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### *Kierkegaard and Classical Greek Thought*

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# KIERKEGAARD AND CLASSICAL GREEK THOUGHT

Edited by

William McDonald

Andrew J. Burgess

ACTA KIERKEGAARDIANA

Vol. 7

Central European Research Institute  
of Søren Kierkegaard, Filozofická fakulta  
Univerzity Konstantína Filozofa v Nitre, Slovakia

&

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## Climacus as a Reader of the *Hippias Major* in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

Daphne Giofkou (UK)

Ἀλλὰ δὴ γ', ὦ Σωκράτες, τί οἰεῖ ταυτ' εἶναι ξυναπαντα; κνισματα τοι ἐστί και περικτυμματα των λογων, ὅπερ ἀρτι ἐλεγον, κατα βραχυ διηρημενα.

*Hippias Major*, § 304. A.

(But really, Socrates, what do you suppose all this amounts to? As I said a little while ago, it is mere scrapings and shavings of discourse, cut up into little bits...) <sup>496</sup>

A quotation from the early Platonic dialogue *Hippias Major* is used as an epigraph to Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs* (1846). Apart from this liminal presence of the Platonic text, "the *Hippias* as an introduction to the beautiful" could serve, according to Johannes Climacus, "as a kind of analogy to an introduction such as" his own book aims to be; namely, an introduction that would not only throw "light on what Christianity is" but make "it difficult to become a Christian."<sup>497</sup> The aim of the present paper is to explore whether this claim can be attested in the *Postscript* and how the Platonic dialogue helps Climacus develop "a new approach to the problem of the *Crumbs*."<sup>498</sup> First, I will refer to the theoretical treatment of epigraphs as paratextual devices, proposed by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette in his book *Paratexts* (*Seuils*), and use his theory as a framework in order to formulate some initial questions. Then, I will turn to the sources that may have influenced Kierkegaard's reception of the *Hippias Major*, including Schleiermacher's edition of *Plato's Works* and Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* (Στρωματεῖς). Finally, I will try to see if there is

<sup>496</sup> SKS 7, 8 / CUPH, 2 / CUP1, 3. All English translation page references in this essay are from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), abbreviated as CUPH. The corresponding page references for the Hong translation, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, follow (CUP1).

<sup>497</sup> SKS 7, 349-50 / CUPH, 322 / CUP1, 384.

<sup>498</sup> SKS 7, 26 / CUPH, 18 / CUP1, 17.

textual ground to argue that Climacus closely follows the Platonic text and responds to the philosophical problems raised in the dialogue.

Kierkegaard didn't lack a poetics of epigraphs; in his review of Hans Christian Andersen's *Only a Fiddler*, he refers to the "musical power" of an epigraph, which ought to "put the readers into a definite mood...or it ought to relate piquantly to the whole section."<sup>499</sup> The task of choosing an epigraph requires from the writer "a high degree of inwardness in one's own subject," so that the choice does not stray into "*loci communes* [commonplace remarks]."<sup>500</sup>

### I. The Epigraph as Paratextual Device

According to the typology introduced by Genette, epigraphs belong to the paratextual elements of a book.<sup>501</sup> The term "paratext" denotes all those elements which stand outside, or better, at the boundaries of the main text, such as: the name of the author (the case of pseudonymity included), the title and/or intertitles, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, notes and appendixes, epilogues and postfaces. These devices lay bare the materiality of the book and function as *topoi*—to use the word with both its spatial and rhetorical connotations—that is, as spaces and openings of communication with the reader. Genette notes: "For us, accordingly, the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather,

<sup>499</sup> SKS 1, 48 / EPW, 92-3.

<sup>500</sup> SKS 1, 48 / EPW, 93.

