

The Paradox and the Criticism of Hegelian Mediation in *Philosophical Fragments*

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Abstract

This paper explores Climacus' criticism of mediation in the *Fragments*. The main thesis is that the famous doctrine of the paradox is aimed at claims made by Hans Lassen Martensen's essay "Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *principium exclusi medii*," which was written in response to Mynster's "Rationalism, Supernaturalism." Climacus can be seen as defending Mynster's position against the claims for mediation made by Martensen. Despite this, some aspects of the description of the paradox are strikingly similar to Hegel's description of mediation.

A series of debates in the German states, Prussia and Denmark was set off by Hegel's criticism of Aristotelian logic and specifically his claim that by means of speculative logic contradictory predicates could be mediated or united in a single subject.¹ This issue of Hegelian mediation is one that appears many times throughout Kierkegaard's *corpus*. The title *Either/Or* is a reference to this since it was a well-known abbreviated form of the law of excluded middle which

¹ For this discussion, see V. Kuhr *Modsigelsens Grundsætning*, Copenhagen and Kristiania: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1915. Anton Hügli "The Principle of Contradiction" in *Concepts and Alternatives in Kierkegaard*, ed. by Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (*Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana* vol. 3), Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel 1980, pp. 272-280. Skat Arildsen "Striden om de logiske Principer og om Rationalismens og Supranaturalismens Begreb" in his *Biskop Hans Lassen Martensen. Hans Liv, Udvikling og Arbejde*, Copenhagen: Gads Forlag 1932, pp. 142-150. O. Waage "Strid om de logiske Principer og om Rationalismens og Supranaturalismens Begreb" in his *J. P. Mynster og de filosofiske Bevægelser paa hans Tid i Danmark*, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel 1867, pp. 123-152. Henning Høirup *Grundtvigs Syn paa Tro og Erkendelse. Modsigelsens Grundsætning som Teologisk Aksiom hos Grundtvig*, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1949, pp. 73-75, pp. 85-89.

Hegel's logic denied, i. e., any given subject must be *either A or not-A*. Thus, Kierkegaard has his esthete say, "Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way."² In the chapter, "The Balance Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical," from Part Two, Judge Wilhelm treats this issue explicitly, referring to the sublation of the law of contradiction as the pet theory of modern philosophy.³ In *Repetition*, Constantin Constantius mentions Hegel directly and compares the notion of repetition with that of mediation.⁴ In the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis discusses the idea of mediation with that of reconciliation. The main theme of Preface VII of *Prefaces* is the notion of mediation. There Nicolaus Notabene refers explicitly to the Hegelian mediation of being and nothing in the category of becoming.⁵ In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* the issue is treated in a couple of different places. The first account comes in the chapter, "Actual Subjectivity, Ethical Subjectivity; the Subjective Thinker,"⁶ and the second in the second division of the chapter, "The Issue in the *Fragments*."⁷ Johannes Climacus says that the former treats the issue in its logical or ontological aspect, while the latter discusses it in its ethical aspect.⁸ Given all this, there can be no doubt that the issue of mediation was central for Kierkegaard. In this paper I wish to examine this issue specifically in the *Philosophical Fragments* (1844).

In a journal entry (presumably from 1846) Kierkegaard responds negatively to a review of the work. This review was written pseudonymously by the Hegelian, Johan Frederik Hagen (1817-59), and appeared in the *Theologisk Tidsskrift* in May of 1846.⁹ Kierkegaard criticizes the review for having missed the essential critical point about Hegelian mediation that was made in the *Fragments*. He caricatures the reviewer's remarks as follows:

² *EOI*, 38 / *SKS* 2, 47. Cf. also *EO2*, 158f. / *SKS* 3, 156f.

³ *EO2*, 170f. / *SKS* 3, 166-172. Cf. *CUPI*, 189-199 / *SKS* 7, 173-182.

⁴ *R*, 148f. / *SKS* 4, 25: "it is incredible how much flurry has been made in Hegelian philosophy over mediation and how much foolish talk has enjoyed honor and glory under this rubric."

⁵ *P*, 45 / *SKS* 4, 506.

⁶ *CUPI*, 304-310 / *SKS* 7, 277-282.

⁷ *CUPI*, 399-422 / *SKS* 7, 363-384.

⁸ *CUPI*, 400 / *SKS* 7, 364.

⁹ [Johan Frederik Hagen] "*Philosophiske Smuler eller en Smule Philosophi*. Af Johannes Climacus. Udgivet af S. Kierkegaard. 164 S. Kbhvn. 1844. (Reitzel 80 Sk.)" in *Theologisk Tidsskrift*, *Ny Række*, 10, 1846, pp. 175-182.

J[ohannes] C[limacus] is certainly justified in the way in which he emphasizes the dialectical, but (yes, now comes the wisdom) on the other hand one must not forget mediation. Historically, J. C. comes after Hegelianism. J. C. without a doubt knows just as much about mediation as such a theological graduate. In order, if possible, to get out of the spell of mediation, constantly battling against it, J. C. decisively brought the problem to its logical conclusion through the vigor of a qualitative dialectic.¹⁰

Here Johannes Climacus is characterized as attempting to escape “the spell of mediation” and indeed as “constantly battling against it.” By insisting on the Hegelian principle of mediation,¹¹ the reviewer has failed to see that the crucial point of the work was precisely a criticism of this principle. Thus, the reviewer, Kierkegaard complains, has in effect overlooked the content of the entire work. Kierkegaard continues, “An author who really understands himself is better served by not being read at all, or by having five genuine readers, than by having this confusion about mediation spread abroad only all too much with the help of a good-natured reviewer, spread with the help of his own book, which was written specifically to battle against mediation.”¹² By saying that the objective of the *Fragments* was to criticize the Hegelian principle of mediation, Kierkegaard identifies the speculative doctrine at issue.

The claim that the *Fragments* “was written specifically to battle against mediation” will be my point of departure in this paper. As noted, the notion of mediation was criticized in both *Either/Or*¹³ and *Repetition*,¹⁴ and in both cases the pseudonymous author took a position with respect to the contemporary Danish debate surrounding Hegel’s criticism of the laws of contradiction and excluded middle. Thus, *Philosophical Fragments*, I wish to argue, can be seen as a continuation and development of this discussion. Specifically, the work is primarily a polemic against Hans Lassen Martensen’s claims for the use of mediation in speculative theology. One can find the positions that Climacus criticizes in Martensen’s article, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *principium exclusi medii*,”¹⁵ which was written in re-

¹⁰ *PF*, Supplement, p. 223 / *SKS* 20, 46f., NB:47.

¹¹ Kierkegaard seems to have in mind p. 181 of the review.

¹² *PF*, Supplement, p. 224 / *SKS* 20, 47, NB:47.

