too long or require too much effort, but because 'to withdraw assent' *presupposes* prior assent. Just as the parent who never gives their children sweets would be confused if they tried 'withdrawing' sweets as a punishment, so to attempt to simultaneously withdraw one's assent from every proposition is to withdraw from no proposition. The lesson is that, as with the case of breaking promises, doubts only make sense against a background of prior commitment.[82] As a matter of logic, doubting must come to an end somewhere.

Wittgenstein, for his part, also made much of the distinction between merely being able to imagine a doubt in a certain case, and one's actually doubting:

> ...that is not to say that we are in doubt because it is possible for us to *imagine* a doubt. I can easily imagine someone always doubting before he opened his front door whether an abyss did not yawn behind it, and making sure about it before he went through the door (and he might on some occasion prove to be right) – but that does not make me doubt in the same case.[83]

Armed with this distinction between genuine doubt and the thought of the possibility of doubt, Wittgenstein goes on to attack the pervasive idea that 'secure understanding is only possible if we first doubt everything that *can* be doubted, and then remove all these doubts'.[84] This notion, he argues, rests on the mistaken idea that the mere possibility of doubt in a given case reveals some kind of deficiency in our epistemic structures. That is, philosophers are liable to confuse the fact that something *can* be doubted with a genuine

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[82] Climacus' route to this conclusion, as reported in *Johannes Climacus*, is circuitous. But he puts the point succinctly enough in *Postscript*: 'It is quite certain that at the bottom of all skepticism there is an abstract certainty that is the foothold of doubt and is like the line one draws as the base upon which the figure is sketched' (*CUP*, fn., p. 335).

[83] *PI* §84.

[84] Ibid. §87.

epistemological problem.[85] If this is something of a passing remark in the *Investigations*, the distinction between genuine doubts and the kind of doubts philosophers' typically take themselves to engage becomes the overture of *On Certainty*. To cite just two remarks, both of which might have made fit epigraphs for Kierkegaard's novella:

If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.[86]

I really want to say that a language-game is only possible if one trusts something (I did not say "can trust something").[87]

Note the agreement with Climacus that the notion of doubting everything is absurd since doubts are only possible against a background of prior certainty, commitment, trust.[88]

It is important to stress that, for both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, the point here is not is that 'doubting everything' or 'thinking according to a fully critical and reflexive system' are ideals that humans, due to their metaphysical condition of finitude, are unfortunately unable to attain.[89] Neither is their intention to recommend a 'retreat to commitment' or unreflective praxis in the face of the endless possibilities of doubt or critical reflection. No: doubt is a genuine issue and critical reflection an important task for thoughtful human beings.[90] Rather, the point is simply that 'thoughts' and 'doubts' are only possible at all to the extent that they are inhabited – i.e. immediately related to - by actual subjects. Since this is something that, according to Kierkegaard and

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[85] This is surely also the point of the more provocative remark: 'Is no demon deceiving us at present? Well, if he is, it doesn't matter. What the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve over' (*RFM* III-78, p. 205).

[86] *OC* §115.

[87] Ibid. §509.

[88] This is what Climacus calls 'faith in the ordinary sense' as opposed to the 'eminent sense' of religious faith (cf. *PF*, p. 84). For helpful further discussion see Evans (1983), p. 132. Compare also Santayana's conception of 'animal faith' (see Sartwell (1991)).

[89] Julia Watkins, for instance, stresses 'Climacus's realization that reflection concerning everything must so exceed the capability of the human mind to finish with it, the thinker is forced to set limits to the scope of inquiry' (Watkins (1997), p. 110). To be sure, Climacus does sometimes make this kind of point, for example, when he says that an 'existential system' – i.e. a total comprehension of the whole of reality of the kind 'metaphysical' readers attribute to Hegel – is possible for God but not for humans. But, as I have tried to show, Climacus' critique has an important non-metaphysical aspect. For thoughtful criticisms of attributions to Climacus of a 'reassuringly standardized formula' (Cf. *CUP* p. 123) pertaining to the difference between existential and logical systems, see Turner & Beidler (1991).

[90] Stanley Cavell emphasises this kind of point in connection with Wittgenstein on scepticism. Far from summarily dismissing sceptical questions as 'mere nonsense', for Cavell 'this struggle with scepticism is endless: I mean to say that it is human' (Cavell (1989), p. 56).

Wittgenstein, philosophers are liable to forget, their self-appointed task in relation to the academy is to 'assemble reminders' of what it means to be a human being.

In sum, Climacus appeals to the PCS by way of emphasising the close conceptual tie between thought and thinker, a tie he believes Hegel's vision of a fully critical and reflexive system necessarily sunders. In his rôle as 'humourist', Climacus brings out the comedy involved in a human being confusing himself with 'thought itself'. For Climacus, however, this is not only confused but also *unethical*, in the sense in which having an interest in the purpose and significance of one's own life is the point of departure of ethical reflection.[91] For consider again the idea of a presuppositionless inquiry. Is this an inquiry in which the inquirer can have no interest? But is not the mere resolution to undertake the inquiry the expression of interest, an assumption that the exercise will enrich our lives or deepen our understanding? If so, is it a necessary condition of conducting an absolute inquiry that one resolves to forget one's resolve to conduct it? Witness an unlikely case:

A thinker erects a huge building, a system, a system embracing the whole of existence, world history, etc., and if his personal life is considered, to our amazement the appalling and ludicrous discovery is made that he himself does not personally live in this huge, domed palace, but in a shed alongside of it, or in a doghouse, or at best in the janitor's quarters. Were he to be reminded of this contradiction by a single word, he would be insulted. For he does not fear to be in error if he can only complete his system – with the help of being in error.[92]

Kierkegaard sometimes expressed a desire to find an idea that he could *live* by. For him, the most ambitious of philosophers was not ambitious enough.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

I have argued that a major trajectory of Climacus' critique survives 'non-metaphysical' readings of Hegel's project, and involves an extension of Hegel's own requirement of immediacy to the thinking subject. Certain general parallels with Wittgenstein (which I have but sketched) reinforce this reading of Climacus in terms of the PCS. The task of the next chapter is to show how, far from being confined to a one-off section of the *Postscript*, the PCS plays a philosophically fertile role in the pervasive Kierkegaardian themes of 'the leap' and 'indirect communication'.

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[91] Cf. Levinas' claim that 'ethics' is prior to 'philosophy' (e.g. Levinas (1979), p. 201).

[92] *SUD*, p. 43-4.

CHAPTER
THREE Thinking without a Rule:
The Theory of the Leap

> We are probably best in accord with ordinary usage if
> we take a judgement to be an act of judging, as a leap
> is an act of leaping...With an act there also belongs an
> agent, and we do not know the act completely if we
> do not know the agent.
>
> (Gottlob Frege)

> Tell me *how* you seek and I will tell you
> *what* you are seeking
>
> (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

Consider the following passage from a paper by Norton Batkin on Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language:

It is in the context of a particular training or of particular practices already mastered that a moment of pointing teaches us or defines for us a use of a word. Learning the use of a word is not a matter of leaping from the word to the world, along the pointing arm of the teacher, but rather a matter of leaping from practice to practice. From this training I leap to that practice, from that practice I leap to another. From repeating the words "block", "slab", "beam" after the teacher, I leap to repeating the words as he points to differently shaped stones and says "block", "slab", "beam". And then I leap to saying the words out loud as he points, silently, to the stones."[1]

Batkin's argument, of which this is a fragment, is just one take on the so-called 'rule-following considerations'. Rather than getting immediately embroiled, I want merely to register the repeated and striking mention of 'leaping' here. Batkin seems to be claiming that there is some curious kind of activity, at the very heart of our linguistic competence, which is best captured by the verb, *to leap*. Witness now a passage in the introduction to the collection to which Batkin's paper contributes, compiled in honour of Stanley Cavell:

On standard accounts [of the so-called Private Language Argument]...[t]he public nature of language...is supposed to provide an automatic resolution to scepticism about other minds. Again, however. Cavell turns the table: for him, the fact that we can only learn our language in a public situation means that we can never be quite sure of what we mean in making a claim about another or, in fact, in making claims about ourselves. The conditions under which we learn to use a

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[1] Batkin (1993), p. 255.

language preclude certainty that we mean the same as others, thus that in telling them how it is with ourselves as well as venturing how it is with them we can be guaranteed error-free communication. Instead, the use of language for the description of our own state as well as those of others requires a leap of faith in what Cavell calls "our mutual attunement." This leap seems less dramatic than Kierkegaard's leap of faith in religious life but far more pervasive; it characterises the whole of life with others and ourselves'.[2]

The burden of this chapter is to show how 'Kierkegaard's leap' is not confined to applications in the religious life, that it does indeed characterise the 'whole of life with others and ourselves', and that it offers a surprisingly cogent way of cashing out Batkin' sense of leaping as a condition of learning and following the rules of thought and language.[3] Although I shall not pursue the possibility here, it may just turn out that this reveals rule-following to involve quite as 'dramatic' a leap as that involved in the kind of religious faith more often associated with Kierkegaard.[4]

Specifically, the aim is to justify treating Kierkegaard's 'theory of the leap' as a response to the PCS (see Chapters One and Two) on both interpretative and substantive grounds.[5] To this end, I first offer a reading of Climacus' use of the metaphor of leaping in the context of his critique of Hegelian systematicity (Section 1). I argue that this metaphor serves the dual purpose of affording an ineluctable role for spontaneity in judgement whilst maintaining a sharp distinction between acts and objects of thought. It thereby also serves to intensify the paradox, implying certain limits to explanation.

Given that, however well-motivated, this metaphor hardly offers a satisfying *solution* to the PCS, I proceed to explore a strategy for 'dissolving' the paradox suggested by Kierkegaard's texts (Section 2). In this connection, I advance an 'Inseparability Thesis' about the relation between acts of thinking and their logically constrained objects.

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[2] Cohen, Guyer & Putnam (1993), p. 6.

[3] The popular notion that Kierkegaardian leaps are exclusively religious phenomena is far from foreign to serious scholarship: T. H. Croxall, for example, baldly asserts, '[a]nd in every case this leap is a leap of Faith. it is a religious movement' (Croxall (1956), p. 20). In fact, as M. Jamie Ferreira has emphasized, Kierkegaard *never* actually uses the phrase 'leap of faith' (see Ferreira (1998), p. 207).

[4] It may thus have the added value of providing *prima facie* grounds for taking the latter rather more seriously than analytical philosophers are wont to do. On religious 'leaps' in Kierkegaard see the Epilogue to this thesis.

[5] There is *no* intention in what follows to argue that the theory of the leap is exclusively concerned with the theory of judgement. Of course, Kierkegaard paints on a much broader canvass, and religious concepts undoubtedly provide his main subject. It *is* my contention, however, that a proper understanding of the more formal aspects of Kierkegaard's thought sheds light on the nature of his project as a whole (see the Prologue and Epilogue to this thesis).

This thesis not only helps to make sense of the notion of constrained spontaneity, I argue, but also offers an account of why the paradox arises for philosophical reflection.

The focus then turns to Kierkegaard's theory and practice of communication. Beginning with a journal entry that refers to the 'indirect' demonstration of basic principles, I display the limitations of this strategy *via* an argument of Frege's (Section 3). Kierkegaard's connection between indirect demonstration and 'the leap', however, suggests a way of overcoming these limitations, which I illustrate by reading Frege's argument as a Kierkegaardian indirect communication (Section 4). The upshot is a form of argument I call the *rhetorical reductio*, the aim of which is to elicit spontaneous agreement. I conclude by showing how Kierkegaard deploys such arguments against Hegel (Section 5).

1. Describing the Paradox

In the course of objecting to Hegel's conception of systematic inquiry – on the grounds that beginning to think according to a logical system essentially involves the spontaneity of the thinking subject (see Chapter Two) – Climacus writes,

What if, rather than speaking or dreaming of an absolute beginning, we speak of a leap? To want to be satisfied with a "mostly," an "as good as," a "one can almost say that," an "if you sleep on it until tomorrow, you may as well say that" merely shows that one is related to Trop, who little by little went so far as to assume that having almost taken the bar examination was the same as having taken it. Everyone laughs at this, but when one chatters speculatively in the same manner in the realm of truth, in the shrine of science and scholarship, then it is good philosophy – genuine speculative philosophy. Lessing was no speculative philosopher, therefore he assumed the opposite, that an infinitely little distance makes the ditch infinitely broad, because the leap itself makes that ditch broad.[6]

Two things are immediately note-worthy. First, the metaphor of leaping is applied in the context of thinking according to a logical system. So much for the idea that Kierkegaardian leaps are all of religious faith. Second, part of the purpose of this metaphor is to emphasise the kind of transitions involved in thinking logically. According to Climacus, such transitions are *qualitative* transitions – where a transition from X to Y is qualitative if and only if X and Y are different in kind – or, in Aristotle's terms, a shift

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[6] *CUP*, p. 115.

from one genus to another.[7] The rhetorical context of this insistence on the qualitative nature of logical transitions is Climacus' attempt to undermine the Hegelian notion that new points of departure in thought are achieved 'immanently' and 'necessarily' within the self-generating activity of 'thought itself'.[8] Any prior process of reflection such as might precede a new point of departure, Climacus goes on to declare, 'must be halted by a leap'. Or, as he puts it later in the *Postscript*,

...if ['the infinity of reflection'] is to be overcome there must be a break, a qualitative leap, and that is the end of the [Hegelian] method, of the dexterity of immanence and the necessity of transition.[9]

Hence the satirical analogy between the Hegelian method and Trop's delusion of achievement.[10] As we saw in Chapter Two, Climacus wants to show that, *pace* Hegel, movement in thought requires the decisive, spontaneous activity of a thinking subject. And the metaphor of leaping serves, in the first instance, to underscore that point.[11]

Now it is not hard to see why Climacus chooses this metaphor for modelling a spontaneous act that effects a qualitative change. For leaping usually involves getting from A to B without touching whatever lies between; and spontaneity usually has to do with the achievement of some result in the absence of intermediate or external determination. Less obvious is what 'A' and 'B' are place-holders for in the case of the

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[7] Climacus frequently uses the term *metabasis eis allo genos* (i.e. transition from one genus to another) to characterize the leap to religious faith (see, e.g., *CUP*, p. 98). Compare the following from Kierkegaard's *Journals*: 'Can the transition from a quantitative to a qualitative determination occur without a leap? And doesn't all of life lie in this?' (*JP* 42-3 IV C 84 (Hannay), p. 177).

[8] For a detailed account of 'the leap' as a protest against Hegelian mediation see Johnson (1997).

[9] *CUP*, p. 338.

[10] The same satirical note is struck in the following:

If a dancer could leap very high, we would admire him, but if he wanted to give the impression that he could fly – even though he could leap higher than any dancer had leapt before – let laughter overtake him. Leaping means to belong essentially to the earth and to respect the law of gravity so that the leap is merely the momentary, but flying means to be set free from telluric conditions, something that is reserved exclusively for winged creatures, perhaps also for inhabitants of the moon, perhaps – and perhaps that is also where the system will at long last find its true readers (*CUP*, p. 124).

[11] Arguably, Climacus' talk of the need for 'decision' and 'resolution' in this context serves the same purpose (see e.g. ibid., p. 113). Although such terms suggest prior deliberation, this surely cannot be right given Climacus' insistence on spontaneity. Compare Wittgenstein's remark that 'it would *almost* be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage [of applying a rule], but that a new decision was needed at every stage' (*PI* §186, my emphasis. Cf. *RFM* VI-24 (p. 326)). See also M. J. Ferreira's distinction between a decision to do such-and-such and a decision that such-and-such is the case (Ferreira (1991), pp. 44-5); and C. Stephen Evans' criticisms of 'volitionist' interpretations (Evans (1989)).

leaps allegedly involved in judgement. Why exactly does beginning to think according to a logical system – or learning to follow a rule – involve a qualitative transition?

The primary qualitative difference of relevance here is that between one's lacking and possessing a capacity.[12] Climacus' argument hinges on the assumption that for any given subject there is a determinate answer to the question whether or not they have learned how to think according to a given rule or system. Either a child can extend '+2' beyond the examples they have learnt by rote, or the child has not yet acquired that competence. The two cases are qualitatively distinct. To say, on the contrary, that one has 'almost' acquired the capacity to follow a given rule makes no sense. In other words, *to think systematically* and *to follow a rule* are success verbs. But if, as Climacus has argued, acquiring a logical capacity cannot be a matter of gradual approximation by means of prior acts of reflection, it must involve a peculiar kind of spontaneity by means of which one somehow 'leaps' into possession of the capacity. That is, it must involve a logically constrained form of spontaneity. In this way, 'the leap', as a metaphor for qualitative transitions, serves also to underline the paradoxical nature of our acquiring new capacities for judgement.

When Russell once asked Wittgenstein whether he was thinking about logic or his sins, the latter famously replied, 'both'.[13] The combination seems unlikely. Yet, in *The Concept of Anxiety*, the metaphor of leaping is applied in the context of a discussion of sin in a way that might help to shed light on the sense in which logical thought involves a

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[12] It should be noted, however, that Climacus also marks a 'leap' *from* possessing a capacity for performing judgements of a certain kind to the 'subjective acceptance' that is constitutive of one's actually performing acts of that kind. For he denies that the latter 'follows directly of its own accord' from the former (*CUP*, p. 129-30). The basic point here is that, in all cases of non-tautologous judgement, there is a logical gap between being able to apply concepts and entertain judgements on the one hand, and exercising those capacities in judgement on the other. Whether one judges that all swans are white, for example, is a separate question from whether one has learnt how to apply the concepts *all*, *swans* and *white*. (By contrast, to judge that all bachelors are unmarried men just is to grasp the concept *bachelor*.) This, therefore, is a species of what Climacus will call 'the leap from possibility to actuality' – in this case the transition from entertaining certain propositions, to actually judging them to be true.

But is not the gap between entertaining and judging bridged by such items as evidence and reasons? Suffice it to say here that Kierkegaard insists that how we interpret evidence has a large bearing on what we take it to prove and suggests that, in cases of non-deductive reasoning such as induction and argument from analogy, forming a judgement on the basis of such arguments is not compelled but requires a 'leap' beyond that which logic can guarantee. See Climacus' discussion of arguments for the existence in God (e.g. *PF*, pp. 39-44) and Kierkegaard's remarks on non-tautologous reasoning (e.g. *JP* III V C 7, n.d. (1844), p. 19; V A 74, n.d (1844), 16). I shall not be concerned here to defend these particular claims about the roles of evidence and induction since the motivation for the metaphor does not depend upon them.

[13] See Monk (1991), p. 64.

leap. Vigilius Haufniensis has already declared that 'sin came into the world by a leap'. In characteristically complex prose, he enlarges as follows:

The difficulty for the understanding is that sin presupposes itself, that sin comes into the world in such a way that by the fact that it is, it is presupposed. Thus sin comes into the world as the sudden, i.e. by a leap; but this leap also posits the quality, and since the quality is posited, the leap in that very moment is turned into the quality and is presupposed by the quality and the quality by the leap. To the understanding this is an offense; *ergo* it is a myth. As compensation, the understanding invents its own myth, which denies the leap and explains the circle as a straight line, and now everything proceeds quite naturally. The understanding talks fantastically about man's state prior to the fall, and, in the course of the small talk, the projected innocence is changed little by little into sinfulness, and so there it is. The lecture of the understanding may on this occasion be compared with the counting rhyme in which children delight; one-nis-ball, two-nis-ball, three-nis-ball, etc., up to nine-nis-ball and tennis balls. Insofar as the myth of the understanding is supposed to contain anything, it would be that sinfulness precedes sin. But if this were true in the sense that sinfulness has come in by something other than sin, the concept would be canceled. But if it comes in by sin, then sin is prior to sinfulness. This contradiction is the only dialectical consequence that accommodates both the leap and the immanence (i.e. the subsequent immanence).[14]

This passage reworks a puzzle that has long exercised theologians. In Augustine's terms, it is the puzzle of how a perfect creation could spontaneously go wrong. Now it would not be wildly off-beam to paraphrase the PCS as a puzzle about how logically imperfect human subjects can spontaneously go *right* in judgement. And the structure of Haufniensis' difficult train of thought suggests the possibility of transposing his remarks to the context of judgement in the following, I hope fairly natural, way:

What is difficult to understand is that acquiring the capacity to perform judgements of type X seems to presuppose that one already possesses that very capacity. If learning how to perform judgements of a certain kind is a matter of spontaneity, it seems this spontaneity must already be mediated by that capacity. This might be thought of as a *leap*, where leaping is a kind of activity that, as Climacus puts it, is 'closest to being in two places at the same time'.[15] Since this is deeply paradoxical, we may be tempted to reject the notion of a leap and resort instead to that of a gradual transition. On this account, one acquires the capacity to perform judgements of type X on the basis of judgements of other types. But this cannot be right. For a series of judgements of, say,

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[14] *CA*, p. 32.

[15] Cf. *CUP*, pp. 199.

type Y can never produce a judgement of type X, no more than a series of numbers produces tennis balls. So we are forced back on the view that acquiring the capacity to perform judgements of type X requires exercising that capacity. Whilst this is undeniably paradoxical, it is the only way of accounting for the possibility of one's acquiring a capacity which, once acquired, presupposes itself.

Again, the accent is on the qualitative nature of the transition involved in acquiring a capacity to perform judgements. (Compare the tennis-ball joke with the Peanuts cartoon in which ten milligrams equal one centigram, ten decigrams one gram, and ten grams one grampa!) But here we have a stronger sense of paradox. For the main lesson of Haufniensis' metaphor of leaping seems to be that 'the understanding' cannot supply the intermediary steps that would appear necessary for one to get from a state of lacking a certain capacity to possessing it. The figure of a leap thus registers the sense that inasmuch as rule-following does not involve prior reflections on or interpretations of a rule, it must involve a sudden and mysterious act of 'boot-strapping', in which a capacity is acquired just by dint of its being exercised.[16]

If the above transposition from the context of sin to that of thought is along the right lines – and I hope it is clear that the results of this maneuver are supported by Climacus' text – it follows that a 'Kierkegaardian' theory of judgement is committed to the view that the paradoxical notion of a leap is in some sense inescapable. Now, as Haufniensis admits in the context of sin, this conclusion is difficult to stomach – it is an 'offence to the understanding'. I shall shortly try to render it less offensive. But it is worth noting in passing that Wittgenstein sometimes articulated his understanding of rule-following in similarly paradoxical terms. For example,

...However many intermediate steps I insert between the thought and its application, each intermediate step always follows the previous one without any intermediate link, and so too the application follows the last intermediate step. It is the same as when we want to insert intermediate links between decision and action.

....

We can't cross the bridge to the execution until we are there.[17]

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[16] Compare Cavell's reference to 'a leap [not of faith but, let us say, of reason] from a ground that is itself implied or defined by the leap' (Cavell (1985), p. 531).

[17] *PG* §110 (p. 160). Cf. *BBB*, p. 145.

If there are no intermediary mental acts that reveal how one is to apply a rule in a given case, and if there is thus a qualitative distinction between interpretations and applications, then the latter must be unmediated by the former. But *how* then can we learn to apply rules? It seems that acquiring the capacity to apply a rule *presupposes* the exercise of that very capacity. And the metaphor of a bridge that has to have already been crossed before it can be crossed surely recalls Haufniensis' sense of a leap to possession of a capacity that presupposes itself. A passage from Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* is even more redolent:

I see that it is red – but how does that help me if I do not know what I have to say or how, in some other way, to give expression to my knowledge? For sooner or later I must make the transition to expression. And at this transition all rules leave me in the lurch. For now they all really hang in the air. All good advice is of no help to me, for in the end I must make a leap. I must *say* "That is red" or act in some way, which amounts to the same thing.[18]

Such passages surely bear out my claim (in Chapter One) that, for Wittgenstein, and *pace* Kripke, the real problem is *not* how to account for knowledge of rules *qua* interpretations but how to account for rule-following once the gap between interpretations and applications – once the need for a 'leap' – has been properly acknowledged.[19]

Now an obvious concomitant of stressing the role of spontaneity in performing judgements is acknowledging certain limits of explanation. In particular, the metaphor of leaping implies that there are limits to our internal access to justifications for judging in the way that we do. Like Wittgenstein, Climacus is thus committed to the claim that our capacity for judgement is closely tied up with our non-discursive responses, with 'ungrounded ways of acting'. For to claim that rule-following essentially involves spontaneous activity is just to claim that explanations in terms of rules must come to an end with such activity, that at this point we can go no further than appeal to our actual practice.[20]

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[18] MS 129, cited in Baker & Hacker (1985), p. 148.

[19] It might be objected that there is a disanalogy between the figure of leaping as this occurs in Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. Whereas in Kierkegaard, as I have argued, the transition is from lacking to possessing a capacity to follow a rule, in Wittgenstein, the transition is 'from the acknowledgement of a grammar to the use of some one of its possibilities' (Guetti & Read (1996), p. 46). In other words, for Wittgenstein, the relevant transition is from the interpretation of a rule to the application of that rule in a particular case. Plainly, however, this is a special case of the transition from lacking to possessing the capacity to *follow* a rule, inasmuch as this capacity involves being able to apply the rule.

[20] This is perhaps why Paul Holmer can attribute the following thesis to Kierkegaard:

The notion of an irreducible immediacy that conditions our use of language, but which can never itself be fully expressed in language, is nicely articulated by the discussion of language and music in the essay on Mozart in *Either / Or*. Having observed that both very primitive forms of language, such as the noises a baby makes, and highly developed forms, such as poetry, share a kind of immediate, musical quality, Kierkegaard's 'aesthete' continues,

...In language there is reflection and therefore language cannot express the immediate. Reflection kills the immediate and that is why it is impossible to express the musical in language: but this apparent poverty of language is precisely its wealth. For the immediate is the indeterminable and so language cannot express it, but the fact that it is indeterminable is not its perfection but a defect. This is indirectly acknowledged in many ways. Thus to cite but one example, we say: 'I can't really explain why I do this or that, in this way or that; I do it by ear.'[21]

Compare with this the following remark from *Philosophical Investigations*:

Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think...Why is just *this* the pattern of variation in loudness and tempo? One would like to say "Because I know what it's all about." But what is it all about? I should not be able to say. In order to 'explain' I could only compare it with something else which has the same rhythm (I mean the same pattern). (One says "Don't you see, this is as if a conclusion were being drawn" or "This is as it were a parenthesis", etc. How does one justify such comparisons? There are very different kinds of justification here.)[22]

Since, for both Wittgenstein and the aesthete, the responses involved in learning a language are immediate in a way that bears comparison with coming to understand a musical theme, this understanding cannot itself be directly communicated.[23] (Both passages, I think, supply a nice rejoinder to Frank Ramsay's famous quip that what we can't say we can't whistle either.) The point that, as the aesthete has it, 'reflection kills immediacy' is also made rather more formally in a chapter of *Johannes Climacus* which presents a view to the effect that the possibility of doubt emerges just at the point when we try to express our immediate consciousness of reality in language. Since language is a system of conceptual relations, the immediate, indeterminate quality of our pre-reflective engagement with the world is lost, and we gain the possibility that language and reality

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There is no proof for logical laws or principles....They describe only the conditions for valid inference; they do not provide logical grounds for being logical. Logic is not its own proof (Holmer (1957), p. 39).

[21] *EO* (Hannay), pp. 80-81.

[22] *PI* §527.

[23] Compare Climacus' reference to 'the lyrical culmination of thought in the leap' (*CUP*, p. 95).

come apart.[24] The relevant point here is that a response to the PCS in terms of a Kierkegaardian leap will acknowledge an important role for remarks like, 'I can't really explain why I do this or that, in this way or that, I do it by ear'.[25]

It ought to be registered that there is available within Kierkegaard's texts a weightier terminology than that of the distinction between lacking and possessing a capacity, which vivifies the sense of a leap to thought. This is the dichotomy between 'finite' or 'existing' subjects and 'eternal' thoughts. Thus, for example, Climacus contrasts 'existing persons' with 'the eternity that is essentially the medium of thought' and remarks that 'existence is not thoughtless, but in existence thought is in an alien medium'.[26] According to this contraposition, the transition involved in acquiring new capacities for judgement is not merely that from lacking to possessing a capacity, but also that whereby finite subjects lay hold of the eternal forms of thought.[27] The qualitative distinction between lacking and possessing a capacity is thus also, in the case of acquired capacities for judgement, the difference between the limited capacities of a time-bound subject and an 'alien medium' of timeless objectivity.[28]

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[24] Or, as *The Concept of Anxiety* has it, 'the immediate is annulled at the very moment it is mentioned, just as a somnambulist wakes up at the very moment his name is mentioned' (*CA*, p. 10).

[25] Compare Cavell's notion of 'mutual attunement' mentioned in the quote above (from Cohen, Guyer & Putnam (1993), p. 6). Cavell refers, for example, to 'the fact of our attunement in words (hence in form of life)' (Cavell (1979), p. 34). For more on why attunement is an appropriate metaphor here, see Chapter Four of this thesis.

[26] *CUP*, pp. 302; 332.

[27] Geoffrey Hale gestures towards this dichotomy when he ascribes to Adorno a reading of Kierkegaard according to which, '...the aesthetic emerges in Kierkegaard's discussions of language not as the realm of free play and dissociation now prized by those commentators who would now claim Kierkegaard as a kind of protopostmodernist but precisely as the condition of finitude upon which meaning is infinitely founded' (Hale (2002), p. 35).

[28] Compare the problem of accounting for the origin of language within an evolutionary framework. Stephen Clarke describes one aspect of this problem thus:

Where Chomsky's theories do not fit so easily into an evolutionary framework...is just that there is no precedent for Universal Grammar, that it is a single, shattering mutation...The power of language is infinitely in excess of anything that a practical animal would need even if our present linguistic capacity arrived (as seems quite likely) by degrees, that transformation from the finite to the infinite is not a matter of degree. But such rapid shifts are not ones that evolutionary theorists can accommodate (Clarke (2000), p.409).

For his part, Haufniensis responds to the problem of the origin of language with humility: 'If one were to say further that it then becomes a question of how the first man learned to speak, I would answer that this is very true, but also that the question lies beyond the scope of the present investigation. However, this must not be understood in the manner of modern philosophy as though my reply were evasive, suggesting that I *could* answer the question in another place. But this much is certain, that it will not do to represent man himself as the inventor of language' (*CA*, fn. p. 47).

Now the platonic overtones of this idiom may well seem wholly out of place in the context of an attempt to secure a close connection between thinker and thought, act and object of judgement. Indeed, I shall shortly defend on Kierkegaard's behalf the claim that these *relata* are inseparable. But I also hope to show that this thesis is consistent with acknowledging the objectivity of thought, albeit in terms very different to Plato's. And the language of temporal subjects and eternal forms might be taken as simply a way of dramatising the conceptual gap between subjective acts and logical constraints. After all, if there were no such gap between psychology and logic, there would be nothing paradoxical in the idea of a logically constrained spontaneity, no need for a 'leap'. What makes Kierkegaard's position so interesting in this respect is that he seems to hold *both* that thoughts are objective in a way that subjective acts are not *and* that thoughts spontaneously arise from such acts.[29]

Ultimately, it is this tension between the objectivity of thought and the requirement of spontaneity that accounts for Climacus' choice of metaphor. For we have seen how leaping is apt to model a kind of transition which is both qualitative and spontaneous. To be sure, Kierkegaard never set out to develop a theory of judgement. But the upshot of the metaphor of leaping in this context is that his approach is circumscribed by the attempt to respect the ineluctable role of subjectivity whilst insisting on a qualitative distinction between subjective acts and objective thoughts. In other words: talk of 'leaps' of judgement is motivated by a sense of the need to do justice both to the objectivity and to the spontaneity of thought – or again, by the need to reject an objectivist theory without implying subjectivism.[30] (Recall that the conclusion of Chapter One was that these are precisely the conditions a theory of judgement ought to satisfy.)

