

# Reconsidering the Relationship Between *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

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In this paper I argue that there is a discontinuity underlying Climacus' conception of the absolute paradox between the time of publication of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.<sup>1</sup> The discontinuity can be explained by a change in the way that he conceives of sin. In *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus places most emphasis on what he calls the difference of sin when he addresses the absolute paradox. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, by contrast, the absolute paradox is said to be that the eternal came into existence in time. Whereas the difference of sin plays a very significant role in *Philosophical Fragments* when the absolute paradox is addressed, its role is notoriously absent in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. This marks a discontinuity in Climacus' conception of the absolute paradox. In the course of this paper, it will be made clear how this discontinuity arises and what its ramifications are. It will be argued that there is a change in his conception of sin; this in turn leads to a change in the conceptual role played by »the eternal« [*det Evige*]. It will be argued that this change in Climacus' thinking does not point to an inconsistency in his project, but rather indicates the recognition of a conceptual shortcoming in *Philosophical Fragments*. This discussion will be accomplished in three sections. In the first section a discussion is devoted to the significance of sin in *Philosophical Fragments*, especially with regard to the claim that sin accounts for the absolute difference between the god and a human being. In the second section the significance of sin and the conceptual role of the eternal in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* will be discussed. As will be seen, the absolute difference between the god and a human being is no longer sin; instead, the eternal takes over a central role in accounting for this absolute difference. In the third section an extended analysis is given to the discontinuity between these two texts. I conclude that this reading of the

texts offers the most sympathetic reading of Kierkegaard's works published under the pseudonym »Johannes Climacus.« In particular, my reading has the explanatory advantage of accounting for why it is so notoriously difficult to see exactly what the absolute paradox means in this part of Kierkegaard's authorship.

## I.

In *Philosophical Fragments*,<sup>2</sup> Climacus claims that there is an absolute difference between the god and a human being. The god is referred to as the unknown; a human being can know nothing about the god. But since it is the very nature of a thinker to want to discover something that thought cannot think, the understanding continually tries to reach the limits of thinking. Climacus does not argue for this view of that the nature of thinking is; rather he takes it to be basic, and thus it is part of this view of his view of human nature. When the understanding reaches the limits of its domain, it becomes disturbed; for at its very limits the understanding collides with the unknown. This unknown, according to Climacus, is the god; since it is unknown – and in principle cannot be known – the understanding cannot ascribe any properties to it (SKS 4, 244, 245; KW VII 39). Yet on account of its passion, the understanding is attracted to this unknown and continually collides with it (SKS 4, 249; KW VII 44). The understanding correctly perceives the god as the unknown, but this perception gives no content to the thought of the god; and since this thought has no content other than sheer ambiguity, it is unsatisfying to the understanding. This unknown, which Climacus calls the frontier that is continually arrived at (SKS 4, 249; KW VII 44), is what the understanding wants to grasp securely in thought. Nevertheless, on account of its utter lack of content, it is impossible for it to be thought.

When the understanding confronts this unknown in passion, the situation in which it finds itself is, according to Climacus, paradoxical. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus accounts for the paradoxicalness by appealing to two elements. The first element consists in the very idea that in order to come to know something about the unknown (i.e., the god), one must first come to know that it is absolutely different from him. The second element is that in order to know that there is this absolute difference, one would have to be able to understand it, but in fact he cannot understand it at all even in principle, on account of the very limits of the understanding (SKS 4, 251; KW VII 46). What accounts for the paradoxicalness of this

situation is that there is an absolute difference between the god and a human being. It is on account of this absolute difference that, although the understanding wants to be able to discover and know something about this absolute difference, it cannot.

Climacus goes on to explain what accounts for this absolute difference: it is not due to the fact that a human being exists in the temporal realm but rather is due to sin (SKS 4, 251; KW VII 46, 47). According to Climacus, sin has its basis in that which a human being has acted on or caused (SKS 4, 251; KW VII 47). In his discussion of non-Socratic view – in contrast with the Socratic view – he equates sin with the individual's being in untruth. The god is said to be the one who teaches the individual that he is in the state of sin or untruth; and, in doing so, the god gives him the condition for receiving the truth, which the individual had lost precisely through the act of sinning.