¹³ *EO2*, 170-176 / *SKS* 3, 166-172.

¹⁴ *R*, 148 / *SKS* 4, 25. *R*, 186 / *SKS* 4, 56f.

¹⁵ Hans Lassen Martensen “Rationalisme, Supranaturalisme og *principium exclusi medii* i Anledning af H. H. Biskop Mynsters Afhandling herom i dette Tidsskrifts forrige Hefte” in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, 1, 1839, pp. 456-473.

sponse to Mynster's "Rationalism, Supernaturalism."¹⁶ Thus, while Thulstrup¹⁷ and others see in the *Fragments* a straightforward criticism of Hegel, I wish to argue that the matter is much more complicated and that Climacus' true interlocutor is Martensen. In order to make good on this claim, I will examine in detail Chapter 3, entitled, "The Absolute Paradox." I will argue that the famous account of the paradox is formulated as a response to the Hegelian doctrine of mediation as presented by Martensen in the context of theology.

I. Climacus' Doctrine of the Paradox

Chapter 3 of the *Fragments* entitled, "The Absolute Paradox,"¹⁸ offers one of the many criticisms of the tradition of rational theology in Kierkegaard's authorship. Johannes Climacus criticizes the rationalists (among others Spinoza and Leibniz) for attempting to offer discursive proofs for the existence of God. He tries to show that all such demonstrations fall short of what they intend to prove and that in each of them there is a "leap"¹⁹ which cannot be justified deductively. The issue of the limits of human knowledge runs through the whole discussion. The well-known account of the paradox is formulated against this background. While Hegel's name does not appear in this chapter, his doctrines of immanence and mediation seem to inform it. I wish to argue that Climacus has in mind these doctrines specifically as they appear in Martensen's speculative theology.

Climacus begins with the epistemological question of the limit of the understanding. His claim is that the human mind runs up against certain natural limitations. He calls this "the ultimate paradox of thought," which he defines as the desire of the understanding "to discover something that thought itself cannot think."²⁰ The natural limitation of thought is simply the unknown. Climacus then goes on to define the unknown provisionally as the god: "But what is this unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides

¹⁶ Jakob Peter Mynster "Rationalisme, Supranaturalisme" in *Tidskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, 1, 1839, pp. 249-268. (Reprinted in Mynster's *Blandede Skrifter*, vols. 1-6, Copenhagen 1852-57, vol. 2, pp. 95-115.)

¹⁷ Niels Thulstrup *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, tr. by George L. Stengren, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, pp. 359-365.

¹⁸ *PF*, 37-48 / *SKS* 4, 242-252.

¹⁹ *PF*, 43 / *SKS* 4, 248.

²⁰ *PF*, 37 / *SKS* 4, 243.

and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge? It is the unknown. But it is not a human being, insofar as he knows man, or anything else that he knows. Therefore, let us call this unknown *the god*.”²¹ Later he defines the paradox as the tension between the divine and human aspects of the teacher.²² Here the divine simply stands for something transcendent and beyond the sphere of human knowing. This is what the human mind cannot understand but must simply believe. Climacus thus prepares the ground for his criticism of rational theology. With proofs for God’s existence, rational theology tries to know something which cannot be known. It tries to capture discursively or deductively something beyond the sphere of what is knowable. It tries to bring what is transcendent into the realm of immanence. For Climacus, these arguments must always fail since they try to span the gap between the known and the unknowable, between human beings and God. From this he ultimately wants to conclude that man’s relation to God cannot be one of knowledge alone.

To capture the distinction more clearly, Climacus introduces the concept of absolute difference.²³ The relation between man and God is thought to be one of absolute difference, which Climacus defines as sinfulness.²⁴ I put aside the question of sinfulness for the moment in order to concentrate on the epistemological question, which is crucial for the whole discussion. He begins with this issue and tries to understand the absolute difference as the limit of human knowledge:

What, then, is the unknown? It is the frontier that is continually arrived at, and therefore when the category of motion is replaced by the category of rest it is the difference, the absolute difference. But it is the absolutely different in which there is no distinguishing mark. Defined as the absolutely different, it seems to be at the point of being disclosed, but not so, because the understanding cannot even think the absolutely different.²⁵

²¹ *PF*, 39 / *SKS* 4, 244-245.

²² *PF*, 62 / *SKS* 4, 264: “Faith, then, must constantly cling firmly to the teacher. But in order for the teacher to be able to give the condition, he must be the god, and in order to put the learner in possession of it, he must be man. This contradiction is in turn the object of faith and is the paradox, the moment.”

²³ See *CUPI*, 412 / *SKS* 7, 374f.: “But between God and a human being (let speculative thought just keep humankind to perform tricks with) there is an absolute difference; therefore a person’s absolute relationship with God must specifically express the absolute difference, and the direct likeness becomes impudence, conceited pretense, presumption, and the like.”

²⁴ *PF*, 47 / *SKS* 4, 251.

²⁵ *PF*, 44f. / *SKS* 4, 249.

The absolute difference is that point where human knowledge comes to a halt. According to this view, the human mind can only grasp things that are similar to itself. Thus, a human being can understand other human beings. But the relationship to God is characterized by the absolute difference since there are no common points to seize hold of. Thus, the absolute difference or absolute other cannot be understood or demonstrated by human knowing.

Climacus wants to employ it for specific theological purposes. Given that there is an absolute difference between God and man, it follows that man is ignorant since he cannot know by himself in what the difference consists and thus cannot know God. Moreover, since there is an absolute difference between God and man, no Hegelian mediation is possible in this case. Therefore, only God himself can reveal the difference to man and make him aware of his sinfulness and thereby of the difference:

if a human being is to come truly to know something about the unknown (the god), he must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him. The understanding cannot come to know this by itself (since, as we have seen, it is a contradiction); if it is going to come to know this, it must come to know this from the god....Just to come to know that god is the different, man needs the god and then comes to know that the god is absolutely different from him.²⁶

Climacus thus understands at least a part of Christ's mission as that of making humans aware of the absolute difference between themselves and God. Given that man can only know what is like himself, this knowledge cannot be transmitted by God in the transcendent sphere but rather must be imparted by him in human form. The knowledge of the absolute difference can only be transmitted by one in a position of equality. For Climacus, this nonetheless remains a paradox.