2 Dissolving the Paradox

What Kierkegaard somewhat playfully calls his 'theory of the leap' is thus, in part, an attempt to characterise the PCS. But is a metaphor for a puzzling phenomenon

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[29] Kierkegaard's insistence on the 'infinite' objectivity of thought and language – as well as on its 'finitude' – is one of the features of his work that makes it recalcitrant to fashionable 'postmodern' readings. For examples of this school see note 18 of the Prologue to this thesis.

[30] For further explication of what 'subjectivism' means in this context, see Section 2 below.

really the best we can do? Would not endorsing the notion of a paradoxical leap represent more an admission of failure than a theoretical advance? In Chapter Four, I shall argue that an appeal to the role of the imagination can go some way towards a solution to the substantive issue of how subjects learn to follow rules. In effect, this is an attempt to give some content to the idea of following a rule, as it were, 'by ear'. For now, however, I want to develop a strategy for 'dissolving' the paradox by clarifying the concepts involved and considering just why it arises for philosophical reflection.[31]

Kierkegaard's metaphor can itself be seen to point to such a strategy. For one virtue of the figure of 'the leap' is that it corrects the temptation to think of rule-governed judgement as proceeding 'step by step like a calculus' by means of intermediate reflections (i.e. the temptation succumbed to by the OTJ – see Chapter One). But once we reject that prejudice, the puzzle of how we manage to traverse an infinite series of steps between a rule and its application simply does not arise. That is, by invoking the role of spontaneity, the metaphor of leaping disarms the Regress of Interpretations discussed in Chapter One. Another way of putting the same point is that, by respecting the requirement of spontaneity, Kierkegaard's approach shows just why the paradox usually associated with Wittgenstein cuts no ice – where this is roughly the paradox that since rules can be interpreted in different ways, every action can be construed as in accordance with a given rule. For, as Wittgenstein himself indicates, that paradox *presupposes* the misunderstanding that following a rule essentially involves acts of interpretation.

Yet it should be clear by now that the theory of the leap articulates a different paradox, namely, that one and the same act is both spontaneous and logically constrained, where these are qualitatively distinct. I believe that Kierkegaard's texts offer not only a nice metaphor for characterising it, but also an insight that helps unravel this puzzle. To anticipate: the insight is that to insist that spontaneous acts and logical constraints are qualitatively distinct is not to deny that they are interdependent, even to the point of

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[31] Wittgenstein writes: 'Something surprising, a paradox, is a paradox only in a particular, as it were defective. surrounding. One needs to complete this surrounding in such a way that what looked like a paradox no longer seems one' (*RFM*, VII–43 (p. 410)).

In case someone thinks such a strategy would be inimical to Kierkegaard, given his penchant for the paradoxical, consider the following from his *Journals*: 'Paradox is the intellectual life's authentic *pathos*, and just as only great souls are prone to passions, so only great thinkers are prone to what I call paradoxes, *which are nothing but grand thoughts still wanting completion*' (my emphasis) (*JP* 38 II A 755 (Hannay), p. 115).

inseparability. The particular text I have in mind is the chapter of *Johannes Climacus* which reports Climacus' youthful attempts to explain the conditions of the possibility of doubt (an account, as he puts it, of '*doubt's ideal possibility in consciousness*'[32]). This unfinished chapter is *very* sketchy and it is charitable to assume that Kierkegaard would have filled it out considerably had he chosen to publish the book. Yet it arguably contains the germs of a unique and fascinating theory of mind.[33]

Climacus begins with 'the child'.[34] He assumes that children have consciousness but that they do not doubt. The first question is therefore what kind of consciousness a child has if it is constituted in such a way that the possibility of doubt has not yet arisen: 'How, then, is the child's consciousness qualified?'. Here is Climacus' answer:

It actually is not qualified at all, which can also be expressed by saying that it is immediate. *Immediacy* is precisely indeterminateness. In immediacy there is no relation, for as soon as there is a relation, immediacy is cancelled. *Immediately, therefore, everything is true*, but this truth is untruth the very next moment, for *in immediacy everything is untrue*. If consciousness can remain in immediacy, then the question of truth is cancelled.[35]

To say that the child's consciousness is *immediate* is just to say that it is not yet constrained by a system of conceptual relations. The concepts of truth and falsity, for example, have not yet been acquired. (The formula that in immediacy 'the question of truth is cancelled' – where 'cancelled' is read as 'non-operative' – is much happier than talk of everything being both true and untrue.) The child cannot doubt, Climacus reasons, because it is immediately bound up in a world it has not yet conceptualised. But the issue is how 'the question of truth', and then the possibility of doubt, arises from this immature consciousness. Climacus' initial answer appears bizarre:

How does the question of truth arise? By way of untruth, because the moment I inquire about truth, I have already inquired about untruth. In inquiring about truth, consciousness is brought into relation with something else, and what makes this relation possible is untruth.[36]

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[32] *JC*, p. 166.

[33] Nonetheless, I have yet to find anything approaching a sustained treatment of this text. For historical contexts of *Johannes Climacus* see Strawser (1994).

[34] Climacus does not specify any age, but the subsequent argument makes it clear that he imagines 'the child' as one who has not yet acquired linguistic competence.

[35] *JC*, p. 167.

[36] Idem.

Appearances to the contrary, I think Climacus' point here is not implausible. His claim is that the issue whether what *seems* to be the case truly is the case could only arise for a form of consciousness that had already become aware that appearances are *not* always what they seem. In other words: the question of truth is intelligible only to whoever is aware of the possibility that their immediate awareness is untrue.[37] Indeed, it is perhaps only the one whose naïve confidence in their immediate awareness has been disrupted in this way who could stand back, as it were, from that awareness in order to categorise it all.[38] But what is the 'something else' into which such a disrupted consciousness is brought into relation? Climacus' answer is 'mediacy' or 'ideality' – i.e. the logically constrained system of conceptual relations embodied by a natural language. But before he unpacks this answer he is himself disrupted by another question:

Which is first, immediacy or mediacy? That is a captious question. It reminded him of the response Thales is supposed to have given someone who asked whether night or day came into existence first: Night is one day earlier.[39]

The question here is a quite general one about the relation between our pre-reflective engagement with the world and the conceptual and linguistic tools at our disposal for mediating that engagement. From the fact that Climacus quite plainly holds that, in a developmental sense, immediacy precedes mediacy (it is the *child's* consciousness that is immediate), it is clear that what is at stake here is not temporal but logical or metaphysical priority. Climacus is considering whether logical constraints *determine* our spontaneous actions and reactions or *vice versa*.

Climacus' answer is very revealing. The question is 'captious' since it overlooks the interdependence of the two *relata*.[40] Just as the concepts *night* and *day* are mutually

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[37] Compare Stephen Clarke: 'As long as we were only aware of our own world, wordlessly present to us, we had no way of making any distinction between our world and the Truth' (Clarke (2000), p. 421).

[38] There is a curious argument lurking here to the effect that the capacity for judgement presupposes a kind of dislocation from the world. I. e. if one did not experience dislocation, one would not achieve the necessary 'distance' from one's immediacy that makes judgement possible. Even if I could do so, this is not the place to pursue such an argument. It ought to be pointed out, however, that whatever the disruption of immediacy is supposed to involve it is clear that Climacus does not take it to amount to doubt, if only for the fact that doubt emerges much later in his explanatory scheme. (Perhaps he envisages it as a kind of uncertainty or anxiety? Kierkegaard distinguishes between uncertainty and doubt (cf. *Pap*. IV B 10:18 n.d., 1842-3 (*JC*, Supp., p. 262)). Of course he devotes a whole book to the concept of anxiety.)

[39] *JC*, p. 167.

dependent, he seems to be claiming, so logical mediation is inextricable from human spontaneity. To be sure, the *relata* are qualitatively distinct. Spontaneous subjectivity and logical rules are as different as are night and day. But one cannot ultimately separate the one from the other – just as our concept of day would be very different if we had no concept of night and *vice versa*, so our spontaneous actions and reactions would be very different if they were not determined by logical constraints and *vice versa*.[41] And, given this relation of mutual interpenetration, it therefore makes no sense to ascribe logical or metaphysical priority to night or day, unmediated subjectivity or mediated objectivity. To deploy an idiom that Kierkegaard develops in the context of religious belief, the spontaneous *how* of judgement is essentially (rather than externally) related to the logically constrained *what*.[42]

It hardly needs saying that this is highly suggestive *vis-à-vis* the PCS. The prospect is of a way of dissolving the paradox by making sense of a relation of, roughly speaking, *being distinct-but-inseparable*.[43] Before this prospect can be explored, however, Climacus needs to be rescued from an obvious charge of self-contradiction. For if, as I have suggested, his response to the question of priority implies that human spontaneity and logical mediation interlock to the point of inseparability how then can he have just characterised a child's consciousness as wholly immediate?

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[40] Compare Samuel Butler: 'The chicken was the egg's idea for getting more eggs'! (Cited in Hughs & Brecht (1979), p. 19).

[41] Compare Vigilius Haufniensis: 'Immediacy is not annulled by mediacy, but when mediacy appears, in the same moment it has annulled immediacy. The annulment of immediacy is therefore an immanent movement within immediacy, or it is an immanent movement in the opposite direction within mediacy, by which mediacy presupposes immediacy' (*CA*, p. 37). There is more than a hint of parody in this Hegelesque formula, but the point is that subjective 'immediacy' and logical 'mediation' stand in a relation of mutual determination, such that the former precipitates the latter, and the latter precipitates the former.

[42] For more on the religious context of this idiom, see the Epilogue to this thesis.

[43] Note, however, that, for Kierkegaard, a conceptual dissolution is not equivalent to an existential resolution. If, as I shall argue, we can make good sense of Climacus' sense of immediacy and reflection as distinct-but-inseparable, we still have to *live* in the tension between the two. In *this* sense, Pat Bigelow may be right to talk of 'the tightrope tension...of living in the zone of the breach [between immediacy and reflection]' (Bigelow (1987), p. 56). Roughly, I take this to mean that, since we have our being neither in a stable world of logical objects nor in a flux of unthinking immediacy, we are denied the kinds of existential stability such worlds might offer. Nonetheless, Bigelow unduly mystifies matters when he declares that this relation 'is the nothing that thinking cannot think' (idem). Here, as so often with Kierkegaard, the strategy is to dissolve our sense of an intellectual problem in order to intensify our sense of an existential problem.

As if to encourage the objection (and support my interpretation) Climacus directly goes on to declare that if consciousness remained in immediacy 'there would be no consciousness at all'.[44] The word to notice, however, is 'remained'. Climacus' argument hinges on the claim that the possibility of conceptual mediation (and therefore, as he will go on to argue, the possibility of doubt) is latent in the child's immediate consciousness. If this were not so – if, counterfactually, the child were the kind of being that *remained* in immediacy – then the child would not qualify as conscious at all. In other words: it is only in virtue of a child's having the potential for conceptual and linguistic competence that Climacus wants to count as it as a conscious being.[45]

The suggestion that logically constrained objects of thought are distinct-but-inseparable from the spontaneous activities of subjects passes by all too quickly as Climacus hurries on towards the possibility of doubt. But we might well pause by taking leave of Kierkegaard's text and homing in on a debate between two analytical philosophers. In a paper entitled 'More About Thoughts', Michael Dummett responds to an 'exceedingly illuminating article' in which David Bell had offered a generally sympathetic interpretation of Frege's theory of judgement but with two exceptions.[46] The first of Bell's charges against Frege need not detain us. But the second is this:

In its fully Fregean form the incoherence arises as follows. Thinking is grasping or apprehending a thought, and a thought is an object. Although Frege himself nowhere explicitly asserts that thoughts are objects, this follows immediately from his identification of a thought as the reference of a singular term of the form: "The sense of the sentence 'S'". And yet, of course, a thought is also the *sense* of a name of an object, i.e., the sense of a sentence whose reference (if it has one) is a truth-value. According to Frege, to have an object in mind *is* to have grasped the sense of some expression which has that object as its reference. But a vicious infinity of such acts of grasping is generated immediately if we maintain, with Frege, that this sense is, in turn, merely an object we have in mind; for in this case the sense would likewise have to be grasped *via* the sense of some expression, which in its turn, as an object, would have to be grasped *via* the sense of some expression...and so on.[47]

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[44] *JC*, p. 167.

[45] This helps explain why, as Kierkegaard's papers testify, Climacus rejected the option of taking animals as his prototype of immediate consciousness (see *Pap*. IV B 14:3 n.d., 1842-3 (*JC*, Supp., p. 252)). Compare the structure of Climacus' argument in this respect with that of moral philosophers who seek to circumvent the implication of their theories that non-rational beings are excluded from the moral community by appealing to the potential for rationality latent in children.

[46] See D. Bell (1987a); Dummett (1991).

[47] Bell (1987a), pp. 46-7.

If the technical machinery is unfamiliar, Bell's worry is surely not. Simply put, the charge is that Frege's theory implies the absurdity that in order to grasp a given thought, T, one must have grasped a thought that refers to T, which in turn requires that one has grasped a thought that refers to a thought that refers to T, and so on *ad infinitum*. In fact, as Bell goes on to spell out, he is no more than applying the principle that one's performing acts of a certain kind cannot require the prior performance of acts of that very kind – i.e. the very principle that I have argued underpins the Kierkegaardian figure of leaping in this context (see also Chapters One and Two.)

Bell proceeds to argue that this principle is sufficient to discredit what he calls the *agent-act-object* model of thought. *Pace* Frege, thoughts are not to be conceived as timeless objects existing in some Third Realm, wholly independent of subjective acts. Instead, Bell proposes an *agent-act* model. What this means is that we should construe thinking and judging as intransitive verbs – i.e. on the model of *to leap*, say, rather than *to carry*. Or, as Dummett glosses the proposal, thinking and judging are mere cognate accusatives (where e.g. *to feel a feeling of anger* is just to feel angry). The *agent-act* model thus implies a kind of subjectivism (or 'anti-realism') about thoughts.

Now, according to Dummett, this proposal comes with a high price-tag. The cost is in fact just what, by Bell's own lights, makes Frege's theory so attractive – namely, its capacity to account for the objectivity of thought. In particular, Dummett argues that to endorse the *agent-act* model is to forfeit any plausible account of the indisputable *explanandum* that two or more thinkers can have one and the same thought.[48] For in order to capture this, the *agent-act* model must surely make sense of two subjects acting in the same kind of way. But it is possible to determine what counts as 'acting in the same way' in a given case, Dummett asserts, only to the extent that it is possible to identify what subjects are thinking independently from any particular mental act.[49]

It is tempting to cast Dummett's objection in Kierkegaardian terms as charging that, whilst paying full due to the role of spontaneity in leaps of judgement, the *agent-act*

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[48] In an unpublished paper, 'Thoughts, Spontaneity and Rationality', Stefano Manfredi argues further that only an *act-agent-object* model is sufficient to account for such features of thoughts as that they are structured, that they contain repeatable elements, and that we can isolate these repeatable elements by means of a procedure of analysis.

[49] Cf. Dummett (1991), p. 308.

model fails to respect the qualitative achievement such leaps accomplish, namely

'eternal', transitive, logically mediated thoughts. The *agent-act* model can accommodate

the subjectivity of thought – the *how* – only at the expense of its objectivity – the *what*.[50]

In fact, however, Dummett does not want to saddle himself with Frege's 'mythology' of

eternal logical objects. It appears that what he needs, therefore, is a way to retain the

agent-act-object model without implying Fregean realism. In this spirit, Dummett

proposes that we distinguish between two kinds of objects in the following terms:

A dance step, for example, is an immanent object. There appears to be no clear answer to the question whether or not we should construe the statement that a dancer danced a certain step on the model of agent-act-object. It would be unreasonable to deny that the dance step is an object: two dancers can execute the same step, and the step may have been danced many times, and hence have existed a long time, before a particular dancer danced it: a dance step has objective properties, and can be spoken of and thought about. On the other hand, the step did not exist, and could not have existed, antecedently to or independently of anyone's dancing it: it is this which distinguishes it as an immanent object from a transcendent one like a shoe. Thoughts and other senses should not be banished, as Bell wishes to banish them, from the category of objects; but they are immanent, not transcendent, objects and hence not inhabitants of a realm altogether independent of us and our activities. Since we *can* conceptually separate the thought from the particular act of thinking, it does not harm to construe that act as having an object.[51]

So Dummett, like Climacus, seems to want to have it both ways.[52] *Contra* Frege, thoughts

are not transcendent objects standing in an external relationship to unmediated acts. But,

contra Bell, neither are they mere cognate accusatives. Rather, thoughts are the

'immanent' objects of acts, where these *relata* are both distinct and mutually dependent.

Dances and thoughts can be identified independently of, but they nonetheless both

determine and depend on, and to that extent are inseparable from, the activities of

[50] Similar charges are, of course, routinely leveled at 'Kierkegaard's doctrine that truth is subjectivity' – where the worry is that to over-emphasize the *how* of religious faith is to forfeit any account of its objective content. See, for example, Anderson (2000), p. 81. Suffice it to say here that if – as I argue in the Epilogue – there are structural analogies between leaps of judgement and faith, we might expect Kierkegaard to display a similar respect for both the *how* and the *what* in the case of the latter.

[51] Dummett (1991), p 313.

[52] There is some evidence that Climacus wants to 'have it both ways' in an even stronger sense than Dummett. This is suggested by the following passage in which he aligns himself with Plato: 'Human existence has Idea in it, but it is not a purely ideal existence. Plato placed the Idea in the second rank of existence, as intermediary between God and matter; an existing human being does indeed participate in the Idea, but he is not himself an Idea' (*CUP*, Lowrie trans., p. 295 (cf. *CUP*, p. 331)). The picture of the human subject as suspended between two metaphysical poles – in this case, unthinking matter and platonic forms – runs throughout Kierkegaard's authorship (see, e.g., *CUP*, *p.* 314; *SUD*, pp. 29-42). Nonetheless, Climacus is consistent in breaking down the traditional implication of the platonic scheme that Ideas stand in an external relation to human subjectivity – on the contrary, humans 'participate' in the Idea.

particular dancers and thinkers. To ask whether acts of dancing or thinking or speaking a language are logically prior to the steps danced or the objects thought or the meanings expressed would therefore be, as Climacus might say, to ask a captious question.[53]

The conception of language, in particular, as both prior to the activity of any particular subject and yet spontaneously determined by the activities of subjects comes out very clearly in the following passage from Kierkegaard's *Journals*:

> If it were true that philosophers are without presuppositions, an account would still be due of language and its whole importance for speculation. For here speculation has indeed a medium which it has not provided for itself, and as the eternal secret of consciousness for speculation is its being the unity of specifications of nature and of freedom, so also is language partly an original given and partly something that freely develops. And just as little as the individual, no matter how freely he develops, can ever reach the point of absolute independence, since true freedom consists on the contrary in appropriating the given, and consequently in becoming absolutely dependent through freedom, so too with language: though we do at times find the ill-conceived tendency not to want to accept language as a freely appropriated given but rather to give it to oneself, whether that manifests itself in the highest regions where it usually ends in silence or in the personal isolation of a jabbering argot. Perhaps the story of the Babylonian confusion of tongues may be explained as an attempt to construct an arbitrarily formed common language, which attempt, just because it lacked fully integrative commonality, had to break up into the most scattered differences, for here it is a question of *totum est parte prius* [the whole is prior to its parts], which was not understood.[54]

This passage not only contains the germs of a theory of freedom – freedom consists in 'freely appropriating' that which is not self-given – but also anticipates the twentieth-century refrain that, with language, the whole is prior to its parts.[55] But the most prominent emphasis is that language is *both* 'freely developed' by individual subjects *and* independently given to them in the form of the 'fully integrative commonality' of their language as a whole.[56] To deploy a formula Kierkegaard liked to apply to the whole of

[53] In the light of Dummett's example, it is intriguing to note that Kierkegaard quite often connects thinking and dancing. Climacus, for example, introduces himself as someone who is 'training myself always to be able to dance lightly in the service of thought' (*PF*, p. 7). This remark comes in the context of an ironic disavowal of the 'concordance of joys' that come with one's 'having an opinion' – that is, for Climacus, learning to think is more akin to practicing a dance than amassing 'real estate' (cf. *PF*, p. 98).

[54] *JP* 40 III A II (Hannay), p. 130.

[55] Compare Wittgenstein's extension of Frege's 'Context Principle' – viz. that a word has meaning only in the context of a sentence – to such contexts as 'language-games', 'practices', 'forms of life'. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the 'integrative commonality' that is an essential condition of language is just one evidence that his oft-noted 'individualism' has nothing to do with atomism. For others, see Westphal (1996) pp. 140-41; Connell & Evans (1992); and Chapter Four of this thesis.

[56] Even Frege himself, for all his anti-psychologism, saw that the relationship between logic and psychology is complex: 'Language is a human creation; and so man had, it would appear, the capacity to shape it in conformity with the logical disposition alive in him. Certainly the logical disposition of man *was* at work in

life: for any given subject, language is 'both gift (*Gave*) and task (*Opgave*)'.[57] (Note that all this is framed as an objection to philosophy *sans* presuppositions – the irony is that the very ambition for a language of pure objectivity reduces one to the isolated subjectivity of a 'gibbering argot'.) If this is existentialism, it is existentialism in a realist spirit.[58]

To draw all these threads together: the proposal, suggested by Kierkegaard's texts and developed *via* the debate between Bell and Dummett, is that the PCS can be clarified by making sense of a relation of, roughly speaking, *being distinct-but-inseparable*. I take it that Climacus' analogy with the concepts *day* and *night* and Dummett's example of the relation between an act of dancing and the dance step performed go some way to illustrating this relation. Admittedly, however, the language of 'distinct-but-inseparable' (or 'both gift and task') remains somewhat paradoxical. I therefore suggest the following general definition of 'inseparability' relations:

X and Y are inseparable iff (i) the relation R *between* X and Y is such that X could not be the same item, or an item of the same kind, if it did not stand in relation R to Y; (ii) Y could not be the same item, or an item of the same kind, if it did not stand in relation R to X; (iii) X and Y are non-identical; (iv) X is not a part of Y and *vice* versa; (v) X and Y are not causally related.[59]

For example: (some mathematical structuralists would argue that) since no number can be identical to 2 unless it is greater than 1, and since no number can be identical to 1 unless it is less than 2, the numbers 1 and 2 are inseparable in the required sense (and since also 1 is not part of 2 or *vice versa*; 1 and 2 are not identical; and 1 and 2 are not causally related).[60] Or consider the relation between a sound-wave and the wooden block through which it passes: if the sound-wave were not the shape it is then the wooden block would not have the molecular structure it has and *vice versa*. Or, again, consider the relation between an artwork and its medium. Although there is no causal relation between a novel

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the formation of language but equally alongside this many other dispositions – such as the poetic disposition. And so language is not constructed from a logical blueprint' (cited in Cohen (1998) p. 65).

[57] Cf. *CI*, p. 276.

[58] I am commenting here on the Sartrean connotation of 'existentialism' as a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Despite his reputation as advocating a 'criterionless choice', Kierkegaard explicitly rejects the notion of *liberum arbitrium*: 'that abstract freedom of choice, is a fantasy, as if a human being at every moment of his life stood continually in the abstract possibility, so that consequently he never moves from the spot, as if freedom were not also a historical condition....' (cited in Perkins (1990), p. 11).

[59] The word 'item' in this definition is supposed to leave it open whether X and Y are concepts, objects, properties, universals, particulars, events or whatever. I do not wish to proscribe here what kinds of *relata* inseparability relations may or may not hold between.

and the order of words in which it is written, and these are not one and the same entity (one does not weep over what happens in the order of words), both are essential for the other.[61] Plainly, the *relata* in such cases are not identical. But there is surely a reasonably clear sense in which they inseparable.

The sharpest contrast is with what are usually called *external* relations. To say that Milly is externally related to the mongoose to her left, for instance, is to say that both the mongoose and Milly would remain essentially the same (instances or kinds) were they to stand in a different spatial relationship. Inseparability relations are, by contrast, a species of the genus, *internal* relations.[62] But it is important to note that inseparability is a specific kind of internal relation. It is to be distinguished, for instance, from the following four species. First, there is the internal relation that is sometimes held to obtain between the proper parts of an organic whole. An inseparability relation *may* be of this kind, but nothing in the above definition requires that this is so.[63] Second, on a standard understanding of internal relations, these relations can be asymmetric (i.e. it is possible that X is internally related to Y in the case that Y is not internally related to X). For

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[60] I owe this example to James Bogen (see Bogen (1995), p. 756).

[61] This example is not arbitrarily chosen. It is well documented that Kierkegaard was strongly influenced by the Danish Hegelian, J. L. Heiberg, for whom the harmony of form and content was the corner-stone of his critical theory. On Heiberg's influence on Kierkegaard see Pattison (1983); Pattison (1999), pp. 16-26, 36-9. For Kierkegaard's use of Heibergian aesthetics see, for example, the essay on Mozart in *Either / Or*.

[62] The very notion of an internal relation is of course far from uncontroversial. It was famously problematized by the early twentieth-century debate between those, such as Bradley and Blanshard, who argued that *all* relations are internal, and those, such as Russell and Moore, who argued that *no* relations are internal. For a helpful overview see Rorty (1967). Suffice it to say here that I take it that it is possible to hold the more moderate and common-sensical view that some relations are external and some internal. A proper defence of the notion of identity presupposed by the claim that a given item would not 'be the same' were it not to have certain relational properties, however, is beyond both my scope and my competence.
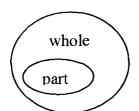
[63] This is important because appeals have been made to internal relations in connection with rule-following in an *altogether* different way to that developed here. Most notably, Baker and Hacker argue, on Wittgenstein's behalf, that the relations that exist between a rule and its application are internal to the 'grammar' of language. Very briefly, this means that both a rule and the act of applying it fall under the same description (e. g. 'the rule that the king may not move through check in castling is complied with by not castling through check' (Baker & Hacker (1984) p. 114)). Thus, '[t]o understand a rule is to grasp an internal relation between rules and their application' (ibid., p. 93).

By contrast, whilst I also claim that there is a non-external relation between acts of applying a rule and the rule itself, I do not make any appeal to a whole (e.g. 'grammar') of which these are internally related parts. Nor do I make any appeal to the notion of 'grasping' an internal relation. This has the important implication that, whereas Baker and Hacker are committed to the view that how one is to apply a rule is determined *in advance* of any particular act of application, I am not committed to any such view. On the contrary, the view I am developing is that rules and acts of application are mutually determining (a view Baker and Hacker might dismiss as 'a bizarre form of logical existentialism' ((1985), p. 116)). For a
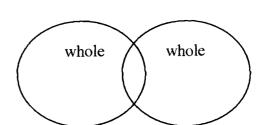
example, a (certain kind of) object is sometimes said to be internally related to the properties that are essential to it, where those properties are not internally related to that (kind of) object (e. g. frogs would not be frogs were they not amphibious but one does not need to be a frog to be amphibious). By contrast, inseparability requires that the two terms of a two-place relation are mutually dependent.

Third, there is a weaker notion of internal relations such that if X and Y are linked by the internal relation R then, given their nature, X and Y are necessarily R-related. That is, in every world in which X and Y both exist, the two are R-related. It does not follow from this, however, that in every world in which one exists the other also exists. By contrast, if X and Y are *inseparable* in the required sense then in every world in which either X or Y exist, both exist.[64] Fourth, there is the kind of relation that obtains between an organic whole and its proper parts. A putative example would be the relation between the brush marks on a canvass and the painting as a whole. Such cases also invite the notion of mutual dependence: if the brush marks were not what they are then the painting would not be what it is and *vice versa*. But the difference between this kind of whole-part relation and inseparability relations is that, in the case of the latter, a certain symmetry obtains between the *relata*. In mereological terms, the notion of inseparability is that of mutually dependent *wholes*. This distinction can be roughly pictured as follows:

Whole-Part Relations

Inseparability Relations

whole

part

whole

whole

forceful critique of Baker and Hacker's account – on both interpretative and substantive grounds – and a partial defence of 'logical existentialism' see Guetti & Read (1996). See also Dwyer (1989).

[64] Arda Denkel discusses the distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' internal relations (see Denkel (1997)). Following Peter Simons, Denkel defines the latter in terms of Husserl's "founding-relation", where A is 'strongly founded' on B iff A is necessarily such that it cannot exist unless B exists, and B is not part of A (ibid., p. 603. Cf. Husserl (1970) p. 478-9). Compare also Hegel's pervasive notion of 'identity-in-difference'. Whilst it is plausible that Kierkegaard inherited certain features of Hegel's understanding of relations, this neither compromises his criticism that Hegel fails to respect the inseparability of acts and objects of thought nor commits him to the idealist doctrine that all relations are internal.

Loosely, then, inseparability is a relation that holds between two wholes just in case any attempt to prize the two apart would destroy the integrity of both.

To advance an 'Inseparability Thesis' about two or more *relata* is thus to assert that these are inseparable in the above sense. I hope to have shown that endorsing an Inseparability Thesis about the relation between acts of thinking and logical constraints is both profoundly Kierkegaardian and an attractive general response to the PCS.[65] The upshot is that thoughts are distinct from but cannot be fully identified or conceived independently of the spontaneous actions and reactions of particular subjects.[66]

Now apart from showing why 'constrained spontaneity' might not be nonsense, the Inseparability Thesis may be seen to have an additional explanatory value. For if it is true that acts of thinking are inseparable from their objects, this has certain meta-philosophical implications. To see this, consider the distinction between thinking a thought and thinking *about* a thought. Thinking that the cat is on the mat, for instance, is very different from thinking about the thought that the cat is on the mat. (Climacus draws a closely related distinction between 'concrete thinking' and 'abstract thinking'.[67]) We might say that the latter involves adopting an external perspective on acts of thinking and their objects. Such, typically, is the position of the theorist of judgement: she is someone who isolates, abstracts, inspects, analyses, interprets, contextualises and in general reflects on thoughts.[68] But there is a clear tension between the claim that thoughts are

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[65] That this thesis is 'profoundly Kierkegaardian' could, I believe, be demonstrated under many different rubrics. One of these is Kierkegaard's conceptions of 'authority' and 'authorship', and his engagement with what one commentator has called 'the problem of writing' (see Bigelow (1987)). The inseparable relation between author and authored is poetically described in the following passage from *Either / Or*, in which the aesthete reflects on his status as an author of a version of the Antigone myth:

[Antigone] is my creation, her thoughts are my thoughts, and yet it is as if in a night of love I had rested with her, as if she in my embrace had confided a deep secret to me... She belongs to me, she law-fully belongs to me, and yet at times it is as if I had cunningly crept into her confidence, as if I always had to look behind me for her; and yet it is the reverse, she is always in front of me – only as I lean forward does she come into existence (*EO* I: 153)

On the theme of the relation between author and authored in Kierkegaard see Hale (2002), Ch. 1.

[66] Or, as Kierkegaard more elegantly puts it, 'ideas are like Thors' hammer, which returns to the place from which it was thrown even if in a changed guise' (*JP* 31 I A 76 (Hannay), p. 38).

[67] See *CUP*, p. 332. Compare also Kierkegaard's distinction between 'the indicative' and 'the subjunctive', according to which '[t]he indicative thinks something as actual...the subjunctive thinks something as thinkable' (*JP* 37 II A 156 (Hannay), p 91).