<sup>501</sup> Articles that draw on Genette's theory of paratext in their reading of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* include: Hugh S. Pyper, "Beyond a Joke: Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* as a Comic Book," *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments"* (International Kierkegaard Commentary, vol. 12), ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 149-68; and Kim Ravn, "The Genesis of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2005*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and K. Brian Söderquist (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 1-23. Stephen Cole Leach and Andrew J. Burgess, "Five Versions in Search of an Author: Writing and Revision in Kierkegaard's *The Book on Adler*," in *The Book on Adler* (International Kierkegaard Commentary, vol. 24), ed. Robert L. Perkins, (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 143-66. Hugh Pyper focuses on the title and the status of the *Postscript* "as an addendum" (151) to the *Philosophical Fragments*, whereas Kim Ravn stresses the importance of pseudonymity as paratext that frames the reader's reception of the text.

a *threshold*.<sup>502</sup> The ambivalent position of the paratext, situated at the same time inside and outside the text, accounts for its liminality, which, in turn, issues in semantic ambivalence. Hence, despite “the *illocutionary force* of its message,”<sup>503</sup> the paratext often becomes an oblique textual fold for the reader.

The epigraph is defined by Genette “as a quotation placed *en exergue*,” which means “*off the work*” or “at the *edge of the work*.”<sup>504</sup> This *outside* is supposed to comment “on the *text*, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes”<sup>505</sup> or on the title, but equally, it sometimes “casts a curious light (or shadow) on the text.”<sup>506</sup> Genette closes his book *Paratexts* by saying that “A threshold exists to be crossed.”<sup>507</sup> In this context of crossing a threshold, the etymology of the verb “to cite” is pertinent here; it derives from the Latin verb *citare*, which means “to summon, urge; to put in sudden motion.” The etymology goes back to the Greek verb κινεῖν, which in turn means “to move, set in motion; to change, stir up.” The contemporary meaning “to quote a passage of writing” is attested around the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>508</sup>

Granted that the epigraph is often another text, Genette posits three main questions that will help to study its diverse functions: (a) “Who is the author, real or putative, of the text quoted?” (b) Who is the person who proposes this quotation to the reader? In other words, who has the authorial responsibility for choosing the quotation? (c) Who is its addressee?<sup>509</sup> Genette alerts readers to the possibility that, depending on the text, the one who “put[s] forward” the motto is not necessarily the author.<sup>510</sup>

Regarding the quotation from the *Hippias Major* in the *Postscript*, answering these questions is not an easy task, the relationship between the pseudonymous author and the editor being only one aspect of this intricacy. The quotation *per se* has a peculiar status, creating a kind of (re)doubling or mirror-effect. The name of Plato as the author of the *Hippias* is totally effaced. Inside the quotation, as it were, there is an addressee, namely, Socrates;

<sup>502</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, with a foreword by Richard Macksey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [first edition, 1987]), 1-2 (emphasis in original).

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 (emphasis in original).

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, 144 (emphasis in original).

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 146 note 3.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>508</sup> See *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (Bronx, N.Y.: H.W. Wilson Publishing, 1988).

<sup>509</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, 150-1.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

in addition, the expectation of an answer—at least, from Socrates—is raised. We find ourselves in the middle of a dialogic situation: someone—we assume it is Hippias—asks Socrates what is the purpose/conclusion of all this; furthermore, he repeats what he said “a little while ago,” but what he is *now* saying characterizes all that had been said in the dialogue as “mere scrapings and shavings of discourse.” *We assume it is Hippias* because of the vagueness of who is speaking; we know it is Hippias, only if we know that every Platonic dialogue is usually named after the most important person who converses with Socrates, and there are only two interlocutors in the *Hippias Major*! But, what exactly was Hippias saying “a little while ago”?

The hermeneutical uncertainty of the motto, accentuated by a number of absent elements,<sup>511</sup> induces the reader to engage in the communicational situation of the *Postscript*. Additionally, the motto enacts and reflects the *pre-post* relation between the *Philosophical Crumbs* and its *Postscript*. As Climacus writes, “[t]he first part is the promised sequel, the second part a renewed attempt on the same lines as the piece, a new approach to the problem of the *Crumbs*.”<sup>512</sup> Yet, how are we to make the passage from the *Crumbs* to the *Postscript* and further, from the first to the second part of the *Postscript*, crossing the threshold, moving? And, after the reading of the book, the motto continues to act retrogressively and at the expense of the author: But really, Climacus, what do you suppose all this amounts to?