Although it looks as if Climacus' view is a skeptical one, it is clear from the end of his analysis that it is not. The criticism of rational theology is merely that one cannot demonstrate God's existence or have knowledge of God by means of unaided human reason. This is due to the fact that God is an absolutely transcendent other, beyond the normal realm of human comprehension. Climacus' objection is against those who claim to know God without divine aid. He writes, "when the god by his omnipotent resolution...wills to be just like the lowliest person, then let no innkeeper or philosophy professor fancy that he is such a clever fellow that he can detect something if the god

²⁶ *PF*, 46 / *SKS* 4, 251.

himself does not give the condition.”²⁷ But this objection does not mean that one cannot know God at all, only that one cannot know Him on the strength of one’s own reason. On the contrary, with the incarnation God reveals himself to human beings and by so doing provides the condition by which He can be known. Thus, one can know God but only with divine aid. But it cannot be discursively demonstrated that God entered into human history as a human being in order to communicate the message. This is the paradox which defies reason. This seems to be the epistemological point behind the doctrine of the paradox.

II. The Paradox as a Refutation of Mediation

I would like to argue that Climacus formulates the doctrine of the paradox, which has just been outlined, in response to the Hegelian notion of mediation. Unlike the treatments of this issue in *Either/Or* and *Repetition*, in *Philosophical Fragments* the question of mediation is interpreted with regard to the specific issue of the difference between man and God. Unlike the treatment in those works, here the discussion is firmly situated in the context of theology and concerns specifically the notion of the incarnation. The criticism can nonetheless be seen as a continuation of those issued in the previous works and as participating in the discussion of the issue of mediation that was taking place in Denmark at that time.

The claim that the doctrine of the paradox is intended as a criticism of the doctrine of mediation and of the god-man is supported by a number of journal entries from the period of the composition of the *Fragments* and slightly earlier. There Kierkegaard consistently distinguishes philosophy from Christianity by insisting that mediation belongs to the former, while paradox belongs to the latter: “Philosophy’s idea is mediation – Christianity’s, the paradox.”²⁸ This juxtaposition of mediation and paradox seems to make it clear that the doctrine of the paradox is intended to do the same work in Christianity as mediation does in philosophy. In a similar passage, Kierkegaard compares his own thought with that of Leibniz: “What I usually express by saying that Christianity consists of paradox, philosophy in mediation, Leibniz expresses by distinguishing between what is above reason and

²⁷ *PF*, 64f. / *SKS* 4, 266.

²⁸ *JP* 3:3072 / *SKS* 19, 211, Not7:22.

what is against reason.”²⁹ Here the same point is repeated: mediation and the paradox are parallel concepts which are characteristic of two different spheres. Finally, he says directly, “Even the idea of mediation, the watchword of the more recent philosophy, is the direct opposite of Christianity.”³⁰

In the text of the *Fragments* itself there is ample evidence of a polemic against mediation. For example, Climacus alludes to the doctrine of mediation in the final sentences of the book. There, as in the journal entries just quoted, the question concerns the difference between philosophy and Christianity. Climacus writes,

If in discussing the relation between Christianity and philosophy we begin by narrating what was said earlier, how shall we ever, not finish, but ever manage to begin, for history just keeps on growing. If we begin with “the great thinker and sage Pontius Pilate, *executor Novi Testamenti*,” who in his own way merits a good deal of gratitude from Christianity and philosophy, even if he did not invent mediation, and if, before beginning with him, we have to wait for one or two decisive books (perhaps the system) that have already been announced *ex cathedra* several times, how shall we ever manage to begin?³¹

Here the doctrine of mediation is mentioned only as an aside. Pontius Pilate is said to have given much to both philosophy and Christianity even though “he did not invent mediation.” The satire here lies in the ironic implication that the principle of mediation has been a great service to both philosophy and Christianity. Thus, mediation is alluded to in a rhetorical or polemical fashion without any accompanying analysis. This is understandable given that Climacus takes the body of the work itself to have provided an adequate analysis and response to the doctrine and its inapplicability to theological questions. In any case, the allusion to it here in the last sentence of the work is indication of its centrality for the argument of the *Fragments* as a whole.

References to mediation are scattered throughout the body of the text. For example, in a passage from Chapter 5, Climacus alludes to the principle of mediation as a way of contrasting ancient philosophy to modern. He writes,

All such human profundity leads to nothing or in our own time may lead to being considered genuine speculative profundity, since the despised sophism has become the miserable secret of genuine speculation (only the devil knows how it happened), and what antiquity regarded negatively – “to a certain degree” (the mocking toleration that me-

²⁹ JP 3:3073 / SKS 19, 390, Not13:23.

³⁰ JP 2:2277 / SKS 18, 125, HH:2. Translation slightly modified.

³¹ PF, 109f. / SKS 4, 305f.

diates everything without making petty distinctions) – has become the positive, and what antiquity called the positive, the passion for distinctions, has become foolishness.³²

Kierkegaard frequently uses the formulation “to a certain degree” to refer to the concept of mediation.³³ A given thing is “to a certain degree” A and “to a certain degree” not-A. While ancient philosophy is concerned with making distinctions, modern philosophy eliminates them with the doctrine of mediation.³⁴

Moreover, in a footnote in the “Interlude” Climacus refers specifically to Hegel’s doctrine of contradiction, which is, of course, synonymous with his principle of mediation. In the footnote Climacus explains his use of the word “contradiction” in order to distinguish it from a Hegelian usage:

Here the word “contradiction” must not be taken in the volatilized sense into which Hegel has misled himself and others and miscast contradiction itself – namely, that it has the power to produce something. As long as nothing has come into existence, contradiction is merely the impelling urge to wonder, its *nisus*, not the *nisus* of coming into existence; when something has come into existence, contradiction is once again present as the *nisus* of wonder in the passion that reproduces the coming into existence.³⁵

Here Climacus indicates his disagreement with the productive aspect of the Hegelian doctrine of mediation. For Hegel, contradictory opposites produce a third concept, in violation of the law of excluded middle. Thus, the category of becoming is produced from the contradiction of being and nothing. By contrast, according to Aristotle’s view, contradiction is conceived as an indeterminate negation of the first term, i. e., A and not-A. Thus, for Aristotle the second term, i. e., not-A, is not any determinate thing but merely the abstract negation of the first term. The contradiction or negation of blue is not some determinate color such as yellow, red, etc. but rather not-blue. Thus, no third is produced. The passage quoted demonstrates clearly that Kierkegaard is aware of Hegel’s criticism of the Aristotelian definition and his reformulation of the concept.

Finally, at the beginning of Chapter 3, when the concept of the paradox is introduced, the concept of mediation is mentioned as well.

³² *PF*, 91 / *SKS* 4, 288f.

³³ See the entry, “*til en vis Grad*,” in the “*Sagregister*” by A. Ibsen in *SV2 XV*, pp. 415f.

³⁴ See the short text at the beginning of *The Concept of Anxiety*: “The age of making distinctions is past. It has been vanquished by the system. In our day, whoever loves to make distinctions is regarded as an eccentric whose soul clings to something that has long since vanished.” *CA*, 3 / *SKS* 4, 310.

³⁵ *PF*, 86fn. / *SKS* 4, 285fn.

