Anthropology and Authority

Essays on Søren Kierkegaard

Edited by

Poul Houe,
Gordon D. Marino
and Sven Hakon Rossel

Amsterdam - Atlanta, GA 2000
Cover illustration: Sketches of Søren Kierkegaard drawn by the Danish artist
Wilhelm Marstrand
(In the Royal Library, Copenhagen)

Le papier sur lequel le présent ouvrage est imprimé remplit les prescriptions de
"ISO 9706:1994, Information et documentation - Papier pour documents - Pré-
scriptions pour la permanence".

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of “ISO
9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents -
Requirements for permanence”.

ISBN: 90-420-0640-4
©Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA 2000
Printed in The Netherlands

To Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong.
of each of these. Faith is "the relationship with God," more specifically, an inter-personal, not just individualistic phenomenon. The eloquent statement of this in Kjer-
ligheidsens Gjerninger (1847; Works of Love) is imprinted upon every other writing of
his, even the attack literature. What do all the polemics sound like when one recalls
that God is always the third party, that He is the constant "middle term," that we are
called by God to love every person as neighbor, that the supreme work of love is to
presume love in the other like the "sprout in the grain"?23

All this is heard once more in Kierkegaard's proclamation of an unchanging, forgi-
ving, self-emptying, suffering God in the "last" sermon. In the end, the authority that
Kierkegaard invokes and obeys, is not a rule, not an institution, not a holy book, not a
destructive, vindictive Judge, but the One who is Infinite Love. As I have argued in
other articles (cited in the notes), this other side of Kierkegaard's theological under-
standing reveals a fullness even in the nihilistic, anarcho polemics of the attack. I cal-
led this his "incarnational optimism." In an eschatological perspective, Kierkegaard
presents a suffering God who shares in the suffering of those who would follow Him.
Ultimately, Kierkegaard's authority is that of the cross and the resurrection, the "inde-
scribable grace" of sacrifice, "the only way in which God can love a person and be
loved by him."26

25 SVI IX, 210; Works of Love, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds. and trs. New York: Harper
Torchbooks, 1964, 207.
26 SVI XIV, 356; Kierkegaard's Attack, 287. Two contemporary thinkers who dwell on the infinite,
suffering even absurd love of God are the Orthodox lay theologian Paul Evdokimov (L'amour fou
Life, Michael Piekon and Alexis Vinogradov, rev. trs. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary
Press, 1998) and Fr. Lev Gillet, who published under the nom de plume "A Monk of the Eastern
Church" (Jésus. Simples regards sur le Sauveur, Présence du Christ, Le Visage de lumière, Amour

I want to thank Dean Alexandra Logue of the School of Arts and Sciences, Baruch College, CUNY
and the faculty committee for reassigned time for research during the Spring, 1997 semester, and to
the University Committee on Research for a 1996-1997 PSC-CUNY Research Award (#667121) both
of which enabled me to complete this paper.

1 Quotations from Concluding Unscientific Postscript are from the translation by Howard V. and
Edna H. Hong, eds. and trs., NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. The only exceptions to this are
when I 'quote' something already quoted by Conant. In these cases, since Conant quotes from the
older translation by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University
Press, 1941), I have, when 'requoting', used this translation too; while nevertheless also giving a
reference to the place in Hong and Hong where the relevant passage can be found. In the present
case, I have modified the Hongs' translation slightly. In this passage, they translate Slaming as
'end'; I have, along with Swenson and Lowrie, gone for 'conclusion' because Climacus is here
clearly referring back to the section immediately preceding the Appendix. This is also headed
Slaming in the original text; and both sets of translators have labelled this section 'Conclusion'.
2 "Must we show what we cannot say?" In: The Senses of Stanley Cavell. R. Fleming and M. Payne,
eds. Lewisbary, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989; "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense." In:
Pursuits of Reason. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary Putnam, eds. Lubbock, TX: Texas
Tech University Press, 1993; "Putting Two and Two Together." In: Philosophy and the Grammar
hereafter MWS, KWN and PTTT respectively.
3 See, for instance, Stephen Mulhall, Faith and Reason. London: Duckworth, 1994, especially
Chapter 3, and "God's Plagiarist: the Philosophical Fragments of Johannes Climacus;" plus
Michael Weston, "Evaluating the issue: the strategy of Kierkegaard's Postscript," both forthcoming in
Philosophical Investigations, 22:1 (1999). Conant's work was also the main focus of a workshop at
the University of Essex in May 1997.
article is to challenge Conant's claim that the Postscript should be read as containing "nonsense ... simple, old garden variety nonsense." This, we shall see, relies upon a particular view of the significance of Climacus's 'revocation' of the text. I shall offer a brief account of Conant's position, before going on to suggest that there is in fact no need to go beyond the text of the Postscript to see the significance of the revocation; that Climacus's description of himself as a 'humorist', and his account of what this term means, in his mouth, suggest a reading of the revocation very different from Conant's.