In a draft title page of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard notes: “To be used as the epigraph, the last lines of Hippias in the dialogue *Hippias* and the first of Socrates’ subsequent last lines.”<sup>513</sup> From this note it is clear that Kierkegaard did not adhere to his initial choice of lines but he definitely opted for the final exchange between Hippias and Socrates. After the lines quoted in the motto, Hippias praises “the ability to produce a discourse well and beautifully in a court of law...or before any other public body”;

<sup>511</sup> Rainier Grutman suggests that the motto is a text fragment, a fragment of an absent text, which yet leaves its traces on the larger text it accompanies. See Rainier Grutman, “How to do things with mottoes: recipes from the romantic era (with special reference to Stendhal),” *Neohelicon* Vol. 37, no. 1 (2010), 139-53.

<sup>512</sup> *SKS*, 7: 26 / *CUPH*, 18 / *CUP1*, 17. For *CUP* as a sequel and postscript to the *Crumbs*, aiming at re-evaluation of Socratic subjectivity, see M. Jamie Ferreira, “The ‘Socratic secret’: The postscript to the *Philosophical Crumbs*,” *Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*, ed. Rick Anthony Furtak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6-24.

<sup>513</sup> *Pap.*, VI B 91 (1845) / *CUP2*, Supplement, 9.

in this way, one achieves “the salvation of oneself, one’s property, and one’s friends.”<sup>514</sup> He urges Socrates to renounce:

...these petty arguments [σμικρολογίας], that one may not, by busying oneself, as at present, with mere talk and nonsense [λήρους], appear to be a fool. —My dear Hippias, you are truly blessed because you know the things a man ought to practise and have, as you say, practised them satisfactorily.<sup>515</sup>

His own “daimonic fortune [δαίμονία τις τύχη],” Socrates continues, is to be always in a state of wandering and *aporia*.<sup>516</sup> He concludes by admitting that now he understands the meaning of the proverbial saying: “beautiful things are difficult.”<sup>517</sup> This is a comment both on the subject matter of the dialogue, the beautiful, and the difficulties in coming up with a definition of the beautiful. However, the saying itself conveys the fragility of the human condition in which happiness could suddenly turn to unhappiness. I wouldn’t exclude that in the words “salvation” (σωτηρίαν) and “blessed” (μακάριος) of the original ancient text, Climacus hears, by a kind of “acoustical illusion,”<sup>518</sup> the different meaning these words acquired in the Christian context.

Comparing the concluding part of the conversation between Socrates and Hippias with the lines that Kierkegaard actually used as a motto, there is a significant shift from *what* is said to *how* it is said.<sup>519</sup> This brings us to the second reference to the *Hippias* in the main body of the *Postscript*.

The second reference appears at the end of §3, “The problem of the *Crumbs* as prefatory not to Christianity but to becoming a Christian” of Chapter 4 in Section I and before Climacus addresses “The problem itself” in Section II (Part Two, Section Two). The passage thus hinges on a turning point in the structure of the *Postscript*.<sup>520</sup> Climacus has already launched his attack

<sup>514</sup> *Hippias*, 304a-b. I use the translation from Plato, *Cratylus*, *Parmenides*, *Greater Hippias*, *Lesser Hippias* (Loeb Classical Library, 167), trans. H. N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>515</sup> *Hippias*, 304b. According to the note, these are the lines that Kierkegaard was going to choose as a motto.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 304b-c.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 304e.

<sup>518</sup> SKS 4, 253 / PF, 49-54.

<sup>519</sup> Cf. SKS 7, 185 / CUPH, 170 / CUP1, 202: “The objective accent falls on *what* is said, the subjective on *how* it is said” (emphasis in original).

<sup>520</sup> For helpful analysis of the frame and structure of the *Postscript*, see Andrew J. Burgess, “The Bilateral Symmetry of Kierkegaard’s *Postscript*,” *International Kierkegaard Commentary to Concluding Unscientific Postscript to “Philosophical Fragments,”* 329-45.

against “the ‘Christian congregation’” where everybody thinks of themselves as Christians<sup>521</sup> and against speculative philosophy, which adopts “the predicate ‘Christian.’”<sup>522</sup> In Section II, Climacus elaborates on the problem of how eternal happiness, as the absolute τέλος for the individual, is decided in time.

