

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
**AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY IN
KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS**

Edited by

Joseph Westfall

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC

LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK

1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

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First published in Great Britain 2019

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3500-5596-7

ePDF: 978-1-3500-5596-4

eBook: 978-1-3500-5597-1

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

Printed and bound in Great Britain

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BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING PLC
50 BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NY 10018, USA

In Memoriam

Robert L. Perkins

June 23, 1930–March 20, 2018

A True Scholar, Teacher, and Friend

PERKINS' TRADITION OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

AND ACTION

—David Woodell

PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY: "LIKE THE GREAT MASTERS BEFORE"

—Dana Yana

PERKINS AND DISSENTING EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

—Robert C. Roberts

PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL ONTOGENESIS

AND A THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

—Richard Swartz

PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL ONTOGENESIS

A COLLEGIATE PRACTICE

—Robert Trumbull

PERKINS AND THE HUMANIST

—M. G. Peay

PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITY AND

COMMUNITY IN PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL WORK

—David Woodell

PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL ONTOGENESIS AND

PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL ONTOGENESIS

—David Woodell

PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL ONTOGENESIS AND

PERKINS' EDUCATIONAL ONTOGENESIS

—Edward J. Murray

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Joseph Westfall is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Houston-Downtown. He is the author of *The Kierkegaardian Author: Authorship and Performance in Kierkegaard's Literary and Dramatic Criticism* (Walter de Gruyter, 2007), as well as numerous articles on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, twentieth-century Continental philosophy, aesthetics, and the philosophy of the arts. He is the editor of *The Continental Philosophy of Film Reader* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and coeditor of *Foucault and Nietzsche: A Critical Encounter* (Bloomsbury, 2018). He also serves on the editorial board of the journal *Evental Aesthetics* and is a member of the steering committee of the Kierkegaard, Religion, and Culture Group of the American Academy of Religion.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Danish

- ASKB *Auktionsprotokol over Søren Kierkegaards Bogsamling*, ed. H. P. Rohde (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Bibliotek, 1955).
- B&A *Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Niels Thulstrup, vols. I–II (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1953–1954).
- Pap. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, and E. Torsting, vols. I–XI-3 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909–1948).
- SKS *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, and Johnny Kondrup, vols. 1–28, K1–K28 (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997–2013).

English

- AN *Armed Neutrality*, in *The Point of View: On My Work as an Author; The Point of View for My Work as an Author; Armed Neutrality*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XXII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- ANI *Armed Neutrality*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).
- BA *The Book on Adler*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XXIV (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- C *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, in *Christian Discourses; The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XVII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- CA *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, edited and translated by Reidar Thomte, in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. VIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- CD *Christian Discourses*, in *Christian Discourses; The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XVII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- CI *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates; Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and

- Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- CIC *The Concept of Irony*, translated by Lee M. Capel (London: Collins, 1966).
- COR *The Corsair Affair and Articles Related to the Writings*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).
- CUPI *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Volume I: Text*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XII:1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- CUPH *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, edited and translated by Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- CUPSL *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by David F. Swenson, completed after his death by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).
- DCF *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, translated by Sylvia Walsh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
- EO1 *Either/Or, Part I*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. III (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- EO2 *Either/Or, Part II*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. IV (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- EOFL *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, abridged and ed. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 1992).
- EOS1 *Either/Or, Volume I*, translated by David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, revised by Howard A. Johnson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).
- EUD *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. V (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- FPOSL *From the Papers of One Still Living*, in *Early Polemical Writings*, edited and translated by Julia Watkin, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- FSE *For Self-examination*, in *For Self-examination; Judge for Yourself!*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XXI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- FT *Fear and Trembling*, in *Fear and Trembling: Repetition*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. VI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- FTL *Fear and Trembling*, in *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness unto Death*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1941).
- JCC *Johannes Climacus, or: A Life of Doubt*, translated by T. H. Croxall (London: Serpent's Tail, 2001).

- JFY *Judge for Yourself!*, in *For Self-examination; Judge for Yourself!*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XXI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk, vols. I–VI (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978).
- JSK *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard*, selected, edited, and translated by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).
- KJN *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, vols. I–XI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007ff.).
- OMWA *On My Work as an Author*, in *The Point of View: On My Work as an Author; The Point of View for My Work as an Author; Armed Neutrality*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XXII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- PC *Practice in Christianity*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XX (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
- PF *Philosophical Fragments*, in *Philosophical Fragments; Johannes Climacus*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. VII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- PV *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, in *The Point of View: On My Work as an Author; The Point of View for My Work as an Author; Armed Neutrality*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XXII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- PVL *The Point of View for My Work as an Author: A Report to History, and Related Writings*, translated by Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper, 1962).
- R *Repetition*, in *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. VI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- RPC *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, translated by M. G. Piety (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- SLW *Stages on Life's Way*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
- SUD *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XIX (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- SUDH *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, translated by Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 1989).

- TA *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XIV (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- TC *Training in Christianity and the Edifying Discourse Which "Accompanied" It*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).
- TDIO *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. X (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- TM *The Moment and Late Writings*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XXIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- TSI *The Single Individual: Two Notes Concerning My Work as an Author, in The Point of View: On My Work as an Author; The Point of View for My Work as an Author; Armed Neutrality*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XXII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- UDVS *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XV (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- WA *Without Authority: The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air; Two Ethical-Religious Essays; Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays; An Upbuilding Discourse; Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XVIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- WL *Works of Love*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, vol. XVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

Chapter 5

KIERKEGAARD THE HUMORIST

M. G. Piety

Introduction

Something doesn't add up in the popular perception of Kierkegaard. His writings are often considered dark and impenetrable, yet he is also one of the most widely read and beloved of philosophers among the general public. How can that be? The answer is not simply that Kierkegaard is one of the greatest Danish prose stylists, but that, contrary to his reputation for gloominess, he is one of the country's greatest humorists as well. "There can scarcely be an experienced reader of Kierkegaard," observes Danish scholar Helge Hultberg, "who is unaware that Kierkegaard is the funniest man in Denmark."¹ Hultberg was not a contemporary of Kierkegaard. His essay is from 1988, so what he is actually saying is that Kierkegaard is the funniest man in Danish history, funnier even than that famous Danish humorist, Victor Borge.