[68] Climacus sees Hegelian speculation precisely as an attempt to absolutize this posture, where the philosopher takes himself to be a mere receptacle through which pure thought thinks itself.

inseparable from acts of thinking and this theoretical posture. For, where the philosopher treats thoughts as stable objects of reflection, the claim is that it is ultimately impossible to separate out thoughts from particular acts of thinking.[69]

The 'ultimately' is important here. For just as one can *partially* identify a dance step independently of particular acts of dancing, so the Inseparability Thesis allows that one can partially identify thoughts independently from particular acts of thinking. (This would be like drawing only that part of the circle that does not overlap with the other circle in the above diagram.) The point is that it is impossible to preserve *in abstracto* the integrity of thoughts *as unified wholes*. According to the Inseparability Thesis, therefore, a version of what Russell once called 'the very important logical doctrine...that analysis is falsification' applies in the theory of judgement to the extent that philosophers treat thoughts as thinker-independent wholes.[70]

It is irrelevant in this connection that philosophers do sometimes reflect on the relation between acts of thinking and objects of thought. For such reflections are *about* the relation between acts and objects. This relation is thus itself treated as a transcendent object, as though it had no essential connection to any particular act of thinking. But to take seriously the Inseparability Thesis is just to deny that *any* objects of thought are wholly separable from particular acts of thinking, including that very thesis. That Haufniensis, for one, takes this claim seriously is intimated by the following:

> The point about the particular is precisely its negative relation to the universal and its repellent relation to it. But as soon as a person thinks the particular away it is cancelled, and as soon as it is thought, it is altered. Therefore, either he does not think the particular but only imagines that he thinks it, or he thinks it and merely imagines that it is included in thought.[71]

A cursory reading might take this to express the existentialist doctrine that 'particularity' cannot be thought, that concrete stuff is beyond conceptualisation, that bare existence eludes essence (i.e. the position that Hegel criticises as 'Sense-Certainty'). But the second clause of the disjunction of the last sentence clearly implies that, on the contrary, particularity *can* be thought. What Haufniensis *is* committed to is that particularity cannot

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[69] Cf. Hegel's recommendation that we make 'thoughts pure and simple our object' (*HL* §3).

[70] Russell was referring to the distortions allegedly involved in treating a whole as merely a collection of its parts. See the early draft of Russell's *The Principles of Mathematics*, in Russell (1994), p. 39.

[71] *CA*, fn. p. 78-9.

be thought *as such* by means of acts of abstract thinking. In other words: the object of the second-order thought about the thought that the cat is on the mat is not identical with the first-order thought that the cat is on the mat. To think *about* thoughts is already to have 'altered' them by failing to think *through* their particularity.[72]

A distinction of C. S. Lewis' may help to bring out how this implication of the Inseparability Thesis contributes to a response to the PCS. Lewis contrasts *looking at* with *looking along*, where looking at a beam of light is a very different experience from looking along it.[73] Now the philosopher may be envisaged as someone who looks *at* our practice of performing judgements. In so doing, she is confronted by a puzzle concerning how we spontaneously conform to rules. But if to look along a form of judging is to instantiate an inseparable relation, it is hardly surprising that paradox ensues when we attempt to separate ourselves from that form of judging in order to 'look at it' from the outside.[74] It is as though one were staring at a sign or pointer itself rather than along it to what it signifies or points to – quite as though one were attempting to circumvent what Merleau-Ponty has called the self-effacement of language:

Now, one of the effects of language is to efface itself to the extent that its expression comes across.

In the way it works, language hides itself from us. Its triumph is to efface itself. There is language after the fact, or language as an institution, which effaces itself in order to yield the meaning which it conveys.[75]

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[72] Indeed, Haufniensis argues on these grounds that in theoretical reflection on psychology we must strive to avoid the distortion that arises from attempting to isolate and abstract 'psychological states', as though these were discrete units. The psychologist must be a phenomeologist, who somehow captures in his theorizing the 'mood that properly corresponds to the correct concept' of whatever he is researching (ibid., p. 14). Thus insofar as we want to understand the concept of freedom, for example, we must not transform it into an object of thought: '...misunderstanding arises because freedom is changed into something else, into an object of thought. But freedom is never *in abstracto*' (ibid., fn. p.111). Haufniensis own attempts to inflect the 'mood' of anxiety in his theoretical reflections on the subject goes some way to accounting for what one commentator has called his 'maddeningly difficult' prose (Marino, (1998) p. 308).

[73] See Lewis (1985).

[74] Compare Nietzsche's diagnosis of philosophical illusion as the attempt to situate oneself 'outside life' (Nietzsche (1978), p. 45). Compare also the claim that underpins Wittgenstein's early saying / showing distinction, namely that the 'logical form' that propositions 'must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it' cannot itself be represented since '[i]n order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world' (*TLP* 4.123).

[75] Merleau-Ponty (1973), p. 108 (cited in Guetti & Read (1996), p. 51).

In this light, the PCS might be seen as a Marcelian mystery; that is, a problem whose solution encroaches on its own data.[76] Such a conclusion certainly chimes with Climacus' sense of the limits of abstract, reflexive thought. It also resonates with Kierkegaard's image of the philosopher as 'like a man who is wearing his glasses and nevertheless looking for his glasses – that is, he is looking for something right in front of his nose, but he does not look right in front of his nose and therefore never finds it'.[77]

3 Indirect Demonstration

In 1844, Kierkegaard marked the following entry in his journals:

Basic principles can be demonstrated only indirectly (negatively). This idea is frequently found and developed in Trendlenburg's [sic] *Logische Untersuchungen* [*Logical Investigations*]. It is significant to me for the leap.[78]

What follows is an attempt to read this remark, as it were, the other way around. That is, we have already seen something of what Kierkegaard means by 'the leap' in the context of performing logically constrained judgements. The task is now to show how this is 'significant' for another central Kierkegaardian theme: indirect communication. Given that this latter topic is hardly homogenous and is subject to widely divergent interpretations, it will be as well to approach the matter obliquely, taking our cue from Kierkegaard's reference to the 'indirect demonstration' of basic principles.[79]

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[76] Cf. Marcel (1948), pp. 8-11. Compare Seng-Ts'an: 'If you work on your mind with your mind, how can you avoid an immense confusion?' (cited in Hughs & Brecht (1979), p. 13).

[77] *CI*, p. 272.

[78] *JP* III, V A 74 n.d., 1844, p. 16. Cf. *CUP*, p. 220: 'The highest principles for all thought can be demonstrated only indirectly (negatively)'. Compare also Kierkegaard's remark that since 'the highest principles for all thought, or the proof of them, are negative', human reason has a boundary. He goes on: Boundary engagements are negative, one is forced backwards. But there is a chattering and conceited conception of human reason, especially in our age when it is never some thinker one has in mind, a reasoning human, but pure reason and the like, which simply does not exist, since nobody, whether a professor or what have you, can be pure reason. Pure reason is a fantasy, and with it belongs that fantastic boundlessness wherein there are no negative concepts but which grasps everything, as did the witch who ended everything by eating her own stomach (*JP* 50 X 2 A 354 (Hannay), p. 463).

[79] For synoptic treatments of Kierkegaardian indirect communication see Ramsland (1987); Lübcke (1990); Wood (1990); J. Thomas (1992).

Now, it is hardly philosophical news that some principles are so basic that they cannot be directly, proved, justified, demonstrated, grounded and so on. Witness Aristotle in a passage that Kierkegaard may well have had in mind when penning the above:[80]

Some, owing to lack of training, actually demand that...[the Law of Non-Contradiction] be proved; for it is lack of training not to recognise of which things proof ought to be sought and of which not. For in general it is impossible that there should be proof of everything, since it would go on to infinity so that not even thus would it be a proof. But if there are some things of which proof ought not to be sought, they could not say what they regard as a principle more fully of that kind.[81]

So according to Aristotle, some principles, such as the Law of Non-Contradiction (hereafter 'LNC'), cannot be directly proved since these constitute the very conditions of proof. And generally speaking, one such condition is that the proof does not depend on an infinite number of steps: demonstrations must, as they say, come to an end somewhere.[82] Not to properly acknowledge this, Aristotle chides, is simply incompetent.

Yet Aristotle himself felt the pressure of the demand for a demonstration of the LNC, not least because Heraclitus had apparently denied it.[83] And if a direct rebuttal was out of order here, that was by no means the end of it for Aristotle. He continues:

But even this [i.e. denying the LNC] can be proved to be impossible in the manner of a refutation if only the disputant says something. If he says nothing, it is ridiculous to look for a statement in response to one who has a statement of nothing, in so far as he has not; such a person, in so far as he is such, is similar to a vegetable. By 'proving in the manner of a refutation' [sometimes translated, 'negative demonstration'] I mean something different from proving, because in proving one might be thought to beg the original [question], but if someone else is cause of such a thing it must be refutation and not proof. In response to every case of that kind the original [step] is not to ask him to state something either to be or not to be (for that might well be believed to beg what was originally at issue), but at least to signify something both to himself and to someone else; for that is necessary if he is to say anything.[84]

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[80] In the work to which Kierkegaard refers, Trendelenburg sought to uphold Aristotelian logic against Hegelian innovations. On Trendelenburg's influence on Kierkegaard see Come (1991). In the light of what follows, it is a curious fact that Trendelenburg also influenced Frege. Hans Sluga explains 'It is possible that Frege read the *Logische Untersuchungen*... Frege certainly took one thing from Trendelenburg and that was the name for his notational system. Following Trendelenburg he called his logical symbolism a *'Begriffsschrift,'* a conceptual script.' (Sluga (1980), p. 49).

[81] Met. Γ4 1006a5-11 (Aristotle (1993), p. 8). For discussion see Lear (1980).

[82] Cf. An. Post. 71b 26-9 (Aristotle (1994), p. 3) '[Proofs must] proceed from items which are primitive and indemonstrable because otherwise you will not possess a demonstration of these (to understand something of which there is a demonstration non-incidentally is to possess a demonstration of it)'.

[83] Cf. Met Γ3 1005b22 (Aristotle (1993), pp. 7-8): 'For it is impossible for anyone to believe that the same thing is and is not, as some consider Heraclitus said...'

[84] Met. Γ4 1006a11 (Aristotle (1993), pp. 8-9).

In this way, Aristotle aims to deny the likes of Heraclitus the luxury of so much as formulating a denial of the LNC. And since there is little to be gained from talking to vegetables, a silent opponent is, he claims, as good as refuted.

Now, in the *Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, Frege, too, develops something like an indirect demonstration. The example is, I think, especially instructive. I will suggest below that it sounds a surprisingly Kierkegaardian note, but for now it will serve to illustrate the limitations of the indirect strategy.[85] As is well known, a major battleground for Frege was the 'psychologism' he found to be rife amongst his contemporaries. This, for present purposes, is the doctrine that the so-called 'laws of logic' simply describe psychological processes. Frege wants to show that this doctrine conflates the subjective act of taking-to-be-true with the objective truth. (In other words: he wants to show that there is a qualitative distinction between human spontaneity and logically constrained thought.) Like Aristotle, however, Frege recognises that a direct proof is out of order here – for to prove the psychology-independence of logic by means of logic, conceived as independent of psychology, would plainly be to beg the question. Instead, Frege advances a thought-experiment. The strategy, it seems, is by indirections to find directions out.

Frege invites us to imagine what it would be like to encounter beings that do not accept a basic law of logic, the LNC, say. This scenario is consistent with psychologism in that this theory treats logical laws as rules *for beings like us*: as merely the way we (for some 'we') are compelled to think. Indeed, it seems essential to the very formulation of this view of logic that there *could* be beings that do not think like us. Now a perfectly natural question is: whose inferences are correct, ours or the logical aliens (or neither)? But, Frege argues, as soon as his opponent grants this as an intelligible question – as it seems he must, inasmuch as he thinks we are psychologically compelled to think of our patterns of inference as *the right ones* – he has also granted the distinction between logic and psychology:

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[85] The following discussion is deeply indebted to an article by James Conant (Conant (1991), esp. pp. 142-155). Conant makes no reference however either to Kierkegaard or to 'indirect communication' in this paper – rather, he is concerned to elucidate the Fregean-Wittgensteinian notion of elucidation – and I cannot say whether he would approve of my development of his ideas.

Anyone who understands laws of logic to be laws that prescribe the way in which one ought to think – to be laws of truth, and not natural laws of human beings' taking a thing to be true – will ask, who is right? Whose laws of taking-to-be-true are in accord with the laws of truth. The psychological logician cannot ask this question: if he did he would be recognising laws of truth that are not laws of psychology.[86]

But suppose the 'psychological logician' simply refuses to grant the intelligibility of the normative question. Then, says Frege, he must also deny the intelligibility of the question whether the doctrine of psychologism is itself true. And if he does that, he forfeits the resources so much as to advance his own theory – his theory is self-refuting in the sense that it cannot allow for there being any conditions in which it can itself be said to be true.

Like Aristotle, Frege wants to reduce his opponent to silence. But surely the advocate of psychologism might reason somewhat as follows:

"You have shown that I cannot state that my theory is true in any other sense than that I am compelled to think that it is true. And you claim to have shown that, even though I am compelled to thinking that the logical aliens are wrong (because I am compelled to think that my inferences are right), I cannot give any sense to the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' here. But all you really show is that if my thesis is true, it cannot be meaningfully stated. So much the worse for the meaningful statement of true theses! Moreover, it is not, in fact, the case that I am compelled to think that the logical aliens are wrong: I can quite readily purge my talk of normative commitments – without being 'reduced to silence' – by distinguishing merely in terms of the rules that are followed by them, and those that are followed by us."

Frege's next gambit is stunning. Insofar as the 'psychological logician' blithely abandons the resources to distinguish between himself and a logical alien in normative terms, Frege suggests, he abandons the resources to make any kind of distinction between himself and a logical alien other than that they make noises and movements he does not make. And this, in turn, is to forfeit the resources to make sense of the very idea of a *logical* alien: for, as James Conant has noticed, 'creatures who moo and eat grass are not manifesting a logically alien form of thought'.[87] So psychologism cannot, within its own terms, make

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[86] Frege (1967), p. 14.

[87] Conant (1991), p. 147.

sense of the very possibility – that there might be logically alien thought – which defines itself against the Fregean view of logic. Now we might be tempted to interpret Frege's reinforced argument as a *reductio ad absurdum*, roughly as follows:

(1) Psychologism admits the possibility of logical aliens.
(2) The concept *logical aliens* is intelligible only on a normative conception of logic.
(3) So, psychologism admits a normative conception of logic.
(4) But, psychologism does not admit a normative conception of logic
(5) So, psychologism both does and does not admit a normative conception of logic.
(6) No intelligible theory both does and does not admit the same conception of logic.
(7) Therefore, psychologism is absurd.

On this reading, (1) should be taken as 'assumed for the sake of *reductio*'. This assumption is putatively supported, however, by the observation that commitment to the possibility of logical aliens seems essential to the formulation of psychologism. For what else can capture the contrast implied by 'laws that bind those of a particular psychological constitution'? Premise (2) embodies the thought that the concept of logical aliens is hopelessly vague unless conceived in normative terms. For how else are we to distinguish between a logical alien and, say, a cow? And (4) is simply a statement of psychologism's commitment to a purely descriptive account of logic. For how can logic prescribe how we ought to think if it is merely a description of psychological processes?

So far so good. The problems come when we consider what conclusions we are permitted to draw from these premises. Conclusions (3) and (5) seem innocuous enough – though it's worth noting that these inferences, on a psychologistic view, are nothing more than psychological processes. But (6) and (7) are obviously illicit. For these plainly rely on a normative conception of logic, in particular on the LNC. And it is open for the advocate of psychologism to simply deny (6) – for the issue whether there are some intelligible theories that do not conform to the so-called laws of logic is precisely what is at stake in the debate about logical aliens. (Notice that is also available to Frege's opponent to relativize 'intelligibility' to psychological constitution.) Indeed, perhaps in this respect Frege's opponent is living proof, not only that logical aliens are possible, but that logical aliens exist! As a matter of fact, Frege did not explicitly formulate his thought-experiment as a *reductio*. That decision was well motivated.

Instead of using a *reductio* model, we might try to salvage some kind of quasi-direct argument from Frege's thought-experiment by reading it as an argument to the conclusion that logical aliens are impossible. For example:

(1) If logical aliens are possible then the concept *logical aliens* is intelligible.
(2) If the concept *logical aliens* is intelligible then psychologism is false.
(3) If logical aliens are possible then psychologism is false. (From (1) & (2)).
(4) Either psychologism is false or logical aliens are impossible. (From (3)).
(5) If psychologism is false then logical aliens are impossible.
(6) Therefore, logical aliens are impossible. (From (4) and (5)).

Clearly (2) and (5) do the main work here. Again, (2) is the conclusion of Frege's argument to the effect that his opponent both must and cannot give normative content to the concept *logical aliens* – he must because this is the only intelligible conception and he cannot because his theory does not admit normative concepts. And (5) is supported by the observation that, on any non-psychologistic view, logic binds all beings and not just 'beings like us'. Now, again, there are worries about the probative force of this argument for someone who does not accept the prescriptive force of the laws of logic (notice that it, too, relies on the LNC). But this formulation brings to the fore a rather different worry to that of question-begging. Frege's thought-experiment seems to have yielded the conclusion that a certain kind of being is logically impossible; i.e. a claim of the form:

$$\Box \neg (\exists x) (Gx)$$

This of course requires that the concept G ( ) is well formed. But notice that the relevant concept here is supposed to be *logically impossible thought*, for logical aliens are supposed to be thinkers who do not conform to the laws of logic. So the claim can be read: It is logically impossible that there is logically impossible thought. And this, of course, is just what the psychologistic philosopher wants to deny – he maintains that it is (in some sense) possible that there is logically impossible thought. But if this claim means anything at all it is surely itself an instance of a logically impossible thought: on Frege's own analysis, it is the thought that a particular logical impossibility – namely logically impossible thought – is possible. So it seems that Frege is guilty of self-contradiction: he wants to deny that there are any instances of logically impossible thought in order to refute what he wants to recognise as just that.

Perhaps Frege ought therefore to deny that the psychologistic claim does mean anything at all; to deny its status as the kind of thing, to echo Frege's own phrase, for which the question of truth or falsity can arise at all.[88] (Compare Wittgenstein's remark that it is not as it were the sense of a senseless utterance that is senseless.[89]) If this is the right way to interpret Frege's stance, however, it is clear that he cannot straightforwardly make any claim about the necessary non-existence of logical aliens. For on this reading, the putative concept *logically alien thought* is entirely contentless – and to dismiss a would-be concept as contentless is surely to say that nothing can be inferred from it. But if the notion of logical aliens is plain unintelligible rather than necessarily uninstantiated it starts to look very unclear how Frege's thought-experiment is supposed so much as to get off the ground. For how can he expect his opponent to reflect on the content of, and imaginatively engage with, an unintelligibility? How, in particular, are we to take the claim that to adequately distinguish the piece of nonsense, 'logical aliens are possible', from the concept *cow* would require a normative determination of the former?!

The prospects for Frege's argument do not appear good. If we read it as a *reductio*, it begs the question by assuming the absurdity of a logical contradiction. If we read it as an argument that it is impossible that there are logical aliens, it is incoherent because it implies that logically impossible thought is both impossible (in the case of logical aliens) and actual (in the case of the advocate of psychologism). And if we read it as an argument that the concept of logical aliens is unintelligible, it is hard to see how it can intelligibly appeal to this concept in supporting the claims it makes.

These considerations highlight some general worries about how indirect strategies are supposed to work. For it is not necessary to detail Aristotle's argument to see that an indirect defence of the LNC – one that would show that an objection cannot be meaningfully stated – is subject to precisely similar constraints: (i) it must not assume the absurdity of a contradiction; and (ii) it must show how, if not via *reductio*, an argument can intelligibly appeal to the possibility or concept it reveals to be inconceivable or meaningless. In short it seems that in attempting, as it were, to reduce logical aliens to vegetative states, indirect strategists are in danger of succumbing to the same fate.

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[88] Cf. Frege (1984), p. 355.

[89] Cf. *PI*, §500.

4 The Rhetorical *Reductio*

Now as the journal entry cited above testifies, Kierkegaard saw a connection between the strategy of indirect demonstration and 'the leap'. And we are surely in a position to see what that connection is. For if, as I have argued, the chief purpose of applying the metaphor of leaping in the context of judgement is to emphasise the role of spontaneity, this suggests an understanding of indirect demonstration as an attempt to elicit spontaneous agreement. In turn, this suggests a diagnosis of the problems that appear to beset any attempt to silence the would-be denier of basic principles. The problems arise when we construe such arguments as direct arguments to indirect conclusions (such as the unintelligibility of certain putative claims). For, insofar as indirect methods aim to do what direct methods cannot do, and inasmuch as what direct methods cannot achieve is spontaneous agreement, such arguments are not indirect methods at all. The moral is that whatever philosophical interest 'indirect demonstration' may have this cannot reside in the promise of any kind of *justification* of basic principles.

To conceive the indirect method as a means of eliciting spontaneous agreement is thus to resist the temptation to construe this strategy in terms of the provision of any kind of quasi-direct argument whatsoever. Hence, perhaps, the shift in Kierkegaard's terminology from indirect *demonstration* to indirect *communication*. The question, of course, is how indirect communication – conceived as a strategy for eliciting spontaneous agreement in judgement – is supposed to work. At one point in the *Postscript*, Climacus offers the following insight into another pseudonymous book:

...the book *Repetition* was called "an imaginary psychological construction". That this was a doubly reflected communication form soon became clear to me. By taking place in the form of an imaginary construction, the communication...establishes for itself a chasmic gap between the reader and the author...so that a direct understanding is made impossible. The imaginary construction is the conscious, teasing revocation of the communication, which is always of importance for existing persons, lest the relation be changed to that of a rote reciter who writes for rote reciters...
...Even in elementary education one distinguishes between "learning by rote" and an "intellectual exercise"....*The being-in-between* of the imaginary construction encourages the inwardness of the two *away from each other in inwardness*.[90]

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[90] *CUP*, pp. 263, 264.

The basic contrast here is between a model of communication that involves the direct transmission of an author's views and one that denies its readers any such access. The first form, Climacus claims, encourages 'learning by rote'; the latter opens up the possibility of a more genuine 'intellectual exercise'. In other words, a text that deploys a strategy of indirect communication is one that aims to get the reader to spontaneously see something for himself. As Climacus writes elsewhere: 'the secret of communication specifically hinges on setting the other free'.[91]

So how can one ensure that an indirect communication will result in spontaneous *agreement* as opposed to disagreement? For Kierkegaard, this all depends on the *artistry* of the communication and will vary according to the subject matter at issue. But there are some general criteria. A Kierkegaardian indirect communication – with the aim of eliciting spontaneous agreement – will typically do two things. First it will appeal to certain forms of imaginative engagement (hence the rubric, 'imaginative construction') and will therefore involve the use of examples or paradigms (hence Kierkegaard's own prolific use of pseudonyms, stories, parables, diaries and so on).[92] And, second, it will display or manifest the incoherence of the views to be opposed (hence the prominent roles of parody, satire, irony, humour, in Kierkegaard's texts). The strategy is thus to communicate in such a way that is consistent with the Inseparability Thesis – where the aim is *not* to directly transmit an abstract meaning (as though meanings were 'real estate') but to engage the 'inwardness' of the thinking subject.

Consider Annie.[93] Annie used to consider herself 'cool and detached'. Until, during a conversation with Clarabel, she shouted out 'I don't care what you think!'. Clarabel, who had been looking for a way to correct Annie's self-image and had long given up on direct means (Annie was also stubborn), seized her moment. 'Well I don't care what you think either!' she screamed. In a flash, Annie saw her own behaviour reflected in another. She saw the incongruency between what she said and how she said

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[91] Ibid., p. 74.

[92] On the conception of imagination that underpins this strategy see Chapter Four of this thesis.

[93] The following illustration is adapted from an example given by Katherine Ramsland aimed to lay bare the structure of Kierkegaardian indirect communication. See Ramsland (1987), p. 333.

it.[94] More generally, she saw the way her actual practice betrayed her considered self-image. This little interaction has all the ingredients of a Kierkegaardian indirect communication. Clarabel offers herself as an example to engage Annie's imagination, an example that precisely manifests the incongruency between her self-image as 'cool and detached' and her tendency to be anything but that. In this way, we may suppose, Clarabel secured Annie's spontaneous agreement about her being a little less the person she thought she was.

There are all sorts of things to be said about Kierkegaard and indirect communication, many of which pertain to the alleged peculiarities of communicating ethical or religious truth. In the interests of a better understanding of its formal structure, and the sense in which this central Kierkegaardian theme emerges out of Aristotle's strategy for demonstrating basic principles, however, I want to see whether we can make this skeletal understanding do any work in rescuing Frege's little discourse about logical aliens from the morass in which we left it. This was the situation: to the extent that Frege is not begging the question, he either implies that logical aliens are both impossible and actual or he is arguing from the normative content of a contentless 'concept'. I would like to suggest, however, that Frege's argument *can* be broadly described in terms of a Kierkegaardian indirect communication.

Recall that the advocate of psychologism thinks of himself as open-minded about logical aliens. Frege, on the other hand, thinks there is no such space for the mind to occupy – for, on his understanding his logic, the pseudo-concept *logical alien* is an oxymoron. But, as we saw, Frege recognises that this understanding cannot be directly demonstrated. Instead, he proposes a thought-experiment – in Kierkegaard's terms, an 'imaginary construction' – in which, rather than directly argue for his view, Frege pretends that the concept of logical aliens is perfectly in order. That is, he pretends that psychologism is true: for, to reiterate, the only way he can begin to make sense of logical aliens is in terms of that theory. The point of this pretence seems to be by way of showing

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[94] Compare Kevin Newmark's account of Kierkegaardian indirect communication in terms a tension between form and content: 'the *form* of communication (which is partly, though not entirely, a question of aesthetics since it is concerned with the outward form or sensuous appearance of the communication) and the meaning of the communication (which would at some point become *religious* truth as inwardness) are maintained indissolubly in a relationship of nonadequation' (Newmark, (1988), p. 9).

that psychologism cannot make sense of logical aliens within its own terms. But, as we also saw, this purpose is ill served by a formal *reductio* argument.

My proposal is that we see this argument rather as what I shall call a *rhetorical reductio*. Aristotle distinguished between the formal syllogisms of 'dialectic' and the informal arguments of 'rhetoric'. An important feature of the latter, he observed, is their capacity to affect decisions:

> But since rhetoric exists to affect the making of decisions – the hearers decide between one political speaker and another, and a legal verdict *is* a decision – the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also...put his hearers in the right frame of mind.[95]

So a rhetorical argument aims to elicit the decision to adopt a certain policy by affecting someone's 'frame of mind', over and above providing *reasons* to change their mind. (It is worth noting that Kierkegaard habitually associates the metaphor of leaping with 'decision' or 'resolution' and explicitly links his indirect method with Aristotelian rhetoric.[96]) A rhetorical *reductio*, in particular, is an argument which, rather than *proving* that a given assumption implies a contradiction, manifests the absurdity of the position it attacks by reduplicating or satirising it. The aim of a rhetorical *reductio* is to achieve in its audience a 'frame of mind' in which they will feel, as it were, pulled in different directions, in which the inconsistency of their view is perceived as an *internal* conflict.

Clarabel deploys a rhetorical *reductio* against Annie by mirroring back the incongruency between what she says and how she says it, so as to secure her spontaneous agreement. And Frege can be seen to deploy a similar strategy by reflecting back to the psychologistic logician the absurdity of wanting to mark a normative distinction without saying anything normative. If the argument works, Frege's opponent will come round to the Fregean view. Yet he will not have done so solely on the basis of reflection, but as a spontaneous 'leap' away from the anxiety of his own internal conflict.

To briefly flesh this out: Frege pretends to seriously entertain (what he himself takes to be) an absurd proposal. (Just as Clarabel pretends to take Annie seriously by

[95] Bk II, Part I, 1377b (Aristotle, (1952), p. 622).

[96] Cf. *JP* III VI A 33, n.d. (1845), 20: 'In the final analysis what I call a transition of pathos Aristotle called an enthymeme'. 'Enthymeme' is, of course, the name Aristotle gives to a rhetorical 'proof'. Compare also Kierkegaard's reference to the need for 'a new science' which would develop 'the Christian art of speaking to be constructed *admodum* Aristotle's *Rhetoric*' (cited in J. Thomas (1992), p. 121).

responding in kind.) This seems to lead Frege into the paradoxical business of denying there can be any instances of illogical thought in order to refute what he takes to be an instance of illogical thought. More generally, it draws him into an attempt to rule out logical aliens without saying anything normative, for he knows he cannot rely on normative distinctions without begging the question. So Frege wants to rule out logical aliens in a way that precisely mirrors his opponent's attempt to rule them *in*: both want to mark a normative distinction without saying anything normative.

Frege, it seems, ends up reducing himself to silence. But that, I am suggesting, is precisely the point; namely, to bring his opponent to a spontaneous recognition of the form, "That's like me!". The hope is that, in *this* frame of mind – that of recognising himself in an incongruous position, of feeling pulled in different directions, of wanting to speak without having the resources to speak – the psychologistic logician will change his mind. Clearly, this would disarm any objection to the effect that Frege's own talk about logical aliens is incoherent – for, on this reading, an incoherent impression is exactly what he's aiming for. In this way, Frege might be seen as putting into practice the Kierkegaardian wisdom that '[f]ixed ideas are like cramp, for instance in the foot – yet the best remedy is to stamp on them'.[97]

The claim here is not that Frege's argument, *qua* rhetorical *reductio*, is in fact successful. Still less is there any suggestion of historical influence on the author of *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic* by the author of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*! What I am proposing is that a Kierkegaardian reading of Frege's thought-experiment does give it half a chance of success where no other reading can – and that this reading displays the formal structure of an indirect communication. By way of a conclusion, I shall illustrate Kierkegaard's own use of rhetorical *reductios* against the Hegelians.

5 The Beginning of Wisdom

The indirect strategy is nowhere more evident in Kierkegaard's works than in their critique of Hegel. As we saw in Chapter Two, Climacus takes Hegel's 'pure thought' to

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[97] *JP* 6 July 38 II A 230 (Hannay), p. 97.

amount to nothing but an *illusion* of thought, a fantasy, a chimera.[98] As with the cases of

Aristotle *vis-à-vis* Heraclitus, and Frege *vis-à-vis* psychologism, Climacus therefore finds

himself confronted not with false doctrines to be directly refuted but with illusions to be

indirectly dispelled. Thus *Philosophical Fragments*, for instance, is set up as an

'imaginative construction' which aims to expose as illusory the Hegelian claim to have

replaced both the classical scheme represented by Plato's Socrates and a 'mythical'

understanding of Christianity. For this reason, warnings not to read such works as

comprising direct arguments are salutary (see the Prologue to this thesis). Very plausibly,

Fragments is designed to elicit from would-be Hegelian-Christians a 'leap' away from the

internal conflict Climacus believes such a confused ambition ought to inflict.[99]

Short of showing how this strategy plays out in works as a whole, a passage from

Either / Or may serve as exemplary. The section of the Diapsalmata entitled 'Either / Or:

An ecstatic lecture' begins famously as follows:[100]

If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry you will also regret it; if you marry or if you
do not marry, you will regret both; whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret both.
Laugh at the world's follies, you will regret it; weep over them, you will regret it; if you laugh at
the world's follies or if you weep over them, you will regret both; whether you laugh at the
world's follies or you weep over them, you will regret both. Believe a girl, you will regret it; if
you do not believe her, you will regret it; if you believe a girl or you do not believe her, you will
regret both; whether you believe a girl or you do not believe her, you will regret both. If you hang
yourself, you will regret it; if you do not hang yourself, you will regret it; if you do hang yourself
or if you do not hang yourself, you will regret both; whether you hang yourself or you do not hang
yourself, you will regret both. This, gentlemen, is the sum of all practical wisdom.[101]

Now this bleak wisdom will typically be subsumed under the rubric of Kierkegaard's

poetic characterisation of the internal logic of an 'aesthetic life-view'.[102] Yet this cannot

be quite right. For, the Kierkegaardian notion of a life-view (*Livanskuelse*) is an *ethical*,

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[98] Climacus is quite insistent on this: 'pure thinking', he says 'is a phantom' (*CUP*, p. 314).