The dialogue, as a whole this time, retains its liminal position; it is pushed back, as it were, to the margins of the text. The *Hippias* could serve as “a kind of analogy of an introduction” not because a positive conclusion was reached at the end of the dialogue but rather a negative one; what Socrates has learnt about the beautiful is “that it is difficult.”<sup>523</sup> Climacus continues: “Had the *Hippias* clarified the notion of the beautiful, there would have been absolutely *no remainder* that had been made difficult, and the dialogue would have had absolutely nothing corresponding to the two-fold nature of our enterprise.”<sup>524</sup> He repeats that he undertakes to write an introduction that “in making it difficult for people to become Christians” puts them off.<sup>525</sup> Climacus employs two illustrations of movement, which correspond to two different kinds of introduction to Christianity: the “immediate transition”<sup>526</sup> and the leap. Philosophical, historical or rhetorical introductions introduce Christianity as doctrine. It is like hotels hiring servants “to meet the travellers at the customs house”—another boundary area—“and recommend accommodation.” This kind of introduction though brings one not “a single step nearer” to becoming a Christian, which is a matter of leaping, “the absolute decision [*Afgjørelse*].”<sup>527</sup>

The affinity that Climacus highlights between his own project and the *Hippias* is its inconclusiveness, the remainder left after the closing of the book/dialogue. However, it could be argued that the same holds true for every Socratic dialogue that revolves around the definitional question “What is X?” and ends with the *aporia* of a definite answer. What could be so special about the *Hippias Major*?<sup>528</sup> An answer could be traced back to Kierkegaard’s

<sup>521</sup> SKS 7, 340 / CUPH, 314 / CUP1, 374.

<sup>522</sup> SKS 7, 343 / CUPH, 317 / CUP1, 377-8.

<sup>523</sup> SKS 7, 349 / CUPH, 322 / CUP1, 384.

<sup>524</sup> SKS 7, 350 / CUPH, 322 (my emphasis) / CUP1, 384.

<sup>525</sup> SKS 7, 348 / CUPH, 321 / CUP1, 383.

<sup>526</sup> SKS 7, 347 / CUPH, 320 / CUP1, 381.

<sup>527</sup> SKS 7, 349-50 / CUPH, 322-3 / CUP1, 384.

<sup>528</sup> Jacob Howland draws the conclusion that “Taken together with the epigram of *Fragments*, the meaning of the *Postscript* epigram could hardly be clearer: the proponents of the Hegelian system are sophists or sham-philosophers, and Climacus will extend the Socratic critique of them that he initiated in *Fragments*.” See Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 188. What I shall argue here is rather that

readings when he was writing his dissertation on *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates* (1841).

## II. The Hippias Major in Schleiermacher's edition of the Platonic dialogues

Schleiermacher translated and edited the *Hippias Major*, although he did not place it in the main body of *Plato's Works* but in the Appendix (*Anhang*), since he argued against the authenticity of the dialogue.<sup>529</sup> This choice was in accordance with his method of arranging the Platonic dialogues, which employed three main criteria: the organic harmony between the form and content of a dialogue, the place of each dialogue in the Platonic corpus, and the distinctive language of Plato.<sup>530</sup> As Julia A. Lamm explains, the same criteria determined whether a dialogue should be attributed to Plato's authorship or not.<sup>531</sup>

The subject matter of the *Hippias Major*, "the idea of the beautiful," Schleiermacher contends, is certainly worthy of philosophical investigation. The treatment of the subject though lacks the appropriate "scientific tone"<sup>532</sup> or—if we are to conform to Climacus' terminology—is "unscientific." Schleiermacher's main objection is summed up in that after a series of refutations and behind Socrates' "verbal dialectics" not even "the basis of the theory" regarding the beautiful could be discerned; "so completely is all such" (i.e., the theory of the beautiful and the scientific treatment thereof) "kept out of sight." Hippias the sophist becomes the target of "personal ridicule" and he is portrayed with "such an unheard of degree of stupidity" that, in the end, the impression left to the reader is the "polemical purpose" of the dialogue.<sup>533</sup> The language about pots, kitchen-furniture, and the examples "taken from trifling things" may well have been introduced as a parody of those who depreciate Socrates'

the motto complicates the relations between the couples: Hippias-Socrates and Climacus-Kierkegaard.