Many Kierkegaard scholars are aware of the importance of the concept of humor in Kierkegaard's thought. The first comprehensive study of this was Julius Schousboe's *Om Begrebet Humor Hos Søren Kierkegaard* (on Kierkegaard's concept of humor) from 1925.² Since that time there have been several dissertations on the topic,³ a dozen or so articles,⁴ and most recently a study entitled *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard*, by Lydia B.

1. Helge Hultberg, "Kierkegaard som Humorist," *Kierkegaardiana* 14 (1988), pp. 49–56. My translation.

2. Julius Schousboe, *Om Begrebet Humor Hos Søren Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Arnold Busk, 1925).

3. Annelise Daab, "Ironie und Humor bei Kierkegaard," diss., Heidelberg Universität, 1926; Lloyd Ellison Parrill, "The Concept of Humor in the Pseudonymous Works of Søren Kierkegaard," diss., Drew University, 1975, and Lowell Allen Nissen, "Kierkegaard on Humor," M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1958.

4. There are too many articles on the concept of humor (and/or comedy) in Kierkegaard's thought to list here. A comprehensive bibliography of these articles can be found at the end of Thomas C. Oden's *The Humor of Kierkegaard: An Anthology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Amir.⁵ But while there are two articles in Danish with the titles "Kierkegaard som humorist" (Kierkegaard as humorist),⁶ fewer scholars outside Denmark seem aware that Kierkegaard is himself a humorist. This chapter looks first at how Kierkegaard came to be viewed as dark and depressing. It then looks briefly at his concept of humor, or of the comic, before tracing the path of humor in his authorship from his earliest published works through some of his most famous later ones. This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive account of humor in Kierkegaard but merely a demonstration that humor is one of the aspects of Kierkegaard's writings that give them such a broad and enduring appeal with the general reading public.

The Origin of the Image of Kierkegaard as a "Melancholy Dane"

Danish Kierkegaard scholar Tonny Aalgaard Olesen asserts that "Kierkegaard scholarship for the past 150 years has had a tendency to invoke Kierkegaard in the shape of the melancholy Dane, particularly disposed to the tragic and whose religious philosophy expressed a passionate gloominess."⁷ *Kierkegaard, The Melancholy Dane* was, in fact, the title of one of the first scholarly works on Kierkegaard in English.⁸ This view of Kierkegaard may be partly the result of the fact that Kierkegaard was a Christian thinker. There are those who would argue that Christianity is itself a gloomy interpretation of human existence, at least to the extent that it would appear to emphasize sin. How could Kierkegaard's thought be anything but dark and depressing? Indeed, W.H. Auden, in his essay "A Knight of Doleful Countenance," describes Kierkegaard as a melancholy author, an author who could hear only "one theme in the New Testament, ... the theme of suffering and self-sacrifice."⁹

Kierkegaard does sometimes seem to depict Christian existence as one of unrelenting suffering. One might be tempted to conclude from this, as so many less-experienced readers of Kierkegaard clearly have, that he was a fundamentally negative thinker. But to do this is to forget that Kierkegaard saw much of his

5. Lydia B. Amir, *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014). John Lippitt's, *Humor and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (London/New York: MacMillan Press/St. Martin's Press, 2000) could perhaps be added to this list, but Lippitt looks at both irony and humor rather than at humor alone.

6. Edvard Lehmann, "Kierkegaard som Humorist," *Gads Danske Magasin*, 8 (1913), pp. 292–301, and Hultberg, "Kierkegaard som Humorist."

7. Tonny Aalgaard Olesen, "The Painless Contradiction: A Note on the Reception of the Theory of the Comic in *Postscript*," trans. Paul A. Bauer, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2005), pp. 339–350.

8. H. V. Martin, *Kierkegaard: The Melancholy Dane* (London: Epworth Press, 1950).

9. W.H. Auden, "A Knight of Doleful Countenance," *The New Yorker* (May 25, 1968), p. 151.

literary output as serving an essentially "corrective" function.¹⁰ That is, his occasional association of Christianity with suffering was a "corrective" directed against a bourgeois Christianity that associated Christianity with material prosperity. Kierkegaard knew that the picture he presented of Christianity was sometimes too harsh,¹¹ but he felt that such exaggeration, if one may call it that, was necessary to shake bourgeois Christianity out of a comfortable complacency in which salvation was viewed as a "done deal" and in which Grace, consequently, was an anachronism.¹²

Kierkegaard's objective in, as he describes it himself, "reintroducing Christianity into Christendom"¹³ was not to replace bourgeois complacency with relentless suffering but to replace a superficial kind of contentment with a deeper, more genuine kind of contentment, a kind of contentment that could be had, he believed, only by relating oneself properly to transcendent truth.

One would be hard-pressed to find any essentially negative messages in Kierkegaard's works—even those with the apparently negative titles such as *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death*. Take, for example, *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard's meditation on despair as an expression, or more correctly, as the definitive expression, of sin. Most of what Kierkegaard qualifies as despair in *The Sickness unto Death* is not actually experienced by the individual as such. Despair in Kierkegaard's technical sense can even take the form of happiness,¹⁴ so *The Sickness unto Death* does not present a phenomenology of human experience as bleak and depressing. The objective of that work is to make clear that even when despair is experienced as such, this is actually a positive step in an individual's development, a step forward in the direction of the complete eradication of despair in both its technical and ordinary senses.