Conant's general argument is as follows. Though he is at times ambivalent about exactly what he takes Climacus to be revoking, the overall suggestion is that the whole book, other than what he calls the "frame" (the Appendix in which the revocation appears; and the 'Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature') is supposed to be read as 'revoked'.

Conant argues that the Postscript's project is to develop "an elaborate reductio ad absurdum of the philosophical project of clarifying and propounding what it is to be a Christian." It does this by a movement from "propositions for which a clear sense can be given (depending upon whether we construe them aesthetically or religiously), to ones which teeter on the brink of sense (where mere truisms are insistent upon) to sheer nonsense (an affirmation of objective absurdity)." The first category aims to draw attention to the idea that "dialectical confusion" can arise from the fact that terms such as faith and revelation have different meanings in religious, as opposed to merely "aesthetic" (or epistemological), contexts; and that a specifically religious use of such terms only has a sense "within the context of a certain kind of life." The second category arises (in the section on Lessing) when the incommensurability of faith and revelation have different meanings in religious, as opposed to merely "aesthetic" (or epistemological), contexts; and that a specifically religious use of such terms only has a sense "within the context of a certain kind of life." The second category arises (in the section on Lessing) when the incommensurability of faith and revelation have different meanings in religious, as opposed to merely "aesthetic" (or epistemological), contexts; and that a specifically religious use of such terms only has a sense "within the context of a certain kind of life." The second category arises (in the section on Lessing) when the incommensurability of faith and revelation have different meanings in religious, as opposed to merely "aesthetic" (or epistemological), contexts; and that a specifically religious use of such terms only has a sense "within the context of a certain kind of life." The second category arises (in the section on Lessing) when the incommensurability of faith and revelation have different meanings in religious, as opposed to merely "aesthetic" (or epistemological), contexts; and that a specifically religious use of such terms only has a sense "within the context of a certain kind of life." The second category arises (in the section on Lessing) when the incommensurability of faith and revelation have different meanings in religious, as opposed to merely "aesthetic" (or epistemological), contexts; and that a specifically religious use of such terms only has a sense "within the context of a certain kind of life." The second category arises (in the section on Lessing) when the incommensurability of fa...
be led to speak nonsense if we advance certain kinds of theses, "we are no longer tempted to advance such theses ourselves." 19

There is much that is perceptive in this analysis. We can take on board Conant's illuminating suggestion that the Postscript, rather than advancing original theses, offers us 'grammatical remarks' which function as reminders of what we already know (but have forgotten, or have become confused about). As Climacus himself tells us, what he is saying about Christianity is nothing new, but "old fashioned orthodoxy" (CUP 275n). In this way, Conant - like his mentor Stanley Cavell - usefully complements readings of the Postscript which make no attempt to draw connections between Climacus and Wittgenstein. However, we can do this without committing ourselves to the view that any of these reminders are themselves nonsensical. 20 I have argued elsewhere that while one indeed cannot and should not attempt to make sense of the 'absolute paradox' as a metaphysical thesis, the term is not nonsense, since a meaningful sense can be given to it in a Christian life by attempting to live in terms of the picture of self-emptying love with which the paradox presents one. 21 But there are several problems with Conant's argument. In another place, 22 I show that much of what Climacus says about the absolute paradox is echoed perfectly sincerely by Kierkegaard himself in the journals and elsewhere. In the space remaining to me here, however, I want to argue that we can better explain the significance of the revocation in terms of the text of the Postscript itself. An appropriate reading of the revocation requires unpacking the significance of Climacus's description of himself as a "humorist." Conant acknowledges this general point, but does not - I shall argue - consider in anywhere near sufficient detail the Postscript's account of what it means to be a "humorist." 23