<sup>529</sup> Volume 2, part 3 of *Platonis Werke von F. Schleiermacher* (Berlin, 1809) comprises the following dialogues: *Phaedo*, *Philebus*, *Theages*, *Erastae*, *Alcibiades I*, *Menexenus*, *Hippias Major*, *Clitophon*. The last six dialogues are edited in the Appendix.

<sup>530</sup> See Schleiermacher's "General Introduction," *Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson (London, 1836), 32-40.

<sup>531</sup> For an overview of Schleiermacher's method, see Julia A. Lamm, "The art of interpreting Plato," *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Mariña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 91-108, esp. 101-7.

<sup>532</sup> *Schleiermacher's Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, 341-2.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 343-4.

teaching method. Still, Schleiermacher finds the device of Socrates talking to himself and assuming the voice of an anonymous questioner ("the play with the man in the back-ground") or "the extravagances of the humour" unworthy of Plato's philosophy.<sup>534</sup> Overall, he considered the dialogue too coarse to be reconciled "with the propriety and polish of Plato."<sup>535</sup> Finally, there are two dialogues with the title *Hippias* and "it is not very probable" that Plato would have chosen the same interlocutor twice. Consequently, one of the two *Hippias* dialogues is spurious. Schleiermacher assumes that most likely the author of the *Hippias Minor* was an imitator of Plato, who "had the larger [*Hippias*] before him."<sup>536</sup>

The disputed authorship of the dialogue may account for the effacing of Plato's name in the motto.<sup>537</sup> More importantly, Schleiermacher's introduction outlines a number of features (e.g. the play with the doubles, the spurious philosophical language, the conversation about trifling things) that would have made the *Hippias Major* the favourite dialogue of Climacus. Indeed, Climacus writes that the words of Diogenes about Socrates' method of philosophizing in the workshops and in the marketplace "will always remain a beautiful eulogy," bitingly insinuating that Hegel's philosophy would hardly withstand the test of the Socratic *elenchus*:

I am by no means of the opinion that Hegel should engage in conversation with a manservant, and that anything would be proved should the latter fail to understand him; ... this is not what I mean and my proposal is least of all like a street-lounger's attempt to assassinate science.<sup>538</sup>

## III. Who is Hippias?

Further light on the role played by the references to this dialogue can be found by looking briefly at Hippias himself. Hippias was one of the sophists, re-

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, 345-6.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>537</sup> Other editions of Plato's dialogues that Kierkegaard may have consulted include: *Platonis quae exstant opera*, Vol. 9, trans. Friedrich Ast, Leipzig 1827 and *Platonis opera omnia: continens Menexenum, Lysidem, Hippiam Utrumque, Ionem*, Vol. 4, trans. with commentary G. Stallbaum (Gotha and Erfurt, 1833). Stallbaum considered the dialogue authentic, written while Plato was young, whereas Ast dismissed it as inauthentic.

<sup>538</sup> SKS 7, 298-9 / CUPH, 274 / CUP1, 327.

nowned for being an expert on a variety of subjects (e.g. astronomy, grammar, history, genealogy, mathematics, geometry) and his ability to deliver long speeches on any given subject. A work is attributed to him under the title *Συναγωγή*, which is translated as “collection,” “miscellany.”<sup>539</sup> The only known passage from this work is quoted by Clement of Alexandria, a Greek Church Father (ca. 150-220), in his work *Stromateis*,<sup>540</sup> whose title also means “Miscellanies.” It reads as follows:

It may be that some of this has been said by Orpheus, some briefly, here and there, by Museus, some by Hesiod and some by Homer, some in other poets and some in prose-writers both Greek and foreign. For my part, I have collected from all these writers what is most important and belongs together to make this new [καίνον] and composite work.<sup>541</sup>