10. See, for example, SKS 22, 194, 208, and SKS 24, 56. See also the chapter entitled "Authorship/Corrective" in Frederick Sontag's *A Kierkegaard Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), pp. 23–31.

11. Emil Boesen, a close friend of Kierkegaard, visited him in the hospital just before his death. Boesen asked Kierkegaard whether he would like to modify any of the statements he had made in his attack on the Danish Lutheran church. "They don't correspond to actuality," Boesen explained. "They are too harsh." "And so they must be," replied Kierkegaard, "or they won't help." This statement corresponds with Kierkegaard's description of his picture of Christianity as a "corrective." See note 10 above.

12. That is, Kierkegaard's harsh portrayals of Christianity would appear to be an expression of Aristotle's dictum in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that when one is aware of a certain tendency in oneself to err in a particular direction away from the truth, one needs to aim to overshoot the truth in the opposite direction. Only in that way, Aristotle explained, could one be confident of hitting the mark.

13. See, for example, SKS 12, 49; SKS 13, 25; SKS 16, 24 and 103; SKS 20, 261; SKS 21, 152 and 289; SKS 22, 314; SKS 23, 18; SKS 24, 56 and 74; SKS 25, 155.

14. See, for example, SUD, 25 / SKS 11, 141.

Unfortunately, the earliest interpreters of Kierkegaard were Danish theologians who appear to have felt obliged to defend the Danish Lutheran Church, and the Danish people, against Kierkegaard's attacks.¹⁵ That was much easier to do, of course, if Kierkegaard's harsh portrayals of Christianity were taken literally rather than as the corrective he had intended them to be.

Another probable origin of Kierkegaard's reputation as a melancholy thinker comes from his own references in his journals and papers to his purported struggles with melancholy and depression.¹⁶ It is well known, however, that as Kierkegaard puts it, "the melancholy have the best sense of the comic," so the fact that Kierkegaard appears to have struggled privately with depression should not obscure how humorous are many of his published works.¹⁷

So much for the reasons Kierkegaard is often thought to be a dark, melancholy thinker. That he is not more widely appreciated as a humorist is certainly due, at least in part, to the pervasiveness of this picture of him, but it is likely also due to the fact that philosophers tend to look down on humor¹⁸ and not to have much of a sense for it themselves. Philosophical works are generally written in a very straightforward and humorless way, not unlike the operating manuals that come with many household appliances.¹⁹

Such a direct manner of communication was appropriate, according to Kierkegaard, when the truth one was attempting to communicate to the reader was not essentially related to his or her individual existence as such. Direct communication was completely ineffective, he believed, however, when the truth in question was essentially related to the existence of the reader. Take, for example, what is known in the philosophy of mind as "raw feels," which is to say subjective experiences as such. There is no way to communicate directly in language what it is like to have a particular experience such as that of eating an ice cream cone, or to take examples more apposite to Kierkegaard's authorship, the experiences of shame, guilt, joy, anxiety, and love.

Kierkegaard's preferred method of communication is indirect. Humor, as we will see below, is particularly suited to this type of communication. Humor is, in fact, a means, according to Kierkegaard, by which religiousness can conceal itself. That is, humor, in the wording of the most explicitly humorous of Kierkegaard's many

15. See, for example, Aage Kabell, *Kierkegaard Studiet in Norden* (Copenhagen: H. Hagerup, 1948), especially Chapter II, "Studiets Begyndelse," pp. 91–134.

16. See, for example, SKS 20, 97 (NB: 141), as well as SKS 19, 213 (Not7: 28), and 443 (Not15: 14). Many more references to Kierkegaard's struggles with depression can be found by doing a search under *Tungsind* (melancholy or depression) in the online version of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*: <http://www.sks.dk/forside/indhold.asp>.

17. SKS 19, 212 (Not7: 26). This sad fact was brought home most recently with the suicide of the comedian Robin Williams in 2014.

18. See John Morreall, "Philosophy of Humor," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/humor/>>.

19. And yet, they are, in general, considerably less helpful than such manuals.

pseudonyms, Johannes Climacus, can serve as an "incognito of the religious."²⁰ Hence, one ought to expect to find a lot of humor in works Kierkegaard published under that pseudonym.

Kierkegaard's Concept of Humor

Before we look at Kierkegaard's use of humor, we need to look at his theory of it, or more specifically, at his theory of what he calls "the comic." Kierkegaard's theory of the comic is referred to by philosophers as "the incongruity theory."²¹ It is essentially continuous with the theories of Kant and Schopenhauer and, in fact, continues to be "the dominant theory of humor in philosophy and psychology."²² According to the incongruity theory, what makes something funny is its incongruity with, or opposition to, the expectations generated by what preceded it. One of my favorite examples of this principle in action is comedian Joe Wong's joke about his impending marriage. "It is a very important step," he explains, "and I'm really stressed out about it. I keep thinking: Fifty per cent of marriages—last FOREVER!"²³ What makes the joke so funny, of course, is that we expect him to say: "end in divorce."

There is more to humor for Kierkegaard, however, than there is for most other adherents of the incongruity theory. Humor provides what one could call a kind of existential dynamic that helps the individual to progress toward the truth and becomes, in the words of Lydia Amir, "the main positive indicator of the individual's relation to the truth."²⁴ The fullest presentation of this theory is put forward by Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*.²⁵ The theory itself appears

20. See CUPH, 419, 424–6, 436, 445n. / CUP1, 500, 504–509, 521, 531–532n. / SKS 7, 453, 457–460, 473, 483n.

21. See Morreall, "Philosophy of Humor."

22. *Ibid.*

23. I heard Joe Wong deliver this joke at the famous Comedy Studio on Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 2010. I have had to rely on my memory in reconstructing the joke, so what I have here, with the exception of the last line, is merely a paraphrase of the original.

24. The strong association Kierkegaard makes of humor with Christianity owes much to the views on humor of Johann Georg Hamann. It is hence something of an exaggeration to say, as Tomny Aagaard Olesen does, that Kierkegaard's theory of the comic as presented in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is "entirely unique" (Olesen, "The Painless Contradiction").