Climacus uses it in an example as follows: “Similarly, the human act of walking, so the natural scientists inform us, is a continuous falling, but a good steady citizen who walks to his office mornings and home at midday probably considers this an exaggeration, because his progress, after all, is a matter of mediation – how could it occur to him that he is continually falling, he who unswervingly follows his nose.”³⁶ Here Climacus simply alludes to the principle with a seemingly trivial example, but its placement at the beginning of the analysis of the paradox is significant. It is introduced to illustrate the notion of the paradox as transcendent. Climacus begins with the claim that human thinking always seeks its own limit by trying to know what cannot be known, but “because of habit we do not discover this.”³⁷ Since one is in the habit of thinking, i. e., in the realm of mediation, one is unaware of the drive of the human mind to go beyond this. The parallel Climacus draws seems to be that walking is like thinking in that it seems to be continuous and uninterrupted, like the realm of mediation, which is characterized by smooth transitions from the one point to the next. But in fact walking involves a leap since it is really a falling, and thinking likewise always involves a leap or a movement beyond itself.

Given these examples, there is a great deal of internal and external evidence that the issue of mediation is central to the argument of the *Fragments*. Thus, I take it to be demonstrated that the position to be criticized, or at least one of them, is mediation. While there is clearly a general Hegelian context here in the criticism of mediation, it remains to be seen whether it is Hegel’s own position or someone else’s that Climacus wants to criticize. In the *Fragments* there are no analyses of this point in Hegel’s philosophy and no quotations from his works on logic. The only reference to Hegel’s logic occurs in the footnote quoted above about the productive aspect of the Hegelian notion of contradiction. But even this is not accompanied by any analysis. Moreover, in the journals there is nothing to indicate a renewed study during this period of any of Hegel’s primary texts, let alone the *Science of Logic*. All of this seems to indicate that the point about mediation in Hegel’s logic itself is secondary and that the real issue and the real target of the criticism lie elsewhere.

³⁶ *PF*, 37 / *SKS* 4, 243.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

III. *The Allusions to Martensen*

The criticism here in the *Fragments* can best be conceived as aimed against Martensen, who, in his contribution to the debate about the question of Hegelian mediation, claimed that the fundamental significance of the Christian revelation is the mediation or unity of God and man. There is every reason to think that Martensen is the main target of the work. Right away in the Preface there are hidden allusions to him. There Climacus is careful to distinguish himself from pretentious contemporary writers, who expect their works to be of great significance. He writes:

For this to happen, the guilty person would have to be singularly stupid by nature, and, most likely, by yelling day in and day out in antistrophic antiphones every time someone deluded him into thinking that now a new era, a new epoch, etc. was beginning, he would have so completely bellowed the sparsely bestowed *quantum satis* of common sense out of his head that he would have been transported into a state of bliss, into what could be called the howling madness of the higher lunacy, symptomatized by yelling, convulsive yelling, while the sum and substance of the yelling are these words: era, epoch, era and epoch, epoch and era, the system.³⁸

This seemingly enigmatic passage is in fact an allusion to Martensen. In 1837 Martensen defended his Latin dissertation, *On the Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness*.³⁹ In 1841 it was translated into Danish by Lauritz Vilhelm Petersen (1817-79). In the Introduction to the translation, Petersen writes the following of Martensen's dissertation: "It was the first work that was published in Denmark in the modern speculative direction and heralded the era in theology from which people have now already begun to mark time."⁴⁰ Climacus thus mocks the pretension of this claim that Martensen's dissertation is an epoch-making work in the history of Danish theology. Here Martensen is

³⁸ *PF*, 6 / *SKS* 4, 216. See also *PF*, Supplement, pp. 226f. / *Pap.* X 2 A 155, p. 117: "[Martensen] actually has always been more of a reporter than an original thinker....He makes quite a splash, and in the meantime young students use the opportunity to inform the public in print that with Martensen begins a new era, epoch, epoch, era, etc. (Note: See the Preface to *Philosophical Fragments*.)"

³⁹ Hans Lassen Martensen *De autonomia conscientiae sui humanae in theologiam dogmaticam nostri temporis introducta*, Copenhagen 1837. ASKB 648.

⁴⁰ Hans Lassen Martensen *Den menneskelige Selvbevidstheds Autonomie*, tr. by L. V. Petersen, Copenhagen 1841, "Forord" (unnumbered pages). ASKB 651. English translation: *The Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology in Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hans L. Martensen's Philosophy of Religion*, tr. by Curtis L. Thompson and David J. Kangas, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1997, p. 74. Translation slightly modified. See the commentary in *SKS* K4, 202-03.

also associated with the key terms, “the system,” and “the higher lunacy,” i. e., in contrast to “the higher unity [sc. of contradictories].”

Martensen is alluded to again in Chapter 1 where Climacus refers to the doctrine of mediation with the familiar formulation “to a certain degree.” From his comments it is clear that he thinks that mediation leads to a position half-way, which ultimately says nothing. He writes:

With half-thoughts, with higgling and haggling, with claiming and disclaiming, as if the individual to a certain degree owed something to another person but then again to a certain degree did not, with vague words that explain everything except what is meant by this “to a certain degree” – with all such things one does not go beyond Socrates or reach the concept of revelation, either, but simply remains in empty talk.⁴¹

Here Climacus once again uses the slogan “to a certain degree” to characterize the doctrine of mediation. In this passage there are two hints which are helpful in determining the target. First there is the formulation of going beyond Socrates. This expression occurs several times throughout the body of the book⁴² as well as in “The Moral” at the end of the text.⁴³ The formulation of “going beyond” was one that Kierkegaard associated with Martensen.⁴⁴ Moreover, going beyond Socratic ignorance to establish a positive position was also something that Kierkegaard associated with Martensen’s claims to begin with doubt and then to go beyond this doubt and establish a positive doctrine. Second the reference to “the concept of revelation” is crucial. The applicability of Hegel’s criticism of the law of excluded middle to key Christian doctrines was central to the contemporary Danish de-

⁴¹ *PF*, 11 / *SKS* 4, 220.

⁴² E. g. *PF*, 96 / *SKS* 4, 293. *PF*, 97 / *SKS* 4, 294.

⁴³ *PF*, 111 / *SKS* 4, 306.