[99] Though I cannot argue for it here, I believe that the rhetorical *telos* of *Philosophical Fragments* is not, as
is commonly thought, to elicit a leap to Christian faith but rather to elicit a leap to a proper understanding of
and engagement with Christian concepts. For support, see the Epilogue to this thesis.

[100] The OED defines 'ecstasy' as a 'morbid state of nerves in which the mind is occupied solely by one
idea' as well as 'an exalted state of feeling, rapture'.

[101] *EO* (Hannay), p. 54.

[102] Gabriel Josipovici makes explicit the dubious assumption that is implicit in almost everything that has
been written about *Either / Or*: 'In *Either / Or* Kierkegaard set out two life-views against each other by
means of collage, forcing us to make our choice between them...' (Josipovici (1998), p. 124).

as opposed to aesthetic, qualification.[103] Roughly, to have a life-view is to consistently express in one's life a coherent project or ideal. For example, Judge William embodies and advocates the life-view of civic virtue in general, and marriage in particular. But the adoption of any such normative project is precisely what the aesthete declines – since he holds that regret is attendant upon any course of action, no course of action can provide a norm for him. In this sense, the notion of an 'aesthetic life-view' is a category confusion. Indeed, Kierkegaard's aesthete seems particular keen to preclude the impression that he has any positive view to offer:

> My practical wisdom is easy to understand, for I have only one principle, which is not even my starting point. One must distinguish between the successive dialectic in either / or and the eternal dialectic touched on here. In saying that I do not start from my principle, the opposite of this is not a starting-out from it, but simply the negative expression of my principle, the expression for its grasping itself in opposition to a starting-point or a not-starting out from it. I do not start out from my principle, because were I to do so, I would regret it. If I were not to start out from it, I would also regret it.[104]

Clearly, then, the aesthete represents less a certain kind of life-view than the rejection of any such attempt to express a coherent project or 'principle' through one's moment-by-moment decisions. His is a retreat from the dilemmas of daily life – 'the successive dialectic in either / or' – to an 'eternal dialectic' in which no commitments are made whatsoever. But having marked his distinction between the dialectics of time and eternity, the aesthete draws a disarming conclusion. 'Therefore', he declares, 'if it seemed to any of my highly esteemed hearers that there was something in what I was saying, he would only prove that his mind was unsuited to philosophy'.

At this juncture, any reading in terms of Kierkegaard's presentation, through the voice of the aesthete, of a certain *weltanschauung* or life-view completely breaks down. To understand the aesthete's 'practical wisdom', he himself insists, is to understand that it literally amounts to *nothing*, that there is no sense to made of it, that it is plain nonsense, and that to think otherwise is to show a singular lack of philosophical acumen. In this light, one may well wonder what the import of the 'ecstatic lecture' is at all.

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[103] Commenting on Kierkegaard's critique of Romanticism in *The Concept of Irony*, David Gouwens correctly observes, '[f]or Kierkegaard the concept of <u>Livanskuelse</u> is already oriented in an ethical and Christian direction, as suggested in his earlier polemic against Hans Christian Andersen in <u>From the Papers of One Still Living</u>' (Gouwens (1989), p. 71).

[104] *EO* (Hannay), p. 54-5.

That what is going on here is something like what I have called a rhetorical *reductio* is hinted by the aesthete's claim to have achieved an eternal perspective: 'I am', he brags, 'constantly *aeterno modo*'. Now the first audience of the aesthete's lecture – his 'highly esteemed hearers' – would have been very familiar with such boasts. For it was of course Hegel's claim to have transcended the either / or structure of the finite determinations of our ordinary modes of understanding by laying bare the eternal activity of thought itself. Climacus satirises the legacy of this achievement as follows:

> As is well known, Hegelian philosophy has cancelled the principle of contradiction, and Hegel himself has more than once emphatically held judgement day on the kind of thinkers who remain in the sphere of understanding and reflection and who have therefore insisted that there is an either / or. Since that time it has become a popular game, so that as soon as someone hints at an *aut / aut* [either / or] a Hegelian comes riding trip-trap-trap on a horse...and wins a victory and rides home again.[105]

According to Climacus, of course, the victory is illusory. And it is very plausible that the aesthete's claim to be *aeterno modo* – a claim he himself acknowledges amounts to nothing whatsoever – is supposed to mimic what Kierkegaard takes to be illusory about the Hegelian project. (Recall the objection to Frege's thought-experiment that, by Frege's own lights, 'logical aliens' is meaningless.) In case the Hegelian should miss his own reflection in the mirror of the aesthete's empty 'eternal dialectic', the screw is turned:[106]

> On the other hand, for those hearers capable of following me, in spite of my not making any movement, I will now unfold the eternal truth whereby this philosophy remains in itself and admits of nothing higher. For if I started out from my principle, I would be unable to stop again; if I didn't stop, I would regret it; if I stopped, I would also regret it, etc. I can always stop, for my eternal starting is my eternal stopping. Experience has shown that it isn't at all difficult for philosophy to begin. Far from it: it begins with nothing. What seems so difficult to philosophy and the philosophers is to stop. This difficulty, too, I have avoided. For if anyone believed that in stopping at this point I really am stopping, he proves he has no speculative insight. For I do not stop: I stopped that time I began. My philosophy, therefore, has the advantage of brevity and irrefutability. For if anyone were to contradict it, I would surely be justified in pronouncing him insane. Philosophy, then, is constantly aeterno modo and does not have, like blessed Sintenis, just single hours which are lived for eternity.[107]

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[105] *CUP*, p. 304-5.

[106] Kierkegaard was fond of quoting the following from Lichtenberg: 'Such works are like mirrors: when an ape looks in, no apostle can look out' (see, e.g., *SLW*, p. 81). For a nice discussion of indirect communication as mirroring, see Pyper (1992).

[107] *EO* (Hannay), p. 55.

The irony is hardly subtle. The implication is that the philosophy which, in an Hegelian trope, 'remains in itself and admits of nothing higher' fails to transcend so much as the non-project of an ironic aesthete – let alone an ethical life-view or the faith of a Christian.

More particularly, the implication is that the Hegelian injunction to begin without presuppositions is (given or taken) in the same spirit as the aesthete's refusal to make a start – in case he regrets it. Notice the parallels with the more direct arguments deployed in the *Postscript*. There, as we saw in Chapter Two, Climacus argues that Hegel's presuppositionless system can never get off the ground because if the beginning is truly immediate it never starts (because it is *eo ipso* 'thoughtless') and if it is truly reflective it never stops (because reflection can never 'resolve itself' into immediacy). Here the aesthete turns Hegelian inertia into a virtue – 'since I never start I can always stop' – and glories in the thought that this method 'has the advantage of brevity and irrefutability'. If the *reductio* works, the Hegelian thinker will see himself reflected in the absurd 'wisdom' of declining all decisive activity. But he will not have done so on the basis of any direct argument to the conclusion that the content of his thought is false or incoherent.[108]

It is not that Kierkegaard has no direct arguments against Hegel. In the previous chapter, I defended one such argument. But I hope to have shown how the conclusions of that argument – that thinking requires spontaneous activity on the part of the thinking subject and that the notion of 'pure thought' is (therefore) illusory – imply the strategic necessity of indirection. Just as there is a certain sense in which the psychologistic view of logic cannot be directly attacked, so there is a sense in which Hegelianism is irrefutable. For Hegel, this is the sense that the 'eternal' perspective of speculation subsumes all other views within its systematic orbit. For Kierkegaard, it is the sense that to engage this speculation directly would already be to grant too much.

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[108] My reading of this section of *Either / Or* is supported by Kierkegaard's identification of the ideal of presuppositionless philosophy with romantic irony in his Masters' dissertation. For example, Kierkegaard quotes Solger's articulation of this ideal – 'It is surely certain that his science (the philosopher's) differs essentially from every other in that it is all-encompassing. Every other science presupposes something as given, either a specific form of knowledge as in mathematics, or a specific subject matter as in history, natural science and the like. Philosophy alone must create itself'. Kierkegaard comments: '[Solger's] contemplative irony now sees the finite as the *Nichtige*, as that which must be annulled' (*CI*, p. 311). In a similar vein, Kierkegaard ironically identifies Hegel's own definition of irony as 'infinite absolute negativity' with the concept of an 'absolute beginning' (ibid. p. 312).

CHAPTER
FOUR Attuning to Rules:
The Role of Imagination

> The *rules* of IMAGINATION are themselves the very
> powers of growth and production.
> (Samuel Coleridge)

> It is ridiculous to oppose judgement to imagination;
> for it does not appear that men have necessarily less
> of one as they have more of the other.
> (Samuel Johnson)

The purpose of Chapters Two and Three was to explore how the PCS informs the criticisms of Hegel's project and the central notions of the leap and indirect communication in Kierkegaard's work. On the view that emerged, there is a sense in which the paradox is insoluble, since it arises from distortions endemic to the process of philosophical abstraction and analysis. Yet I argued that this diagnosis does itself go some way to disarming the paradox, and that we can make good sense both of certain of Kierkegaard's texts and the notion of constrained spontaneity by endorsing an Inseparability Thesis about the relation between acts and objects of thought.

Substantive issues remain, however, concerning how we are to understand our capacity to follow rules if not on the basis of rules. Just how is that we come to make spontaneous 'leaps' of judgement in this way? To what extent are such leaps 'blind'? How can they be understood as acts of rule-*following* rather than mere rule-conformity? In virtue of what, if not reflection on rules, are they performed non-arbitrarily? In this chapter, I will argue that Kierkegaard's work does suggest answers to such questions. In particular, I shall show how his texts invite and support an inquiry into the role of imagination in thinking and judging.

Since there is a general worry whether any such inquiry is in the spirit of Kierkegaard's insistence that the role of spontaneity implies limits of explanation, I introduce the topic by drawing an analogy with a project he clearly does pursue in a far more sustained manner (Section 1). I then exhibit textual support for the claim that Kierkegaard's work invites an investigation into the role of imagination in judgement,

and describe a typical response, namely, *indirect imagism* (Section 2). By canvassing two stock objections to this strategy, I argue that whatever else may be wrong with it, indirect imagism is ill-equipped to account for constrained spontaneity.

This should motivate the search for an alternative approach. I argue that a reasonably cogent if unduly mystified alternative can be extracted from certain nineteenth century texts. I characterise this as *direct imagism* (Section 3). Returning to Kierkegaard's work, I show how passages in both *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *The Sickness Unto Death* articulate a qualified endorsement of direct imagism (Section 4). I then respond on Kierkegaard's behalf to a powerful general objection to this theoretical framework, to the effect that it fails to address certain sceptical worries (Section 5), and spell out the implications for debates about rule-following (Section 6). Finally, I sketch one way of developing an appeal to the role of imagination in rule-governed thought within the framework of direct imagism (Section 7).

1. The Remit of Psychology

The subtitle of *The Concept of Anxiety* is 'A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin'. The book sets out to address the classical theological problem of how sin came into the world. By way of an answer, Vigilius Haufniensis offers the following formula:

By a qualitative leap sin enters into the world, and it continually enters into the world in that way.[1]

As we have seen (in Chapter Three), the sense in which sin involves a leap for Haufniensis is parallel to the sense in which logical thought involves a leap for Climacus. For, in both cases, we are confronted with a capacity whose possession seems somehow prior to its acquisition. As Haufniensis puts it, 'if [sinfulness] comes in by sin, then sin is prior to sinfulness'[2] – that is, we cannot ultimately reconcile the fact that my capacity to sin is *acquired* with the fact that any sinful act I might perform *presupposes* my having already acquired the capacity to sin. (Similarly, the PCS is generated by combining the

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[1] *CA*, p. 111.

[2] Ibid., p. 32.

thought that S's capacity to follow a rule R is acquired with the thought that any R-governed act by S presupposes S's having already acquired the capacity to follow R.) Haufniensis goes so far as to declare, on these grounds, that there is something about the origin of sin that 'no science can explain'.[3]

This raises the question why an author who insists that the origin of sin is inexplicable should bother to write a book that purports to explain how sin comes into the world in terms of the concept of anxiety. Haufniensis makes space for himself by arguing that, whilst, from a 'scientific' (i.e. observational) perspective, there is something inherently paradoxical about the moment of one's acquiring the capacity to sin, we can nonetheless account from within that perspective for the psychological preconditions of this moment. In other words, he claims that we can describe and analyse the kind of psychological states and processes prior to 'the Fall'.[4] Haufniensis writes:

> The science that deals with the explanation is psychology, but it can explain only up to the explanation and must guard against the impression of explaining that which no science can explain...Psychology must remain within its boundary; only then can it have significance.[5]

Haufniensis takes himself to be applying a general principle here to the specific context of the origin of sin. The principle is that 'the history of the individual life proceeds in a movement from state to state. Every state is posited by a leap'. He continues,

> As sin entered into the world, so it continues to enter into the world if it is not halted. Nevertheless, every such repetition is not a simple consequence but a new leap. Every such leap is preceded by a state as the closest psychological approximation. This state is the object of psychology.[6]

It is within this methodological framework that Haufniensis introduces and develops his psychological explanation of the state that is immediately prior to the acquisition of sinfulness, namely that of anxiety. Time and again we are given notice that the *explananda* of this account are the psychological *pre*conditions of one's acquiring and exercising the capacity to sin, *not* moments of acquisition or application; the run up to the

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[3] Ibid., p. 39.

[4] As Ronald Johnson puts it, 'explanations can take us right up to the moment before the leap, but only that far; they describe the conditions under which sin becomes possible, but they cannot explain why sin becomes actual' (Johnson (1997), p. 163).

[5] *CA*, p. 39.

leap, as it were, rather than the leap itself. Towards the end of the book, for example, Haufniensis reiterates,

Here again I repeat that this is only the final psychological expression for the final psychological approximation to the qualitative leap.[7]

The premise of this chapter is that, although undoubtedly given less sustained attention than the question of the origin of sin, Kierkegaard's work invites an explanation of the psychological preconditions of judgement and rule-following. Such an explanation must, as with the case of *The Concept of Anxiety*, guard against the impression of having removed what is paradoxical about moments of acquisition and application – in this case, the PCS. But the explanation may nonetheless describe and analyse the conditions of the possibility of the occurrence of such moments. Where Haufniensis develops the concept of anxiety in the service of his explanation of sin, this chapter aims to develop the concept of imagination in the service of an explanation of rule-following.

2. Indirect Imagism

Having articulated his puzzle about logical judgement, and applied the metaphor of leaping in this context, Climacus registers the following remark:

In order to shed light on logic, it might be desirable to become orientated psychologically in the state of mind of someone who thinks the logical – what kind of dying to oneself is required for that purpose, and to what extent the imagination plays a part in it.[8]

To what extent does imagination play a role in logical thought? How might such a role account for systematic spontaneity?[9] Unfortunately, Climacus is not moved by his own goad here but proceeds in typically sardonic vein to offer 'another meagre and very simple comment'. Yet the suggestion that imagination plays a part in logical thought – where the latter is to be construed very broadly as encompassing our capacities for

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[6] Ibid., p. 113.

[7] ibid., p. 91.

[8] *CUP*, p. 117.

[9] Compare Kierkegaard's question in his journals, 'to what extent does imagination play a role in logical thought, to what extent the will; to what extent is the conclusion a resolution?' (*JP* III 3658 (Pap. IV C 89) n.d. 1842-43).

forming and applying concepts according to rules – is far from idiosyncratic. Admittedly, philosophers have tended to focus on the relation between imaginary and perceived objects (in Husserl's terms, the 'neutrality-modification' of intentional objects[10]). Yet the thesis that imagination performs a general cognitive function goes back at least as far as Aristotle's assertion that 'the soul never thinks without a mental image'.[11]

An orthodox way of cashing out this thesis is what I shall call *indirect imagism* (sometimes called Picture Theory or pictorialism[12]). In order to count as a form of indirect imagism a theory must be committed to at least the following: (a) images are analogous to, or functionally equivalent with, physical pictures; and (b) images are mental particulars. The function of imagination is concomitantly defined, at least in part, as the mind's capacity to interpret (to 'see') these mental images (or 'quasi-pictures').

Thus an indirect imagist theory of the role of imagination in perception will typically make reference to three distinct moments: (i) picture-like sensory input (in Russell's terms, 'sense-data'); (ii) the copying and memorising of this input inside the mind; and (iii) the interpretation of these copies or models by 'the mind's eye'. In this way, the mind is viewed as relating indirectly to its objects via the interpretation of an inner image.[13] Even such a highly sophisticated pictorialist theory as Stephen Kosslyn's contemporary work – which draws heavily on an analogy with computer graphics – roughly adheres to this basic schema.[14]

What is more relevant to Climacus' proposal, an indirect imagist theory of thought and language will typically claim that concepts are built up from mental pictures, themselves innate and / or constructed from sensory input and memories, which are subsequently associated with words in a natural language. Locke gave canonical

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[10] The problem here is essentially how to account for the fact that one and the same intentional object can figure in both perception and imagination. For a brief discussion see section 7 below.

[11] *De Anima* 431a 15-20. Nigel Thomas comments that 'for Aristotle images play something very like the role played by the more generic notion of "mental representation" in modern cognitive science' (N. Thomas (2001), p. 2).

[12] In fact, Pictorialism is only one species of indirect imagism. Hume appeals, for instance, to reified 'images' which, whilst not conceived on analogy with physical pictures, are conceived as internal 'faint copies' of perceptions. To accommodate this so-called 'Classic Perceptual Model' within our definition of indirect imagism would, however, lead to unnecessary complications.

[13] Compare Alexander Gerard's description of the mind as 'Like a mirrour it reflects faithful images of the objects formerly perceived by us...It is in its nature a mere copier' (cited in Abrams (1953), p. 160).

[14] See, e.g., Kosslyn (1980).

expression to such a view in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he argued that 'the use of words...stand as outward marks of our internal ideas', the latter being abstracted from our sensation of particulars and contemplated by an 'internal sense'.[15] In his *Autobiography*, Einstein nicely articulates a similar view:

What, precisely, is "thinking"? When at the reception of sense-impressions, memory-pictures emerge, this is not yet "thinking". And when such pictures form series, each member of which calls forth another, this too is not yet "thinking". When, however, a certain picture turns up in many such series, then – precisely through such return – it becomes an ordering element for such a series, in that it connects series which are in themselves unconnected. Such an element becomes an instrument, a concept... It is by no means necessary that a concept must be connected with a sensorily cognisable and reproducible sign (word)...All our thinking is of this nature of a free play with concepts...For me it is not dubious that our thinking goes on for the most part without use of signs (words), and beyond that to a considerable degree unconsciously. [16]

For Einstein, recognising patterns between mental pictures, to which words are subsequently attached, is of the essence of conceptual thought. Developing and defending this kind of claim would be constitutive of a response to Climacus' goad along the lines of indirect imagism.

I take it that this framework has intuitive appeal, at least for those who have not been influenced by more recent philosophical trends. This is not least because it tallies with the familiar idea that thinking according to new conceptual schemes involves a creative use of analogy, metaphor and models in order to see patterns – an idea that is borne out by anecdotal evidence such as Einstein's. More generally, indirect imagism trades on the insidious notion that it is because humans have access to internal models of the world that they can handle it so competently. As K. J. W. Craik once put it,

If the organism carries a "small-scale model" of external reality and of its own possible actions within its head, it is able to try out various alternatives, conclude which is the best of them, react to future situations before they arise, utilise the knowledge of past events in dealing with the present and the future, and in every way to react in a much fuller, safer, and more competent manner to the emergencies which face it.[17]

Yet indirect imagism has of course suffered a less than enthusiastic reception in the twentieth century. Thinkers as diverse as Sartre, Frege, Wittgenstein, Ryle, Watson and

[15] Locke (1898), pp. 274; 207.
[16] Cited in Holton (1981), p. 380.
[17] Craik (1943), p. 61.

Dennett have all launched vigorous attacks on the plausibility, even the coherence, of its central claims. To be sure, these attacks are fought on different fronts and reflect different theoretical and polemical agendas. But I suggest that two key arguments – or families of argument – have loomed large in the revolt against indirect imagism.

The first of these might be called Image-Concept Gap arguments. Their target is any attempt to account for conceptual thought in terms of mental images. The central claim is that concepts and images are categorically distinct, that they are just different kinds of beast. Ready support for this claim is the observation that there are some concepts that simply cannot be pictured. We surely cannot, for example, form images of abstract concepts like *facile* or *correct* or connectives such as *or*. But it seems to follow that some concepts are not composed of pictures. Another way of forcing a wedge between images and concepts is to claim that the former operate at a level of generality the latter cannot. However 'fuzzy' my generic image of a horse may be, it arguably will always fall short of the concept of a horse in general. At any rate, the thought that images are somehow inadequate to concepts is supported by a further claim, namely, that private images cannot support the essentially *public* nature of conceptual thought.

For it is surely an important feature of concepts that they are intersubjective. The fact that I happen to associate the image of my father's brief-case with the word 'case', for example, is of no help whatsoever in my grasping the concept *case* in a sentence such as, 'The point is easy to see in such cases'. The point is indeed easy to see in such cases due to the ambiguity of the word. But what such cases clearly mark is that my associating images with words is an altogether different kind of thing to my grasping and applying concepts. Cora Diamond illustrates the point in relation to the two sentences, 'Smith has Parkinson's hat' and 'Smith has Parkinson's Disease'. Diamond comments:

> ...everything that one might want to think of as connected with the word "Parkinson" spoken in isolation could be present in both cases: that is, all the ideas we might associate with the word, all the acts of intention we might perform when we uttered it aloud or to ourselves. None of that help us get a grip on the work done by the word "Parkinson" in the first sentence.[18]

Grasping the semantic role of a word – the work it does in a sentential context – is not reducible to any image one might associate with the word. Or, as Michael Dummett has

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[18] Diamond (1991), p. 98.

it, 'Thought differs from other things also said to be objects of the mind, for instance pains or mental images, in not being essentially private'.[19] Very broadly, the form of this objection to indirect imagism appears to be as follows:

(1) Concepts are intersubjective (or public).
(2) Images are subjective (or private).
(3) Nothing is both subjective (or private) and intersubjective (or public).
(4) So nothing can be both a concept and an image.

Such is one of the many motives of Frege's 'anti-psychologism': logic and semantics may have no truck with 'whatever happens to run through our heads'. And, very plausibly, it is this kind of point Climacus invokes when he moots that 'the state of mind of someone who thinks the logical' – i. e the psychological preconditions of logically constrained acts – involves 'a kind of dying to oneself' – i.e. a readiness to forego one's purely personal preferences and associations in conforming to intersubjective norms. I shall suggest below that there are reasons to deny (2), given that the notion of an image need not imply that which is 'private' or idiosyncratic. But given that the kind of theory generated by indirect imagism does hold that concepts are complexes of private images, Image-Concept Gap arguments embody a powerful objection to such theories.

The second genus of argument is closely related to the Regress of Judgements discussed in Chapter One. The target is less the attempt to assimilate concepts and images than the coherence of the kind of mental process postulated by indirect imagism. At one level, the objection simply invokes Occam's Razor. To postulate a 'private theatre' of mental images (Ryle) enjoyed by 'mental homunculi' (Dennett) allegedly performs no explanatory work in an account of human behaviours or cognitive functions.[20] Worse: not only is this ghostly interior unnecessary, it is also incoherent since it multiplies the very problems it is supposed to explain. To see the basic structure of this point, suppose someone tried to explain the familiar phenomena of having a word 'on the tip of one's tongue' by postulating little people inside one's head who are reaching for a sign but cannot quite get hold of it. Such an 'explanation' surely confounds the mystery, for we now have two characters who inexplicably can't quite get hold of a sign. Indirect

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[19] Dummett (1978), p. 116.
[20] Cf. Ryle (1949), Ch. 8; Dennett (1978).

imagism, the objection runs, makes a subtler form of the same mistake, by pushing back the explanation of human phenomena such as perception and logical thought to the level of sub-personal inner processes.

So, for instance, we have learnt from Wittgenstein to be suspicious of appeals to the role of 'abstraction' in conceptual thought. Very crudely, the story supplied by an indirect imagist framework is that I abstract a mental image of, say, a tree from perceptual experience which I can then check against a given object in order to classify it as a tree or otherwise. But, again, any problem I have with classifying this object with trees, I have also with classifying this object with this image and this image with trees. Interposing an image as an intermediary seems only to replace one concept-application with two.[21]

It is very noteworthy in this context that Climacus invokes the role of imagination precisely in the hope of 'shedding light on logic' in the wake of the paradox implicit in a regress of judgements (namely, the PCS). When combined with his insistence on the publicity of logical thought (in contrast to the alleged 'inwardness' of ethico-religious reflection), this fact is surely very strong evidence that Climacus would not be impressed by indirect imagism *qua* theory of the role of imagination in thinking and judging. (Indeed, Climacus' whole critique of his age in terms of the loss of inwardness attendant upon a misplaced objectivity depends on the assumption that objective thinking is essentially public, that it involves a kind of 'dying to oneself'.[22])

The force of both kinds of argument, combined with a general suspicion of 'ghost in the machine' pictures of the mind, goes some way to accounting for the anti-imagist consensus that appears to have emerged, at least in the analytical tradition. According to this consensus, images play at most a subsidiary and relatively insignificant role in higher-order cognitive capacities. In the rubble of ambitious claims for the imagination, any continued interest is mostly focussed on how information is stored in the brain – in particular, whether these structures are best viewed as picture-like or sentence-like (the

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[21] This way of formulating the point is due to Susan Hurley (cf. Hurley (1998), p. 243, n. 22).

[22] Climacus makes this explicit when distinguishing between 'objective' and 'subjective' reflection: 'The way of objective reflection now leads to abstract thinking, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of various kinds, and always leads away from the subjective individual, whose existence or non-existence becomes, from an objective point of view, altogether properly, infinitely indifferent...' (*CUP*, p. 193).

so-called 'analog / propositional debate'[23]). But few contemporary philosophers envisage a fundamental role for imagination in concept formation and application.

It may appear therefore that we ought to give up Climacus' hope that an appeal to the role of imagination might help solve the PCS. 'Yet', Wittgenstein once remarked, 'the naïve theory of *forming-an-image* can't be utterly wrong'.[24]

3. Direct Imagism

Indirect imagism is a broadly *mechanistic* theory in that it conceives the function of imagination as an inner (perhaps unconscious) mechanism by means of which the mind or brain reflects on an inner picture. Kierkegaard was writing in different times. In his milieu, 'the imagination' served as a kind of catch-all for just that which is non-mechanistic, immediate, spontaneous, intuitive, organic, holistic in human experience and cognition. In the writings of such luminaries as Kant, Schelling, Fichte, Schiller, Schleiermacher, the Schlegels, Solger, Tieck, Novalis, the imagination takes the form of 'a synthetic and magical power' – the epicentre of our cognitive capacities to be sure, but no less opaque, ineffable, mysterious for that.[25] Fichte captured something of the *Zeitgeist* when he paid homage to the imagination as the very 'basis for the possibility of our consciousness, our life, our being'.[26]

Exactly what such writers mean by 'the imagination' is indeed obscure.[27] Even such a rigorous thinker as Kant seems reluctant – at least in the *First Critique* – to bring to light the 'dark power' that presumably undergirds his entire project given its explicit status as the 'common root' of understanding and sensation.[28] And there are of course

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[23] For a brief synopsis, see J. Thomas (2001), pp. 4-6.

[24] *PR*, II.12 (p. 58).

[25] Kant's doctrine of schematism was of course the point of departure for many of these thinkers. Cf. *B*. 181: '[T]his schematism of the understanding in its application to appearances and their mere form is an art concealed in the depth of the human soul' (Kant (1933), p. 183).

[26] Cited in Kearney (1988), p. 178.

[27] The following formulation of Coleridge's is sufficient to illustrate the esoteric idiom: 'The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former...' (cited in Abrams (1953), p. 282).

[28] Heidegger argued that Kant ultimately drew back from the 'abyss' opened up by this sense of the primacy of the transcendental imagination. Heidegger writes:

many shifts in meaning as the concept of imagination is shaped by diverse philosophical and literary vocabularies. Nonetheless, I think the following five features display the salient connotations of what for convenience I shall call the Romantic View.

(1) *Empathy*:

On a Romantic View, the imagination facilitates a kind of empathy with one's (human and natural) environment. This notion of *Einfühlung* (in-feeling or feeling-into) underpins the typically Romantic attempt to resist any sharp division between 'inner' and 'outer' worlds.[29] Thus Fichte, for instance, envisions imagination in terms of a 'hovering' between subject and object, and Coleridge in terms of a 'union' between perceiver and perceived.[30] *Pace* indirect imagism, to exercise imagination in relation to some object O is to be sensitive to and sensible of O rather than to replicate an inner representation of O.

Empathy takes both immediate and reflective forms. On a Romantic View, humans pre-reflectively empathise with immediate experience, from which they subsequently abstract (see below) in order to empathise with new points of view. Pre-reflective empathy is thus typically conceived as analogous to a pre-conscious state of dreaming. The connection between imagination and empathy also suggests a close connection between imagination and emotion. For many Romantics, it is because humans experience such emotions as fear, love, longing and wonder that they are sensitive to and sensible of beings and objects other than themselves.

(2) *Abstraction*:

Like indirect imagism, the Romantic View accords an important role to 'abstraction', which it also conceives as a bridge from immediate imagery to genuinely conceptual thought. To abstract is to distance oneself from one's direct awarenesses by consciously attending to, reflecting upon, comparing and unifying these images. Thus Kant:

Does not the *Critique of Pure Reason* deprive itself of its own theme if pure reason is transformed into transcendental imagination? Does not this laying of the foundation lead to an abyss? By his radical interrogation, Kant brought the 'possibility' of metaphysics before this abyss. He saw the unknown; he had to draw back (Heidegger (1962), pp. 162-6).

[29] On this theme see Warnock (1994), Ch. 1.

[30] Cf. Fichte (1970), p. 215.

To make concepts out of representations one must...be able to compare, to reflect, to abstract...I see, for example, a spruce, a willow and a linden. By first comparing these objects with one another I note that they are different from one another in regard to the trunk, the branches, the leaves etc.: but next I reflect on that which they have in common amongst themselves...and I abstract from the quantity, the figure, etc. of these; thus I acquire a concept of a tree.[31]

Pace indirect imagism, however, the Romantic View conceives abstraction as involving new ways of imagining the world, by selectively attending to certain *aspects* of our direct imagery, rather than the acquisition of internalised models. Thus the process of abstracting the form of a tree involves (not the forming of an inner image but) coming to perceive something *as* a tree. The process of abstraction is therefore better understood as exercising a *skill* – broadly speaking, the skill of being able to regard particulars as instantiated universals – rather than an internal mechanism by means of which particulars are compared with universalised images.