The most important point to emphasize in relation to the topic at hand is that the reason the absolute paradox arises is due exclusively to the absolute difference of sin. Climacus is quite clear about this point in *Philosophical Fragments*. It is on account of sin that the understanding is confronted with the absolute paradox; and it is on account of sin that there is an absolute difference between the god and a human being (SKS 4, 251; KW VII 47). Somehow, sin gets in the way of the understanding when it tries to know something about the god. The implicit idea here seems to be that if the individual had not sinned – that is, had not committed some action – then he could possibly come to discover and know something about the god; but according to the assumption of the non-Socratic view, the individual has indeed sinned. Climacus does not address precisely the nature of sin other than to discuss it exclusively in terms of that which accounts for the limits of the understanding of an individual human being, and that which accounts for the understanding's being confronted with the absolute paradox.

## II.

In contrast with what he wrote in *Philosophical Fragments*, where it is sin that accounts for there being an absolute difference between the god and a human being, Climacus holds a very different view of what accounts for this difference when he writes *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.<sup>3</sup> Here, it is no longer sin but rather something *else* which accounts for the absolute difference between them; nor is it sin which accounts for the inability of a

human being to understand the absolute paradox. In the place of sin, which in *Philosophical Fragments* is described as that which is caused by the action of a human being, Climacus now maintains that the absolute difference is not due to something that a human being has done, but rather is due to the very nature of the existence of the human being. What ever might be at issue here with regard to the nature of a human being's existence, it certainly does *not* have to do with the conception of sin given in *Philosophical Fragments*. Instead, Climacus points to there being a fundamental ontological difference between the god and a human being. This difference is not one that is posited by the causal activity of a human being, but rather is a difference that is there prior to and independent of any human action at all. In order to establish what kind of ontological difference to which Climacus is pointing, it is fitting to refer to the text itself.

In the context of a discussion of why speculative thinking cannot mediate the absolute paradox, Climacus writes the following:

But the absolute difference between God and a human being is simply this, that a human being is an individual existing being (and this holds for the best brain just as fully as for the most obtuse), whose essential task therefore cannot be to think *sub specie aeterni*, because as long as he exists, he himself, although eternal, is essentially an existing person and the essential for him must therefore be inwardness in existence; God, however, is the infinite one, who is eternal. As soon as I make the understanding of the paradox commensurate with the difference between being more or less intellectually endowed (a difference that still does not ever transcend being human, unless someone were to become so brilliant that he became not only a human being but also God), my discussion of understanding *eo ipso* demonstrates that what I have understood is not an absolute paradox but a relative paradox, because the only possible understanding of the absolute paradox is that it cannot be understood (SKS 7, 199; KW XII.1 217, 218).

In this passage of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, it is an ontological difference between the god and a human being to which Climacus points. Before addressing the nature of this ontological difference, it is first of all crucial to point out that it indicates a very significant departure from the approach Climacus took in *Philosophical Fragments*. Here in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the difference between the god and a human being is something that not only can be known but also can be understood. Con-

trary to what was put forth in *Philosophical Fragments*, the difference between the god and a human being is accessible to human reason after all. Since it is accessible to human reason, it cannot be sin, because the very definition of sin in *Philosophical Fragments* was that it made knowledge of the absolute difference between the god and human being completely beyond the capacity of the understanding. Here in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, however, the difference between the god and a human being is accessible to reason without being sheer ambiguity. Although this is not stated explicitly by Climacus, it is entailed by what he writes. For since there is content to this thought that is not entirely ambiguous, and since part of the content of this thought concerns God, it can be inferred that God is no longer being conceived of as the unknown. Indeed, far from being the unknown, the god is called the infinite one who is eternal.

Whereas sin is no longer conceived of as accounting for the absolute difference between the god and a human being, it is important to note that a discussion of sin is far from absent in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Indeed, sin is brought into discussion at several significant parts of the text. Nevertheless, Climacus does not discuss sin in contexts where the issue at hand is the difference between the god and a human being. Whereas in *Philosophical Fragments* the issue of the difference of sin was broached in order to show why the situation of the understanding was paradoxical when it tried to give content to the thought of the god, Climacus' approach in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* has changed. What has changed is the way in which sin is equated with existence itself, or with existing (SKS 7, 191; KW XII.1 208; SKS 7, 245, 246; KW XII.1 270, 271). Whereas in *Philosophical Fragment* sin is conceived of as having been posited by a human being's causal activity, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* sin is conceived of as having been posited when the individual comes into existence. In fact, it appears that sin is not to be distinguished from the very existence of a human being

In order to establish that this discontinuity does in fact exist between these two texts, attention will be directed to passages in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* where Climacus discusses sin and the consciousness of sin. Since the concepts of sin and the absolute paradox are closely related in *Philosophical Fragments*, it is worth exploring what implications this discontinuity has for the way in which the absolute paradox is conceived of in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The first of these passages to be discussed is made in the famous section where Climacus argues that truth is subjectivity; it reads as follows:

The paradox emerges when the eternal truth and existing are placed together, but each time existing is accentuated, the paradox becomes clearer and clearer. Viewed Socratically, the knower was an existing person, but now the existing person is accentuated in such a way that existence has made an essential change in him.