⁴⁴ *CA*, Supplement, p. 207 / *Pap.* V B 60, p. 137: “Some teach that eternity is comic, or more correctly, that in eternity a person will perceive a comic consciousness about the temporal. This wisdom we owe especially to the last three or four paragraphs of Hegel’s *Aesthetics*. Here [in Denmark] it has been presented in one of the journals by Professor Martensen. Although the professor, after his return [from Germany], and since his first appearance in the *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, has invariably assured us that he has gone beyond Hegel, he certainly did not go farther in this case.” Translation slightly modified. See also *CA*, Supplement, p. 213 / *Pap.* V B 72:33: “The whole wisdom of the superiority of the comic we owe to the three or four last paragraphs in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*, although it has also been presented with bravura by one who long since has gone beyond Hegel; and while he astonished women and children with his discourse, he would not as much as intimate that it was Hegel’s.” See also *JP* 6:6947 / *Pap.* XI 3 B 57, p. 107: “Professor Martensen ‘goes further’ – that is to be expected of Prof. M.”

bate. The main doctrine at issue was that of the revelation. Martensen defended the view that the revelation of God in human form in history is an example of Hegelian mediation. Thus, he claims, the very essence of Christianity is supported by this view. In this same passage from the *Fragments* there is also a direct reference to mediation which is seen as eliminating all distinctions, which is ridiculed as “a common lunacy” and a “*commune naufragium*.”⁴⁵

Martensen is alluded to again later indirectly with reference to the question of skeptical doubt. Kierkegaard associated the phrase “*de omnibus dubitandum est*” with him.⁴⁶ In the “Interlude” to the *Fragments*, Climacus writes, “Yet it is not so difficult to understand this or to understand how this casts light on belief, provided one is not utterly confused by the Hegelian doubt about everything, against which there is really no need to preach, for what the Hegelians say about it is of such a nature that it seems rather to favor a modest doubt as to whether there really is anything to their having doubted something.”⁴⁷ Here Climacus

⁴⁵ *PF*, 12 / *SKS* 4, 220.

⁴⁶ In Kierkegaard’s mind, this phrase was associated with Martensen who was apparently wont to parrot it. In 1837-38 as a young student, Kierkegaard attended Martensen’s lecture course, “Introduction to Speculative Dogmatics.” In lecture notes, which were found in the journals and papers, we read the following: “Descartes (d. 1650) said: *cogito ergo sum* and *de omnibus dubitandum est*. He thereby produced the principle for modern Protestant subjectivity. By means of the latter proposition – *de omnibus dubitandum est* – he gave his essential watchword, for he thereby denoted a doubt not about this or that but about everything” (*SKS* 19, 131, Not4:7). See also *Pap.* II C 25, in *Pap.* XII, p. 282, where Martensen repeats the same phrase in his lectures, “The History of Philosophy from Kant to Hegel” in 1838-39. Finally, in his doctoral dissertation *De autonomia*. op. cit., § 5, p. 19; Danish translation: *Den menneskelige Selvbevidstheds Autonomie*, op. cit., § 5, p. 16, Martensen writes, “Descartes, who may be seen as the founder of modern philosophy, arrived, for reason of wanting to restore science, at the proposition *that one must doubt everything* (*de omnibus dubitandum est*).” (English translation quoted from *The Autonomy of Human Self-Consciousness in Modern Dogmatic Theology*, op. cit., p. 85.) In 1842-43 Kierkegaard even wrote a draft for a short work entitled, *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*. It is the story of a young student of theology who tries to come to terms with the principle of universal doubt. The criticism of Martensen in the work is thinly veiled. There he satirizes at length Martensen’s claim that modern philosophy (in contrast to the Middle Ages) begins with doubt. See *JC*, 132ff. / *Pap.* IV B 1, pp. 115ff. Throughout his *corpus*, Kierkegaard repeats the Latin phrase “*de omnibus dubitandum est*,” (e. g., *EPW*, 114 / *SKS* 17, 288, DD:208. *EPW*, 117 / *SKS* 17, 290, DD:208. *JC*, 131 note / *Pap.* IV B 1, p. 114 note. *CUPI*, 195 / *SKS* 7, 179. *CUPI*, 200 / *SKS* 7, 184.) Elsewhere Kierkegaard simply refers to those who doubt everything (e. g., *SLW*, 34 / *SKS* 6, 38. *SLW*, 120 / *SKS* 6, 114. *SLW* Supplement, p. 540 / *Pap.* V B 175:4.)

⁴⁷ *PF*, 82 / *SKS* 4, 281.

talks not of Hegel but of “Hegelians” who have claimed to doubt everything. There can be little doubt that the target here is Martensen.

Finally, further evidence comes from years later in 1850 when Kierkegaard wanted to write something in response to the controversies surrounding Martensen’s then recently published *Christian Dogmatics*.⁴⁸ In a draft found in his papers, Kierkegaard refers to the way in which Martensen ignored the pseudonymous works, many of which were aimed at him. In this context, Kierkegaard disdainfully writes of Martensen, “mediation is his existence-category.”⁴⁹ Here Martensen is associated directly with the principle of mediation. Moreover, by referring to this as an “existence-category,” Kierkegaard tries to indicate what he takes to be the category mistake in Martensen’s way of thinking, which would take a principle from abstract thinking and make it into a principle of life.

IV. *The Criticism of Martensen’s Article on Mediation*

Given these allusions, there is every reason to suspect that Martensen is important for the *Fragments*. I now turn to his article, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *principium exclusi medii*,” which, I wish to argue, is the main target of the criticism of mediation in the *Fragments*. This is clear when one examines the context and the content of his article. With respect to its context, it was Mynster’s article, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism,” that set off the Danish debate about Hegel’s concept of mediation. Mynster’s claim was that given the law of excluded middle, rationalism and supernaturalism, *qua* contradictory terms, cannot both be antiquated at the same time since if the one were antiquated, then the other would *ipso facto* not be antiquated. In this context Mynster critically alludes to Hegel’s treatment of the law of excluded middle, claiming that, despite Hegel’s criticism, this Aristotelian law is still valid for all sound thinking. This article evoked a response from Heiberg, who concentrates almost exclusively on the question of Hegel’s criticism of the laws of contradiction and excluded middle in the context of logic.⁵⁰ He only fleetingly alludes to the impli-

⁴⁸ Hans Lassen Martensen *Den christelige Dogmatik*, Copenhagen 1849. ASKB 653.

⁴⁹ JP 6:6636 / Pap. X 6 B 137.

⁵⁰ Johan Ludvig Heiberg “En logisk Bemærkning i Anledning af H. H. Hr. Biskop Dr. Mynsters Afhandling om Rationalisme og Supranaturalisme i forrige Hefte af dette Tidsskrift” in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, 1, 1839, pp. 441-456. (Reprinted in Heiberg’s *Prosaiske Skrifter*, vols. 1-11, Copenhagen 1861-62; vol. 2, pp. 167-190.)

cations of the doctrine of mediation for Christianity. By contrast, Martensen, a trained theologian, makes this the main point of his article. He is interested above all in showing that the central doctrines of Christianity, such as the Incarnation and the Trinity, are supported by the Hegelian principle of mediation. Kierkegaard felt himself called upon to respond to this application of Hegelian logic to Christianity and thus to come to the aid of Mynster.