The first point to notice here is that humour and revocation are regularly linked by Climacus: "...revocation characterizes the humorist." 24 One would thus expect a humorist to issue a revocation. But what does it mean for him to do so? Climacus's revocation must be read in terms of the modesty characteristic of the figure of the "humorist." Against those who would claim their position as The Truth, Climacus is saying something like: 'This is how it appears to me: but you don't have to listen to a mere humorist.' This modest, humoristic denial that is not quite a denial involves the technique central to the maudiatic art; letting the reader "stand alone - with another's help." 25 In this con-nection, we must pay close attention to Climacus's saying "that to write a book and to revoke it is not the same as refraining from writing it, that to write a book that does not demand to be important for anyone is still not the same as letting it be unwritten." Climacus has written a book and revoked it, and made the link between this activity and writing a book which does not demand to be important. This supports my claim that the revocation is intended to be read in the above way. But it is important that we read this as a statement of modesty; not, as Conant reads it, an instruction to throw away the main body of the text. 26 (As Cain puts it, quoting Philosophiske Smudler (1844; Philosophical Fragments), "The book is called back by Climacus so that it can be called back into the existence of a reader 'to see if it contains anything that he can use'.") 27 There are two closely connected reasons for reading the "revocation" in this way. Firstly, issuing such instructions would be out of keeping with the general spirit of both the "Appendix" and other aspects of Climacus's self-presentation. And secondly, we should not expect 'humorists' - as Climacus describes them - to be so authoritarian.

How can the above claims be justified? In relation to the first point, recall, as quoted earlier, that part of the "Appendix" in which Climacus describes himself as a humorist. Conant claims that Climacus here issues "vehement warnings" 28 as to how his work should be read. But this 'vehemence' is difficult to find. By contrast, the two particularly striking aspects of Climacus's self-presentation are his modesty, and his lock of a sense of urgency. To illustrate this, consider one passage in which Climacus talks about himself: the section in which he describes how he became an author: 29

It is now about four years since the idea came to me of wanting to try my hand as an author. I remember it very clearly. It was on a Sunday; yes, correct, it was a Sunday afternoon. As usual, I was sitting outside the cafe in Frederiksberg Gardens, that wonderful garden which for the child was the enchanted land where the king lived with the queen, that lovely garden which for the youth was a pleasant diversion in the happy gaiety of the populace, that friendly garden which for the adult is so cozy in its wistful elevation above the world, that garden where even the envied glory of royalty is what it indeed is out there - a queen's recollection of her late lord. There as usual I sat and smoked my cigar. Regrettably, the only similarity I have been able to detect between the beginning of my fragment of philosophic endeavor and the miraculous beginning of that poetic hero was that it was in a public place. Otherwise there is no similarity at all, and although I am the author of Fragments, I am so insignificant that I am an outsider in literature. I have not even added to subscription literature, nor can it truthfully be said that I have a significant place.

19 KWN 218.
20 I am grateful to Anthony Radd for discussion on this point.
21 Lippitt and Hutto, 1998, section V, struggles to say something like this.
22 Lippitt, 1999. See my comment after note 44.
23 The same point could be made of an older, 'classic' paper to which Conant is indebted, namely Henry E. Allinson's "Christianity and Nonsense." Review of Metaphysics, 20 (1967), 432-60.
26 While he does not use precisely this language, recall the earlier point that in his second article Conant describes "An Understanding,..." as part of the "frame of the work" which is intended to "provide directions for how to read it" (KWN 202; my emphasis).
27 Cain 91. As well as "revoked," an alternative translation of tilbagekaldt would be "called back." 28 KWN 216.
people, prominent or much discussed, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier, some by railroads, others by omnibuses and steamships, others by telegraph, others by easily understood surveys and brief publications of everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who by virtue of thought systematically make spiritual existence easier and easier and yet more and more meaningful - and what are you doing?

At this point my introspection was interrupted because my cigar was finished and a new one had to be lit. So I smoked again, and then suddenly this thought crossed my mind: You must do something, but since with your limited capabilities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others have, take it upon yourself to make something more difficult. This idea pleased me enormously; it also flattered me that for this effort I would be loved and respected, as much as anyone else, by the entire community (CUP 185-86).