Let us now call the individual's untruth sin. Viewed eternally, he cannot be in sin or be presupposed to have been eternally in sin. Therefore, by coming into existence . . . , he becomes a sinner. He is not born as a sinner in the sense that he is presupposed to be a sinner before he is born, but he is born in sin and as a sinner (SKS 7, 191; KW XII.1 208).

Notice that in this passage sin is not described as accounting for the absolute difference between the god and a human being. Notice also that sin does not arise on account of the causal activity of the individual. Instead, what accounts for sin is nothing other than the individual's coming into existence. Clearly, coming into existence is distinct from the causal activity of the individual that was discussed in *Philosophical Fragments*. The discovery of this fact serves as very good evidence that Climacus is departing – whether wittingly or unwittingly – from his previous conception of sin.

This distinction is subtle but nevertheless a significant one, and for that reason some further discussion of it is warranted. In *Philosophical Fragments*, sin is a state into which a human being enters by his own cause or action; and it is on account of this cause or action that posits the absolute difference between a human being and the god. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, however, sin is posited precisely by the human being's coming into existence. There is no mention of, let alone emphasis upon, the individual's being responsible for positing this difference. What accounts for sin being posited in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is that it simply arises in an individual as a result of his very existence; sin is *not* accounted for by what the individual has done. In other words, sin is *not* posited by his own causal activity after he has come into existence. It is precisely the way in which sin is equated with existence that is a departure from what was initially claimed in *Philosophical Fragments*. For in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, existence itself is conceived of as essentially sinful; the nature of sin is simply the nature of the human being's existence, and not his actions.

The second passage to be discussed is made briefly by Climacus in a footnote. In its entirety, the footnote reads as follows: »The consciousness of sin is the paradox, and about this the paradox is again very consistent, that

the existing person does not discover it by himself but gets to know it from outside. The identity is thereby broken« (SKS 7, 485; KW XII.1 534). On the one hand, perhaps it makes sense that Climacus makes this move, given what he previously wrote in *Philosophical Fragments* with regard to the non-Socratic view. As was mentioned in that earlier text, it is the god who teaches a human being that he is in sin; without the god as this teacher, it is logically impossible, according to Climacus, for the learner to discover this. On the other hand, it is important to point out that in this passage in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* what Climacus means by the consciousness of sin is *not* that the individual becomes aware of the absolute difference between the god and a human being. He is very explicit about what he means by the consciousness of sin, for as he goes on to explain that it is awareness that, by coming into existence, the individual is not merely in the process of becoming, but by having entered into existence, he has thereby become a sinner. Climacus confirms this again later when he writes:

»To exist [*existere*]« generally signifies only that by having come into existence the individual does exist [*er til*] and is becoming; now it signifies that by having come into existence he has become a sinner (SKS 7, 530; KW XII.1 583).

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, when the individual gains the consciousness of sin, what he gains awareness of is simply his own existence, which is not distinct from his being a sinner. It is his very existence that accounts for his sin, not any action or cause on his behalf. Climacus makes this point very clear yet once more when he writes that: »In the consciousness of sin, the individual becomes aware of himself in his difference from the universally human, which is itself is only an awareness of what it means to exist *qua* human being« (SKS 7, 531; KW XII.1 584). Note what Climacus does *not* say here: it is not the absolute difference between the god and a human being of which one becomes aware. Rather, it is the difference between one's own existence and the idea of the universally human. Thus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* sin concerns not the issue of distinguishing between a human being and the god, but instead the issue of distinguishing between a human being and the universally human.

### III.

Clearly, these passages serve as good evidence for the claim that there is a substantial discontinuity in Climacus' thought between *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. What has been established thus

far is that the discontinuity concerns his conception of sin. However, it can now be shown that this first discontinuity entails that the role played by his conception of the eternal is likewise discontinuous. The claim being established here is not that Climacus conceives of the eternal differently, but rather that the structural role of the eternal changes. This point will be established in the pages to follow by pointing out the relevant textual evidence.