Kierkegaard was quite familiar with the ongoing debate about the Hegelian doctrine of mediation. But in case there is any doubt about its relevance for the *Fragments*, one will note that the issue is referred to explicitly in the final pages of the work. There Climacus writes,

But here I shall stop. Even if I were a better dialectician than I am, I would still have my limits. Basically, an unshakeable insistence upon the absolute and absolute distinctions are precisely what makes a good dialectician. This is something we in our day have completely disregarded in and by sublating the law of contradiction, without perceiving what Aristotle indeed emphasized, namely that the thesis that the law of contradiction is sublated is based upon the law of contradiction, since otherwise the opposite thesis, i. e., that it is not sublated, would be equally true.⁵¹

Here Climacus alludes to the Hegelian criticism of the law of contradiction, and by saying “in our day” he makes reference to the contemporary debate about this issue. Climacus points out the self-contradictory nature of denying the law of contradiction, i. e., in order to deny it, one must implicitly appeal to it. While he explicitly attributes this objection to Aristotle, it had also been raised by Sibbern in his article on the issue in his “Review of *Perseus*.”⁵² Sibbern’s article can be seen as a forerunner to the debate proper, which had as its focus the question of the mediation of the theological views of rationalism and supernaturalism. The article is alluded to directly or indirectly by virtually all of the participants in the debate. This objection is referred to explicitly by Andreas Ferdinand Schiødte (1816-87) in his anonymous contribution to the debate⁵³ and by Mynster in his most extensive

⁵¹ *PF*, 108f. / *SKS* 4, 304f.. Translation slightly modified.

⁵² Frederik Christian Sibbern “Om den Maade, hvorpaa Contradictionsprincipet behandles i den hegelske Skole, med Mere, som henhører til de logiske Grundbetragtninger” in *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, 19, 1838, p. 426. F. C. Sibbern *Bemærkninger og Undersøgelser, fornemmelig betreffende Hegels Philosophie, betragtet i Forhold til vor Tid*, Copenhagen 1838, p. 81. *ASKB* 778.

⁵³ Anonymous [Andreas Ferdinand Schiødte] “Et Par Ord til nærmere Overveielse angaaende de tre saakaldte logiske Principer” in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, 2, 1839, p. 121.

treatment of the issue.⁵⁴ Thus, there can be no doubt that this debate is relevant for the *Fragments*. It now remains to be seen specifically which article or aspect of the debate is most significant.

In his article, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *principium exclusi medii*,” Martensen argues that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity rest on the concept of mediation. He writes, “The central point of Christianity – the doctrine of Incarnation, the doctrine of the God-man – shows precisely that Christian metaphysics cannot remain in an either/or, but that it must find its truth in the third which this law excludes.”⁵⁵ Here he uses what later becomes the “Kierkegaardian” formulation of the either/or in order to characterize the position which he believes to be foreign to Christianity. The very goal of modern theological thinking, says Martensen, is to unite opposites and “to grasp the identity of what is contradictory for the understanding.”⁵⁶ He claims the fact that the law of contradiction “cannot be a final court of appeals for theology appears obvious in practice when we see how Christianity continually sublates it.”⁵⁷ Thus, Martensen’s thesis is that mediation is the very principle of Christianity.

Martensen is primarily interested in the question of the incarnation and in the person of Christ, which is clearly one of the main issues in the *Fragments*. He contrasts Christianity with Judaism, saying that while the latter holds a strictly transcendent conception of God, insisting on an absolute split between man and God, what characterizes Christianity is the incarnation. But he goes on to say that Christianity is characterized by Hegelian logic, i. e., by mediation, whereas Judaism is characterized by Aristotelian logic, i. e., the either/or or the law of excluded middle. He writes,

The metaphysics of the Jewish religion must, by contrast, stringently maintain this law precisely because Judaism’s standpoint is pure, *unmediated supernaturalism*, which can conceive God only in a distant infinity beyond the world and human consciousness, as

⁵⁴ Jakob Peter Mynster “*De principio logico exclusi medii inter contradictoria non negligendo commentatio, qua ad audiendam orationem...invitat*. Jo. Fr. Herbart. Gottinae 1833. 29 S. 8^o, *De principiorum contradictionis, identitatis, exclusi tertii in logicis dignitate et ordine commentatio*. Scripsit I. H. Fichte. Bonnae 1840. 31 S. 8^o” in *Tidsskrift for Litteratur og Kritik*, 7, 1842, p. 333. (Reprinted as “Om de logiske Principer” in Mynster’s *Blandede Skrifter*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 124).

⁵⁵ Hans Lassen Martensen “Rationalisme, Supranaturalisme og *principium exclusi medii*,” op. cit., p. 458.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

the absolutely supernatural Creator of heaven and earth, and can conceive man only as a being eternally restricted by the limitations of finitude and being something created.⁵⁸

It lies in the very notion of the incarnation that God became man and thus came down from the transcendent sphere and entered into the human realm. Like Kierkegaard, Martensen says that, for the Jews, Christ must have been an offense since he appeared to be a human being who claimed to be God. Their persecution of Christ, he argues, was based on Aristotelian logic: "Seen from the point of view of logic, their accusation rested on the *principium exclusi medii* or on the assumption that the contradicting predicates 'God' and 'man' could not be mediated in the selfsame subject. But with the same logic, one could attack every fundamental dogma of Christianity."⁵⁹ Thus, argues Martensen, the claim for a pure supernaturalism as supported by the law of excluded middle is antithetical to Christianity.

The second argument of Martensen's article is that supernaturalism or the conception of God as a transcendent other, located in a supernatural sphere, is on its own conceptually incoherent. It can only be understood in contrast to its opposite, namely naturalism. The two constitute complementary concepts. Thus, the notion of the supernatural or of a supernatural God, must be mediated by the notion of the natural. Both fall within the immanent sphere of thought: "I cannot help but see how the concept of the supernatural can become actual except through the mediation of what is natural. If this is so, the latter is contained in the former as one of its moments. The important insight of logic, that every concept contains its other or its negative, has already proven its usefulness for science and demands its due here."⁶⁰ Following Hegel's logic, Martensen argues that isolated positions are conceptually incoherent; instead, such positions must be seen in their larger context as the complements to opposite positions. Thus, supernaturalism and naturalism constitute a dialectical pair which necessarily belong together.

The result of this view is that no position or concept can stand on its own, alone in some transcendent sphere. The universe of concepts constitutes an immanent sphere of thought. It is along these lines that Martensen understands the person of Christ and the incarnation. He argues that one must conceive of Christ as an immanent determination. Although he descended from the supernatural sphere, this is a dialecti-

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 458.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 458.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 459.

cal concept and is thus necessarily related to the natural sphere. Martensen claims, "These well-known views have opened up a horizon – which, in our time, has become broader than ever before, which permits one to view Christianity as the *immanent* determination of God's essence and the divine world order."⁶¹ Thus, Martensen draws on Hegel's doctrine of the immanent development of the Concept. There is no transcendent term or, in Climacus' language, no absolute other.