(3) *Unification:*

By abstracting from immediate imagery, the imagination thus searches for commonality and pattern within and between different phenomena.[32] As Kierkegaard has it:

This is the eternal *one* of the imagination. Just like the eternal "once upon a time" of the imagination: then man goes out into the morning of life.[33]

Paradigmatic for the Romantics in this respect is aesthetic judgement, where this is conceived as dependent on our capacity to respond to art-works not as disparate collections of brush-strokes or notes or words or marks but as integrated wholes. Such responses to phenomena as displaying unity or integrity account for the distinctively aesthetic feelings of aptness or resonance, the feeling that an art-work hangs together in a particular and satisfying way. This notion of unification underpins Shelley's typically Romantic contrast between reason as the 'principle of analysis' and imagination as 'the principle of synthesis'. And it is taken to support the typically Romantic claim – notably

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[31] Kant (1992), p. 592.

[32] Compare Charles Lamb's definition of the imagination as 'that power which draws all things to one' (cited in Abrams (1953), p. 179).

[33] *JP* I.4 VIII A 622 n.d., 1848.

endorsed by Fichte – that imagination, by unifying disparate elements, can 'make sense of' even that which reason finds contrapositional or paradoxical.[34]

(4) *Perspicacity*:

Due to its insistence on the immediacy of imagination – whether in the sense of pre-reflective empathy or in the sense of the immediate and direct object of acts of selective (in)attention – the Romantic View connects imagination with non-discursive moments of insight, with 'genius'.[35] The notion of an immediate and direct insight underpins both Schelling and Fichte's (otherwise somewhat different) conceptions of 'intellectual intuition'.[36] As Michael Vater reconstructs the common ground: 'Intellectual intuition is a knowledge or activity...where the passivity or givenness of sensible intuition...gives way to spontaneous manifestation or self-realisation'.[37] Fichte's and Schelling's systems may be seen as different ways of pursuing (and enacting) the idea that forms of non-discursive insight are the bedrock on which human cognition and experience are founded.[38]

(5) *Creativity*:

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the Romantic View is a shift from conceiving the operation of imagination as a passive contemplation of an image (as in indirect imagism) to an active and creative organ.[39] In the process of abstracting and empathising, the

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[34] Compare Coleridge's reference to the 'the power' that 'reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities' (cited in Abrams (1953), p. 118). And Schelling: '[W]hat we speak of as the poetic gift is merely productive imagination, reiterated to its highest power. It is one and the same capacity that is active in both, the only one whereby we are able to think and to couple together what is contradictory – and its name is imagination' (Schelling (1978), p. 230).

[35] Compare Shelley: 'For the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness' (cited in Abrams (1953), p. 192).

[36] Joseph Lawrence comments: '[Schelling] counters the sceptical attack...by appealing to a primary, pre-reflexive, knowledge that the self has of itself. Because it is non-propositional, this knowledge cannot be clarified through conceptual analysis' (Lawrence (1989), p. 191).

[37] Vater (2000), p. 213.

[38] Hence Schelling's famous claim that 'aesthetic intuition' gives the philosopher access to the holy of holies 'where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder' (Schelling (1978), p. 231).

[39] Richard Kearney nicely summarises Kant's 'Copernican revolution' in approaches to the imagination in this respect (Kearney (1988), p. 156-7):

Departing from the received wisdom of classical and medieval philosophers, Kant rescued imagination from its servile role as an intermediary faculty between our sensible and intelligible experience, declaring it

imagination not only searches for unity but *produces* or constructs different possible interpretations. As such, the imagination is viewed as expressive of the will.[40]

It is easy, however, to over-simplify the Romantic concept of creativity. For the creative imagination is typically characterised in terms of a complex interplay between active construction and passive reception. In particular, to exercise the imagination is to act constructively in such a way as to become the passive receiver of the constructed image. The paradigm here is the process of artistic creation where the artist is viewed as initiating and participating in a process over which she does not have full control. Crudely speaking, artist creativity consists in setting in motion a self-perpetuating process such that the end result appears to have been received rather than created by the artist.[41] (This idea clearly informs R. G. Collingwood's more recent theory of creativity.[42]) Thus Fichte refers to imagination as a kind of 'active passivity' or a suspension between creativity and receptivity in which we encounter the unity we construct.[43] This aspect of the Romantic View is one of the most obscure. But that it is highly suggestive *vis-à-vis* the PCS should be evident.

It is not my purpose here either to develop the attribution of this sketch to particular figures or to defend the Romantic View as a whole. (Certainly the Romantics' reputation for obscurantism is not entirely unjust.) But I do want to suggest that it contains the germs of a genuine alternative to indirect imagism, and one that both avoids the stock objections and is far better equipped to accommodate the PCS. Of course more than a list of associated concepts is required to make this plausible. But the above can be

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to be the primary and indispensable precondition of all knowledge. Nothing could be known about the world unless it was first performed and transformed by the synthetic power of imagination.

[40]To say that imagination is 'expressive of the will' perhaps avoids the misleading connotation that, as Malcolm Budd puts it, 'the existence and continuation of [any given] image is determined by the will' (Budd (1989), p. 105).

[41] Cf. Kierkegaard's conception of his own authorship in terms of 'Governance' (e.g. *PV*, pp. 71-90). This is a religious analogue of what *Either / Or* calls 'wanting rightly': 'To want rightly, on the other hand, is a great art, or rather it is a gift. It is what is inexplicable and mysterious about genius, just like the divining rod, to which it never occurs to want except in the presence of what it wants.' (*EO* (Hannay), p. 63).

[42] See Collingwood (1938).

[43] Compare Coleridge's description of the process of poetic production as a combination of spontaneous and constrained activity which 'must be reconciled and co-present. There must not only be a partnership, but a union; an interpenetration of passion and of will, of *spontaneous* impulse and of *voluntary* purpose.' (cited in Abrams (1953), p. 121).

taken as a first approximation to a *direct imagist* conception. These might be distilled into the following conditions a theory must meet in order to count as form of direct imagism:

(a) The theory must hold that, for at least some acts of imagining, acts of imagining are analogous to acts of pictorial interpretation.

(b) The theory must hold that, for at least some acts and objects of imagination, the relation between act and object is immediate and direct.

Notice that both indirect and direct imagism appeal to an analogy between the activity of imagination and our responses to physical pictures. But whereas the former appeals to pictures as analogous to the mental particulars that it is the job of the mind's eye to interpret, the latter appeals only to an analogy with our responses to pictures. And the import of (b) is that direct imagism denies what indirect imagism asserts, namely that objects of imagination are necessarily mediated by images inside the heads of individual subjects. It denies, in other words, that successfully performing acts of imagining essentially involves reflecting on a mental content.

It is worth noting that, although it does appeal to an analogy with pictorial interpretation, direct imagism is not vulnerable to certain powerful objections to the analogy with physical pictures. (Note that the two forms of objection outlined above were specifically targeted at the appeal to indirect imagism in an account of thought, not at the analogy with pictures *per se.*) One such worry is that whereas physical pictures have configurational properties, mental images do not. A physical picture has a certain size, shape, location, colour, and so on. But it is very plausible that we experience no such properties of our images, these being wholly transparent to consciousness. At any rate, it should be clear that direct imagism side-steps such objections. For the appeal here is to an analogy with our responses to pictures, not with pictures themselves.

So just what are 'acts of pictorial interpretation'? Consider the following picture:

This is a picture of a Dalmatian.[44] But the fact that it takes most people a while to see the picture *as* of a Dalmatian suggests that this involves a particular kind of experience, over and above simply perceiving the marks on the page. Plausibly, the interpretation of any picture (and not just peculiar ones such as the above) involve this kind of experience, in addition to its merely visual impact.[45] As Robert Hopkins describes it,

Sometimes, when you look at a picture, you do not at first see what it depicts. You can see the patterned surface before you, and can see quite clearly what marls lie where. You may even be able to tell that *something* is depicted, from the obvious care with which the surface has been marked, but not what is. Then, in a moment, the way you see the surface is transformed. You can now see, let us suppose, that the picture is of a horse, that the strange shaped lump that had puzzled you depicts its head, those straggly lines of colour its legs, and so forth. It need not be that you now see any of those marks as lying differently from how they seemed to before. You

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[44] 'Dalmation dot dottogram'. Photograph by R. C. James, from Miller (1990), p. 188.

[45] To say that pictorial experience is 'over and above' any merely visual impact is not to say that, in normal cases, we first perceive the marks as mere marks and then perceive the picture. Normally, we perceive a picture immediately. Nonetheless, it remains true that this capacity for immediate pictorial experience involves more than mere visual perception. (Wittgenstein expresses this distinction in terms of first and third-person perspectives. From the former it would make no sense for the person who only sees the rabbit in Jastrow's picture to say "Now I am seeing it as a picture-rabbit"; 'Nevertheless someone else could have said of me: "He is seeing the figure as a picture-rabbit" (*PI* II.xi. (p. 195)).

need not think that you mistook or overlooked the position of some mark. It is simply that you now see the marks as organised in a particular way. [46]

This distinctive *pictorial experience* may be said to be the product or object of acts of pictorial interpretation. As such, pictorial experience is the basis of more complex aesthetic responses to pictures.[47] The key claim of direct imagism – and the assumption behind the Romantic View as a whole – is that the cognitive work of the imagination is best conceived on analogy with such responses.[48] The relevant conception of imagination, on this view, is our capacity for non-discursive acts of *seeing-as* or *taking-as* – what Wittgenstein called the 'continuous seeing' of an aspect.[49] And it is to such responses that a direct imagist theory appeals when it claims a role for imagination in thinking and judging.[50] (Note that there is an ordinary usage of 'imagination' which is naturally read in terms of *taking-as*: Francis Dauer, for example, cites, 'I still imagine him to be (think of him as) a peanut farmer rather than the president'.[51])

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[46] Hopkins (1998), p. 15

[47] In fact, the analogy is with aesthetic experience more generally. I am focusing on pictorial experience only to bring out the distinction between mere perception and taking-as. But making sense of a piece of music, say, can also be seen to involve a distinctive experience of hearing a series of sounds as harmonious. This certainly seems to be the view of the aesthete in *Either / Or* who claims that '[t]he ear is the most spiritually determined of the senses... There is much in nature which addresses itself to the ear but what affects the ear is the purely sensual, and therefore nature is dumb. And it is a ridiculous fancy that one hears something because one hears a cow moo or, what has perhaps a larger claim in this respect, a nightingale sing; it is mere imagination to think that one hears something, mere imagination that the one is worth more than the other, for its all six of one and half a dozen of the other' (*EO* (Hannay), pp. 78-9). In other words: to hear the noises a nightingale makes as singing requires something over and above mere sensual hearing.

[48] Note that this does not commit direct imagism to the view that the imagination is actually at work in pictorial experience – though this is surely not implausible, it would take independent argument to demonstrate (for an attempt to show that it is, see Walton (1990)).

[49] Cf. *PI* II.xi, (p. 194). The contrast registered by 'continuous' is the 'dawning' of an aspect. On this distinction, see Mulhall (2001), pp. 153-163. Wittgenstein marks a connection between aspect-seeing and imagination in several passages. For example:

The concept of an aspect is akin to the concept of an image. In other words: the concept 'I am now seeing it as...' is akin to 'I am now having *this* image'.

Doesn't it take imagination to hear something as a variation on a particular theme? And yet one is perceiving something in so hearing it. (*PI II.xi* (p. 213)).

[50] Plainly, in order for this analogy to work, something must take the role of pictures as the occasion of the imaginative responses allegedly involved in judgement. I shall claim below that this role is fulfilled by *examples* of judgements. Of course there are all sorts of things to say about pictorial experience beyond the mere observation that it involves seeing-as or (in Wollheim's terms) 'seeing-in', but this may be all that is required for the analogy to go through (cf. Wollheim (1987)).

[51] Dauer (1993), p. 265.

Now it is possible to gain from even this skeletal conception a sense for how direct imagism might avoid the problems that have beset direct imagist strategies. Consider first the 'Fregean' objection outlined above. The claim was that concepts and images are generically distinct because whereas images are private mental items, concepts are intersubjective. Now there is nothing in (a) or (b) to suggest that the objects of imagination are private or idiosyncratic. On the contrary, these entail that at least some acts of imagining do *not* involve reflecting on a private image. Of course there is work to be done to show that our direct images are in fact governed by intersubjective norms. But at least a general conception of imagination in accordance with (a) and (b) does not rule out the possibility of such an account.

The other argument was to the effect that appeals to the imagination in an account of logical thought are vulnerable to a vicious regress. That objection was directed at the attempt to explain thought in terms of a prior process of interpreting mental images. But again, direct imagism is not *prima facie* vulnerable to this attack. For given that the alternative model is committed to a notion of spontaneous aspect-perceptions that do *not* involve the prior interpretation of mental contents, no such incoherence is implied. Of course, there is work to be done to show just what role these direct responses play in logical thought. But at least direct imagism opens up the possibility of such an account.

1. The Capacity 'Instar Omnium'

In his *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of the Imagination*, David Gouwens helpfully maps out the main sites of Kierkegaard's 'two-front polemic' against Romanticism and Rationalism.[52] On the one hand, Kierkegaard launches a very general attack on 'the Romantic spirit', which he views as involving a pernicious attempt to evade historical and ethical constraints. Kierkegaard rarely misses the opportunity to poke gentle fun at the excesses of Romantic outpourings – e.g. when one of his aesthetes mentions 'certain sensitive people' who seem to hold that the greatest significance of language is 'to produce inarticulate sounds'.[53] But beyond this, Kierkegaard argues (often indirectly) that

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[52] Gouwens (1989), p. 95.
[53] *EO* (Hannay), p. 76.

the Romantic celebration of imagination can only lead to boredom, fragmentation, self-stultification, stagnation – in short, an 'aesthetic stupor'. In the *Concept of Irony*, for instance, Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* is presented as a paradigmatic expression of the Romantic spirit, and is marshalled as powerful testimony to its degeneracy:

> This (letting imagination alone prevail) is repeated throughout *Lucinde*. Now who is such a monster that he is unable to delight in the free play of the imagination? But it does not follow from this that the whole of life should be given over to the imagination. When the imagination is allowed to rule in this way it prostrates and anaesthetises the soul, robs it of all moral tension, and makes of life a dream. Yet this is essentially what *Lucinde* seeks to promote.[54]

Plainly, the kind of criticism Kierkegaard is engaged in here is concerned less with how the Romantics conceive the function of the imagination than with the ethical and existential significance invested in that conception.[55]

Yet on the other front of Kierkegaard's polemic – the attack on Hegelian rationalism – Romanticism becomes a key ally. This is nowhere more evident than in Climacus' remarks on philosophical beginnings in the *Postscript* (see Chapter Two of this thesis). There Climacus appears to side with Schelling that philosophical thought must be based on some kind of direct intuition over against the Hegelian attempt to absolutize 'pure thought'.[56] Climacus writes:

> When thinking turns toward itself in order to think about itself, there emerges, as we know, a scepticism. How can there be a halt to this scepticism of which the source is that thinking selfishly wants to think itself instead of serving by thinking something? When a horse takes the bit in its teeth and runs away, it would be all right, apart from the damage that might be done in the meantime, for one to say: Just let it run; it will surely become tired. With regard to thinking's self-reflection, this cannot be said, because it can keep on for any length of time and runs in circles. Schelling halted self-reflection and understood intellectual intuition not as a discovery within self-reflection that is arrived at by rushing ahead, but as a new point of departure. Hegel regards this as a mistake and speaks depreciatingly about intellectual intuition – then came the method. Self-reflection keeps on so long until it cancels itself; thinking presses through victoriously and once again gains reality; the identity of thinking and being is won in pure thinking.[57]

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[54] *CI*, fn. p. 292 (trans. modified).

[55] And the Romantics certainly did present themselves as cultural iconoclasts. Compare Schlegel's so-called 'manifesto of the young German Romantics' in which the 'aim and mission is, now to...make life and society poetic' (cited in Gouwens (1989), p. 36).

[56] Climacus is building up to his claim that for 'the subjective thinker' – i.e. the Socratic exemplar held up as an alternative to the Hegelian 'pure thinker' – 'imagination, feeling, and dialectics in impassioned existence-inwardness are required' (*CUP*, p. 350). For discussion see Walsh (1990).

[57] *CUP*, p. 355.

Philosophers want to understand the relation between mind and world. Just raising this question clearly involves reflecting on our thoughts about the world. Now, 'as we know', such reflections can give rise to (e.g. Kant's) sense of the need for an internal 'critique' of the categories of our thought. But then further questions arise about the status of this reflexive inquiry. How can we be sure that philosophical reflection on the conditions of thought will tell us anything about *the world*? Does not Kant's project open up a chasm between human thought and the unknowable *Ding an Sich*? And so we move up (with the post-Kantian Idealists) to a third-order, meta-philosophical level of reflection. But the worry persists: for is not reflection loosing all contact with the world in this continual spiralling back on itself? In this way, Climacus suggests that a peculiar post-Kantian scepticism emerges due to the fact that thought 'selfishly wants to think itself'.

Climacus' point is that if this kind of scepticism is to be addressed, and the regress halted, there must be 'a new point of departure' – and that at least Schelling's insistence on the need for 'intellectual intuition' marks some kind of appreciation of this fact. Climacus views Hegel's 'presuppositionless' method, on the other hand, as depending on the curious notion that if thought continues far enough in reflection upon itself it will eventually, and of its own accord, make contact again with its proper object.

The present point is simply to register Climacus' sympathy with the Romantic insistence that thought – even abstract, philosophical thought – begins with immediate and direct responses to the world. (The sympathy is evident as early as *Johannes Climacus*, in which Climacus favourably compares the Greek idea that philosophy begins with wonder with the modern idea that it begins with doubt – where this preference is justified by the fact that wonder is immediate in a way that doubt is not.[58]) And sympathy with the further Romantic claim that it is *imagination* that is at work in such responses is surely manifest in the following passage from *The Sickness Unto Death*:

As a rule, imagination is the medium for the process of infinitizing; it is not a capacity, as are ['feeling, knowing, and willing'] – if one wishes to speak in those terms, it is the capacity *instar omnium* [for all capacities]. When all is said and done, whatever of feeling, knowing, and willing a person has depends upon what imagination he has, upon how that person reflects himself – that is, upon imagination. Imagination is infinitizing reflection, and therefore the elder Fichte quite correctly assumed that even in relation to knowledge the categories derive from the imagination.

[58] Cf. *JC*, p. 145: 'Wonder is plainly an immediate category and involves no reflection upon itself. Doubt, on the other hand, is a reflection-category'.

The self is reflection, and the imagination is reflection, is the rendition of the self as the self's possibility. The imagination is the possibility of any and all reflection, and the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the intensity of the self.[59]

The thrust of this dense passage is clear enough: viz. that the imagination is essential for a whole gamut of human capacities, including those of reflection and knowledge. Imagination is nothing less than the *sine qua non* of 'any and all reflection'. Again, the approving nod to a guiding light to the Romantics – this time to Fichte – intimates that, however polemically orientated against such thinkers, Kierkegaard shares their sense of the explanatory primacy of the imagination.[60]

Note especially that Anti-Climacus concurs with the Romantic View that imagination is not a local 'faculty' such as the capacity to reflect on mental particulars, but a far more general way of engaging with the world (and oneself), if one wishes to speak in terms of capacities, a 'capacity for all capacities'. In this way, Anti-Climacus anticipates Sartre's claim that images are not *elements* within consciousness but 'complete consciousnesses', and that acts of imagining are modes of relating directly to reality rather than the means of an inner process of reflecting on mental images.[61] (Compare also Wittgenstein's remark that 'the image and the reality are in *one* space'.[62])

Romantic influences can also be detected in the elliptical phrase, 'the medium for the process of infinitizing'. I take it that this expression compresses features (1) to (5) above. That is, to engage in a 'process of infinitizing' is to creatively experiment with different perspectives in search of a unified (apt, resonant) image. It is, in Kierkegaard's words, to 'try out [one's] mind as one tunes an instrument'.[63] (The cognate of 'infinite' here is best understood on analogy with the infinite form of a verb as opposed, say, to its present tense. Thus one might say that to conceive a verb *in abstracto* is to infinitize it. In a nineteenth-century context, 'infinite' carries the primary connotation of the unity of a

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[59] *SUD*, pp. 30-1.

[60] I wrote 'intimates' rather than 'implies' for of course the above passage is to be attributed to Anti-Climacus, not Kierkegaard. However, it will hopefully become clear in what follows that there is sufficient agreement between the pseudonymous authors to warrant (at least) my references to a broadly 'Kierkegaardian' view of the role of imagination.

[61] Sartre writes: 'An imaginative consciousness...presents itself to itself as an imaginative consciousness, that is, as a spontaneity which produces and holds on to the object as an image' (Sartre (1995), p. 14.).

[62] *PR*, III.38 (p 73).

[63] Cf. *POI'*, p. 82.

whole rather than the endlessness of a series.[64]) It is part and parcel of this process of mental attunement, I take it, that we come to imagine phenomena in certain ways: e.g., as tokens of types, parts of wholes, examples of patterns, intensions of extensions, instances of universals and so on – which is in turn a *sine qua non* of our subsuming particulars under concepts in judgement. Presumably, it is on such grounds that Anti-Climacus concurs with Fichte that the imagination is 'the possibility of any and all reflection'.

This interpretation is confirmed by the wider context of Anti-Climacus' discussion of personal identity, which exploits the notion of infinitizing in connection with our capacity to imagine ourselves in different possible ways. Anti-Climacus details the ways in we confer unity, meaning and purpose on our lives by occupying different possible perspectives on ourselves and argues that such acts of self-imaging are essential for 'becoming a self' in the deepest sense. And there is no reason to suppose that this notion of infinitizing substantially changes in the contexts of knowledge and cognition (see Section 5 below).

More formally, then, Anti-Climacus' claim for the role of imagination in performing judgements might be construed as follows:

If S has acquired the capacity to perform judgements of type T, there must be some point at which S spontaneously made sense of examples of judgements of type T.

The admittedly loose phrase 'made sense of' is supposed to evoke the concept of searching for unity and finding certain images apt or resonant (for more on this see Sections 6 and 7 below).[65] But the general import of the claim can be taken as a commentary on Kant's dictums that 'examples are the go-cart of judgement' and that 'judgement can be practised but never taught'.[66] Indeed, the picture is the very Kantian

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[64] For a discussion of this distinction, see A. Moore (1990), p. 86.

[65] Compare here Christopher Peacocke's appeal to the notion of finding a certain transition in thought 'primitively compelling' (Peacock, (1992), p. 6):

To say that a thinker finds such transitions primitively compelling is to say this: (1) he finds them compelling; (2) he does not find them compelling because he has inferred them from other premises and/or principles; and (3) for possession of the concept C in question...he does not take the correctness of the transitions as answerable to anything else...

[66] B. 171-2 (Kant (1922)). Compare also Wittgenstein: 'How do I explain the meaning of "regular", "uniform", "same" to anyone? – I shall explain these words to someone who, say, only speaks French by means of the corresponding French words. But if a person has not yet got the *concepts*, I shall teach him to use the words by means of *examples* and by *practice*. – And when I do this I do not communicate less to

one of an active, interrogative consciousness spontaneously unifying its objects. It should be clear that the requirement of spontaneity here implies a rejection of indirect imagism.

To be sure, Anti-Climacus' remarks on the cognitive role of imagination are incidental to the main theme of *Sickness Unto Death* and Kierkegaard never really develops them. But there is surely sufficient evidence here for concluding that, despite a general orientation against Romanticism, Kierkegaard is sympathetic to direct imagism. And we may reasonably infer that when Climacus moots a connection between imagination and logical thought such that might help account for leaps of judgement, he envisages an account along these lines.

2. Spontaneity in the Void

In order to pursue this connection further it will be as well at this juncture to consider a very general misgiving *vis-à-vis* direct imagism. The worry is nicely expressed by John McDowell's reference to 'spontaneity as a frictionless spinning in a void'.[67] According to McDowell, a broadly Kantian emphasis on spontaneity and creativity is ill-equipped to satisfy certain *desiderata* of any theory of judgement. In particular, we want to know that and how our concepts are *justified*. And the concern is that appeals to spontaneous acts of imagining violate this requirement. McDowell argues that, whilst it often leads down blind allies, we should nonetheless take very seriously our desire for 'reassurance that when we use our concepts in judgement, our freedom – our spontaneity in the exercise of understanding – is constrained from outside thought, and constrained in a way that we can appeal to in displaying the judgements as justified'.[68]

In short, if Kant rightly rejected the so-called 'Myth of the Given' as a response to this *desideratum* – i.e. the picture of the mind as a passive receptor of externally given content – he is in danger of succumbing to what Susan Hurley has dubbed the 'Myth of the Giv*ing*' – i.e. the picture of the mind as imaginatively constructing its contents *ex*

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him than I know myself.' (*PI* §208). And Kierkegaard: 'Abstract concepts are just like the straight line, invisible and only to be seen in their concrete instances.' (*JP* 39 II A 496 (Hannay), p. 105).

[67] McDowell (1994), p. 11.

[68] Ibid., p. 8.

nihilo, unbridled by any external constraint.[69] According to McDowell's revival of a Hegelian critique, neither myth is adequate to the demand for justification. For, where the former illicitly appeals to brute 'givens' (see Chapter Two of this thesis), the latter cannot make out our concepts to be answerable to the external reality it may nonetheless posit.

Now whether or not Kant is vulnerable to McDowell's critique is not our concern. But we do need to consider whether Kierkegaard is, and whether any attempt at a direct imagist account must inevitably fail to satisfy the demand for justification.

Kierkegaard is certainly sensitive to McDowell's kind of worry. Indeed, the spectre of 'frictionless spinning in a void' very aptly captures his antipathy toward many post-Kantian thinkers. Consider, for example, his general verdict on Fichte:

> But since Fichte...in his ideal kingdom would have nothing to do with actuality, he achieved the absolute beginning, and proceeding from that, as has so frequently been discussed, he wanted to construct the world. The *I* became the constituting entity. But since the *I* was merely formally understood and consequently negative...[Fichte's system].... accomplishes nothing because there is nothing to which it can be applied...an exaltation as strong as a god who can lift the whole world and yet has nothing to lift.[70]

According to Kierkegaard, Fichte gives philosophical expression to the tendency of Romantic art and literature to loose touch with 'historical actuality' – where the celebration of imagination becomes 'a cowardly, effeminate ruse for sneaking out of the world.'[71] In particular, Fichte's fantasy of the world-constructing imagination of a purely formal subject ('the I') fails to engage with the lived world of actual, embodied, historically situated subjects.[72] In a similar vein, Anti-Climacus notes that in imagination one can 'go astray in all possible ways' and repeatedly warns against the degeneration of a healthy use of the imagination into mere fantasy.[73]

The position that thus emerges from Kierkegaard's 'two-front polemic' is roughly as follows. The Romantic View is right to afford a fundamental role to the imagination, conceived in direct imagist terms. As we have seen, Anti-Climacus goes so far as to

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[69] Cf. Hurley (1998), p. 15.

[70] *CI*, p. 273.

[71] ibid., p. 329 (trans. modified).

[72] As Kierkegaard puts it elsewhere: 'Fichte threw the empirical ballast overboard in despair and capsized.' (*Pap.* 1 A 302 (p. 59) (1836)).

[73] Cf. *SUD*, p. 37.

concede to Fichte that 'the categories' – i.e. our most basic ways of carving up the world – 'derive from the imagination'. On the other hand, the Romantic celebration of the untrammeled spontaneity of a disembodied subject fails to satisfy both the existential demand for a coherent life (it 'robs [the soul] of moral tension') and the theoretical demand for justification ('there is nothing to which it can be applied').

The pressing question is whether this position is internally consistent. That is: is it possible to maintain a direct imagist theory without succumbing to the Myth of the Giving? Can Kierkegaard keep his distance from what he sees as the empty formalism of much post-Kantian thought whilst allying himself with a strongly Romantic view of the cognitive role of the imagination? Is it possible to conceive the work of imagination in thought about the world as a *constrained* spontaneity?

In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus is undoubtedly more concerned with the conditions of selfhood than of knowledge. Broadly, he argues that the self 'becomes fantastic' or unconstrained just when the process of infinitizing – of adopting different possible perspectives on oneself in search of a satisfying self-image – becomes an end in itself. The picture here is of a subject who, so to speak, lives only in imagination and fails to relate to the possibilities he imagines as possibilities *for him* (as what Gibbons calls *affordances*, i. e., invitations to action).[74] A memorable picture of such an 'idling' subject is provided in *Repetition*. Constantin Constantius accounts for the peculiar 'magic of the theater' in terms of our desire to try on 'all manner of differentiation's' of ourselves, to imagine ourselves in different *rôles*. Constantius writes,

[I]n such a dream of imagination the individual is not a real figure but a shadow, or rather the real figure is invisibly present and therefore is not content with casting one shadow, but the individual has a multiplicity of shadows, all of which resemble him and for the moment have an equal claim to be accounted himself. The personality is not yet discovered, its energy announces itself only in the passion of possibility.[75]

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[74] Kierkegaard acknowledged his own tendency towards fantasy in this sense: 'My imagination and my dialectic constantly had material enough to operate with, and time enough, free from all bustle, to be idle. For long periods I have been employed with nothing else but the performance of dialectical exercises with an adjunct of the imagination, trying out my mind as one tunes an instrument – but I was not really living' (*POV*, p. 82 (trans. modified)).

[75] *REP* (Lowrie), p. 58.

Whilst the occasions of self-experimentation afforded by the theater may play a valuable part in the process of maturation, therefore, to remain in the twighlight of shadows is to succumb to one variety of what Anti-Climacus will call despair.[76]

More positively, the possibility of constrained spontaneity, of a healthy imagination, is envisaged in terms of a subject employing his imagination in relation to his own 'historical actuality' – i.e. his having certain physical properties, being committed to certain promises and duties, having certain passions and goals, having failed in certain projects, participating in certain cultures, and so on.[77] It is, Anti-Climacus suggests, only when the imagination is inherited or appropriated in this way that the process of infinitizing has a chance of terminating in truthful, resonant, constitutive self-images. The temporally situated creature who imagines himself as omnipresent would thus be paradigmatically fantastic in Anti-Climacus' sense.

Anti-Climacus explicitly applies this account to epistemological contexts somewhat cryptically as follows:

So also with knowing, when it becomes fantastic. The law for the development of the self with respect to knowing, insofar as it is the case that the self becomes the self, is that the increase of knowledge corresponds to the increase of self-knowledge, that the more the self knows the more it knows itself. If this does not happen, the more knowledge increases, the more it becomes a kind of inhuman knowledge.[78]

Now indirect imagism goes hand-in-glove with a certain view of what it means for a judgement (a belief, thought, image, representation) to count as knowledge: roughly, that we have knowledge if and only if our internal models resemble how the world really is. Such an epistemology is not available to direct imagism, however – for on this framework, there is no logical gap between images and what they resemble. But how then is direct imagism to account for the difference between knowledge and fantasy? The above quotation is plausibly read as articulating an answer to this question.

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[76] Compare Climacus' description of the aesthete as one who 'holds existence at bay by the most subtle of all deceptions, by thinking. He has thought everything possible, and yet has not existed at all.' (*CUP*, p. 253).

[77] Compare Haufniensis' reminder that '[e]ach individual begins in a historical nexus' and is constrained by 'the consequences of nature' (*C.4*, p. 73). Noting Kierkegaard's sense of the importance of becoming transparent to oneself, George Pattison refers to 'that process whereby the self takes cognizance of all that is by virtue of its immediacy: its historical, cultural and psychological facticity, i.e., the fact that it is born, has been brought up this way in this time with these talents and opportunities' (Pattison (1997), p. 77).