25. Some readers may be more familiar with the title *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. The titles *Philosophical Fragments* and *Philosophical Crumbs* refer to the same work (*Philosophiske Smuler*). *Fragments* was the first translation of the Danish term *Smuler*, but *crumbs* is actually a more accurate translation. See RPC, 181.

in what Hultberg refers to as "*verdenslitteraturens længst fodnote*" (the longest footnote in literary history).²⁶

"The comic is present," explains Climacus,

wherever there is a contradiction When a peasant knocks at the door of a man who is a German, and talks with him to find out whether there is someone in the house whose name the peasant has forgotten but who has ordered a load of peat, and the German, impatient at being unable to understand what the peasant is talking about, says: "Das ist doch wunderbarlich [That's strange]," to the great joy of the peasant, who says, "That's right, Wunderlich, that was the man's name," then the contradiction is that the German and the peasant cannot talk together because the language is an obstacle, yet the peasant nevertheless gets the information through the language.²⁷

Or to take another example from this same footnote:

If a soldier stands in the street and gazes at the wonderful window display of a fancy-goods store, and comes closer to take a better look, with glowing countenance and eyes fixed only on the window display failing to see the basement yard coming unduly near, and just as he is about to have a really good look, he disappears into the basement, then the contradiction is in the movement, the direction upward of the gaze, and the direction down, infernally, into the basement. Had he not been gazing upwards it would not have been so ridiculous. So it is more comic for a man who walks about gazing at the stars to fall into a hole in the ground than when it happens to someone not thus elevated above the earthly [as famously happened to the Greek and pre-Socratic philosopher Thales].²⁸

Another example from this same note, which shows Kierkegaard's sense of humor extends even to ethical and religious subjects, involves a German priest with a poor understanding of Danish, who confusedly declares from the pulpit, "The word became pork (*Fleisch*) [John 1:14]."²⁹ The comedy, explains Climacus,

26. Hultberg, "Kierkegaard som Humorist," p. 49.

27. CUPH, 432n. / CUP1, 516n. / SKS 7, 466n. Hannay actually interpolates "thinks he" where I have the second ellipsis so that the translation reads "the contradiction is that the German and the peasant cannot talk together because the language is an obstacle, yet the peasant nevertheless [thinks he] gets the information through the language." No such qualification appears, however, in the original text. The contradiction would thus appear to be that the peasant gets the information when reason, or logic, tells us he should not.

28. CUPH, 432-433n. / CUP1, 516n. / SKS 7, 466n.

29. The Danish cognate of the German *Fleisch* is *flæsk*, but while *Fleisch* means both meat and flesh, the Danish *flæsk* means pork. The Danish term that is used at John 1:14 is *kød*, which, like the German *Fleisch*, means both meat and flesh.

lies here not only in the ordinary contradiction arising when someone speaks in a foreign language unfamiliar to them and the effect produced by their words differs from the one wanted; the contradiction is made more acute by its being a priest and that he is preaching, since speech in the context of a priest's address is used only in a rather special way, and the least that can be taken for granted is that he can speak the language. Furthermore, the contradiction verges on the ethical domain; that one can make oneself guilty of blasphemy innocently.³⁰

But if the comic is present wherever there is contradiction, then human existence is essentially comical in that human beings, according to Kierkegaard, are composed of contradictions. That is, human beings are syntheses of temporality and eternity, of finitude and infinitude, of possibility and necessity, of body and soul.³¹ Hence, Gregor Malantschuk, one of Kierkegaard's most distinguished interpreters, observes that "in humor," according to Kierkegaard, "a person discovers the disparity between the eternal qualifications of his essence and his phenomenal actuality, and this misrelation is deepened further when he sees the difficulty of fulfilling the ethical requirement."³²

Kierkegaard, like many other thinkers of the same period, believes that existence can be divided into different stages. The aesthetic stage is the first, the stage of what Kierkegaard calls "immediacy." After that comes the ethical stage, and finally the religious stage. Irony constitutes a sort of boundary, according to Kierkegaard, between the aesthetic and ethical stages, and humor a boundary between the ethical and the religious stages. Humor, according to Climacus, "is the last stage of existence inwardness before faith." In fact, it is, for Kierkegaard, what Malantschuk refers to as "the boundary for the human understanding of life."³³ "Humor," explains Climacus, "is not faith but is prior to faith; it is not after faith or a development of faith. Understood in the Christian way, there is no going beyond faith, because faith is the highest."³⁴

And yet there is a sense in which humor *is* "after faith," for Kierkegaard. It is not after faith in the Hegelian sense of succeeding faith as a development from it, but it comes after faith, or perhaps it is more correct to say it *remains* after faith as what Climacus calls "the incognito" of faith.³⁵ "In his innermost

30. CUPH, 433-434n. / CUP1, 518n. / SKS 7, 466n.

31. See SUDH, 43 / SUD, 13 / SKS 11, 129; and UDVS, 307 / SKS 8, 400.

32. Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 202. Malantschuk directs his readers to an entry in Kierkegaard's papers (i.e., *Papirer*), which he asserts provides an account of the difference between irony and humor, but the reference he gives, Pap. III B 19, must be erroneous because it is not an account of the difference between irony and humor. An extended account of the difference between irony and humor can be found, however, in KJN 1, 216-217 (DD: 18) / SKS 17, 225-226.

33. Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, p. 216.

34. CUPH, 244 / CUP1, 291 / SKS 7, 265-266.

35. CUPH, 423-426 / CUP1, 504-509 / SKS 7, 457-461.

being," writes Climacus, "the religious one is anything but a humorist, on the contrary, he is absolutely occupied with his God relationship."³⁶ Humor is how the religious, or more specifically, the Christianly religious person, expresses himself *outwardly*. The Christian humorist, explains Kierkegaard in an early entry in his journals, "is like a plant of which only the roots are visible, [because it] blooms in the light of a higher sun."³⁷ The Christian uses humor in his relations to others not, Climacus continues, in order to make them look "ridiculous, or to laugh at them."³⁸ The humor of the Christian has a very different sort of objective.