Clement cites the above passage as testimony of “the propensity of the Greeks to plagiarism in expressions and dogmas [τὸ εὐεπίφορον εἰς κλοπὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων κατὰ τοὺς λόγους τε καὶ τὰ δόγματα];”<sup>542</sup> since the Greek poets and philosophers are caught stealing from one another, they are even more ready to steal from “the truth which belongs to us,” that is, the truth of the Scriptures, the revealed truth. As evidence he provides long catalogues of verses and various quotations from Greek poets and philosophers. As Clement notes, some of them admit, “so as not to be convicted of ingratitude,” that they have received the most important of their doctrines from Socrates.<sup>543</sup>

We may recall that Climacus is faced with the accusation of plagiarism in the *Crumbs*: “Now if someone were to say, ‘What you are composing is the shabbiest plagiarism ever to appear, since it is nothing more or less than what

<sup>539</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: The Fifth Century Enlightenment*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 280-5.

<sup>540</sup> Kierkegaard refers to Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis* (Book V.9) in *Repetition* (SKS 4, 91 / R, 225).

<sup>541</sup> *Str.* VI.2 (PG 9, 228C-229D). As translated and quoted in Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 283. *Stromateis* abounds in quotations from the Platonic dialogues, being a valuable resource for philologists and editors. For instance, Stallbaum in his introduction to the *Hippias Major* makes reference to *Stromateis* V.14 (PG 9, 144B-145A) regarding the question whether the beautiful is identical with the good (*Platonis opera omnia: continens Menexenum, Lysidem, Hippiam Utrumque, Ionem*, 156).

<sup>542</sup> *Str.* VI.2 (PG 9, 228C, trans. Philip Schaff). The word used by Clement is “theft [κλοπήν].”

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*

any child knows,’ then I presumably must hear with shame that I am a liar.”<sup>544</sup> Climacus starts reversing the apologetic tradition, to which Clement of Alexandria belongs, by saying that a poet always steals from another poet, whereas here the divine poetics is different from every human poetic composition: “the poem was so different from every human poem that it was no poem at all but *the wonder*.”<sup>545</sup>

#### IV. Hippias Major or On the Beautiful (refutative)

In this section I will try to show, taking into account both the form and the content of the dialogue, why Kierkegaard turned to the *Hippias Major* in the *Postscript*.<sup>546</sup>

The dialogue is set most probably in the agora where the two interlocutors met by chance. Socrates asks Hippias, since he knows how to talk eloquently about the “beautiful pursuits” young men should follow, to teach him “the beautiful itself [αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν], what it is.”<sup>547</sup> Not only does Socrates pretend ignorance but he feigns that a friend (an unnamed questioner) keeps interrogating him about the beautiful, insults him for not being able to make the appropriate distinctions and it is he who constantly raises objections to Hippias’ definitions.<sup>548</sup> Socrates’ indirect mockery contributes to the comic effect of the dialogue; Hippias attacks the anonymous friend as “uncultivated”<sup>549</sup> and “an ignoramus,”<sup>550</sup> having Socrates reveal in the end that the vexatious fellow is “the son of Sophroniscus,”<sup>551</sup> Socrates himself.

At the beginning of their conversation, both Socrates and Hippias agree to the following premise: if it is “by wisdom” that wise people are wise and “by

<sup>544</sup> SKS 4, 241 / PF, 35. Cf. Climacus does not deny that all the allegations of the anonymous accuser aim at “my mixing of borrowed phrases in what I said” but he intends in the next part of his pamphlet “to clothe the issue in its historical costume” (SKS 4, 305 / PF, 109). See also the comments on these passages by Jolita Pons, *Stealing a Gift: Kierkegaard’s Pseudonyms and the Bible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 127-9.

<sup>545</sup> SKS 4, 242 / PF, 36.

<sup>546</sup> Only in *The Concept of Irony* he briefly mentions a conversation between Socrates and the sophist Hippias as it takes place in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (IV.4). See SKS 1: 88, 274 / CI, 26, 232.