Anti-Climacus would have us distinguish between an 'inhuman knowing' in which the imagination is a law unto itself, and a genuine or authentic knowing in which the process of infinitizing is situated in and limited by the historical (and especially ethical) constraints on a finite subject's agency. Broadly speaking, this sensitivity to contextual conditions means resisting the temptation to impose one's own fantasies on reality, to create the world in one's own image. (This further explains Climacus' rather idiosyncratic use of the language of self-abnegation – 'a kind of dying to oneself' – in connection with abstract thinking. Compare Iris Murdoch's distinction between a healthy, situated imagination and one that 'somewhat mechanically generat[es] narrowly banal false pictures (the ego as all-powerful)'[79].) So whilst philosophers typically envisage the spectre of unconstrained spontaneity as calling into question whether our images are justified by the world, Anti-Climacus would shift our attention to the question whether our images of the world are justified by the role they play in our lives.

An extreme case of 'inhuman knowledge' in Anti-Climacus' sense is the parrot reciting what in other mouths would be true sentences. The parrot's 'knowledge' plays no essential role in its life.[80] Even more surreal is Climacus' parable of the man who escapes from the asylum and tries to prove his sanity by declaring that the earth is round every time the ball in his pocket knocks against his back-side. We would, I think, be reluctant to say that these utterances express *knowledge* of the fact that the earth is round. The reason, again, is that the man stands in an entirely accidental relation to this fact, he mentions (rather than uses) it in an absent, detached, uncontextualised, arbitrary, unknowing way. In short, the image of the earth as round plays no essential role in this man's life. (Compare G. K. Chesterton's remark that the madman is not the one who has lost his reason, but the one who has lost everything but his reason.[81] For Climacus, the 'absent-

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[78] *SUD*, p. 31.

[79] Murdoch (1992), p. 322.

[80] Cf. *CA*, pp. 134-5: 'Then come the parrots, who despite their survey of world history unfortunately lack all contemplation, and who know just as much about the concepts as that noble youth knew about raisins, who, when asked in the test for a grocers license where raisins come from answered: We get ours from the professor on Cross Street'.

[81] Cf. Chesterton (1996), p. 17.

minded' obsession of his contemporaries with churning out 'objective truths' displays a similar pathology.[82])

The lesson is that knowledge, as opposed to fantasy, requires that images of the world are rooted in the lives of subjects who are aware of themselves as historically situated. This explains Anti-Climacus' sense that genuine knowledge is possible just to the extent that there is a corresponding self-knowledge – that is, a clear-sighted view of which ways of imagining the world might play a vital role in one's life, given the conditions in which one finds oneself at any time. (The man in Climacus' story displays his lack of self-knowledge by associating himself with a perspective for which he has no essential use in the context.[83]) For Kierkegaard, too, this has the salutary implication that the one who would acquire knowledge must first know which of her 'judgements' are her own and which she has acquired in an accidental, fantastic way (e.g. by mere absorption of the latest intellectual fashions). As *The Concept of Irony* inherits its Socratic theme: 'To know that one is ignorant is the beginning of coming to know'.[84]

A similar emphasis on the subjective conditions of knowledge and understanding characterises Haufniensis' concept of 'spirit', which he negatively defines as follows:

Spiritlessness can say exactly the same thing that the richest spirit has said, but it does not say it by virtue of spirit. Man qualified as spiritless has become a talking machine, and there is nothing to prevent him repeating by rote a philosophical rigmarole, a confession of faith, or a political recitative. Is it not remarkable that the only ironist and the greatest humorist [i.e. Socrates and Hamann] joined forces in saying what seems to be the simplest of all, namely, that a person must distinguish between what he understands and what he does not understand?[85]

Compare Haufniensis' figure of the spiritless person as a 'talking-machine' with Wittgenstein's remark that 'speech with and without thought is to be compared with the playing of a piece of music with and without thought'.[86] One thing this suggests is that,

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[82] In this connection, John Lippitt draws attention to Bergson's observation that a comic character is 'generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself', and argues that similar considerations go some way to explaining Kierkegaard extensive use of humor (see Lippitt (2000), p. 17).

[83] Cf. *CUP*, pp. 194-5.

[84] *CI*, p. 269. It is precisely because he views his age as characterised by fantasy that Kierkegaard sees an important role for Socratic irony: 'Particularly in our age, irony must be commended...In our joy over the achievement in our age, we have forgotten that an achievement is worthless if it is not made one's own.' (ibid., p. 327).

[85] *CA*. p. 95.

[86] *PI* §341. Compare also Wittgenstein's reference to humans as 'reading-machines' (cf. *PI* §157).

the infelicity of appeals to prior acts of interpretation notwithstanding, genuine thought and meaning involve more than absent conformity to rules. The Kierkegaardian 'more' is a creative, empathetic, imagination properly attuned to a subject's temporal conditions. (It may well be that the one who refuses to play a piece of music on the grounds that he cannot (yet) make full sense of the score is the better musician.)

At least part of the answer to the question how one can consistently appeal to a fundamental role for imagination in thought and judgement, as conceived along direct imagist lines, and resist the conclusion that the latter are thereby rendered arbitrary or unconstrained thus invokes the Inseparability Thesis (see Chapter Three of this thesis). Images are unconstrained just to the extent that they are separated from the acts of contextually situated agents. Conversely, the possibility of judgement and knowledge depends on a subject being fully integrated with the objects of her imagining.[87]

Now all this may appear quite unsatisfactory from the perspective of the demand for justification. Philosophers want to know how our images of the world are related to how the world actually is, but Anti-Climacus seems only concerned with how we relate to our images of the world. And there surely is an important distinction between objects of imagination and actual objects (for one can of course imagine things that do not exist). Nothing has been done to show that it is impossible for one to be 'present in' one's judgements in the case that one is not in touch with reality. But philosophers want reassurance that our cognitive life is not 'all a dream'.

At this point, one might attempt to defend on Kierkegaard's behalf the claim that it is indeed impossible to be properly related to one's images in Anti-Climacus' sense in the case that one is not so related to reality. On a strongly 'anti-realist' view the fact that gods, gorgons, unicorns and the rest do not exist is *because* they have no resonance for us, play no essential role in our lives. (I take it that something like this explains Nietzsche's claim that God is dead – i. e. we no longer have a role for the image of God in our lives. Compare Climacus' claim that God 'comes into existence' for the one who

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[87] In connection with the theme of integrity and transparency in Kierkegaard, John Lippitt draws attention to R. G. Collingwood's discussion of 'the corruption of consciousness', which Lippitt describes as 'that sense of alienation from one's own experience such that one fails to experience that experience *as* one's own', Lippitt (2000), p. 30.

'rubs the lamp of freedom'.[88]) The products of a properly situated imagination would thus be viewed as strictly coextensive with 'reality'. As Kierkegaard picturesquely puts it:

The imagination is what providence uses in order to get men into reality, into existence, to get them far enough out, or in, or down in existence. And when imagination has helped them out as far as they are meant to go – that is where reality, properly speaking, begins.[89]

Nonetheless, I take it that direct imagism is also consistent with a more realist view according to which there is a 'preestablished harmony' between our spontaneous aspect perceptions and reality – or indeed, according to which there is no such harmony and the thing-in-itself is beyond our reach. In fact, the above entry surely goes some way towards the former kind of realism in its appeal to the role of divine 'governance' in ensuring that human imagination is an adequate guide to reality 'properly speaking'.[90] The picture here is of our being provided the means to fulfil a pre-ordained, God-given, and divinely directed task.[91] (But note here that a willingness to talk of God or 'providence' is important in making sense of the notion of a pre-established harmony.)

Plainly, however, any such appeal has very little anti-sceptical purchase – for it is utterly obscure how one would go about demonstrating that there is a preestablished harmony (or noumenal realm). And it would be quite perverse, given his deep-seated suspicion of arguments for the existence of God, to attribute to Kierkegaard an appeal to God as a move within an anti-sceptical strategy, *à la* Descartes. Since, as C. Stephen Evans has amply documented, the textual evidence goes both ways *vis-à-vis* the realism / anti-realism debate, it is therefore safe to conclude that Kierkegaard was not concerned to develop either a realist or an anti-realist response to scepticism.[92]

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[88] Cf. *CUP*, p. 138.

[89] *JP* (Dru), p. 243.

[90] There is also some evidence of the former, Kantian kind of realism in the corpus. Climacus, for instance, claims that human knowing can only 'approximate' to reality since 'the empirical object is not finished, and the existing knowing spirit is itself in the process of becoming' (*CUP*, p. 189). For a realist interpretation of *Postscript*, see Piety (1997).

[91] That Kierkegaard himself (and here there may well be a contrast with Climacus) is realist at least about God is suggested by the following entry in his *Journals*: 'The philosophers think that all knowledge, even the existence of the Deity is something man himself produces and that only in a figurative sense can there be talk of revelation, rather as one can say that rain falls from heaven though rain is nothing but mist produced by the earth. But, to keep to the metaphor, they forget that in the beginning God separated the waters of heaven and earth and that there is something higher than *atmosphere* (*JP* (Hannay), p. 106).

[92] See Evans (1998b).

More in the spirit of Kierkegaard would be to argue that, whilst it is all too possible to make of life a dream, what is needed to ward off this eventuality is not an anti-sceptical *argument*. Here many tributaries converge: the sense that philosophers' doubts are often disingenuous (see Chapter Two of this thesis); the sense that genuine scepticism is a profound human condition such that it cannot be engaged by a merely intellectual approach[93]; the sense that 'being in touch with reality' is primarily an ethical rather than an epistemic qualification[94]; the sense that cherished epistemological ideals (e.g. that a perfect correspondence demonstrably exists between our images and reality) only gain their purchase on inadequate conceptions of what it means to think, to imagine, to judge, to believe. In short, since scepticism is most fundamentally a form of existential dislocation (or 'dissonance'[95]) no merely conceptual solution may engage it – here, as so often with philosophy, method and problem pass one another by.

On a Kierkegaardian view, then, the 'discovery that gives philosophy peace' – to employ the Wittgensteinian phrase with which McDowell characterises his own aims – could only be realised by a subject who spontaneously finds certain images of the world apt or resonant and who establishes a vital role for these images in her life.[96] One thing is clear: such are prizes that could never be won by any formal argument. (Though it may be that an artfully designed text such as Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* or Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* can serve as (re)orientation.[97])

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[93] Compare Kierkegaard's remark that 'the possibility of doubt is essential to existence, is the secret of human existence' (cited in Strawser (1994), p. 623).

[94] Compare Climacus' claim that 'the only actuality there is for an existing person is his own ethical actuality...The actual subjectivity is not the knowing subjectivity because with knowledge he is in the medium of possibility, but is the ethical subjectivity' (*CUP*, p. 316). Many passages in Kierkegaard can be read as anticipating the contemporary interest in 'virtue epistemology', insofar as the latter aims not merely to draw an analogy between epistemic virtues and moral virtues, but also to analyze or explain the former in terms of the latter. Consider for example Kierkegaard's claim that 'that which upbuilds...is an aspect of knowledge that ought not to be ignored' (cited in Perkins (1990), p. 9).

[95] Compare the following from the *Journals*: 'In the end it's all a question of ear. The rules of grammar end with the ear – the edicts of the law end with ear – the figured bass ends with ear – the philosophical system ends with ear – which is why the next life is also represented as pure music, as a great harmony – if only my life's dissonance may soon be resolved into that.' (*JP* Sept. 36 I A 235 (Hannay), p. 54).

[96] The following expresses what might be called an acute sense of epistemic precariousness: 'How near, besides, is man to madness despite all his knowledge? What is truth other than to live for an idea? Everything must in the final analysis be based on a postulate. But only when it no longer stands outside him but he lives in it, only then, for him, does it cease to be a postulate' (*JP* 35 I A 73 (Hannay) p. 33).

[97] Recall that the latter is called an 'imaginary construction'. That Kierkegaard's works can be read as 'attunements' is indicated by many of their subtitles. *Fear and Trembling*, for instance, is subtitled

To summarise the claims of this section: Kierkegaard's work is responsive to the anxiety that a direct imagist theory of thought about the world implies a 'spontaneity in the void', but locates the void in cases where images are idle, having lost their resonance for us and their grip on our lives. The upshot is that the only proper response to the scepticism that emerges from a dislocated imagination is to come back to ourselves.

3. Images of Rules

Now it is worth spelling out that Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein on rule-following is structurally isomorphic with McDowell's critique of Kant. Kripke asks, in effect: if there is no fact of the matter that determines how one is to proceed 'in accordance with' a rule, beyond an individual's spontaneous acts of taking-as – if there is nothing to choose, say, between plus and 'quus' (where x quus y = x + y, if x, y < 57; = 5 otherwise) – how then can one be *justified* in proceeding in a particular way?[98] In other words: How, on a direct imagist account, are we to distinguish between 'seems right' and 'is right' in a given case? Again, the anxiety is that direct imagism hosts a particularly virulent form of scepticism.

The general account I have called Kierkegaardian can be specifically applied to debates about rule-following in three ways. First, it excludes certain appeals to 'the community'. Second, it significantly qualifies the claim that our rule-following practices are 'blind'. Third, it significantly qualifies the claim that our rule-following practices are 'unjustifiable'. I shall briefly consider these in turn.

Firstly, then, a Kierkegaardian approach runs against the grain of certain popular appeals to 'the community' by way of an analysis and / or explanation of rule-following. Very broadly, on a 'socio-externalist' or 'communitarian' account, rule-following turns out to be essentially a matter of one's conforming to the paradigmatic behaviour of some

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'Dialectical Lyric' – a kind of philosophical poem or song – and, contains a section whose title Alastair Hannay translates as 'Attunement' (sometime 'Prelude' or 'Exordium'). Edward Mooney comments: 'If nowhere else in his voluminous production, surely here Kierkegaard anticipates – and fulfills – Nietzsche's call for a music-playing Socrates' (Mooney (1992), p. 346).

[98] Kripke is another author who resorts to the metaphor of leaping in this context: 'The sceptic argues that when I answered ' 125' to the problem '68 + 57', my answer was an unjustified leap in the dark' (Kripke (1982), p. 10).

relevant community.[99] This idea clearly informs Kripke's 'sceptical solution' to the problem of justification in lieu of truth-conditions. 'All that is needed to legitimise assertions that someone means something', he suggests, 'is that there be roughly specifiable circumstances under which they are legitimately assertable, and that the game of asserting them under such conditions has a role in our lives'.[100]

Now an immediate concern is whether any such theory can account for rule-*following* as opposed to mere rule-conformity. (Recall that it was a conclusion of Chapter One that this is a *desideratum* of any theory of judgement.) This worry is given graphic expression, by Haufniensis' reference to spiritless 'talking-machines'. Haufniensis would surely press the question: is mere conformity to social norms an adequate conception of what it means for humans to *think*? After all, the temptation to conceive rule-following as an essentially reflective activity is surely so powerful precisely because our concept of thinking requires more than mechanical conformity. (Consider the naturalness of such remarks as 'I wasn't really *thinking*, I was just responding automatically', 'Stop being so conventional and start thinking for yourself!', 'He merely paid lip-service to the thought that....', 'The dog isn't *thinking* – it's been trained to do that'.) And it is this truth upon which Climacus' sustained satire on 'second-hand' thinkers (and Christians) so often trades.[101] For example:

Or is it not the case that God is so unnoticeable, so hidden yet present in his work, that a person might very well live on, marry, be respected and esteemed as husband, father, and captain of the poopinjay shooting club, without discovering God in his work...by managing with custom and tradition in the city where he lived? Just as a mother admonishes her child who is about to attend a party, "Now mind your manners and watch other polite children and behave as they do" so he, too, could live on and behave as he saw the others behave. He would never do anything first and would never have any opinion unless he first knew that others had it, because "the others" would be his very first. On special occasions he would act like someone who does not know how to eat a course that is served at a banquet; he would reconnoitre until he saw how the others did it etc.[102]

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[99] For various versions of 'community view' see, e.g., Peacocke (1981); Kripke (1982); Malcolm (1989); Bloor (1997). For a helpful overview see Canfield (1996).

[100] Kripke (1982), p. 78.

[101] Cf. *CUP*, p. 308: 'If in our day thinking had not become something strange, something secondhand....'.

[102] Compare *JP* 49 X 1 628 (Hannay), p. 407: 'One person talks in the name of the century, another in the name of the public, another in the name of science, another by virtue of his office, and their lives are everywhere guaranteed by tradition, that 'others', 'the others' are doing the same thing'.

As we have seen, it is characteristic of a Kierkegaardian view that, the misguidedness of appeals to prior acts of interpretation notwithstanding, genuine thought (like genuine religion) involves more than mere conformity to social norms.

A further worry is akin to Kierkegaard's dismissal of Fichte's appeal to the world-constructing activity of an abstract subjectivity as nebulous.[103] For it is far from clear how the appeal to the rule-constructing activity of 'the community' is supposed to be a solution, even a 'sceptical' one. In particular, it is hard to see how communitarian theories can supply a criterion for distinguishing between 'seems right' and 'is right'. To see this, consider the case that two people who have hitherto applied a rule in conformity with the paradigmatic behaviour of a relevant community diverge in the way they apply the rule in a new situation, i.e. a situation that is new to everyone. The question arises: who applies the rule correctly? Any appeal to the paradigmatic behaviour of the community is clearly out of order here, for, *ex hypothesi*, there is no such behaviour.[104]

As several critics of Kripke have argued, and in several other ways, it appears therefore that mere appeals to assertability-conditions only serve to shunt the problem from individuals to communities: e. g. the problem becomes how 'the community' spontaneously acts in accordance with its own paradigmatic behaviour, before it is has established a paradigm.[105] Kierkegaard's general suspicion of ascriptions of agency to such abstractions as 'the public' or the transcendental ego is surely germane here.[106]

Secondly, a direct imagist appeal to the role of imagination in rule-following significantly qualifies the claim that our rule-following practices are 'blind'. To be sure,

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[103] It is interesting to note in this connection that Fichte's 'ego' is often held to be intersubjective. See, e.g., Hohler, (1982).

[104] This scenario is envisioned by Alberto Voltolini (see Voltolini (2001), p. 92).

[105] Simon Blackburn, for instance, argues against metaethical appropriations of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following. Having outlined the view that standards of moral correctness are reducible to communal consensus, Blackburn writes, 'If Wittgenstein leads us this way, however, he fails to allow for the possibility that goose-stepping along with everyone else can yet lead to moral error' (Blackburn (1981), p. 173). See also Blackburn (1984); McDowell (1984); Gillett (1995); Voltolini (2001).

[106] Consider, for example, the following passage in which Kierkegaard distinguishes between genuine community and 'the public': 'In community the single individual is the microcosm who qualitatively repeats the macrocosm: here it is a case of *unum noris omnes* [know one, know all] in the good sense. In the public there is no single individual, the whole is nothing; here it is impossible to say *unum noris omnes*, for here there is no One. 'Community' is no doubt more than a sum, but is truly still a sum of units; the public is nonsense: a sum of negative units, of units that are not units, that become units with the sum, instead of the sum being a sum of units.' (*JP* 50 X 2 A 390 (Hannay), p. 465).

the process of infinitizing is not to be confused with the successful performance of judgements. On a Kierkegaardian account, however, this process is nonetheless a prior condition of such leaps. And, if the above interpretation was on the right lines, this process is far from blind, in at least two senses. For it requires a capacity for aspect-perception – hearing words as meaningful, finding certain ways of imagining examples apt – and it requires a subject who is clear-sighted about what, at any given time, she can and cannot appropriate.[107] (Notice how natural it is to describe the work of imagination as a kind of vision.) Such might well be constitutive of the feeling, 'Now I can go on!'[108]

Now someone with Wittgensteinian scruples may feel deeply uneasy about Anti-Climacus' placing so much theoretical weight on a *process* of infinitizing. For was it not Wittgenstein's intention – unambiguously expressed, for example, by the remark that 'when I follow a rule, I follow it *blindly*' – to reveal the utter bankruptcy of the notion that understanding consists in a mental process? It is worth noting in passing that, in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein explicitly rejects this characterisation of his aims.[109] Anticipating the charge that he is 'really a behaviourist in disguise', committed to denying any role for mental processes in phenomena like memory, Wittgenstein asks, 'What gives the impression that we want to deny anything?':

The impression that we wanted to deny something arises from setting our faces against the picture of the 'inner process'. What we deny is that the picture of the inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of the word "to remember".[110]

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[107] In connection with the notion of hearing words as meaningful, consider the following from Henrik Steffens, which Kierkegaard quotes approvingly in an early *Journal*: "The European languages are only sound: the letters, the syllables, the words, have meaning only for the ear. The sound fixes on the innermost, liveliest, most labile existence, and above all that language which puts an emphasis on expression, where the sounds, rising and falling, emphasized or repressed, cling closely and lightly to the inner meaning of every changing mood, can rightly be called a *Christian* language*, and hints at the victory of love over law' (* what I call the romantic)' (*JP* 28 Sept. 36 I A 250 (Hannay), p. 55).

[108] Cf. *PI* §179. Whilst I cannot explore the matter here, the relation between Wittgenstein's remarks on 'aspect seeing' in the second part of *Investigations* and those on rule-following in the first deserves more attention than it usually receives. That these two sets of concerns are not unconnected is suggested, for example, by the fact that Wittgenstein claims both that experiences of understanding and that experiences of aspect-perception are grounded in 'the mastery of a technique' (Cf. §150 & II.xi (p. 208).) For readings that emphasise this connection, see Mulhall (2001), pp. 163-82; Guetti (1993).

[109] It is also worth noting that some commentators have argued that there is a serious mistake in the Anscombe translation of the passage in which the 'blind' metaphor occurs. Stephen Mulhall claims that, due to Anscombe's mistranslation of the distinction between *folgen* and *befolgen*, 'where [Wittgenstein] talks of blindly following a rule, Anscombe has him talking of blind obedience to it. This gives his talk of blindness a rather cowardly or fearful cast, as it has when someone talks of 'merely obeying orders' or of 'blind terror'...' (Mulhall (2001), p. 141).

To deny that the picture of a mental process provides an adequate conception of what it *means* to remember (or to follow a rule), Wittgenstein argues, is not to deny that mental processes are part of the surroundings of remembering (or following a rule).[111] (And note that Wittgenstein's criticisms are targeted at the picture of an *inner* process.)

More substantively, however, it is significant that the framework I have outlined *does* afford an important role for intersubjectivity. As we have seen, the imagination can fulfil its proper function, on a Kierkegaardian view, only to the extent that it is attuned to the 'historical actuality' in which one finds oneself – where this certainly includes participation in culture. (Recall Kierkegaard's remarks on the social nature of language quoted in Chapter Three.) Part of what it means to have a properly 'attuned' imagination therefore is that one establishes an essential role for one's images in one's life with others. Genuine thinking and understanding, on this view, involve more and not less than conformity to intersubjective norms, and are therefore not reducible to an individual's mental processes. To make explicit what has been in the background throughout: Kierkegaard's 'individualism' is *very* far from an 'absolutizing of the subject' (as Levinas would have it).[112] After all, Climacus finds himself using the language of self-mortification to characterise the kind of appropriation appropriate to logical thought!

It is also salutary to reiterate that the activity Anti-Climacus refers to as a process is to be seen as no more than a 'final psychological approximation' to the qualitative transition effected by the actual performance of a judgement. To say that understanding 'consists in' the process of infinitizing would therefore be seriously misleading. More accurate would be to say that imaginative responses to examples are necessary but not sufficient for acts of thinking and judging that display understanding. James Guetti and Rupert Read get the emphasis right in this respect with the following analogy:

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[110] Ibid. §305.

[111] *PI* §307. Cf. *PI* §154: 'In the sense in which there are processes (including mental process) which are characteristic of understanding, understanding is not a mental process. / (A pain's growing more and less: the hearing of a tune or a sentence: these are mental processes.)'

[112] Cf. Levinas (1988), p. 26. Compare also Louis Mackey: '[t]he effect of the Kierkegaardian position is *to infinitize the freedom of the individual and thereby to absolutize human subjectivity*' (Mackey (1962), p. 615).

Let us consider a game of chess, in which, for one reason or another, the players as they play have to hold in one hand – or to position beside the board – a table or chart of the possible moves of the game. Before any move they look back and forth from the game board to their charts. But when they actually come to moving a piece, they no longer do this, but give all their attention to the positions on the board. This model seems a fair picture of the relation between applications and rules if the former are considered to amount to "leaps" from the latter, since here applying a rule involves looking or turning *away* from the rule-formulation.[113]

We might take the 'looking back and forth' between charts and board here as a metaphor for the work of the process of infinitizing in enabling one to regard the pieces on the board in the light of their possible positions. But the point is that no such process is to be confused with actually performing a move in the game.[114] If rules can be understood backwards, they must be followed forwards.[115] What Kierkegaard's work allows us to see – here and more generally – is the consistency of certain kinds of psychological explanation with a firm commitment to the spontaneity of human performances.

Thirdly, if the claim that learning to follow a rule essentially involves immediate responses to examples rules out discursive justifications of our rule-following practices, it does not rule out justification *per se*. Consider again the analogy with aesthetic experience. Having reported his transition from initial perplexity about a Jackson Pollock – specifically, *Lavender Mists* – to the kind of pleasure characteristic of an aesthetic response, David Bell reflects on what exactly this response consists in:

Well, one wants to say that the painting has begun to make sense to me, or perhaps that I have begun to make sense of it...Certainly [this] does not seem to be a conclusion – a judgement or a thought. And if it is a feeling, it is an immensely complex one: at the most general level it has to do, for example, with the relation of parts to whole, and involves the feeling that the whole has an integrity, a *point*, in other words that its elements and lines are not arbitrary but comprise a mutually and internally self-determining unity...To come to feel that such aspects are not merely co-present but belong indissolubly together, for them to strike one as, in a quite particular way, *right*, is the beginning of a genuinely aesthetic response to the whole which embodies them.[116]

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[113] Guetti & Read (1996), p. 47.

[114] In this sense, the connection Philip Dwyer makes between Wittgenstein and Sartre holds just as well between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard: 'It is this notion of being perpetually engaged in a choice by virtue of its being undetermined by anything that has gone before, that constitutes the central link between Wittgenstein and Sartre.' (Dwyer (1989), p. 55) – though 'act of freedom' would be less misleading than 'choice' here (see Chapter Three note 10 of this thesis).

[115] This is of course a variation on the following famous remark: 'It is quite true what philosophy says: that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the principle: that it must be lived forwards. Which principle, the more one thinks it through, ends exactly with the thought that temporal life can never be properly understood precisely because I can at no instant find complete rest in which to adopt the position: backwards' (*JP* 43 IV A 164 (Hannay), p. 161).

Whether or not these remarks furnish a complete description of aesthetic experience, it is surely correct that such feelings of aptness are not judgements, and therefore resist discursive justification. Yet it is also implicit in Bell's remarks that aesthetic responses are constrained and motivated by the art-work itself, for example, by the relations between its parts to one another and to the whole. To have an aesthetic appreciation of an art-work is precisely not to view such features as arbitrary or fortuitous. (It is perhaps significant that, even in the case of Pollock's Abstract Expressionism, one equivocates between 'the painting has begun to make sense to me' and 'I have begun to make sense of it'. These are surely not mutually exclusive.)

Moreover, it is *prima facie* plausible that aesthetic responses are such that they can be indirectly communicated.[117] That is, having achieved an aesthetic appreciation of a painting one might help another to achieve this same experience, not by directly transferring a conceptual content, nor yet by gesturing towards an ineffable content, but by describing the conditions under which the painting begins to make sense. One may, for example, advise another to stop focussing on the individual elements and try to see the painting as a whole, or stand at a certain distance and squint the eyes slightly or whatever. And the possibility of this kind of aesthetic education rests on our confidence that, if imagined in certain ways, certain objects will indeed elicit an aesthetic response.

One aspect of the essay on Mozart in *Either / Or* is a meditation on what is involved in this kind of aesthetic education. Kierkegaard's aesthete sets himself the task of demonstrating that *Don Giovanni* is the apotheosis of musical achievement, since it uniquely expresses that which can only be properly expressed in music (rather than language or sculpture or painting). But this task, he notes, is problematic: for how can one *say* what can only be properly expressed in music? Confessing that he is no musical expert, and that he feels most at home with prose, the aesthete nonetheless hopes that he 'may be able to impart some odd piece of enlightenment on the subject'.[118] He goes on:

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[116] Bell (1987b), p. 237.

[117] I am using the concept of indirect communication here in a way that is included by. but by no means exhausts, the Kierkegaardian concept. Here, indirect communication simply means. e.g., supplying examples rather than interpretations.

[118] *EO* (Hannay), p. 76.

If I were to imagine two countries bordering on each other, with one of which I was fairly familiar and with the other was quite unfamiliar, and I was not allowed to enter that realm however much I wanted to, I should still be able to form some conception of it. I would travel to the boundaries of the kingdom I knew and follow them constantly, and as I did so my movements would describe the contours of that unknown land.[119]

This is clearly supposed to be a metaphor for the strategy the aesthete will adopt in order to demonstrate his claim that *Don Giovanni* expresses that which can only be properly expressed in music. By marking the limits of language from within, the aesthete would thereby show what music can express that language cannot. In this way, he aims to indirectly justify his claim – not by *stating* what it is that cannot be expressed by language (how could he?) but by communicating the conditions under which it is possible to experience Mozart's opera *as* the apotheosis of musical achievement.[120]

The aesthete is particularly keen to stress, however, that this strategy does not commit him to the idea that there is something 'beyond' or above language – a mysterious, ineffable, kind of content that music can somehow get hold of in a way that language cannot. On the contrary, he insists that since language is a much richer medium than music, it is precisely that which is devoid of content that falls outside of its domain. This limit is a *limitation*, he says, only on the dubious assumption that "ugh!" is 'worth more than a whole thought'.[121] To recognise limits of language, then, is not to commit oneself to a mystical notion of the ineffable or the need for a pregnant silence. (The aesthete explains that if he didn't try to justify the oft-asserted claim that *Don Giovanni* is masterful, the very 'stones would take to speaking in Mozart's honour, to the shame of every human being to whom it was given to speak'.[122])

So, whilst aesthetic responses resist discursive justification, they are neither arbitrary nor wholly incommunicable. And this at least makes space for an analogous claim in the case of judgement. According to the view I have attributed to Anti-Climacus, insofar as our capacities for judgement are acquired, they are acquired and exercised by

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[119] Ibid., p. 76-7.

[120] In this connection, Vanessa Rumble emphasises the way the aesthete's language 'takes on a lyrical cadence which begins to approximate the music it describes. Rhythm and onomatopoeia roll, and language itself seems to be pulled into a vortex in which signification dissolves into a simple gesture' (Rumble (1997), p. 100).

[121] *EO* (Hannay), p. 80.

[122] Ibid., p. 82.

means of immediate and imaginative responses to examples. But such responses are constrained both by the reflection that surrounds them and by the examples themselves, and the kind of 'understanding' they afford can be communicated and justified by appeal to the conditions under which the examples begin to yield that experience.

In teaching someone how to continue a series of numbers – to take the stock example – one may emphasise patterns visually or vocally, formulate explicit rules, physically guide the pupil's hand as he writes and so forth.[123] Such, plausibly, are the means by which a pupil's imagination is engaged. (To deny that the concept of rule-following implies prior acts of reflection is not to deny that, as a matter of psychological fact, certain kinds of reflective activity – e.g. the formulation of hypotheses – *may* be part of the learning process in a given case.) But to communicate the conditions under which a series begins to make sense is, to echo Wittgenstein, a very different *kind* of justification to any direct attempt to justify a rule.[124]

What, then, are we to say about Wittgenstein's awkward pupil, whose immediate response to an arithmetical series – what strikes him as 'in a quite particular way, *right*' – is what strikes the rest of us in a quite particular way as wrong?