In the latter part of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* – specifically, in the section entitled »The Issue in *Fragments*« – Climacus conceives of the absolute paradox in a way that omits any mention at all of the difference of sin. He maintains, for instance, that: »The paradox is primarily that God, the eternal [*den Evige*], has entered into time as an individual human being« (SKS 7, 541; KW XII.1 596).<sup>4</sup> The way that he prefaces his remarks about the paradox in this passage is curious (i.e., that the paradox is »primarily« . . .). Perhaps, however, it is fitting, given the fact that elsewhere in the text he also maintains that the paradox consists in the consciousness of sin. Yet in the context of this passage, and all others wherein the absolute paradox is discussed, there is no mention at all of the qualitative difference of sin. Perhaps it might be argued on Climacus' behalf that what he additionally has in mind here *just is* the difference of sin, and *that* is the reason he prefaces his remarks about the absolute paradox. However, that potential argument is dubious, for whereas previously in *Philosophical Fragments* the difference of sin played a crucial role in his discussion of the absolute paradox, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* it is notoriously absent. Such an argument would be offered only by someone taken in by the false assumption that there is such continuity between these two texts with regard to Climacus' conception of sin. For, as shown above, a close reading of the texts proves otherwise.

Given the absence of a discussion of the qualitative difference of sin, the question that naturally ought to arise is why sin is *not* brought into the discussion at crucial points concerning the absolute paradox. The reason this question naturally should arise is because, given that Climacus is presumably following up on what he initially wrote about the absolute paradox in *Philosophical Fragments*, it is quite startling to find that in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* his discussions of the absolute difference between the god and a human being lacks *any* mention of the qualitative difference of sin.<sup>5</sup> This question perhaps does not arise so naturally to the reader who simply assumes that Climacus is consistent with regard to conception of the absolute paradox within these two texts. Indeed, one might be tempted to give such a defense of Climacus on the grounds that *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is a continuation of what was first introduced in *Philosophical*

*Fragments*. For, it might be argued, that is what a postscript is – he is simply adding to or fleshing out the outline that he put forth initially in *Philosophical Fragments*. However, if the reader carefully attempts to make sense of the claims made in these two works – especially with regard to the significance of the absolute paradox in its conceptual relationship to the eternal and to sin – then this question arises immediately on account of a glaring discontinuity between them.

As it turns out, other than linking sin to existence itself, Climacus does not discuss the nature of sin in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Now, on the one hand, there may be a good reason for his not doing this. For one thing, it might be argued that he need not do so, since he has already sufficiently established sin's nature in *Philosophical Fragments*. After all, a postscript to a previous work presumably builds upon what was said previously without necessarily repeating it yet again. On the other hand, what he does discuss at length when he broaches the topic of the absolute paradox is the eternal [*det Evige*], and his conception of the eternal has significant implications. As will now be shown, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* his primary conception of the eternal is with timelessness. Not only is the eternal as timelessness given great emphasis, it is also what accounts for the ontological or qualitative difference between the god and a human being. It is important to point out that this position that I am attributing to Climacus is only implicit in the text of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Despite its being only implicit, it is nevertheless the one to which he must be committed if a coherent reading of the text is to be given concerning his conception of the absolute paradox that is put forth in the text. If my reading and my argument regarding these texts are correct, then Climacus' conception of the absolute paradox in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is a departure from his conception of it previously put forth in *Philosophical Fragments*.<sup>6</sup> It will be argued that this discontinuity exists for the reason that Climacus is taking back a claim that he initially put forth in *Philosophical Fragments*: that the absolute difference between the god and a human being is the qualitative difference of sin. The reason he is taking it back is because in *Philosophical Fragments* he conceives of sin in such a way that it creates conceptual difficulties for his discussion of the absolute paradox.