Kierkegaard uses humor to communicate indirectly truths that cannot be communicated directly. All of what Kierkegaard calls "essential truth," or truth that relates to the essence of the individual as such, must, as I explained above, be communicated indirectly. There is no way to communicate directly the experiences of anxiety, guilt, despair, offense, and joy, or what Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus calls "the happy passion" of faith.³⁹ Kierkegaard's concern is not to write scholarly treatises on the phenomena of subjective experience to impress scholarly audiences. His objective is to help ordinary (albeit literate) people to come to understand what he believes to be the truths of this experience, and this he can do only indirectly.

What Kierkegaard's pseudonym Constantine Constantius says about farce could be extended to cover all humorous communication. Constantius says: "With farce the effect depends largely upon the observer's own energetic contribution."⁴⁰ Laughter cannot be compelled.⁴¹ The reader must be open to the comedic dimension of what he reads, which is to say that he must be open more generally to the message the author is trying to communicate. The "reader" to whom Kierkegaard continually refers in the singular is thus very often, if not always, the person who gets the joke.

36. CUPH, 426 / CUP1, 508 / SKS 7, 461.

37. SKS 17, 226. The date of this entry is 1837, a year before Kierkegaard's first book, *From the Papers of One Still Living* and six years before what is generally considered to be the beginning of his mature authorship in 1843. The translation here is my own. The new *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* (KJN), ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000-present) uses Kierkegaard's confusing abbreviation "χστν" for "Christian" (see "Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007]," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63: 2, pp. 246–248) and inexplicably copies the earlier translation by the Hongs of "høiere" as "loftier" rather than as the cognate "higher" (JP 2, 1690). Also, the passage is awkward without the interpolated "because it," which neither the new translation nor the earlier translation has.

38. CUPH, 426 / CUP1, 508 / SKS 7, 461.

39. RPC, 128 / PE, 59 / SKS 4, 261.

40. RPC, 27 / R, 159 / SKS 4, 34.

41. As is evidenced by the failure of many scholars to appreciate the pervasiveness of humor in Kierkegaard's authorship.

Humor in Kierkegaard's Works

Kierkegaard was a jokester from the time he was very small, hence his nickname "Gafflen" (the fork). That is, he delighted in poking fun at people and/or situations he found amusing.⁴² Later, as John Updike observes, Kierkegaard's "satirical pen" became "a feared weapon."⁴³

References to humor begin to appear in Kierkegaard's journals in the 1830s, long before he published the works for which he is widely known. Kierkegaard observes, for example, in an entry dated 1837, that

humor is irony taken to its maximum vibration. Even though Christianity [*det Xristelige*] is the genuine *primus motor*, it is still possible to find peoples in Christian Europe who have come no further than describing irony and who are hence incapable of achieving the absolutely isolated, uniquely personal humor.⁴⁴

Many of Kierkegaard's references to humor in his journals relate to comic writers, and one of the main sources on which he draws for humorous effect is comedic theater. He was a great lover of comedic theater. "As a true son of his

42. See "Barndom og Skoleår" in *Erindringer om Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. Steen Johansen (Copenhagen, CA: Reitzel, 1980), pp. 11–22.

43. John Updike, "The Fork," in *Picked Up Pieces: Essays* (New York: Random House, 2012), pp. 99–14.

44. SKS 17, 234 (DD: 36). I have made several changes here to the English translation of this passage in *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* (KJN 1, 225). KJN has "Although the Xn aspect is the real *primus motor*, there are still people in a Christian Europe who have not come to describe more than irony." There is nothing in the Danish, however, that corresponds to KJN's "aspect." That's an attempt on the part of the translator, or translators, to make sense of Kierkegaard's "*det Xristelige*," which translates literally as "the Christian" where "Christian" functions as an adjective. There is no noun, however, that it qualifies, so the translator simply added "aspect" without indicating that it was added. KJN also includes "a" in front of "Christian Europe." This is literally correct, but it's unnecessary. What other kind of Europe was there? Danish, like German, uses articles more often than does English, so to include them all in a translation is not only unnecessary, but it yields a translation that is unidiomatic. The Danish term that I have translated as "peoples" and that KJN translates as "people" is "Folk." "Folk" unequivocally refers, however, to "a people," and not to "people." It is a stab at the Danish people as a group. They are the "Folk" in "Christian Europe" to which Kierkegaard is snidely referring. If he had meant "people," he'd have written "*mennesker*" (or "*Mennesker*" given that he was writing in the nineteenth century). Finally, where I have "the absolutely isolated, uniquely personal humor," KJN inexplicably has "the absolutely isolated humor that subsists in the person alone." This is not, as one might expect, a literal translation. The Danish is: "*den absolut-isolerede, personlig-ene-bestaaende Humor*." That translates literally as: "the absolutely isolated, uniquely personal humor."

native land," writes David F. Swenson, Kierkegaard was influenced by the "full wealth" of Danish literature. "But of all Danish writers," continues Swenson,

He appears to owe most to Holberg, the great pioneer of Danish comedy.⁴⁵ Holberg's humor is something which Kierkegaard may almost be said to have absorbed *in succum et sanguinem* [in juice and blood]. The Holberg comedies served for him a veritable language; and the more technical philosophical treatises are replete with references to Holbergian characters and situations, giving substance and mass to the delicate comedy of their fine-spun polemic.⁴⁶

The first literary personage to be gored by Kierkegaard's "satirical pen" was Hans Christian Andersen. Andersen's arguably failed attempt at a novel, *Kun en Spillemand* (Only a Fiddler),⁴⁷ was the subject of Kierkegaard's extended review, published in 1838, the title of which, *From the Papers of One Still Living, Published against His Will*, has got to be intended as some kind of a joke. And, indeed, the tone of much of this work is satirical as can be seen in the following passage from the beginning, a passage that represents what would appear to be Kierkegaard's first published allusion to Holberg's comedy *Erasmus Montanus*, a work he would allude to often later in his authorship.