To take seriously the appeal to imagination, as conceived by direct imagism, is indeed to bite the bullet that we have no access to a final discursive justification of our responses. And to conceive the work of imagination as a spring-board for leaps of judgement is to be unflinching in this respect. On this view, it is not hard to see why the teacher confronted by an awkward pupil is soon forced back on remarks of the order, 'Can't you see!'[125] But to bite that bullet is very far from offering a 'sceptical solution', at least if that implies that there is nothing to choose between 'plus' and 'quus'. On the contrary, in so far as our way of continuing the series '+2' continues to strike us as right

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[123] Stephen Mulhall has argued that Wittgenstein focuses on arithmetical examples precisely so as to exemplify, in order to subvert, 'our tendency to sublime the logic of our language' (Mulhall (2001), p. 135). For the attempt to conceive language *per se* on the model of mathematics can be seen as an instance of that tendency. Mulhall thus questions whether arithmetical examples can be made to generalize (cf. ibid., p. 228-9). Certainly, it is plausible that Wittgenstein aims to undermine the image of rules as detached from human interests and practices, even in cases where we may find that picture most compelling. But I take it that this is consistent with the view that arithmetic is a particular clear case of the very general fact that '[r]ule-following is FUNDAMENTAL to the language-game' (*RFM*, VI–28.).

[124] Cf. *PI* §527.

[125] Cf. *PI* §185.

(and other ways as wrong) – that is, in so far as reflection on the awkward pupil has not reflected us out of an immediate relation to our arithmetical practices – our confidence remains intact.[126] (After all, to be struck in a certain way is not to remain neutral.)

In so far as philosophical reflection *has* undermined our confidence, on the other hand, what is needed is a 'new point of departure'. (There is no suggestion here of a mere retreat to 'ordinary practice' or 'common sense'.[127]) To recall a distinction I introduced in Chapter Three, the puzzlement that results from 'looking at' our practices of arithmetical judgement can only be overcome by beginning again to 'look along' those practices.

4. Imagination and *Looking-For*

To summarise: having articulated the PCS, Climacus moots an appeal to the imagination. One way of pursuing this suggestion – namely, *via* direct imagism – pivots on an analogy with aesthetic experience, but rejects any analogy between images and pictures. It is therefore not obviously vulnerable to the stock objections to an appeal to imagination. Anti-Climacus' qualified endorsement of this Romantic View offers a coherent way of responding to a different worry: namely, the spectre of 'spontaneity in the void'. Anti-Climacus takes this anxiety seriously and maintains that scepticism can only be overcome, and fantasy avoided, when particular acts of imagining are woven into the fabric of a subject's life with others. Moreover, the analogy with aesthetic experience displays a kind of immediacy that is neither blind nor incommunicable.

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[126] It might be objected that the Kripkean scepticisms are untouched by this claim – viz. how any finite set of examples is sufficient to represent a determinate rule. In this context, Philip Pettit points out that exemplification is a three-place relationship such that 'it involves not just a set of examples and a rule but also a person for whom the examples are supposed to exemplify the rule' (Pettit (1990), p. 9). This has the important implication that 'although any finite set of examples instantiates an indefinite number of rules, for a particular agent the set may exemplify just one rule' (idem). On the present account, finding certain ways of imagining examples apt or resonant is the subjective element of exemplification.

[127] Such is the impression one gets from many readings of Wittgenstein, i.e. that philosophers ought simply to stop asking silly questions and get on with 'ordinary' life. (Compare Kant's definition of misology as a certain kind of intellectualism that starts 'envying, rather than despising, the more common stamp of men who keep closer to the guidance of mere instinct, and do not allow their reason much influence on their conduct' (Kant (1946), p. 13).) A more sensitive reading would attribute the peculiarities of form in Wittgenstein's text – the numerous interlocutory voices, the intimate tone, the 'picture-album' presentation, the extensive use of metaphor, the imaginative exercises – as a hard-fought attempt to provide what Climacus calls a 'new point of departure'. Stanley Cavell has done the most to develop such a reading: see, e.g., Cavell (1979); see also Mulhall (2001).

Hopefully, this discussion has brought out what is distinctive about a 'Kierkegaardian' conception of the role of imagination in thinking and judging. And I hope to have given some indication of its philosophical appeal. Plainly, however, Anti-Climacus' notion of a 'medium for the process of infinitizing' is very far from a fully-fledged theory. And many questions remain. In particular, one would like to know exactly what is involved in achieving a spontaneous 'making sense' of examples and just why it is *imagination* that is supposed to do this work. As always with Kierkegaard, one quickly bumps up against the fact that these texts, though richly suggestive, are less concerned with developing theories than applying them. What Kierkegaard offers is less by way of resources to describe our imagination than to engage it.

By way of a conclusion, however, I shall briefly suggest how all this might be cashed out. It should be emphasised that the following is 'Kierkegaardian' only in the sense that it attempts to follow through Anti-Climacus' conception of the imagination against the background of Climacus' articulation of the PCS.

In a recent book (conceived as a contribution to 'cognitive science') Ralph Ellis develops some ideas which, although not presented in these terms, may help to flesh out a direct imagist account.[128] Ellis begins by distinguishing between imagination and perception in terms of a distinction between 'looking for' and 'looking at'. According to this distinction, to perceive X is to *look at* X whereas to imagine X is to *look for* X. The motivation for this terminology is phenomenological. The claim is that an adequate description of our experience of images must appeal to something like the concept of looking-for. Ellis invites us to consider the case of one's being asked to imagine a pink wall as blue and offers the following description:

It is *almost* as if, for a brief fraction of a second, I can 'see' the pink wall as being blue. But of course this is not an accurate description, because I know all the while that the wall is pink, and there is no possibility of my confusing this experience with one in which the wall *really does* become blue for a fraction of a second. A closer description of what is happening would be that... I focus on the wall as if trying to become intensely aware of any amount of blue that *is* or *might be* mixed in with the pink, almost as if I were to hypothesise to myself that perhaps there is more blue in the pink than I had originally thought, and then quickly reject that hypothesis as soon as I

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[128] See Ellis (1995). In fact, Ellis often adverts to talk of 'mental pictures', and tries to get round the stock objections to an appeal to such items in concept-formation, suggesting that he is quite happy within an indirect imagist framework (see. pp 67-87 and *passim*). My use of his work is therefore somewhat against its spirit.

see that there is not. There is a sense in which I *look for* blueness in the wall and *do not find it.* (I.e., I look for blueness and find pink instead.)[129]

So, according to Ellis, to imagine a pink wall as blue is best conceived as to 'prepare oneself' for seeing blueness in the wall. On this basis, Ellis appears to draw a further contrast between perception and imagination. To perceive X, he suggests, requires that two independent conditions are satisfied, namely, that one is looking for X and that one is having a percept of X. On the other hand, to imagine X requires only the activity of looking for X. There is nothing more to a state of imagining than this activity of looking for – the wall does not even have to *appear* to be blue to be imagined as such. In other words, the object of an act of imagining, unlike that of an act of perceiving, is wholly determined by the act itself.[130] As Sartre put a related thought:

In a word, the object of perception overflows consciousness constantly; the object of the image is never more than the consciousness one has; it is limited by that consciousness: nothing can be learned from an image that is not already known.[131]

The basic point here is that one important difference between objects of perception and imagination is that whereas the former outstrip our awareness of them, the latter do not.

It is worth clearing up a possible source of confusion here. The confusion may be put in the form of an objection that Ellis' claim – that, unlike perception, imagination involves nothing more than acts of imagining – is inconsistent with our earlier claim that a spontaneous response to examples may be constrained by the examples themselves. For presumably 'the examples themselves' – e.g. those provided for the child by their parents' use of language, or the teacher's samples of a numerical series – are, as such, independent of any response to them. The confusion, of course, resides in the conflation of acts of imagining *per se* (acts of visualising), with imaginative responses to examples. To imagine a unicorn, or blue where there is only pink, are very different kinds of activity to responding to a picture or piece of music. And recall that direct imagism models the work of imagination in rule-following on the latter. Once this is properly acknowledged, the two claims are clearly consistent: Ellis' claim is that acts of imagining *simpliciter* are

[129] Ibid., p. 37.

[130] This goes some way to explain why, as the Romantics knew, imagination is under the control of the will in a way that visual perception is not.

[131] Sartre (1995), p. 12.

sufficient to determine their objects; our claim was that imaginative responses to examples are constrained by the examples to which they respond.

Nonetheless, the kind of activity involved in responding to examples does have a *mental* object (as distinct from the examples themselves). Indeed, this is the salient feature of the analogy with the kind of activity involved in pictorial interpretation. Whilst physical marks are the occasion of acts of pictorial interpretation, the *product* of these acts consists in the experience of seeing the picture as a depiction (rather than as a mere arrangement of marks on a surface). And this product is quite properly described as the mental or 'intentional' object of the response. So a version of Ellis' claim still applies: viz. provided acts of pictorial interpretation are appropriately constrained by the pictures to which they respond, these are otherwise sufficient unto themselves.[132]

In order to get a genuine contrast with perception, then, Ellis needs to show that the intentional objects of perception (i. e. 'percepts'), unlike those of imagination, are ontologically dependent on the actual objects they present: in other words, that 'percepts' are independent of acts of perception; or again, that it is not the case that in order to 'have a percept of' X one need only to look *for* X. Since we are not concerned with the case of perception, however, the important point here is that, provided acts of infinitizing are appropriately constrained by (e.g. causally related to) whatever examples they infinitize, they are sufficient to fix their intentional objects. Indeed, this is a further way of making sense of the notion of a *constrained spontaneity*. (A picturesque way of putting it would be that the process of infinitizing is constrained at the point of departing with actual examples but spontaneous at the point of terminating with a satisfying image.[133])

Ellis' definition of the imagination, then, is that it necessarily involves acts of *looking for such and such*. It follows that an 'image' is just whatever it is that is being looked for: e.g. to have an image of a unicorn is to 'prepare oneself' for seeing unicorns.

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[132] I am avoiding any attempt to spell out what 'appropriately constrained' means here. This is for strategic reasons: since the analogy I am after appeals only to the basic structure of pictorial experience – taking X as Y – I do not need to get bogged down in discussions of how this structure is filled out in pictorial experience. For an interesting account in terms of resemblance see Hopkins (1998). What would be required, however, in order to properly defend a direct imagist theory, is an account of how imaginative responses to examples are constrained by the examples themselves – i.e. why one's taking X in the light of Y is response to X rather than, say, Z. I take it that this may well be a merely causal matter.

[133] Compare Francis Dauer's claim that imagining-as lies somewhere between belief and fantasy, since it outstrips any discursive justification but is not wholly unconstrained (see Dauer (1990)).

Now the most familiar acts of imagination involve looking for something rather precise, such as a unicorn or a blue wall. But such acts might be seen as only the most explicit expression of the capacity *instar omnium*, i. e. the capacity for 'looking-for' rather more general 'objects' (= targets) such as meaning, purpose, unity, integrity and so on.

Consider again pictorial experience. It is highly implausible that my seeing a picture of a dog as such, for example, requires that I first have to look for a dog in the picture. For this implies that I have to know what a picture depicts before I can see it as a depiction of that thing. (This knowledge may be helpful in unusual cases, such as puzzle-pictures, but it is certainly not required even then.) What is far more plausibly required is a capacity to look for meaning, purpose, unity, in a picture – i.e. the capacity to experiment with different ways of organising the marks on the surface in search for a coherent, satisfying, resonant image. (Recall Kierkegaard's metaphor of 'trying out one's mind as one tunes an instrument'.) Of course, this capacity may be more or less required by different pictures. Making sense of (say) a Picasso may demand interrogation of a far greater intensity than seeing a Constable as a landscape. But the point is that, across the board, looking-for is a prerequisite of seeing-as.

My suggestion is that to the extent that Ellis' claim that imagination is best conceived as a kind of looking-for is plausible, this lends support to Anti-Climacus' claim that exercising the imagination *qua* 'medium for the process of infinitizing' is essentially involved in performing judgements. Consider the following simple argument:

(1) To *look for* such-and-such essentially involves the imagination.
(2) Necessarily, if humans did not look for meaning (coherence, unity, integrity) in their lives and the world they would not reflect on themselves or on the world.
(3) So imagination is essential for 'any and all reflection'.

This surely captures Anti-Climacus' claim that imagination is essentially involved in performing judgements. And a similar argument could be run for particular acts of acquiring and exercising the capacity to judge according to given rules or systems. Premise (2) is surely promising, though it would perhaps be hard to demonstrate. Certainly, Ellis' general account of the nature of imaginative activity supports (1). And, at the very least, this displays one reason why Kierkegaard, following the Romantics,

ascribed a fundamental role to *imagination* in the spontaneous activity that must, for reasons now familiar, be at the heart of rule-governed thought.

One final point: the notion of looking-for goes some way to explain the connection, on a Romantic View, between imagination and emotion and will. For it is predictable that what one looks for, and the intensity with which one searches, will reflect one's interests, concerns, desires.[134] Thus, in claiming an important role for imagination in perception, Ellis invokes the idea of 'feed*forward* loops – meaning that we first look for something, and what we receive [in perception] is largely selected in accordance with what we are looking for...I.e. we select what is important to focus our attention on for the emotional-motivational purposes of the organism, rather than passively receiving information to which we react'.[135] A parallel claim for the role of imagination in thinking and judging would capture much of the view I have attributed to Kierkegaard: viz. that constrained spontaneity depends on our capacity for imaginative engagement with examples, as situated within a broader context of human interests and concerns.

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Notwithstanding the clichéd inadequacies of certain forms of imagism, I have argued that Climacus' suggestion that an appeal to imagination might help to 'shed light on logic' in the wake of the PCS is well-motivated. Plainly, there is work to be done to properly defend the framework outlined here. But the promise is of a way of respecting the role of spontaneity in our rule-following practices without either reducing these to mere social conformities or inflating them to private mysteries.

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[134] And here perhaps we can glimpse why Anti-Climacus can say that the 'intensity' of imagination is the 'possibility of the intensity of the self' – i.e. given that imaginative interrogation can be more or less intense, in the case that this interrogation is applied to oneself, the relative intensity will be an expression of how keen one is to make sense of oneself, which in turn will reflect how much of a self one is.

[135] Ellis (1995), p. 84.

General Conclusion

In the body of this thesis, I have studiously avoided any discussion of what are undoubtedly Kierkegaard's central concerns, namely, ethical and religious concepts. The aim has been to explore a general problem for the theory of judgement: viz. the role of spontaneity in logically constrained thought. I argued that the biting satire of Hegel in the *Postscript* pivots on this issue, and that Kierkegaard's sense of the inseparability of human spontaneity and logical constraints, and the importance of an existentially situated imagination, are valuable insights. In the process, I tried to show how these considerations both anticipate and can be used to interpret certain of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following. One implication is that anyone interested in what thoughts are, and what it means to think, might profit from a reading of Kierkegaard.

It seems likely, however, that anyone who is not interested in what faith is, and what it means to have faith, would scarcely find it worth the effort. And, inasmuch as a secondary aim of this thesis has been to contribute to an understanding of Kierkegaard's work, I owe some account of how the peripheral themes explored here bear upon the more prominent concerns. The following Epilogue is an admittedly abbreviated response to this demand. But I hope to give some indication of the indirect relevance of this thesis to any accounting of Kierkegaard's treatment of the concept of faith.

Epilogue
Faith and Judgement:
Parallels and Disanalogies

> ...would that powerfully equipped men came forward
> to restore the lost power and meaning of words, just
> as Luther restored the concept of faith for his age.
> (Søren Kierkegaard)

> How can I get a man who has
> forgotten words to have a word with him?
> (Chuang Tzu)

Several commentators on Kierkegaard have noticed certain methodological

parallels with Wittgenstein.[1] For both authors seem less concerned with advancing

substantive theories than with exploring and clarifying concepts. And, in both cases, the

purpose of these conceptual investigations is in some sense to provide *reorientation* in the

face of certain kinds of bewilderment. Famously, Wittgenstein remarked that a

philosophical problem has the form, 'I don't know my way about' – and viewed this as

symptomatic of the propensity of our language to 'go on holiday'.[2] For his part,

Kierkegaard characterised his age in terms of a 'confusion of language':

...a rebellion, the most dangerous kind of all, of the actual words which, out of human control,
crash as though despairingly into one another, and from this chaos a person snatches, as from a
grab-bag, the first and best word to express his so-called thoughts.[3]

Kierkegaard believed that this 'unholy confusion' was largely due to the philosophical

revisions of Christianity that were so fashionable, and culturally pervasive, in his day.

And his work is plausibly read as an attempt to liberate Christian concepts from their

newfound roles in the philosophers' systems.[4] Or, as he put it:

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[1] See, e.g., Cavell (1969); Hustwit (1978); Cloeren (1985); R. H. Bell (1988); Creegan (1989); Conant (1989a); Conant (1993); Conant (1995); Hannay (1990); Phillips (1992); Hall (1993); Barrett (1994); Mulhall (1994); Ferreira (1994); Roberts (1995).

[2] *PI* §123; cf. §38.

[3] *JP* 36-7 1 A 328 (Hannay), p. 66.

[4] Cf. *CA*. p. 78: 'Cannot at times an entire Christian terminology be seen to degenerate into ruin by some pretentious speculator's treatment?'; *CUP*, p. 363: 'The whole Christian terminology has been confiscated by speculative thought...'.

The old Christian dogmatic terminology is like an enchanted castle where the loveliest princes and princesses rest in a deep sleep – it needs only to be awakened, brought to life, in order to stand in its full glory.[5]

Now one of the many means by which both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein aim to restore concepts to us is by retracing the connections between them, and showing up the differences.[6] Given that the kind of disorientation characteristic of philosophy is partly due to the temptation to impose a kind of false unity on our concepts, getting clear about these precise connections and differences becomes critical.[7] In this essay, I shall outline the subtle ways in which the concept of judgement and the concept of faith are compared and contrasted in Kierkegaard's work.

1. First and Second Immediacy

A central, if often overlooked, Kierkegaardian theme is to correct what Climacus diagnoses as 'the confusion in recent speculative thought that faith is immediacy'.[8] The concern here is to preserve a distinctive role for the concept of faith. For if this concept simply designates a natural and spontaneous response to the world, it cannot designate a specifically religious – let alone Christian – response. As Johannes de Silentio puts it:

Modern philosophy has permitted itself without further ado to substitute in place of "faith" the immediate. When one does that it is ridiculous to deny that faith has existed in all ages. In that way faith comes into rather simple company along with feeling, mood, idiosyncrasy, vapours, etc.[9]

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[5] *JP* 37 II A 110 (Hannay), p. 86. Compare the following from *Postscript*: 'Just as an old man who has lost his teeth now munches with the help of the stumps, so the modern Christian language about Christianity has lost the power of the energetic terminology to bite – and the whole thing is toothless 'maundering'.' (*CUP*, p. 363. Cf. *BA*, p. 166).

[6] In Wittgenstein's terms, a grammatical investigation involves eliciting the 'criteria' we have for distinguishing between concepts. As Cavell puts it, 'Wittgensteinian criteria are appealed to when we "don't know our way about", when we are lost with respect to our words and to the world they anticipate' (Cavell (1979), p. 34).

[7] Compare the motto of *The Concept of Anxiety*: 'The age of making distinctions is past. It has been vanquished by the system. In our day, whoever loves to make distinctions is regarded as an eccentric...' (unpaginated).

[8] *CUP*, p. 500.

[9] *FT* (Lowrie), p. 59. Compare Kierkegaard: 'What Schleiermacher calls "religion" and the Hegelian dogmaticians "faith" is, after all, nothing but the first immediacy, the prerequisite for everything – the vital fluid – in an emotional-intellectual sense the atmosphere we breathe – and which therefore cannot properly be characterised with these words' (*JP* 36 I A 273 (Hannay), p. 56).

It may turn out that all instances of so-called faith are, in fact, feelings, moods and so on. De Silentio's point is certainly not to rule out an argument to this effect. It is simply that the conclusion of such an argument would be that the concept of faith is uninstantiated, not that it is of the same genus as feelings, moods and so on. But to assimilate these concepts, without further ado, is to misunderstand the concept of faith.

According to Climacus, for example, faith presupposes relinquishing one's relative goals for the sake of an absolute good.[10] Such tasks are reflective rather than spontaneous; they involve reflecting on and prioritising one's projects. According to the New Testament, for another example, the way to faith is narrow and those who find it are few.[11] Again, as Kierkegaard remarks in his *Journals*: '...most people never reach faith at all. They keep on living in immediacy, and finally manage some reflection; then they die'.[12] I take it that this is less an empirical observation than an expression of the view that it is internal to the concept of faith that faith is difficult to attain.

The worry about conflating faith and immediacy is thus an instance of the general misgiving that philosophers distort religious concepts by abstracting them from their proper applications. In the following passage, Freud nicely articulates this anxiety in both its general form and particular manifestation in the confusion of faith with spontaneity:

Where questions of religion are concerned, people are guilty of every sort of dishonesty and intellectual misdemeanour. Philosophers stretch the meaning of words until they scarcely retain anything of their original sense. They give the name of 'God' to some vague abstraction...[and]...even boast that they have recognised a higher purer concept of God, notwithstanding that their God is now nothing more than an insubstantial shadow and no longer the mighty personality of religious doctrines. Critics persist in describing as 'deeply religious' anyone who admits to a sense of man's insignificance or impotence in the face of the universe, although what constitutes the essence of the religious attitude is not this feeling but the next step after it, the reaction to it which seeks a remedy for it. The man who goes no further but humbly acquiesces in the small part which human beings play in the great world – such a man is, on the contrary, irreligious in the truest sense of the word[13]

[10] See, for example, *CUP*, p. 431.

[11] See Matthew 7: 13-14. Cf. *CUP*, p. 585: 'the narrow gate to the hard way of faith'.

[12] *JP* 48 VIII I A 649 (Hannay), p. 299.

[13] Freud (1991), p. 214.

Philosophy in general – or the 'recent speculative thought' to which Climacus specifically refers[14] – may or may not have an inherent tendency to devalue religious concepts. But it is surely incumbent on any philosophical treatment of faith at least to do justice to how this concept is actually used in authentic contexts.[15]

Faith presupposes reflection. On the other hand, acts of faith are not performed *on the basis of* reflection. Hence de Silentio's notion of a 'second immediacy': i.e. a kind of spontaneous act or state that presupposes a process of reflection.[16] I shall have something to say about the motivation for this insistence on the spontaneity of faith below. But the present point is that the basic analysis of faith developed in Kierkegaard's work is accurately formulated in terms of immediacy and reflection. To be a little more precise:

An act A, performed by a subject S, is an act of faith only if (i) S has previously performed certain relevant kinds of reflection; and (ii) A is not performed on the basis of any reflection whatsoever.

This, I take it, is the bare bones of that vexing 'definition of faith' in *The Sickness Unto Death*: 'In relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it'.[17] That is, faith is the culmination of a certain kind of process of reflecting on oneself in an immediate and direct relation to God.

So if faith is contrasted with 'the immediate instinct of the heart'[18], it is also contrasted with reflective judgement. Clearly the positive conception that emerges is subtle, even paradoxical. Faith turns out to be a kind of act or state that is in some sense the culmination of a process of reflection but that does not itself reflect back on that process. But this situation is made even more problematic by the fact that Kierkegaard's treatment of judgement seems to preclude any straightforward contrast with faith in terms

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[14] As Reidar Thomte notes, the polemic against a conflation of faith and immediacy is less directed at Hegel, who criticized F. H. Jacobi on precisely these grounds, but against the Danish Hegelians, Rasmus Nielsen and H. L. Martensen (cf. *CA*, p. 224, note 15).

[15] I take this point to stand entirely independently of any commitment to the idea, most often associated in the philosophy of religion with D. Z. Phillips, that truth or standards of justification are relative to 'incommensurable' conceptual schemes. On these issues see, e.g., Tessin & von Ruhr (1995).

[16] Cf. *FT*, p. 8. Compare Kierkegaard: 'faith is immediacy after reflection' (*JP* 48 VIII 1 A 649 (Hannay), p. 299).

[17] *SUD*, p. 14.

[18] *FT* (Lowrie), p. 38.

of the relation between immediacy and reflection. The following excerpt from *The Concept of Anxiety* amply illustrates this further complexity:

Faith loses by being regarded as the immediate, since it has been deprived of what lawfully belongs to it, namely, its historical presupposition. Dogmatics loses thereby, for it does not begin where it properly should begin, namely, within the scope of an earlier beginning. Instead of presupposing an earlier beginning, it ignores this and begins without ceremony, just as if it were logic. Logic does indeed begin with something produced by the subtlest abstraction, namely, what is most elusive: the immediate. What is quite proper in logic, namely, that immediacy is *eo ipso* cancelled, becomes in dogmatics idle talk.[19]

Hopefully, this thesis has gone some way to indicate what a Kierkegaardian author might mean when he says that immediacy is '*eo ipso* cancelled' in logical thought, and how this differs from what a Hegelian might mean by it. For we have seen how both Climacus and Kierkegaard insist on the role of spontaneity in acquiring and exercising capacities for logically constrained judgement. In short, the Hegelian requirement of immediacy is extended to the thinking subject. This suggests the following contrast with faith:

Whereas judgement is a kind of reflective activity that presupposes spontaneous activity (first immediacy), faith is a kind of spontaneous activity that presupposes reflective activity (second immediacy).

Here, then, we have a rather complex relation between the concepts of judgement and faith. In what follows, I shall try to spell out what parallels and disanologies are implied by this schema.

2. Parallels

It is important to be clear that the relevant sense of 'presupposes' in the above formula is temporal (rather than logical or metaphysical) priority – as indeed is emphasised by the terms, 'first' and 'second' immediacy. As I showed (in Chapter Three) Climacus is committed to the claim that it is senseless to ascribe logical or ontological priority to either immediacy or reflection in judgement since these stand in a relation of mutual determination. Similarly, to say that having faith presupposes that one has undergone a process of reflection on one's life such that, for example, one comes to view

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[19] *CA*, p. 10.

oneself as a sinner (what Haufniensis calls the 'historical presupposition' of faith), is not to claim that this is logically or metaphysically prior to a direct encounter with God.

Here, then, is a crucial analogy: faith, like judgement, is 'both gift and task'. To emphasise at the expense of the other either the importance of a direct encounter with God (faith as gift) or the roles of ethico-religious reflection and striving (faith as task), is to misunderstand faith. In more theological terms: to emphasise our responsibility for righteousness at the expense of God's sovereign grace or *vice versa* is to do justice to neither. (Compare my claim that Kierkegaard opens up the possibility of rejecting a rationalist notion of logical necessity without endorsing a Romantic notion of untrammelled spontaneity.) Kierkegaard's strategy in this respect, like Wittgenstein's and unlike Hegel's, is less to offer a theoretical alternative than, by means of a careful investigation of the way the concepts of grace and responsibility operate in a believer's life, to undermine our sense that there is an *intellectual* problem here. Given that one wants to have faith, the real problem is how to live out one's life as both gift and task.[20]

I have characterised Climacus' 'no-priority' claim about the relative roles of immediacy and reflection in judgement in terms of an 'Inseparability Thesis' (see Chapter Three). According to this thesis, the relation between acts and objects of thought is inseparable in the sense that, whilst these are qualitatively distinct, the one cannot be fully identified or articulated independently of the other. In other words: the spontaneous *how* of judging is essentially related to the logically constrained *what*. Now this claim has some very important implications for Climacus' treatment of what he calls 'the ethico-religious'. (I shall say more about this category in Section 3 below. For now we can simply take it as encompassing matters of a broadly ethical or religious nature.) In its most general form, the implication is this:

For any act of thinking about ethics and religion, that act is essentially (rather than externally) related to the object of thought.

This is indeed a direct consequence of the Inseparability Thesis – it simply applies to ethico-religious reflection what, according to that thesis, holds true of all thinking. I

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[20] For much fuller discussions that arrive at similar conclusions see Barrett (1994); and Ferreira (1991), p. 7 and *passim*. See also Julia Watkin's discussion of Kierkegaard's sense of the mutually corrective nature of Catholic and Protestant views of grace and works (Watkin (1997b), pp. 34-5).

believe that this claim is central to the thesis that 'truth is subjectivity' as this is expounded in the *Postscript*. Since, as I shall argue, this notorious thesis can only be properly understood by reference to certain disanalogies between ethico-religious and other kinds of judgement, I shall pick up the theme in the next section. For now, it is important to note that, whatever special character Kierkegaard might want to ascribe to ethico-religious reflection, the contrast with other kinds cannot be absolute. For a general commitment to act-object inseparability rules out any simple-minded contrast between, say, the purely objective status of empirical propositions and the merely subjective status of religious perspectives.[21]

Perhaps the most obvious parallel between the Kierkegaardian conceptions of faith and judgement, however, is that both are said to involve 'leaps'. Now I have argued (in Chapter Three) that the point of this metaphor in the context of judgement is to acknowledge the essential role of human spontaneity without collapsing the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. Leaping is a figure for unmediated activity that nonetheless accomplishes a qualitative transition. As such, the metaphor is supposed to bring out what is paradoxical in logically constrained thought – viz. the sense that acquiring capacities for logical thought involves exercising those very capacities – and implies limits to explanation and justification.

Supposing that this structure survives the transposition to contexts of faith would give us something like the following. The point of the metaphor here is to allow an important role for human spontaneity in faith without collapsing the distinction between God and humans. As such, the metaphor is supposed to bring out what is paradoxical about faith – viz. the sense that faith presupposes itself – and implies limits to explanation and justification. Does this analogy go through?

Consider first the claim that there is a qualitative distinction between God and humans. This is surely a profoundly Kierkegaardian claim.[22] Whatever we take to be the

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[21] That this positivistic contrast utterly fails to capture the distinction between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' in Kierkegaard's works could be demonstrated in many other ways. For example, Climacus' claim that 'the empirical object is not finished, and the existing knowing spirit is itself in the process of becoming' (*CUP*, p. 189), hardly encourages a split between a stable realm of objective facts and the flux of subjectivity.

[22] Merold Westphal has perhaps done the most to make the case for Kierkegaard as providing a 'theological critique of ontotheology', where he follows Walter Lowe in defining the latter term as 'any

ultimate import of *Philosophical Fragments*, it seems clear enough that the concept of alterity is center stage.[23] (This is an important theme whether or not one accepts Stephen Mulhall's claim, for instance, that Climacus mimics the very anthropomorphism he attacks by treating 'the god' as a product of human reason's confronting its own limits.[24]) Witness Climacus' characterisation of the subject-matter of his 'thought-project' as that which 'no philosophy (for it is only for thought), no mythology (for it is only for the imagination), no historical knowledge (for it is only for memory) has ever had...of which in this connection one can say with all multiple meanings that it did not arise in any human heart'.[25] If *Fragments* is a playful treatment of the hypothesis that 'the god is absolutely different from a human being'[26], the same distinction is marked more straightforwardly by many entries in the *Journals*.[27] For example:

Yes, certainly God is unchangeable, but what good is that to me? Do I really have what it takes to deal with an unchangeable being? For a poor fickle human it is the greatest strain, the pain I have to endure here far greater than anything I can suffer from another person's inconstancy.[28]

The human is the relative, mediocrity; human beings feel good only in mediocrity. God is the unconditioned.[29]

The philosophers think that all knowledge, indeed even the existence of the Deity, is something man himself produces and that only in a figurative sense can there be talk of revelation, rather as one can say the rain falls from heaven though rain is nothing must mist produced by the earth. But, to keep to the metaphor, they forget that in the beginning God separated the waters of heaven and earth and that there is something higher than *atmosphere*.[30]

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effort or tendency to think of God and the finite order in univocal terms' (Westphal, (1994), p 31, n. 7). See also Westphal (1995).

[23] Louis Mackey claims that '*Philosophical Fragments* is obsessed with alterity' (Mackey (1986), p. 102). Similarly, Steven M. Emmanuel advances a reading of *Fragments* in terms of ' the total incommensurability between an infinite God and a finite human intellect' (Emmanuel (1991), p. 279).