Though there is irony in this passage, I see no justification for dismissing it as merely ironic. Rather, it gives us important clues about aspects of Climacus's character. Note, as before, the modesty of his denial of being anything special. Unlike the "prized and highly acclaimed," his own "limited capabilities" prevent him from contributing to humanity by making life easier in some way. Although he has published one book prior to the Postscript, he did so at his own expense and remains "an outsider in literature." Elsewhere, he tells us that this book has had no impact, attracting only one review (CUP 274n). Even more striking is the lack of a sense of urgency about the human condition, since our 'goal' is 'behind time to give us this combination both ways around); the existing situation shared by all human beings. Secondly, for the humorist - unlike for the Christian - there is no sense of urgency about the human condition, since our 'goal' is 'behind us'; whatever salvation may be available to us is assured.

In relation to the first note, that Climacus does not, unlike most contemporary humor theorists, take 'humor' as an all-encompassing umbrella term for anything perceived as funny, a category of which irony (along with, say, jokes, satire and wit) would be a sub-category.30 Rather, Climacus's umbrella term is 'the comic', and irony and humor are the two subsections thereof which he discusses in detail. One of the most important distinctions between irony and humor, as Climacus uses the terms, is that humor is more gentle than irony. Whereas irony is proud, and tends to divide one person from another - at one point, Climacus talks of it in terms of self-assertion and "teasing" (CUP 551) - humor is concerned with those tragicomic aspects of the human situation which we all share; hence Climacus's description of it as "sympathetic" (CUP 582) and "profound" (CUP 552n).31

The second point is related to this. Irony and humor have similar roles as 'border territories' between the 'aesthetic', 'ethical' and 'religious' existence-spheres which are pivotal to the thought of both Climacus and Kierkegaard. At one point, Climacus asserts: "... irony is the confinium [border territory] between the esthetic and the ethical; humor the confinium between the ethical and the religious" (CUP 501-02). If Climacus is a humorist, how does this work, in the latter case?

The relationship of humor to the ethical and religious existence-spheres is complex.32 However, all that matters for the present discussion is the difference between humor and Religiousness B, since it is clear that humor, for Climacus, stands somewhere between ethical and Christian living. Whatever their exact relationship, it is clear that Religiousness A and humor have some important things in common. As C. Stephen Evans puts it, both the person in Religiousness A and the humorist believe "like Socrates and Plato, that the eternal is something that all humans possess already."33 From the standpoint of Religiousness A, "it must be assumed that every human being, viewed essentially, participates in eternal happiness and finally
becomes eternally happy" (CUP 581). According to Climacus, this is essentially the view shared by the humorist, as exemplified by his attitude to suffering. The humorist, like the Christian, "has an essential conception of the suffering in which he is [but] revokes the suffering in the form of jest" (CUP 447). In other words, he has an intellectual understanding that suffering is essen-tial to human existence, "but at the same time it occurs to him that it most likely is not worth the trouble to become involved in explaining it. The revocation is the jest" (CUP 448). The key difference between the religious person and the humorist is that for the former, "reflection is on the suffering;" for the latter, it is "away from the suffering" (CUP 443). For the humorist, there is no real momentous distinction between those within and those outside a religious mode of existence:

The difference between the religious person and the person who does not religiously transform his existence becomes a humorous difference: that whereas the religious person utilizes his entire life in becoming aware of the relation to an eternal happiness and the other does not concern himself with it ... they both, viewed eternally, go equally far (CUP 581-82).

The standpoint of Religiousness B, however, is different from humour: "Only on this condition do I become blessed, and as I absolutely bind myself to it, I thereby exclude everybody else" (CUP 582). The Christian, according to Climacus, has a "pathos of separation" which involves "the pain of sympathy" (CUP 582). Within Religiousness A, one can sympathise with "every human being qua human being" (CUP 585); within Christianity, that "syrpathy" can only be with other Christians. So, in virtue of his faith, the Christian, according to Climacus, is conscious of himself and his kind as being fundamentally different from non-Christians. What matters about this for our purposes is as follows. The sense of us all being in the same existential boat which is present in Religiousness A (and which can thereby bring about "sympathetic humour" (CUP 582)) is absent from the Christian who lives with the view that salvation is dependent upon each individual's commitment to God through Christ, and the anguish of being unable "to win" for Christ his family or beloved (CUP 586).