The conceptual problem is that in order for him to establish the point that Christianity is paradoxical or that the individual's relationship to the god is a paradoxical one, he must either posit some knowledge of the god, or else he must ascribe some properties to the god. For example, if nothing at all can be known about X, then it cannot be established that there is any-

thing paradoxical about X, let alone that there can be a possible relationship between a human being and X which is paradoxical. This is the problem which Climacus faces in *Philosophical Fragments*, since in that work he says that the god is nothing other than the unknown; and as the unknown, no properties whatsoever can be attributed to the god. Climacus seemingly acknowledges this problem in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* since there he not only attributes properties to God, but in fact essential ones – that is, properties which define the very nature of God. One of these essential properties that he assigns to God is that He is not in a process of becoming. From what Climacus writes in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* concerning existence and becoming, it is entailed that God does not have his being in time. After all, if He did, then that would be counter to all thinking, according to Climacus. But the reason that he gives in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* for its being counter to all thinking is different from the one he offers in *Philosophical Fragments*. Since this point is an important one, the next few paragraphs will establish that this reading of the text is warranted.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the underlying problem for the existing individual is that he has his being *in time*. Climacus points to two distinct aspects of the problem. The first aspect concerns point that having one's existence in time places limits on the extent to which one can have knowledge of the nature of the universe. To that extent, having one's being in time results in an epistemological difficulty. Specifically, Climacus points out that existence in time prevents the individual from knowing things concerning the divine and the eternal (SKS 7, 374; KW XII.1 411). To exist in time means to be in a process of becoming. To be in this process is a difficult undertaking due to the very nature of what it means to exist in time. This difficulty involves not only the suffering which occurs simply on account of having one's being in time, but also the frustration of not being able to think thoughts which are beyond the limits of an understanding located within time. The second aspect of the underlying problem of having one's being in time is due to the ontology of a human being. It is due precisely to the fact that a human being exists in time; that is, since a human being has already come into existence, one is sinful. A substantial discussion has already been devoted to elaborating precisely this issue, and now it can be elaborated upon. Climacus maintains that sin is an existence-category that cannot be thought; to this category there corresponds the category of the paradoxical-religious, which likewise cannot be thought. However, the way in which he develops the paradoxical-religious category entails that it is thinkable in some sense in order for it to be paradoxical

to the understanding (SKS 7, 518; KW XII.1 570). Although in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* it is these two problematical aspects of existing in time to which Climacus links the absolute paradox, it is nevertheless the first of them – that is, the mere fact of the individual's existence *in time* – upon which he places most emphasis when discussing the absolute paradox. Thus it is simply one's very existence *in time* that accounts for the absolute paradox that confronts and confounds the understanding.

In a certain way, it is difficult to establish this point. After all, part of what is being proven is the negative claim that, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus does not emphasize the conceptual relationship between the absolute paradox and the qualitative difference of sin in order to account for the question of why there is an absolute paradox. Yet it might be objected that the approach being taken in this essay is one that simply omits mention of the passages in the text where Climacus does indeed discuss the relationship between the qualitative difference of sin and the absolute paradox. This objection fails, however, since it is false; for earlier in this essay, a careful analysis was given to several passages where sin's relevance for the absolute paradox is put forth by Climacus. As was found, those passages indicated a departure from the points established in *Philosophical Fragments*. The next step, therefore, is to give careful analysis to the passages in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* wherein Climacus links together the absolute paradox and the eternal wherein a similar departure from *Philosophical Fragments* is indicated.

To begin with, it is important to revisit the point that whereas in *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus is adamant that no properties can be attributed to the god, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* he does not hesitate to do so. Not only does he claim that God is a subject (SKS 7, 183; KW XII.1 199), he also is quick to assent to Aristotle's view that God is unchangeable and unmoved (SKS 7, 284; KW XII.1 312; cf. SKS 7, 393; KW XII.1 432, footnote). In addition, Climacus maintains that »God does not think, he creates, God does not exist, he is eternal« (SKS 7, 303; KW XII.1 332). Whereas in *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus seems to embrace negative theology, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* he rejects it; for one cannot consistently maintain both that the god is the unknown and that he is the one who is an eternal subject in whom there can be no change. Building upon this divine property of changelessness, Climacus goes on to note that in the realm of becoming is it possible for change to occur, and all things that exist in that realm are subject to change. Since God is essentially changeless, however, He cannot possibly change. And since God cannot

possibly change, Climacus goes on to say that God does not have His being in time; for in time, everything is *i Vorden* – that is, in a process of becoming and of change where there is both possible and actual change.