<sup>547</sup> *Hippias*, 286e.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 286c-e.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 288d.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 290e.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 298c.

justice” that the just are just, so it must be “by the beautiful” that all beautiful things are beautiful.<sup>552</sup> Surprisingly, Hippias’ first reply to the question as to what is the beautiful is: “a beautiful maiden is beautiful.”<sup>553</sup> Socrates retorts that this “something” they are seeking to define is “by reason of which” every particular beautiful thing is beautiful and certainly “a beautiful maiden” is not the answer.<sup>554</sup> When Socrates next refines his question, enquiring this time if the beautiful is that “by the addition of which all other things are...made to appear beautiful,” Hippias’ second reply is: gold.<sup>555</sup> The definitions of the beautiful proposed and refuted include: the appropriate, the beneficial, and the pleasant to the sight and hearing.

The various interpretations given to the dialogue rest upon the philosophical approach to the definitional question “what is X?” Paul Woodruff, for example, argues that the Socratic questioning is “ontologically neutral.”<sup>556</sup> Socrates’ concern is to make clear distinctions and not to propose the separate existence of Forms, in this case the Form of the beautiful. Thus, in approaching the *Hippias* there is no reason that we should take the next step in the development of Plato’s ontology, which will take shape in the middle and later dialogues.<sup>557</sup> For Michael L. Morgan, on the contrary, the *Hippias Major* “may exhibit an early stage in Plato’s metaphysical thinking.”<sup>558</sup>

What underlies the dispute around the definition of the beautiful is “the continuous doctrine of reality (τῆς οὐσίας) according to Hippias,”<sup>559</sup> as Socrates names it. Hippias argues that there are continuous properties: if two things are wise, beautiful etc., both collectively are wise and each individually is necessarily wise.<sup>560</sup> Socrates, on the other hand, allows for the possibility of discontinuous properties: two (duality), one (unity), each, both, odd or even number.<sup>561</sup> If each of us is, for instance, an odd number, we cannot be odd when added together, and vice versa.<sup>562</sup> As David Wolfsdorf, whose interpre-

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., 287c-d.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid., 287e.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 288a.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 289d-e.

<sup>556</sup> Paul Woodruff, “Socrates and Ontology: The evidence of the *Hippias Major*,” *Phronesis*, Vol. 23, no. 2 (1978), 102.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 105 and 113-14.

<sup>558</sup> Michael L. Morgan, “The Continuity Theory of Reality in Plato’s *Hippias Major*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 21, no. 2 (1983), 134.

<sup>559</sup> *Hippias*, 301e.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 300e-301b.

<sup>561</sup> Morgan, 147.

<sup>562</sup> *Hippias*, 302a-e.

tation I follow here, explains, for Hippias the same substance (οὐσία) is continuous and present in every particular “among the aggregate of entities of a kind.”<sup>563</sup> Therefore, Hippias accuses Socrates of being wrong in trying in his discourse to separate the beautiful (τὸ καλὸν) from every beautiful thing.

Hippias’ attack against Socrates’ mode of “conversing [διαλέγεσθαι]” culminates in what he did say “a little while ago,” that is, before the motto-citation:

But you see, Socrates, you do not consider the entirety [ὅλα] of things, nor do they with whom you are in the habit of conversing, but you all test [κρούετε]<sup>564</sup> the beautiful and the other beings [ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων] by taking them separately in your speeches and cutting them to pieces [κατατέμνοντες]. Because of that it escapes you that the bodies of being are naturally large and continuous.<sup>565</sup>

Interestingly, Friedrich Ast in his *Platon’s Leben und Schriften* makes special reference to Socrates’ “scrapings and shavings of discourse”<sup>566</sup> in conjunction with the abovementioned passage as an exemplar of “die eristischen Begriffspalter” (the eristic division of concepts).<sup>567</sup> This portrayal of Socrates is familiar from Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. The intertextual link between Aristophanes’ comedy and the Platonic *Hippias Major* has been identified, though the import of this connection is yet to be researched.<sup>568</sup> Kierkegaard argues in *The*

<sup>563</sup> David Wolfsdorf, “Hippias Major 301b2-c2: Plato’s Critique of a Corporeal Conception of Forms and of the Form-Participant Relation,” *Apeiron*, Vol. 39, no. 3 (2006), 221-56, esp. 241-5.