Thus the lack of urgency of a humorist such as Climacus should come as no surprise, owing to the clear distinction between the humorist and the anguished Christian living the life of suffering for his faith.34 The distinction is this: while the Christian lives the suffering and anguish of religious existence, the humorist, thinking that nothing can be done about the suffering that is essential to the human condition, chooses to smile, albeit sadly, about it. His reflection is, as we noted above, "away from the suffering," comforted by his view that "the goal [of existence] lies behind" (CUP 449); that whatever salvation is available, is available to all. For the humorist, in the end "everyone advances equally far" (CUP 450).

Let us review the above argument. I am suggesting that Climacus's revocation should be understood in the light of his description of himself as a humorist. Both this self-description and Climacus's account of what it means to be a humorist give us reasons to expect him to lack a sense of urgency, and to have a sense of modesty.

---

34 Climacus is unclear as to where those fully in Religiousness A fit within this framework. But as we have said, for our present purposes, we need only compare the humorist with the Christian.

---

Both factors should be taken into consideration when assessing how Climacus's revocation of his work should be read. And this gives us cause to doubt whether this revocation should be understood as 'directions' for how to read the work. Rather, I have suggested, he is simply denying that he is (or, perhaps, that anyone could be) any authority on the matters on which he has been ruminating.

To be fair to Conant, he does explain what he thinks is the significance of Climacus's describing himself as a humorist. (Conant owes us some such explanation, since Climacus repeats his claim to be a humorist in the "Appendix" itself: in that crucial section which contains the revocation around which Conant's reading revolves.) But Conant's explanations, I suggest, are inadequate. "The humour of Climacus's doctrine," he tells us, "is that it gradually subverts any possible hope for a ground upon which the integrity of a distinction between the absurdity of the paradox and mere nonsense could be drawn."35 Now we might well ask: is that all? Why should we accept this, and this alone, is "the correct point of departure"36 for understanding what Climacus means when he describes himself as a humorist? Why is there no need to consider the lengths to which Climacus goes to distinguish irony from humour, the outlook of the humorist from that of a Christian, and so on? Moreover, Conant's overlooking the fact that Climacus distinguishes irony from humour leads him to blur an important distinction. He does this when he simply maps the contemporary understanding of 'humour' as an all-encompassing umbrella term on to Climacus's description of himself as a humorist, by quoting a passage in which Climacus in fact talks about irony. According to Conant, in a passage crucial to the 'frame' of the work, Climacus says that what caused the reviewer of Philosophical Fragments to have "the most mistaken impression one can have" of that text was that he managed to "leave out the humour."37 But 'humour' is the wrong word here, given Climacus's very definite use of that word to mean something more gentle than irony. As we have said, humour, for Climacus, focuses upon aspects of the human situation which we all share: it is not a catch-all term which would include even the most savage, unsympathetic irony. What Climacus actually says is that the reviewer has gone wrong in omitting to mention "the indefatigable activity of irony, the parody of speculative thought in the entire plan, the satire in making efforts as if something ganz Auserordentliches 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" (CUP 275; my emphasis).38 Irony, parody, and satire are all branches of "the comic" (Climacus's all-encompassing term), but note that there is no mention of 'humour'. This quote clearly cannot be used, therefore, as Conant attempts to use it, to provide "the correct point of departure" for explaining Climacus's claim to be a 'humorist'. (Note, too, that

35 MWS 261.
36 MWS 280n.
37 Ibid.
38 Conant actually quotes essentially the same passage as this, but does not seem to notice that there is a problem in conflating irony, parody and satire with 'humour'.
this inadequate explanation comes from Conant's being forced to rely, for his explanation, on a part of the text which is the 'frame' of the work. 39

While he is right to suggest that Climacus's self-description "should cause us to carefully consider what sort of conviction he has in the doctrines he sets forth," 40 Conant's own consideration is not detailed enough. As I have been arguing, a more careful consideration of what Climacus takes a 'humorist' to be will suggest conclusions different from Conant's. Face Conant, I would support Evans's view that Climacus's revocation "must be taken as expressing his own attitude toward the book, not as an 'objective' judgment that the book contains no serious content. A humorist will therefore read the book in the same spirit as it was written, a [Christian] religious individual rather differently." 41 In other words, we are not compelled to take Climacus's revocation 'straight'. But there is another perspective from which Conant's position can be criticised. Let us finally deal with this.