The next thing to note is that when Climacus links together God and the absolute paradox in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, it is especially upon God's qualities of being unchangeable and eternal that Climacus focuses attention. There is good reason to make this move only if the absolute paradox is to be conceived of as being paradoxical on account of its bringing together the opposite notions of being in time and being outside of time. There is an abundance of textual evidence in support of this reading of the meaning of the absolute paradox – much of which has been given above. Time and again in the text, God's properties are discussed in order to show that they are incompatible with existence in time; and then this incompatibility is appealed to in order to show that it is precisely this that accounts for the absolute paradox. A glance at some relevant passages is appropriate in order to illustrate this point.

Early on in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus states, »The basis of the paradox of Christianity is that it continually uses time and the historical in relation to the eternal [*det Evige*]« (SKS 7, 94; KW XII.1 95). Much later on, he quite clearly explains what he means by relating the historical to the eternal when he writes: »The historical is that the god, the eternal [*den Evige*] has come into existence at a specific moment in time as an individual human being« (SKS 7, 526; KW XII.1 578). The reason that the absolute paradox must be understood as pointing to the ontological nature of God's timelessness is made clear by the way in which Climacus has set up his discussion. He clearly holds that the eternal one [*den Evige*] is not in a process of becoming (SKS 7, 279; KW XII.1 306) precisely because the realm of the eternal and the realm of becoming are opposites. Since the realm of becoming is the realm of time, it follows that the eternal and the temporal are opposite realms. It is for the very reason that they are opposite realms that the absolute paradox cannot be understood, for according to Climacus, the thesis of Christianity (which is absolutely paradoxical) is that »the eternal has come into time« (SKS 7, 518; KW XII.1 570). The reason that it is so difficult for the understanding to think that very thought – namely, that the eternal has come into existence in time – is because in order for the eternal to do precisely that, it would have to do so against its very nature. In other words, it would have to »define itself as a temporality, as in time, as historical . . . . This is the paradox« (SKS 7, 484; KW XII.1 532). It is Climacus' view that in order for the existing indivi-

dual to think this thought in a coherently, one would have to be *outside* of the process of becoming; but of course it is the very nature of a human being to be *in* the process of becoming (SKS 7, 280; KW XII.1 307, 308). Therefore it is logically impossible, on Climacus' account, for a human being to think such a thought coherently.

Climacus is committed to the view that it is logically possible for the eternal to enter into time; for if it were not logically possible, it would not be possible for any mind to think it.<sup>7</sup> But rather than to speak of what is *logically possible*, Climacus speaks of what can be *thought*; and in his vernacular, he is committed to the view that is coherent to think a thought whose content is that the eternal has entered into time. However, it is a coherent thought only for a mind that thinks in the language of abstraction and *sub species aeterni* (SKS 7, 280; KW XII.1 307, 308). According to Climacus, only God can do that, since only God has his being in eternity, outside of the realm of becoming, that is to say, outside of time. For an existing human being, however, the thought that the eternal came into time must be paradoxical; put in Climacus' vernacular, it is thinkable only if one breaks with all thinking.<sup>8</sup> It is thus quite a feat for a human being to believe in the absolute paradox. Climacus maintains that the individual can in fact perform such a feat, but only in passion whereby one believes in something in opposition to the understanding. What this entails, however, is that a human being cannot coherently conceive of an event wherein an essentially timeless being enters into time.

It is important to keep clear what Climacus is and is not committed to, given the reading that has been offered in this essay. On the one hand, he is *not* committed to the view that it is logically impossible for a timeless being to enter into time; in fact he is committed to the view that such an event is logically possible, since he maintains that a *timeless* being can indeed think such a thought. On the other hand, he is committed to holding that no *human* being can think it coherently because no *human* being exists outside of time; nevertheless, Climacus maintains that a human being can begin to get a paradoxical intimation of it. What accounts for this paradoxical intimation is revelation – but whether or not this appeal to revelation is a good one is a topic to be reserved for another essay.

#### IV.

What has been established in this essay is that there is a discontinuity in Climacus' conception of the absolute paradox between *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. It was argued that this discontinuity is

due to a change in his conception of sin. Whereas this change resulted in a change in the *role* played by the eternal [*det Evige*], Climacus does not conceive of the eternal in a fundamentally different way. Despite the change in his conception of sin, it was argued that this pointed to an improvement in his thought. An alternative reading of these two works might be used in order to levy against Climacus the criticism that he simply holds inconsistent beliefs regarding the absolute paradox, and that this inconsistency explains why he has differing conceptions of sin and of the role of the eternal. Against that interpretive option, it was argued that those tensions pointed to a development in Climacus' thought that indicates his recognition of a conceptual problem regarding his presentation of the absolute paradox as initially stated in *Philosophical Fragments*. Although Climacus does not explicitly state that he recognizes this error, it has been argued that he does seem to do so implicitly.<sup>9</sup> This charitable reading of Climacus' two texts will work only if the absolute paradox is conceived of in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as having to do primarily with the ontological issue of God having His being outside of time, and only if this ontological issue accounts for there being an absolute difference between God and a human being. Since there is an abundance of textual evidence in support of this charitable reading, there is good reason to think that it is the correct reading of these two significant texts in the Kierkegaardian *corpus*.