Andersen loses himself not so much in high-flown [*høittravende*] as in long-winded [*langttravende*] observations, in which the hero is a superb peripatetic who, because he has no essential reason for stopping anywhere and because existence [*Tilværelse*] on the contrary is always a circle, ends up going in a circle, even though Andersen and others who have lived for many years on [a] hill believe he is walking straight ahead because the earth is as flat as a pancake⁴⁸.⁴⁹

45. Although the Danes like to claim Ludvig Holberg as one of their own, he was in fact Norwegian.

46. David F. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard*, ed. Lillian Marvin Swenson (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), p. 79.

47. H.C. Andersen, *Kun en Spillemand* (Hedehusene, Denmark: Nyt Dansk Literatur Selskab, 1988).

48. Kierkegaard appears to have been particularly fond of the phrase "flat as a pancake" (*flad som en pandekage*). I'm told by professional comedians that the "k" sound is considered to be particularly funny. This could be part of the appeal of the phrase for Kierkegaard. It might also be that Kierkegaard enjoyed the irreverence, or incongruity, of the insertion of the expression "pancake" into a piece of writing that otherwise had pretensions to erudition.

49. FPOS, 78 / SKS 1, 34. I have taken the liberty of changing Watkin's "the hill" to "a hill." The Danish expression is "*pa a Bjerget*," which, since the definite article in Danish is enclitic, translates literally as "the hill," but which more than likely means "a hill." I say more than likely because the allusion to Holberg's *Erasmus Montanus* is so conspicuous that Kierkegaard may well have assumed his readers would immediately recognize the "hill" in question as the one referred to in this work.

Humor becomes one of the chief means by which Kierkegaard communicates with his readers. We've already seen that Kierkegaard's interest in the concept of humor predates what scholars think of as his mature authorship.⁵⁰ He used humor to make clear to his readers how ridiculous it was to seek answers to life's most pressing questions in objective reflection. Objectivity, as Climacus points out in Kierkegaard's *Postscript*, published in 1846, in a passage that again alludes to Holberg's play *Erasmus Montanus*,⁵¹ is not always an indication of what one could call well-ordered thinking. "I shall here permit myself to tell a story," begins Climacus,

that without any adaptation on my part comes direct from an asylum. A patient in such an institution seeks to escape, and actually succeeds in effecting his purpose by leaping out of a window. [H]e . . . prepares to start on the road to freedom, when the thought strikes him (shall I say sanely enough or madly enough?): "When you come to town you will be recognized, and you will at once be brought back here again; hence you need to prepare yourself fully to convince everyone by the objective truth of what you say, that all is in order as far as your sanity is concerned." As he walks along and thinks about this, he sees a [skittle] ball lying on the ground, picks it up, and puts it into the tail pocket of his coat. Every step he takes the ball strikes him, politely speaking, on his hinder parts, and every time it thus strikes him he says: "Bang, the earth is round." He comes to the city, and at once calls on one of his friends; he wants to convince him that he is not crazy, and therefore walks back and forth, saying continually: "Bang, the earth is round!" But is the earth not round? Does the asylum still crave . . . another sacrifice for this opinion, as in the time when all men believed it to be flat as a pancake? Or is a man who hopes to prove that he is sane, by uttering a generally accepted and generally respected objective truth, insane? And yet it was clear to the physician that the patient was not yet cured; though it is not to be thought that the cure would consist in getting him to accept the opinion that the earth is flat.⁵²

50. Kierkegaard published a few short articles, as well as two books: *From the Papers of One Still Living* and *The Concept of Irony* before 1843. His mature authorship is generally considered to begin in 1843 with the publication of *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *Repetition*.

51. See Ludvig Holberg, *Erasmus Montanus eller Rasmus Berg*, III, 2, *Den Danske Skue-Plads*, I-VII (Copenhagen: 1788), V, no pagination; III, 3, *Comedies by Holberg*, tr. Oscar James Campbell, Jr., and Frederic Schenck (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1935), p. 145. The play concerns a conflict between Erasmus, who knows the world is round, and villagers, who think it is flat.

52. CUPSL, 174 / CUP1, 194-195 / SKS, 7, 178-179. I have elected here to use the wording (with a couple of minor modifications) of the Swenson-Lowrie translation of the *Postscript* because I believe it preserves the literary qualities of the original Danish text better than do the two more recent English translations by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong [CUP1] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Alastair Hannay [CUPH] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

It is not merely what one could call a misguided pursuit of objectivity to which Kierkegaard, or his pseudonym Climacus, objects. One of the main objects of his satirical barbs is the Hegelian phantom of "pure thought,"⁵³ which Climacus calls "a psychological curiosity, a remarkable piece of ingenious combination and construction in the fantastic medium of pure being."⁵⁴

Pure thought, asserts Climacus,

for someone existing, is a chimera when the truth is to be existed in. Having to exist under the guidance of pure thought is like traveling in Denmark with [the help of] a small map of Europe on which Denmark shows no larger than [the nib of a pen]—yes, even more impossible.⁵⁵

Climacus, the pseudonym Kierkegaard used when he published *Philosophical Crumbs* and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, is a self-professed humorist, and most Kierkegaard scholars are agreed that the *Postscript* is hilarious; hence it is the focus of John Lippitt's *Humor and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought*. Less notice has been taken of humor in the *Crumbs*, yet humor pervades this work as well, as can be seen in the following passage that is excerpted from Climacus's discussion in *Crumbs* of what he refers to euphemistically as the "difficulty" of trying to prove the existence of God. "It is generally very difficult to prove that something exists," observes Climacus. "And what is worse for those brave souls who nevertheless dare to undertake such a project, the difficulty is not one that will confer celebrity on those who preoccupy themselves with it."⁵⁶