Martensen makes use of the Hegelian doctrine of immanence in the context of philosophy of religion. The underlying premise is that the concept of the divine is no different from any other object of consciousness. It is always a representation of the human mind determined according to specific fixed rules for representation. Thus, the concept of the divine develops according to these rules, but it is a purely immanent development of the concept, and there is no term which is external to consciousness. Therefore, when Martensen talks of the person of Christ, he speaks of the idea or concept of Christ.

Martensen claims that the modern age needs to overcome naive religious thinking in terms of metaphors and stories, and grasp the truth and necessity in terms of the abstract Concept. Thus, one will be able to think the immanence of the divine. He writes,

The thinking human spirit is unable to reconcile itself with the great mystery and, instead of thinking it as revelation, finds itself pondering its own createdness and the inconceivability of what is divine. The immanent thinking inspired by the dialectic, by contrast, finds no rest until it knows the mystery as revelation. If the Trinity is really to have meaning for thought, as the absolute truth, then it must become the key to the entire system of the world. All actuality in heaven and on earth must be taken up into its circle, and it must be known as the Concept which conceives everything and itself.⁶²

He claims that the unity of Christ and human nature has not been consistently thought through at the conceptual level. This is now made possible for the first time by the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Thus, Martensen uses the doctrines of mediation and immanence to claim that the basic doctrines of Christianity can be grasped by unaided human reason and thus can be the objects of knowledge.

This background information about Martensen's article helps to explain the motivation for a number of arguments in the *Fragments*. For example, Martensen's claim that supernaturalism and naturalism, God and man, represent two complementary, dialectically related concepts is criticized at least indirectly in the work. Climacus allows a mock

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 465.

Hegelian to raise an objection to the doctrine of the absolute difference that he has just advanced. He writes, “But this difference cannot be grasped securely. Every time this happens, it is basically an arbitrariness, and at the very bottom of devoutness there madly lurks the capricious arbitrariness that knows it itself has produced the god. If the difference cannot be grasped securely because there is no distinguishing mark, then, as with all such dialectical opposites, so it is with the difference and the likeness – they are identical.”⁶³ Climacus’ allusion to “dialectical opposites” is the only hint he gives that he is concerned with a Hegelian argument here. The dialectical opposites are presumably God and man, which mutually condition one another as reciprocal concepts. Climacus indicates that since the difference or the unknown cannot be identified, it must collapse. Here he draws on Leibniz’s principle of the identity of indiscernibles, which states that what cannot be distinguished is identical. He then compares this with the doctrine of mediation, according to which the difference between opposites collapses at the level of speculative thinking. He now goes on to try to answer this objection. Although there is no real analysis of the issue, Climacus claims that this view that all difference ultimately reduces to identity is merely obfuscation, which he calls here a “fantastical fabrication.”⁶⁴ He thinks the problem is only a trick played by the abstract understanding which has no basis in actuality. Only in the abstract immanent realm of thought can God and man be considered identical. But in actuality there is an essential difference, which he defines as sin later in the discussion.

Second, it is in response to Martensen’s claim that the divine is a part of the immanent sphere of concepts that Climacus formulates his doctrine of the god as the absolutely different. Indeed, the doctrine of the absolute other is just the opposite of the doctrine of immanence. Climacus is intent on sketching the limits of reason. He insists that the realm of immanence reaches only so far before it runs up against the unknown. The underlying claim is that there is a transcendent sphere beyond human thinking. The notion of the god as something absolutely different is intended to defy an all-encompassing immanent scheme. The god is not simply different from humans in the way apples and oranges are different, but rather he is *absolutely* different. The difference lies not in some relative difference in the immanent sphere of thought where things such as apples and oranges can be

⁶³ *PF*, 45 / *SKS* 4, 250.

⁶⁴ *PF*, 45 / *SKS* 4, 250.

compared and contrasted, but rather it transcends this sphere. For this reason it is the *absolute* difference. Thus, Climacus takes up a supernaturalist position in defense of Mynster and against Martensen.

Third, Kierkegaard formulates his doctrine of the paradox in response to Martensen's claim that the divine is immanent to human understanding and can therefore be known by thought. Thus, it is no accident that in the *Fragments* Climacus criticizes rationalism and its immanent attempts to ground faith. If the incarnation can be understood in terms of a concept, then the divine is comprehensible to human reason. According to this view, the divine is brought into the sphere of human thought, and the epistemological problems are resolved. By contrast, Climacus formulates the doctrine that the absolute other is transcendent and cannot be grasped by reason precisely because it is absolutely other.⁶⁵ If the god is absolutely different, then he cannot be grasped by unaided human reason. The human mind can only know what is like itself, i. e., what is within its own immanent sphere. In order to know the divine, a human being must have help from the god.

It will be noted that while the general context of the discussion is about Hegel's logic, the more immediate and urgent issue – both in the debate generally and for Climacus – has to do with theology. The absence of quotations from or references to Hegel's writings is striking given the importance of the issue of mediation. This seems to indicate that while Hegel's criticism of the laws of Aristotelian logic is no doubt in the background of this discussion, it is not the central point, and in its original context it would probably not have evoked Kierkegaard's criticism. It is rather the application of the principle of mediation in a theological context which makes the issue for him a pressing one. It is clearly the Danish discussion of this issue which is most important and not Hegel's treatment of it in the *Science of Logic*.

It might be argued that the position being criticized is still Hegelian in the sense that Martensen simply reiterates Hegel's philosophy of religion by giving a fairly standard right-Hegelian account. This might be true in a sense, but it will be noted that there are likewise no references to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* either in the text or in the journals and papers from the period. This indicates that even though at least a part of the view being criticized is, to be sure, Hegelian, nonetheless *the polemic* is with Martensen and not with Hegel. Kierkegaard is not provoked by Hegel's logic or his philosophy of religion but rather by Martensen's use of them. Moreover, there are

⁶⁵ See also A, 119f. / *Pap.* VII 2 B 235, pp. 207f.

instances where one can clearly distinguish between Martensen and Hegel in the text of the *Fragments* in the sense that there is a positive Hegelian influence alongside a polemic against Martensen. This can be seen from the following considerations.