## Notes

1. The amount of time that elapsed between these two texts was not long at all – only twenty months. *Philosophical Fragments* was originally published on June 13, 1844, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* was published on February 27, 1846.
2. In referring to this text, I will utilize the following editions. For the Danish edition, I will be referring to the fourth volume of *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter*, edited by N. J. Cappelørn, J. Garff, J. Kondrup, A. McKinnon, and F. H. Mortensen, Copenhagen, Gads Forlag, 1997. The English translation is volume seven of *Kierkegaard's Writings*, translated and edited by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985. When referring to these texts within the body of this essay, I will refer first to the page number in the fourth volume of *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter* and then to the page number of volume seven of *Kierkegaard's Writings*. For example, (SKS 4, 251; KW VII 46) refers to page 251 of volume four of *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter*, which corresponds to page 46 of volume seven of *Kierkegaard's Writings*.
3. In referring to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, I will utilize the following editions. For the Danish edition, I will be referring to the seventh volume of *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter*, edited by N. J. Cappelørn, J. Garff, J. Knudsen, J. Kondrup, and A. McKinnon, Copenhagen, Gads Forlag, 2002. The English translation is volume twelve of *Kierkegaard's Writings*, translated and edited by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992; this volume is divided into yet two other volumes, the first of which is the translated text, and the second of which is the scholarly apparatus belonging to the translated text. When referring to these texts within the body of this essay, I will refer first to the page number in the seventh volume of *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter* and then to the page number of volume twelve of *Kierkegaard's Writings*. For example, (SKS 7, 191; KW XII.1 208) refers to page 191 of volume seven of *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter*, which corresponds to page 208 of volume twelve of *Kierkegaard's Writings*.
4. See also, for example, (SKS 7, 193; KW XII.1 210), where Climacus writes that the absurd, not the absolute paradox, »is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time . . . . «
5. Compare, for instance, (SKS 7, 374, 375; KW XII.1 412, 413; SKSVII 446/KW XII.1 492), where Climacus discusses the absolute difference between God and a human being without any mention of sin.
6. This point may be controversial, in so far it is not to be found in any of the book length studies of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* available in English (e.g., C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's »Fragments» and »Postscript»: the Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1983; Niels Thulstrup, *Commentary on Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: with a New Introduction*, translated by Robert J. Widenmann, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984; Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: a Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1996).
7. It is worth pointing out that, according to Climacus, there is no absolute paradox from God's point of view, i.e., the point of view of eternity or timelessness (SKS 7, 194, 195; KW XII.1 212).
8. It is important to emphasize that Climacus holds that the absolute paradox is beyond all thinking and not just beyond some kinds of thinking. The reason it is necessary to add this point is that Climacus distinguishes between subjective thinking and objective thinking. Given this distinction, there may be a temptation to attribute to Climacus the view that the absolute paradox is thinkable for the subjective thinker but not for the objective thinker (i.e., the speculative philosopher). This

temptation ought to be avoided, however, for very good reasons. I discuss this matter in a separate essay »How is an Existence–Communication Possible?« in the book entitled *Kierkegaard and the Word*, edited by Gordon Marino and Poul Houe, Copenhagen, Ritzel's Forlag, 2002.

9. In an essay entitled »Kierkegaard's Conceptual Confusion,« *Kierkegaardiana*, Vol. 20, 1999, pp. 71–82, Alastair McKinnon argues for a thesis not unrelated to the one made in this essay. Using a series of entries from Kierkegaard's journals over a year after the publication of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, McKinnon argues that Kierkegaard adopts a new and different conception of paradox and absurd after seeing that there is a distinction between the question »Did X happen?« and »Is X a paradox or the absurd?« If the points made earlier in this essay are correct, the roots of this change in Kierkegaard's thought are to be found even earlier than McKinnon suggests.