[24] See Mulhall (1999); Mulhall (2001). Compare Vanessa Rumble's characterisation of *Fragments* as a 'narrative which displays the very practice being criticized' (Rumble (1997), p. 99).

[25] *PF*, p. 109.

[26] Ibid., p. 46.

[27] Compare also Climacus' reference to the tendency to 'confuse Christianity with something that has arisen in man's, that is, humanity's heart, confuse it with the idea of human nature and forget the qualitative difference that accentuates the absolutely different point of departure: what comes from God and what comes from man' (*CUP*, p. 580).

[28] *JP* 51 X 4 A 311 (Hannay), p. 527.

[29] *JP* 54 XI A 445, ibid., p. 606.

[30] *JP* 39 II A 523, ibid., p. 106.

Against philosophical redescriptions of God as 'self-consciousness' (Hegel) or postulate of practical reason (Kant) or plug for epistemological gaps (Descartes) or whatever, Kierkegaard aims to 'strictly uphold the relation between philosophy (the purely human view of the world – the *humanist* standpoint) and Christianity'.[31] We are to distinguish, with Pascal, between the 'gods of the philosophers' and the 'God of Abraham'.[32] The most salient difference is that whereas the former are controlled by the demands of our theories and can be approached with detached contemplation, the latter makes demands on our lives and must be approached with 'fear and trembling'.

Secondly, consider the claim that human spontaneity plays an important role in faith. Again, many texts could be cited in support of such a claim. In the following entry, for instance, Kierkegaard gives an ironic twist to Climacus' critique of Hegel's 'absolute beginning':

The condition for a person's salvation is the faith that there is, everywhere and at every moment, an absolute *beginning*. When someone who has egoistically indulged himself in the service of illusions is to start upon a purer striving, the crucial point is that he believes absolutely in the new beginning, because otherwise he muddies the *passage* into the old. Similarly with conversion in the stricter sense: faith is the possibility of the new, the absolute beginning, otherwise it remains essentially the old.[33]

If faith presupposes certain kinds of reflection and striving, it nonetheless constitutes a complete break with such processes – 'old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new'.[34] If this were not so, the concept of faith would be assimilable to that of ethical striving – as embodied, for example, by Judge William's exhortations to self-choice and virtue. An important implication of this insistence on the spontaneity of faith, on its radical discontinuity with any prior process of reflection, is that faith is an inherently risky adventure. Thus, for example, Kierkegaard censures contemporary theologians for giving the impression that exercising faith is like getting on 'a steam

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[31] *JP* 37 II A 77, ibid., p. 85.

[32] Cf. Pascal's 'Memorial' worn on a parchment around his neck which includes the words: 'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers' (cited in J. M. Cohen's introduction to the *Pensées* (Pascal (1961), p.15)). Compare Etienne Gilson's remark that '...the God of Descartes was a stillborn God. He could not possibly live because, as Descartes had conceived him, he was the God of Christianity reduced to the condition of philosophical principle, in short, an infelicitous hybrid of religious faith and of religious thought' (Gilson (1941), p. 86, cited in R. Stern (1991), p. 173).

[33] *JP* 50 X 2 A 371 (Hannay), p. 463.

[34] II Corinthians 5:17. Cf. *PF* (Hannay), p. 82: '...faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off'.

engine going down a railway track with its head of steam fired up by the Apostles'.[35] As with rule-following, faith is not a matter of simply getting on the tracks laid out in advance of any particular act of faith.[36] And there is a sense in which faith is 'blind'.[37]

Thirdly, consider the claim that faith presupposes itself and therefore implies limits to justification and explanation. Some such claim surely informs the criticism of arguments for the existence of God in *Philosophical Fragments*, for instance.[38] The general form of Climacus' objection to apologetic arguments is that 'if...the god does not exist, then of course it is impossible to demonstrate it. But if he does exist, then it is foolishness to want to demonstrate it'.[39] One reason why it is foolish to want to demonstrate the existence of the god, even in the case that he does indeed exist, emerges when Climacus turns his attention to the teleological argument in particular:

Or are the wisdom in nature and the goodness or wisdom in Governance right in front of our noses? Do we not encounter the most terrible trials here. and is it ever possible to be finished with these trials?... Therefore, from what works do I demonstrate [the existence of the god]? From the works regarded ideally – that is, as they do not appear directly and immediately. But then I do not demonstrate it from the works, after all, but only develop the ideality I have presupposed; trusting in *that*, I even dare to defy all objections, even those that have not yet arisen. By beginning, then, I have presupposed the ideality, have presupposed that I will succeed in accomplishing it, but what else is that but presupposing that the god exists and actually beginning with trust in him.[40]

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[35] *JP* 35 I A 62 (Hannay), p. 21.

[36] In Climacus' famous metaphorics, to have faith is to be "out on 70, 000 fathoms of water" (*CUP*, p. 204). John Lippitt has suggested a comparison in this connection with the following from Stanley Cavell:

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation – all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more. but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying. (Cavell, (1969), p. 52, cited in Lippitt (2000), pp. 168-9.)

Philip Dwyer draws attention to the same celebrated passage in making his case for a link between Wittgenstein on rule-following and Sartre's sense of the 'anguish' of freedom (See Dwyer (1989), p. 60-1).

[37] Cf. *JP* 50 X 6 B 79 (Hannay), p. 460: 'The weaker faith has to watch out and speculate, just like the weaker love which lacks the courage to become entirely blind'.

[38] Some such claim also informs Climacus' distinction between 'speculative doctrines' and 'existence-communications' (cf. *CUP*, pp. 379-80). John H. Whittaker comments, 'Existence communications are not hypotheses...They cannot be left for evidence to decide or justify, as if they might be evaluated in the light of speculative arguments or independent evidence' (Whittaker (1988), p. 174).

[39] *PF*, p. 39.

[40] Ibid., p. 42.

Climacus' misgiving about the teleological argument is that the view of nature as displaying the wisdom and design of a divine creator is not given immediately and directly in experience – far from it – but depends on whether one does or does not have faith. As Evans puts it, 'it is not the proof that is the basis of the person's faith in God. It is rather the person's faith in God, which guides the interpretation, that is the basis of proof'.[41] And Climacus goes on to characterise the logical gap between the conclusion of a sound apologetic argument and faith in God as a 'leap'. In other words, the metaphor of leaping in the context of faith signals the extent to which faith presupposes itself and therefore cannot be proved, justified, demonstrated.[42]

If this sketch is along the right lines as a characterisation of the basic role of the figure of 'the leap' in the context of faith, certain other interpretations are wrong. Most obviously, given the importance of spontaneity, 'the leap' cannot be a matter of deliberate choice. This alone is sufficient to seriously undermine the persistent idea that the 'theory of the stages' is an attempt to get us to choose the life of faith over against other lifestyles – as though Kierkegaard were saying, in John Elrod's words, "My dear reader, these are the existence possibilities open to you; take your choice".[43] For how could the spontaneous life of faith result from a process of deliberating on the relative merits of existence-possibilities?

Secondly, given that Kierkegaard upholds a qualitative distinction between God and humans, 'the leap' cannot mark an attempt to reduce faith to a human enterprise. The rather fashionable attempt to mine Kierkegaard for novel humanistic revisions of traditional theological concepts is therefore quite against the spirit of his work. (It will be recalled that nothing but 'old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful severity' is supposed to emerge from a proper reading of *Fragments*.)

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[41] Evans (1998), p. 120. Compare Merold Westphal's discussion of Climacus' 'hermeneutical skepticism' (Westphal (1994), p. 16).

[42] In this respect Climacus' use of the metaphor of leaping owes much, of course to Lessing's emphasis on the logical gap between faith and reasons (see, e.g., Hannay (1997)). For instance, Lessing presses the question: 'If on historical grounds I have no objection to the statement that Christ himself rose from the dead, must I therefore accept it as true that this risen Christ was the Son of God? (Lessing (1957), p. 54). Ronald Green has argued that the metaphor also owes much to Kant (see. e.g., Green (1989), p. 405-6).

[43] Elrod (1975), p. 4.

In many ways, the view outlined here supports M. J. Ferreira's sustained and careful examination of 'Kierkegaardian leaps'.[44] And her work suggests a further analogy between faith and judgement. It will be recalled how (in Chapter Four) I made out the Kierkegaardian case for an important role for imagination in judgement. Similarly, Ferreira emphasises the role of imagination in the kind of 'transforming vision' she claims (on Kierkegaard's behalf) is constitutive of ethical and religious transitions. In this context, Ferreira, too, appeals to the notion of aspect-perception and further draws an analogy with the role of metaphor in affecting decisive shifts in perspective.

Short of a detailed discussion of Ferreira's claims, it is worth drawing attention to one *prima facie* difference in emphasis between her appeal to the role of imagination and my own. I argued that, on a Kierkegaardian view, the infinitizing role of imagination can only be the 'final psychological approximation' to leaps of judgement, whereas Ferreira seems to identify the notion of a leap with that of transforming vision. Though I cannot argue the case here, it may be that to conceive the work of imagination as *constitutive* of faith is to fail to do justice to Kierkegaard's sense that, ultimately, *acts* of faith are 'blind', unmediated by any prior understanding, imaginative or otherwise.[45] Nonetheless, as I also argued in connection with judgement, Ferreira is right to draw attention to the way the role of imagination significantly qualifies that claim.

A final analogy is the following. We saw (in Chapter Three) how Kierkegaard deploys what I called *rhetorical reductios* against the systematic pretensions of the Hegelians. Despite the methodological reservations I raised in connection with form-based approaches (in the Prologue), the work of James Conant and others has gone some way to showing how such arguments are at work in Kierkegaardian treatments of religious concepts. Consider the following passage from *Fragments*, in which Climacus qualifies his claim that being around at the same time as an incarnated god puts one at no particular advantage in respect of what it means to be a 'follower':

If we assume that centuries elapsed between that event [i.e. the god's appearance in time] and the one who comes later, then there presumably will have been a great deal of chatter among men about this thing, so much loose chatter that the untrue and confused rumours that the contemporary (in the sense of immediacy) had to put up with did not make the possibility of the

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[44] See. e.g., Ferreira (1991); (1998).

[45] Ronald Johnson has criticized Ferreira on similar grounds (see Johnson (1997), p. 167-8).

right relationship nearly as difficult, all the more so because in all human probability the centuries-old echo, like the echo in some of our churches, would not only have riddled faith with chatter but would have eliminated it in chatter, which could not have happened in the first generation.[46]

Climacus claims that if there is any advantage in being physically contemporaneous with the god incarnate, this advantage consists in the fact that contemporary followers would not have had been distracted by the interference of intervening gossip. But we also have here a clear intimation of what *Fragments* takes itself to be combating; namely, the elimination of faith in 'chatter' – i. e. religious talk that has become separated from the acts of historically situated subjects (see Chapter Four).[47] Now this sheds a certain light on the repeated complaint, registered by Climacus' interlocutor, of plagiarism.[48] Just two pages earlier this curious figure had interrupted the argument in full flow:

Stop a moment. If you go on talking in this way, I cannot get a word in edgewise. You talk as though you were defending your doctoral dissertation – indeed, you talk like a book and what is unfortunate for you, like a very specific book. Once again, wittingly or unwittingly, you have introduced words that do not belong to you...[49]

This surely gives more than a hint that Climacus' own philosophical reproduction of Christianity can itself be seen to 'echo' back to us chatterers about religion the various ways in which our words do not belong to us, the ways in which our fascination with 'looking at' the concept of faith, say, distracts us from 'looking along' the life of faith.[50]

3. Disanalogies

All these parallels are surely striking, given the popular idea that Kierkegaard went all out to drive a wedge between faith and reason. Nonetheless, there are

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[46] *PF*, p. 71.

[47] According to Peter Fenves, 'Kierkegaard offers an incomparable point of departure for an investigation into the category of "chatter"' (Fenves (1993), p. 9).

[48] Stephen Mulhall hangs his 'self-subverting' reading of *Fragments* on this charge of plagiarism (see Mulhall (1999); Mulhall (2001)).

[49] *PF*, p. 68.

[50] This reading is supported by the fact that, in his *Journals*, Kierkegaard personifies 'Echo' as a 'grand master of irony': 'you who parody in yourself what is highest and deepest on earth: the word that created the world, since you give only the lattice, not the filling – ah yes, Echo, avenge all that sentimental tosh that lurks in woods and meadows, in church and theater, and which once in a while breaks loose *there* and altogether deafens me' (*JP* 36-7 I A 333 (Hannay), p. 70).

disanalogies. These are nicely summarised by Kierkegaard's remark that 'faith is not an intellectual but an ethical category, signifying the personal relationship between God and man'.[51] It seems we need to get clear about the difference between the intellectual and the ethical – or, as I shall say, between 'logico-aesthetic' and 'ethico-religious' categories (the point of this terminology should become clear in what follows).

Consider Chekhov's short story, *The Bet*.[52] An elderly banker recalls a party he had given several years earlier. The event had been 'attended by a good few clever people...including numerous academics and journalists' and a hotly contested debate about capital punishment soon ensued. The banker had pronounced that 'to judge *a priori*, I find capital punishment more moral and more humane than imprisonment. Execution kills you once, whereas life imprisonment does it slowly' – adding, however, that he had sampled neither. A young lawyer retorted that if he had to choose between these equally immoral options, he would choose the life sentence, since '[a]ny kind of life is better than no life at all'. Impassioned by the argument, the banker had then proposed a bizarre bet: 'two million you won't last five years in solitary confinement'.

The lawyer agrees, bragging he would do fifteen years. The banker, 'then a spoilt and frivolous person', is thrilled and has him put in one of the lodges in his garden. At first the captive plays the piano and reads light novels, then literary classics, now he just mopes around, then he is seen writing incessantly at night. In the sixth year, he devours books on languages, philosophy and history. Then he reads only the Gospels, theology and religion. In the last two years, he reads quite indiscriminately, suggesting 'someone swimming in the sea, surrounded by the wreckage of his ship, and trying to save his life by eagerly grasping one spar and then another'. Then the eve of freedom dawns.

But the banker has fallen on hard times and to pay up would be his ruin. With the intention of murdering his captive, he ventures into the lodge. The lawyer is asleep next to a paper on which he has penned some lines. These include the following:

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[51] *JP* 54-55 XI 2 A 380 (Hannay), p. 641. Compare the following from the *Postscript*:

Faith, then, is not a lesson for slow learners in the sphere of intellectuality, an asylum for dullards. But faith is a sphere of its own, and the immediate identifying mark of every misunderstanding of Christianity is that it changes it into a doctrine and draws it into the range of intellectuality (*CUP*, p. 327).

[52] See Chekhov (1991), pp. 113-119.

I despise your books, I despise all the blessings and the wisdom of the world. Everything is worthless, fleeting, ghostly, illusory as a mirage. Proud, wise and handsome you may be, death will wipe you from the face of the earth along with the mice burrowing under the floor. Your posterity, your history, your deathless geniuses – all will freeze or burn along with the terrestrial globe.

You have lost your senses and are on the wrong path. You take lies for truth, and ugliness for beauty. You would be surprised if apple and orange trees somehow sprouted with frogs and lizards instead of fruit, or if roses smelt like a sweating horse. No less surprised am I at you who have exchanged heaven for earth. I do not want to understand you.[53]

As a 'practical demonstration of my contempt for what you live by', the lawyer concludes by renouncing his claim to the money. The banker leaves, filled with remorse.

Chekhov's story can, I think, be read as an exploration of the categorical difference between logico-aesthetic and ethico-religious reflection. The frivolousness of the initial debate about capital punishment, the glib claim that 'any life is better is than none' and the banal bet are juxtaposed against the lawyer's ultimate sense of the transience, mediocrity and pettiness of human life, and the banker's coming to see himself as contemptible. To be sure, the pontifications of the party-goers about capital punishment involved no *logical* mistake: concepts were correctly applied, thoughts had, meanings conveyed, conversations continued. But all this is indeed 'illusory as a mirage' from the perspective of the end of the story. Plausibly, Chekhov wants us to distinguish between idle 'chatter about ethics' and genuine ethical reflection.

Can we make this distinction more precise? Recall that objective reflection, for Climacus, involves a kind of 'dying to oneself' (see Chapter Four). This is a picturesque way of saying that conforming to intersubjective norms requires forgoing one's purely personal preferences and associations, and resisting the temptation to form the world in one's own image. And it is arguable that this kind of disinterestedness is also involved in aesthetic experience. As Kant argued, in order to appreciate an object *aesthetically* one ought not to treat it as, say, a financial investment. Plausibly, an attitude of disinterested contemplation is quite proper in such contexts. Climacus claims that reflection on matters of ethics and religion, however, ought *not* to display this kind of attitude. On the contrary, he thinks it is quite proper that, in this sphere, one's passionate interest is directed towards how one is to live in the light of whatever perspective one is reflecting upon.

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[53] Ibid., p. 118.

At one level, then, Climacus simply wants to mark a category distinction, and to expose the confusions that result from its violation. Now to treat that which is logico-aesthetic as though it were ethico-religious is readily seen to involve a kind of mistake. Agonising over the role that *modus tollens* would have on one's life if one adhered to it is simply irrelevant to following that rule. Or suppose someone thought that in order to really appreciate a Jackson Pollock they ought to live their life in as random a way as possible. Detached contemplation rather than existential involvement surely is the proper attitude for judging in accordance with logical or aesthetic criteria. (A work of art may elicit quasi-religious feelings, but such would not fall under Climacus' category of the ethico-religious.) But it is the opposite confusion that Climacus emphasises. And this is undoubtedly harder to take, at least for those of us weaned on philosophy courses that embody the assumption that performing ethical judgements is a matter of churning out the practical implications of whatever theory is judged the most rational.

Yet there surely *is* a good sense in which the characters in Chekhov's story make a kind of mistake in their hotly contested debate about capital punishment. For whilst they take themselves to be discussing a matter of ethical gravity, the whole tenor and context of their discussion suggests glibness, folly, triviality. Chekhov gently brings out the comedy in this situation by having the banker, 'younger and more excitable in those days', getting carried away, banging the table with his fist and proposing his absurd bet – and having the lawyer respond with a no less absurd gesture: 'You stake your millions and I stake my freedom'. And perhaps we should not overlook the detail that the assembly comprised 'numerous academics'.

Notice, moreover, that there is no implication here that the mistake involves talking about ethical matters in a dispassionate *tone* – on the contrary, the debate is highly animated. And it is significant that the lawyer's note is not merely a piece of eloquent, sober-minded prose but contains a very concrete demonstration of the perspective it articulates.[54] Kierkegaard clarifies this kind of point in his *Journals* when he formulates the contrast in terms of the distinction between the 'what' and the 'how':

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[54] Note, however, that this is not *proof* that the Lawyer's later perspective is in earnest in a way that his earlier declarations were not. After all, he showed himself willing to carry through some very serious practical consequences of that debate. The moral is that actions, no less than words, can be frivolous.

In life, the difference is not what is said, but how....

'How' here is not the aesthetic, the declamatory, whether in flowery language or simple style, whether with sonorous chords or with a screeching voice, whether dry-eyed and unfeeling or tearful, etc. No, the difference is whether one speaks or one acts by speaking, whether one simply uses one's voice, expression, arm movements, a threefold, perhaps fourfold, stress on one word, etc., whether one makes of things like this to exert pressure, to stress a point, or whether to exert pressure one uses one's life, one's existence, every hour of one's day, makes sacrifices, etc. The latter is a high pressure that changes what is said into something quite other than when a speaker says the same thing verbatim.[55]

Roughly, then, the disanalogy is this: whereas in logico-aesthetic judgement, the thinker's attention is wholly absorbed by the object of thought, in ethico-religious reflection, the thinker's attention is directed towards his own relation to the object of thought.

Now one might well accept that there is an important distinction here, and acknowledge that ethical thinking can be more or less in earnest, without conceding anything so exotic as the thesis that truth is subjectivity. For that thesis, as I understand it, makes a further claim: namely, that it is *impossible* (and not merely undesirable or improper) to think about matters of ethics and religion in a logico-aesthetic way. Consider a famous passage in which Climacus attempts to motivate his thesis:

If someone lives in the midst of Christianity enters, with knowledge of the true idea of God, the house of God, the house of the true God, and prays, but prays in untruth, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with the passion of infinity, although his eyes are resting on the image of an idol – where then is more truth? The one prays in truth to the true God although he is worshipping an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore worshipping an idol.[56]

Much ink has been spilled defending such passages against the threat of relativism. But it is not clear to me that relativism is so much as a threat here. For Climacus' claim that there is 'more truth' in the pagan's situation than in the 'Christian's' (where, as Climacus says, the objective reality of the Christian God is assumed for the sake of argument), is quite naturally read as follows. Since the 'Christian' is not praying with ethico-religious passion, he is not praying at all. But at least the pagan is *praying*. The difference between them is therefore akin to that between nonsense and falsehood: given an aim for truth, both are undesirable – but the former fails to achieve even the status of the kind of thing

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[55] *JP* 50 X 2 A 477 (Hannay), p. 474. Cf. *CUP*, p. 450.

[56] *CUP*, p. 201.

that *could* be true or false. A false sentence is closer to the truth than a piece of nonsense; a true prayer to a false god is closer to the truth than an illusion of prayer.[57]

If this is along the right lines, the key assumption is that the 'Christian', just by virtue of praying in the wrong spirit fails to pray at all. More generally: to attempt to think about ethics and religion in a logico-aesthetic way is to fail to think about ethics and religion. The mode of one's thinking (or praying) is essentially involved in fixing what one is thinking about (or whom one is praying to). But this is just the claim I derived above from the Inseparability Thesis, namely:

For any act of thinking about ethics and religion, that act is essentially (rather than externally) related to the object of thought.

If the Inseparability Thesis is defensible, it seems the truth-is-subjectivity doctrine ought to be no less so. On this interpretation, the latter says no more, but no less, than that a suitably qualified subjectivity is a *sine qua non* of grasping ethico-religious truths.

The implication is that it is not merely that the characters in Chekhov's story are thinking about an ethical subject in a shallow, glib, trivial way but that they are not thinking about an *ethical* subject at all. Since they stand in the wrong kind of relation to the propositions about capital punishment they debate, these propositions simply fail to attain the status of ethical perspectives for them. To be sure, the characters are not just speaking nonsense – they do think and speak according to logico-aesthetic criteria. But, insofar as they take themselves to be discussing an important ethical topic, they are under an illusion of thinking, speaking, judging.[58] This is an ambitious claim, but it is certainly not the silly idea that ethical or religious truth is whatever you want it to be.

A more apposite worry, however, is as follows. Surely not just *any* ethical or religious perspective is edifying. But it seems to follow from this that one ought to reflect in a disinterested, objective way *before* one becomes existentially involved. (Note the similarity with the dialectic of rule-following: the objectivist maintains there must be

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[57] Admittedly, this way of formulating the contrast is more cautious than Climacus' suggestion that the pagan is praying to the true God, just in virtue of his praying truly. But the important point is clear in the following from Kierkegaard's *Journals*: 'The person who may have an incorrect conception of God, but nevertheless observes the self-denial this incorrect conception requires of him, has more spirit than the person whose knowledge of God may in scholarly and speculative respects be the most correct but which exerts absolutely no power over his life' (*JP* 51 X 3 A 736 (Hannay), p. 512).

some kind of prior reflective activity.) After all, the pagan would surely have been in an even better position if he had first got clear who the true God is, and then prayed with 'the passion of infinity'. Indeed, Kierkegaard himself seemed to concede as much when he wrote in an early journal, 'I certainly don't deny that I still accept an *imperative* of knowledge, and that one can also be influenced by it, but *then it must be taken up alive in me*, and *this* is what I now see as the main point'.[59] If the main point is existential involvement, Kierkegaard nonetheless seems to accept here that this is posterior to the mundane business of acquiring true beliefs about ethics and religion.

Climacus' commitment to the stronger claim that it is impossible to judge matters of ethics and religion unless one thinks in an ethico-religious way is clearly inconsistent with this picture.[60] But recall that inseparability relations are supposed to be mutually determining (see Chapter Three). This means that whether one is having a thought about a matter of ethics or religion is determinate of, as well as determined by, whether one is thinking in an ethico-religious way. ('Only the truth that edifies is the truth for you', is not equivalent to, 'whatever you happen to find edifying is the truth for you'.) So to deny that there can be a prior process of reflection on abstract ethical or religious doctrines is not to accept that one can think in an ethico-religious way in the absence of ethical or religious content. The point is that we cannot ultimately say what ethical or religious content is, and we therefore cannot judge between competing perspectives, without thinking in an ethical or religious way.

Nonetheless, it is consistent with this that one can *partially* identify ethico-religious perspectives *in abstracto*. (I argued a parallel point more generally in Chapter Three.) One does not have to be thinking ethically or religiously to see family resemblances between one ethical perspective and another, or between ethical and religious concepts, for example. And I take it that Kierkegaard's distinction between intellectual and ethical categories can itself be understood intellectually. (Compare

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[58] Cf. *JP* 54 XI 2 A 117 (ibid.), p. 623: '...as if one had a relation to the ethical just by talking about it'.

[59] *JP* 35 I A 76, ibid., p. 33.

[60] This need not be taken as evidence of a disagreement between Climacus and Kierkegaard. That the mature Kierkegaard endorsed the stronger view that existential involvement is essential for thinking about ethics and religion is surely evident in a later entry in his *Journals*:

All Christian and all ethical knowledge in general ceases to be what it is when outside its situation.

Climacus' claim that one does not have to actually be a Christian to understand what Christianity is.[61]) Again, the point is that although it is possible to minimally identify an ethical or religious perspective without thinking ethically or religiously, to do so is not to regard those perspectives *as* ethical or religious.[62]

Plausibly, moreover, ethico-religious reflection involves *both* existential engagement and moments of 'taking stock', in which we treat our commitments critically.[63] Kierkegaard's sober call to self-examination is hardly an invitation to repress our critical faculties. The point, however, is that this 'taking stock' is of a particular (for example, non-prudential) kind. In ethico-religious reflection we must fight self-deception, prejudice, laziness, and this requires such virtues as honesty, integrity, courage as well as those of humility, obedience, commitment. (But note that obedience *is* sometimes the right way to respond to a demand on one's life.) What Climacus does preclude is that existential involvement is only warranted once the true ethical or religious doctrines have been discovered by means of a prior process of disinterested reflection.

Admittedly, however, matters are not quite so straightforward. For, later in the *Postscript*, Climacus seems to advance a yet further claim, namely that to have a *fully developed* ethico-religious subjectivity just *is* to grasp the objective truth. (This claim is clearly consistent with the above, but should be seen as a further claim.) To understand what 'fully developed' might mean here, one would have to retrace the steps of what Merold Westphal has called Climacus' 'existential phenomenology' – that is, his exploration of the ways in which the experience of resignation, suffering and guilt figure

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A situation (namely actuality, or the fact that one expresses one's knowledge in actuality) is the *conditio sine qua non* for ethical knowledge (*JP* 49 X I A 610 (Hannay), p. 406).

[61] Cf. *CUP*, p 372: 'That one can know what Christianity is without being a Christian must, then, be answered in the affirmative'.

[62] In a seminal paper, James Conant argues that Climacus' own 'aestheticism' – his abstract, disinterested approach to the problem of what it means to be a Christian – involves a kind of performative paradox (see Conant (1995))). It seems to me that Conant overlooks the distinction between being able to think about an ethical or religious perspective as such and thinking according to the distinction between the categories. Climacus position is best understood as the claim that whereas the former requires ethico-religious reflection, the latter does not. And this leaves open that Climacus' attempt to clarify the categories is, as Paul L. Holmer puts it, 'itself of logical...significance' (Holmer (1957), p. 40). Nonetheless, it may well be that Climacus can be seen to *distort* ethical and religious perspectives by not engaging with them himself.

[63] Compare Kierkegaard's remark that 'the real task is to become objective towards oneself' (*JP* 47 VIII I A 165 (Dru), p. 126). The point is that critical reflection on matters of ethics and religion is *more* demanding than logico-aesthetic reflection, not less.

in a religious life.[64] But the basic argument is that, since a fully developed subject would experience herself as wholly incapable of ethico-religious fulfillment, and therefore as a sinner, as 'nothing before God', she could only find fulfillment by receiving the gift of grace that is the atoning work of Christ. In other words: faith is the culmination of a certain process of reflecting on oneself in an immediate and direct relation to God.

But what justification is there for thinking that Christianity is uniquely suited to fulfil the role of the objective correlate of a fully developed form of religiousness? The following passage from Kierkegaard's *Journals* may shed some light of what many commentators on the *Postscript* have found a bizarre twist in Climacus' argument:

It seems to me that Christian dogmatics must be an explication of Christ's activity, the more so since Christ established no teaching but was active. He didn't *teach* that there was a redemption for man, he *redeemed* man. A Muhammadan dogmatics (*sit venia verbo*) would be an explication of Muhammad's teaching, but a Christian dogmatics would be an explication of Christ's activity.[65]

The connection I have in mind is this: given that, as Climacus suggests, a fully developed subject would have recognised her systemic failure to realise her own ethico-religious ideals, the last thing she would need is more *teaching*. For it is not ideals she lacks, but the resources to realise them. Rather, she would need redemption; that is, she would need redeeming. And that is just what Christianity – more precisely, Jesus – offers.

Now all this might be construed as a kind of apologetic for Christianity, along the lines that nothing short of faith in Christ can make sense of our deepest experience of ourselves. (It is interesting to note in this connection that Kierkegaard took the later sections of the *Postscript* to be especially significant in protecting Climacus from the charge of subjectivism.[66]) But to attribute such an argument to Kierkegaard would be against the spirit of his claim that 'faith is not an intellectual category', that one's having

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[64] See Westphal (1996), pp 150-51 and *passim*.

[65] *JP* 34 I A 27 (Hannay), p. 14.

[66] Cf. *JP* 49 X 2 A 299 (ibid.), pp. 449-50:

In all of what people commonly say about Jo. Climacus being mere subjectivity, etc., it is quite overlooked that, besides all that testifies in any case to him being a real-life figure, in one of the last sections he points out that the remarkable thing is that there is a 'how' with the characteristic that when *it* is precisely stated, the 'what' is also given, that this is the 'how' of faith. Here inwardness, at its very maximum, proves to be objectivity again, after all. And that is a twist to the subjectivity principle which to my knowledge has never been performed or accomplished.

faith is not assimilable to one's being persuaded by any apologetic argument, metaphysical or existential, formal or rhetorical. Plausibly, Kierkegaard's work should be taken as a 'contribution to fixing the [Christian] concept of faith' rather than a defence of faith.[67] As such, it is surely both subtle and illuminating.

I have not done justice to the themes touched on in this Epilogue. But a firm conclusion is this: expositors of Kierkegaard on faith would do well to examine the relationship between this concept and Kierkegaard's treatment of judgement. To that extent, this thesis has been an indirect contribution to 'fixing the concept of faith'.

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[67] Cf. *JP* 34 1 A 44 (Hannay), p. 16. The preceding is not intended to preclude that Kierkegaard's work has devotional value. Of course, the signed discourses are most naturally read as devotional (rather than philosophical) texts – though these may also offer many contributions to an investigation of religious concepts. Nor do I wish to rule out apologetic uses of Kierkegaard's work. It seems to me that Kierkegaard offers much to support the view, for example, that religious concepts are uniquely apt or resonant in certain existential situations. The point is that, insofar as we wish to be faithful to the texts, we should respect Kierkegaard's broadly anti-apologetic stance (cf., for example, *PC*, p. 144, *WL*, p. 193).

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