Climacus's point here, clearly, is not that it is "difficult" to prove the existence of God, or anything else for that matter, but that it is impossible, and that those

53. The expression "pure thought" appears more than fifty times in the *Postscript*.

54. CUPH, 254 / CUP1, 304 / SKS 7, 277.

55. CUPH, 260 / CUP1, 310–311 / SKS 7, 283. I have altered the translation in two places here. First, I have followed the lead of Swenson and Lowrie in adding "with the help of" to the phrase "like traveling in Europe with [the help of] a small map of Europe" (see CUPSL, 275). The Danish is: "at skulle reise i Danmark efter et lille Kort over hele Europe." Swenson and Lowrie were correct in that the Danish *efter* means something like "according to" (see *A Danish English Dictionary*, ed. J.S. Ferrall and Thorl. Gudm. Repp, Copenhagen, 1845, s.v., *efter*). Second, I have changed the "steel pen-point" that appears in all three existing English translations of the *Postscript* to "the nib of a pen." The Danish is simply "Staalpen," which means a steel pen rather than a quill pen. The reference is clearly to the nib of the pen, however, rather than to its "point." The nib is the metal end of a pen that touches the paper and from which the ink flows. It is generally about the size of a fingernail. Many, if not most, nineteenth-century pen nibs would have been smaller than are contemporary nibs, so even it is probably best to think of something the size of the nail on a person's little finger.

56. RPC, 113 / PE, 40 / SKS 4, 245.

"brave souls" who do not realize this and "nevertheless dare to undertake such a project" only make themselves look ridiculous in a manner not unlike that of a person who would attempt to fly by vigorously flapping his arms.

And then there is the incongruity between the length of *Philosophical Crumbs* (approximately 100 pages) and its *Postscript* (more than 500 hundred pages), and the obvious contradiction between Climacus's name and his position in both the *Crumbs* and the *Postscript*. That is, the name, Johannes Climacus, originally belonged to Saint John Climacus, or John of the Ladder.⁵⁷ While the original Climacus described a metaphorical ladder by means of which one could come closer to God, Kierkegaard's Climacus proclaims repeatedly that he is not Christian⁵⁸ and that indeed, according to Christianity, if one is not in the right relation to God, through faith in Christ, then one is absolutely separated from him (or her or it). So there is no ascending nearer to God for Kierkegaard's Climacus, despite his name.

The contradiction that we saw above is associated by Kierkegaard with "the comic" and appears in a number, if not all, of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. Johannes de silentio, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*, is not silent, but loquacious, as is Frater Taciturnus, the pseudonym who appears as the author of a part of *Stages on Life's Way*. Constantine Constantius, the pseudonymous author of *Repetition*, is unable to achieve repetition, which is to say, constancy or contentment, as can be seen in the following passage from *Repetition*. "No one is ever granted even as little as a half an hour out of his entire life," writes Constantius,

where he is absolutely content in every conceivable way. ... I was close to achieving it once. I got up one morning in unusually good humour. This positive mood actually expanded as the morning progressed, in a manner I had never before experienced. By one o'clock my mood had climaxed, and I sensed the dizzying heights of complete contentment, a level that appears on no scale designed to measure moods, not even on the poetic thermometer. My body no longer seemed weighed down by gravity. It was as if I had no body, in that every function hummed along perfectly, every nerve rejoiced, the harmony punctuated by each beat of my pulse which served in turn only to remind me of the delightfulness of the moment. I almost floated as I walked, not like the bird that cuts through the air as it leaves the earth, but like the wind over the fields, like the nostalgic rocking of waves, like the dreamy progress of clouds across the sky. My being was transparent as the clear depths of the ocean, as the night's self-satisfied stillness, as the soft soliloquy of midday. Every mood resonated melodically in my soul. Every thought, from the most foolish to the

57. See, for example, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982).

58. I believe he is lying when he claims this, but that issue is not relevant to the present discussion; hence this is not the place to develop that argument.

most profound, offered itself, and offered itself with the same blissful festiveness. Every impression was anticipated before it came, and thus awoke from within me. It was as if all of existence were in love with me. Everything quivered in deep rapport with my being. Everything in me was portentous; all mysteries explained in my microcosmic bliss that transfigured everything, even the unpleasant, the most annoying remark, the most loathsome sight, the most fatal collision.

As I said, it was exactly at one o'clock that my mood reached its peak, where I sensed the heights of perfect contentment. But then suddenly I got something in my eye. I do not know whether it was an eyelash, an insect, or a piece of dust. I know this though, that my mood immediately plummeted almost into the abyss of despair. This is something that everyone who has ever experienced these heights of contentment, and still speculated to what extent complete contentment was possible, will easily understand. Since that time I have given up any hope of ever being completely contented in every way, given up that hope that I had once nourished, of being, if not always completely content, then at least occasionally completely content.⁵⁹

Scholars sometimes forget that Climacus is not the only one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms who is a self-professed humorist. Lippitt, in his aforementioned study of humor and irony in Kierkegaard, mentions *Either/Or* (vol. I), *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Prefaces* as explicitly humorous works but fails to mention *Repetition*, which is shot through with humorous passages such as the one above and the following one where Constantius recounts the story of his unexpectedly early return home after his aborted attempt to recreate the joys of an earlier trip to Berlin. "I have always been very suspicious of revolutions," begins Constantius,

to the extent that, for this reason, I hate all forms of cleaning or straightening up, in particular the scrubbing of floors. I had thus left the strictest instructions [with my servant] to ensure that my conservative principles would be maintained even in my absence. But what happened? My faithful servant was of another mind. He supposed that if he initiated a frenzied cleaning immediately after my departure, the whole thing would be completed by the time I returned home again, and he was certainly the man to accomplish this. I return. I ring the doorbell; my servant appears. It was a moment rich with import. My servant became as pale as a corpse. Through the half-opened door to my rooms I glimpsed the horror: everything was in a state of chaos. I was stunned. He was so confused he did not know what to do. His conscience smote him and—he slammed the door again in my face. That was too much. My distress had reached a climax, my principles sank, I feared the worst, to be treated as a ghost in the manner of Grønmeyer the businessman.⁶⁰