Conant seems to assume - and to castigate "most commentators" for failing to recognise - that Climacus's is the final word on how the reader with integrity should approach the text. In other words, Conant's work assumes an implicit 'ought' with regard to the act of reading. The reader ought to follow Climacus's 'directions' and re-voke what has been said. This is the assumption which underlies the following worry: "... one of the difficulties of writing about Kierkegaard ... is learning to live with the delicate burden of both facing up to and yet not collapsing under the burden of the following thought: how would he respond ... to what I have just written about him?" 42

But why is Conant so concerned about this kind of 'faithfulness'? If we take "A First and Last Explanation" seriously, we notice that Kierkegaard himself renounces any privileged perspective with regard to the views of the pseudonyms: "There is in the pseudonymous books not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader." 43 Moreover, Climacus agrees. In the "Glance" - an essential part of the Postscript's 'frame', remember, according to Conant - Climacus praises the other pseudonyms because they have "not said anything or missed a preface to take an official position on the production, as if in a purely legal sense an author were the best interpreter of his own words" (CUP 252; my emphasis). If issuing 'directions' on how to read a work would be a 'misuse' of a preface, clearly the same would apply to doing so in an appendix. Conant claims that this is what Climacus is doing, yet Climacus's own words - moreover, words found within the 'frame' - tell us otherwise. Thus Conant's reading of the 'frame' on which his interpretation depends is rather selective. 44 Neither Kierkegaard nor Climacus demand of the reader a particular kind of reading in the way Conant implies.

In summary, we have been considering Conant's claim that the Postscript - like the Traactiet - contains material that is simply nonsensical, and that we are supposed to be able to see this if we read the text aright. Conant is wise to focus attention upon Climacus's revocation of the text. But, amongst other flaws, he pays insufficient attention to Climacus's description of himself as a 'humorist' and the clues the Postscript gives us as to the humorist's tendency to issue revocations. The difference between the outlook of a humorist and that of a 'Christian-religious' individual indicates that we are in no way compelled to take such revocations as seriously as does Conant. However, we do need to take seriously that Climacus's self-description as a 'humorist' and the clues the text gives as to what this means - are vital to understanding the Postscript. This idea - hinted at by both Allison and Conant but not really developed by either - deserves further exploration. The present essay has attempted to set the ball rolling in this direction.

39 We might also note that if, as Climacus claims in the above quote, the parody is in the plan of the Fragments (and I can see that this might indeed be the case for the layout of the Postscript too), there is no need to infer from this that the text itself (in the case of the Postscript) is parodic. Conant does make this inference - but note that Climacus does not claim that the actual text is parodic.

40 KWN 201.

41 C. Stephen Evans, Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: the Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1983, 204. (Evans himself asserts this view, rather than adequately supporting it. I have added the word 'Christian', since Evans's exact phrasing raises questions about humor's relation to Religiousness A which, while important in their own right, need not concern us here.)

42 MWS 279 n29. Note that Conant here seems to confute Climacus and Kierkegaard, despite having criticised other commentators for doing this.

43 Søren Kierkegaard, "A First and Last Declaration," appended to the end of the Postscript in un-numbered pages (p.626 in the Hong's translation), following Climacus's "An Understanding with the Reader," and signed "S. Kierkegaard."

44 In KWN, Conant suggests the following way of reading the Postscript: "... if what one seeks is a mode of writing that can help the philosophically-inclined reader to overcome his 'forgetfulness,' then what is required is a literary form which will avoid 'dogmatizing' and which allows the author 'to withdraw himself' in such a manner that the reader is left to confront himself" (KWN 204). But a pseudonymous author issuing 'directions' as to how his work should be read is hardly going to achieve this end.

An earlier, fuller version of this article was published in Religious Studies, 33:2 (1997), 181-202, under the title: "A funny thing happened to me on the way to salvation: Climacus as humorist in Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript." My grateful thanks to that journal and to Cambridge University Press for permission to use that material again here. I am also grateful to Michael Lotti, Gordon Marino, Jeff Mason, Paul Muench, Stephen Mulhall, Anthony Radd and Michael Weston for comments on earlier versions of the article.