Although Climacus clearly wants to reject some of the essentials of Martensen's position, nonetheless when one ignores for a moment the polemical posturing, there are many indications that he does not reject the principle of mediation entirely but rather uses and incorporates it into the doctrine of the paradox. For example, he describes the paradox as follows: "Thus the paradox becomes even more terrible, or the same paradox has the duplexity by which it manifests itself as the absolute – negatively, by bringing into prominence the absolute difference of sin and, positively, by wanting to sublimate this absolute difference in the absolute equality."⁶⁶ Climacus' formulation here is interesting since what he calls "the paradox" is precisely what Hegel calls "the dialectical relation of concepts." Climacus even uses the Hegelian term "to sublimate," "*ophæve*," the Danish equivalent of "*aufheben*." There is a clear Hegelian movement in his description: a negation or a difference, sublated into a higher unity or an "absolute equality," where the difference or the contradiction disappears.

In another passage Climacus characterizes the paradox in exactly the way in which Hegel characterizes the concept of mediation, i. e., as that which unites contradictory notions. Climacus writes, "but the paradox specifically unites the contradictories, is the eternalizing of the historical and the eternal. Anyone who understands the paradox any other way may retain the honor of having explained it, an honor he would win by his unwillingness to be satisfied."⁶⁷ This too indicates that Kierkegaard does not want to reject the Hegelian principle outright but rather to make use of it for his own purposes by modifying and reformulating it in terms of the paradox. It should be noted that in *Practice in Christianity* the concept of the God-man is central. There when the pseudonymous author Anti-Climacus speaks of the God-man as a sign of contradiction,⁶⁸ it is clear that this is a Hegelian use of "contradiction" and not an Aristotelian use. Contradiction is conceived as the relation of opposites, i. e., god and man, and not as a pure negation, i. e., god and not-god. This is further evidence that the

⁶⁶ *PF*, 47 / *SKS* 4, 252. Translation slightly modified.

⁶⁷ *PF*, 61 / *SKS* 4, 263. Translation slightly modified.

⁶⁸ *PC*, 124-127 / *SVI* XII, 116-119. *PC*, 132-36 / *SVI* XII, 124-127.

paradox is more closely related to the Hegelian concept of mediation than it would seem to be at first glance.

Further evidence for a similarity between Hegelian mediation and the paradox can be found in the journals. In an undated entry from around 1842-43 with the heading “The Absolute Paradox,” Kierkegaard writes,

Insofar as philosophy is mediation, it holds true that it is not complete before it has seen the ultimate paradox before its own eyes. This paradox is the God-man and is to be developed solely out of the idea, and yet with constant reference to Christ’s appearance, in order to see whether it is sufficiently paradoxical, whether Christ’s human existence does not bear the mark of his not being the *individual* human being in the profoundest sense, to what extent his earthly existence does not fall within the metaphysical and the aesthetic.⁶⁹

Here the doctrines of mediation and the paradox of the God-man are explicitly compared. It seems clear that the paradox is not conceived as the opposite of mediation but rather as one variant or example of it. The two do not mutually exclude one another; on the contrary, mediation is only completed by the paradox. Climacus uses Hegelian language in claiming that both are “developed solely out of the idea.” Thus, this constitutes another example of appropriation.

Given this, it seems obvious that the concept of mediation as presented by Martensen clearly provoked Kierkegaard. As a result he formulated the doctrine of the paradox as a response. But in his formulation of this doctrine he ends up incorporating at least some of the basic principles of the original Hegelian doctrine. While Kierkegaard may have aimed at rejecting Martensen’s theology, he nonetheless employs some aspects of the original Hegelian principle of mediation in his refutation. This should be indication enough that the criticism here is not intended to be aimed at Hegel but rather at Martensen. Climacus objects to the application to which Martensen puts this principle and the conclusions he draws from it, but has no qualms about availing himself of the actual Hegelian principle itself. Thus, despite all of the polemical rhetoric, Kierkegaard seems to use this aspect of Hegel’s methodology as a positive source of inspiration and as a tool which he can appropriate and employ for his own purposes.

I take this paper to have demonstrated the little recognized role of Martensen in the *Fragments*. The point of departure was Kierkegaard’s own claim that the *Fragments* “was written specifically to bat-

⁶⁹ JP 3:3074 / SKS 19, 418, Not13:53.

tle against mediation.”⁷⁰ The role of mediation in the text has led most commentators to conceive of the book as a grand polemic against Hegel’s speculative logic, in which mediation plays a key role. However, this fails to explain the central issues of the *Fragments*, i. e., the incarnation and the object of Christian faith. This constellation of issues points not to Hegel’s logic but rather to Martensen’s article, “Rationalism, Supernaturalism and the *principium exclusi medii*.” While Martensen appeals to Hegel’s logic in this work, the central issues of his article are theological and, moreover, virtually identical with those in the *Fragments*.

The doctrine of God as the absolutely different is intended as an alternative to Martensen’s conception of Christianity as purely immanent and thus of the divine as being continuous with the human. The doctrine of the absolute paradox is intended as a refutation of Martensen’s conceptual interpretation of the incarnation. Finally, Climacus’ claim that one cannot know the divine with unaided human reason is intended as a response to Martensen’s claim that an adequate conceptual understanding of the incarnation can be achieved by human reason alone. Given this, Martensen’s role in the work can hardly be overestimated.

Nonetheless one might still want to argue that despite this polemic with Martensen, Climacus is simultaneously in a polemic with Hegel to the degree to which Martensen is putting forth a specific version of Hegel’s doctrines. Thus, insofar as Climacus criticizes Martensen, the Hegelian, he also criticizes Hegel himself. The analyses set forth here, however, have shown that while the specific points being criticized might appear to be Hegelian at first glance, upon further examination they prove to have little to do with any of Hegel’s original doctrines. For example, while Hegel does use the expression “the absolute method,” Climacus does not criticize this doctrine itself, but rather concentrates on the way in which people have been misled and distracted from what is most important by unnamed teachers of this doctrine. Similarly, while it appears that the doctrine of the absolute paradox is intended as a direct critique of the Hegelian doctrine of mediation, closer examination reveals that from the way in which the paradox is described it in fact has profound similarities with the Hegelian doctrine.

All of this is of course not to imply that Kierkegaard was a Hegelian or that he shared a great deal with Hegel philosophically. On the con-

⁷⁰ *PF*, Supplement, p. 224 / *SKS* 20, 47, NB:47.

trary, there are many things in the *Fragments* which indicate radically different philosophical investments. For example, Hegel's view is that the goal of philosophy is to provide conceptual analyses, whereas Climacus' view is that philosophy should give one insight into one's own personal ethical existence. Similarly, Hegel's doctrine of the modal categories is considerably different from what Climacus presents in the "Interlude." But these presuppositions are not points of dispute which Climacus has put forth in the work itself. This is something that the commentator can put together for the sake of the comparison in part on the basis of the arguments which he or she has put forth. One is free to make such comparisons, but to do so would be ahistorical since it is clear that Kierkegaard's intent is to carry out a polemic against Martensen.