59. RPC, 40–41 / R, 173–174 / SKS 4, 46–47.

60. RPC, 38–39 / R, 171 / SKS 4, 45. Grønmeyer the businessman is a character in a comedy, *Kjøge Hauskors*, by J.L. Heiberg. Grønmeyer's old farmhand, Niels, mistakes him for a ghost and tries to shoo him away with a pitchfork. Notice that there are two "k" sounds

Humor, for Kierkegaard, does not exclude seriousness: quite the contrary. Humor is present even in Kierkegaard's edifying or "upbuilding" discourses, as is clear from Kierkegaard's reflections in his journal on the idea of "learning" as it is presented in "What We Learn from the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air," Part Two of his *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, published in 1847.

The dialectic in the concept: to learn means that the learner relates to the teacher as to his ideal genus proximum. As soon as the teacher is merely assigned a lower place within the same genus and is situated beneath the learner, the situation becomes humorous. This is how it is in learning from a child or from a stupid person; because the child or the stupid person can be called the teacher [only] in a humorous sense.

But the situation becomes even more humorous when the teacher and the learner do not even have a common genus but relate to [each other] inversely, in qualitative heterogeneity. This is the absolutely humorous situation. The lilies and the birds.

The presentation is edifying, mitigated by humor's touching jest and jesting earnestness. At many points the reader will be moved to smile, never to laugh, never to laugh ironically. The tale of the worried lily, which, however, is also a parable, is absolutely humorous. Thus also with the entire discourse about being clothed. In general, the humorous is present everywhere because the design itself is humorous.⁶¹

At times, Kierkegaard's humor is very subtle. Less-experienced readers of Kierkegaard often laugh at the description of the self in *The Sickness unto Death*, published in 1849, as "a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. The self is not the relation but the relation's relating to itself."⁶² If, however, one remembers Kierkegaard's assertion that the comical is

in the title of Heiberg's play. Kjøge, now spelled Køge, is a small harbor town to the southwest of Copenhagen. Perhaps it is partly the "k" sound and partly a memory from when I worked as a translator for the translation center at the University of Copenhagen, but I can never hear mention of Køge without wanting to laugh. I had been employed to translate a tourist brochure about Køge in which it was proudly announced that while there were not many poisonous insects, the area boasted an impressive variety of bats, which interested tourists could see taking over the night sky shortly after dusk.

61. KJN 4, 90-91 (NB: 129) / SKS 20, 91. I made a couple of minor grammatical corrections to the text here. First, I moved "only" to the proper position. Second, I changed "one another," which is correct only when there are more than two parties in the relation in question.

62. SUDH, 43 / SUD, 13 / SKS 11, 129. I have chosen Hannay's translation here not merely because I believe it is better than the Hong's but because the Hong's translation unintentionally adds a comical dimension that, amusing as the original is, is not present in the original and of which it would be unsporting of me to take advantage.

present wherever there is contradiction and that the elements that make up the "relation" that is the self, according to both Kierkegaard and the pseudonymous author of *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus, then one will realize that the description of the self at the beginning of this work was very likely intended by Kierkegaard to be humorous.

The passages above are only a few of the examples of humor one could produce from the texts in question, and those texts, in turn, are only a few of the many works by Kierkegaard that contain humorous passages. Given the extent to which, as it should now be clear, humor pervades many of Kierkegaard's works, one is tempted to conclude that the famous "hemmelige Note" (secret note), which Kierkegaard purports in a journal entry from 1843,⁶³ would explain his entire authorship, but which no one will ever find even the slightest hint of among his papers, is actually a grand joke he is playing on later scholars whom he envisioned searching and searching for this key that would unlock the authorship.

I hope it is clear now that Kierkegaard was, indeed, a great humorist and that this is one of the qualities that has traditionally endeared him to a reading public that extends well beyond the walls of academe. I believe that there is much more humor in Kierkegaard's authorship than anyone has hitherto suspected and that great progress will be made in understanding his thought if we approach his works with a view to discovering the humor they contain.

It is possible, of course, that I am attributing too much significance to humor in Kierkegaard's thought. I would answer such an objection by quoting the following passage from the aphorisms that make up the *Diapsalmata* section of the first volume of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*:

I was transported to the seventh heaven. There sat all the gods assembled. As a special dispensation, I was granted a favor of making a wish. "What do you want," asked Mercury. "Do you want youth, or beauty, or power, or a long life, or the most beautiful girl, or any one of the other glorious things we have in the treasure chest: Choose—but only one thing." For a moment I was bewildered; then I addressed the gods, saying: My esteemed contemporaries, I choose one thing—that I may always have the laughter on my side. Not one of the gods said a word; instead, all of them began to laugh. From that I concluded that my wish had been granted and decided that the gods knew how to express themselves with good taste, for it would indeed have been inappropriate to reply solemnly: It is granted to you.⁶⁴

My guess is that one of the reasons that Kierkegaard is not more widely appreciated to be a humorist is that he would have thought it in poor taste to point out all the humor in his works. A joke is not nearly so funny, after all, if you have to explain it. Kierkegaard wrote, I believe, for people who got his jokes, for people for whom explanations were unnecessary.

63. KJN 2, 157 (JJ: 95) / SKS 18, 170.

64. EO1, 42–43 / SKS 2, 51–52.