<sup>564</sup> The literary meaning of the verb κρούω is “to tap an earthen vessel, trying whether it rings sound”. Metaphorically, the verb means “to prove, test, scrutinize.” See also the comments of David Wolfsdorf, “Hippias Major 301b2-c2: Plato’s Critique of a Corporeal Conception of Forms and of the Form-Participant Relation,” 242. Aristophanes in the *Clouds* uses the noun κρούσις with the meaning of “sophistical attempts to deceive, chicanery” (*Clouds*, 318). See Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

<sup>565</sup> *Hippias*, 301b. Translation modified.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 304a.

<sup>567</sup> Friedrich Ast, *Platon’s Leben und Schriften* (Leipzig, 1816), 461.

<sup>568</sup> See Plato, *Hippias Major*, trans. with a commentary Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), 60 note 104, and 99-101; Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 257-7. Zuckert dates the conversation between Socrates and Hippias dramatically around 421/420 BC, that is after the staging of the *Clouds* in 424/423 BC. She suggests that in the *Hippias Major* Plato “seems to have presented a comic response to Aristophanes’ comic critique of the philosopher” (258).



*Concept of Irony* that “the Socrates brought on stage by Aristophanes is the actual Socrates.”<sup>569</sup> Socrates, “armed with sophisms,” is identified with the sophists but the identification renders the utmost distance from both the sophists and Plato, for the reason that “Aristophanes’ view is appropriate precisely as comic.”<sup>570</sup> On the one hand, Socrates’ dialectic is depicted parodically as “an idle vagabond” who “spends time and energy on the most foolish hairsplitting [*Ordkløverier*] [λόγων ἀριβίων σχινδαλάμους [the nice hairsplittings of subtle logic], l. 130].”<sup>571</sup> Nevertheless, the negative dialectic of Socrates is most accurately displayed by the comic vein of Aristophanes.

Between these two extreme points lies the dialectic activity whose validity is actualized in dividing. That is, while the essential philosophical dialectic, speculative, unites, the negative dialectic, because it relinquishes the idea, is a broker who continually makes transactions in a lower sphere; that is, it separates [*den er adskillende*].<sup>572</sup>

The memory of the Aristophanic Socrates—“λεπτοτάτων λήρων ἱερεῦ [high priest of this most subtle nonsense]”<sup>573</sup>—contours essential facets of the figure of Climacus and his *Postscript*. While the dramatic features of the dialogue might have more bearing on Kierkegaard’s reading of the *Hippias Major*, the engagement with the philosophical content proves no less important. If Socrates’ dialectical method consists in cutting to pieces, in separating, similarly Climacus employs his existential dialectic, undermining whatever provides *en masse* identities, such as: the age, the generation, humanity, world history. Everyone, Climacus writes, “joined in a project of abandoning themselves to

<sup>569</sup> SKS 1, 182 / *CI*, 131. For the presence of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* in Kierkegaard’s writings, see Eric Ziolkowski, “Aristophanes: Kierkegaard’s Understanding of the Socrates of the *Clouds*,” *Kierkegaard and the Greek World, Tome I: Socrates and Plato*, ed. Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun (Farnham: Ashgate 2010, 167-98).

<sup>570</sup> SKS 1, 195-6 / *CI*, 145.

<sup>571</sup> SKS 1, 200 / *CI*, 150. Cf. SKS 1, 201 / *CI*, 151: “Consequently, the fruits of instruction correspond perfectly to this, for Socrates promises (l. 260): λέγειν γενήσεται τρίμμα, κρόταλον, παμπάλη [You will be the flower of talkers, prattlers, gossips].” “Τρίμματα” means literally “fragments,” “scrapings” (Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*). George Grote briefly mentions the similarities between these two passages, from Aristophanes (*Clouds*, 130 and 260) and Plato (*Hip. Ma.*, 304a). See George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1865), 384-6. I was not able to identify if Kierkegaard had any source for his own co-reading.

<sup>572</sup> SKS 1, 200-1 / *CI*, 151

<sup>573</sup> SKS 1, 189 / *CI*, 139.

become something *en masse* with the help of the generation”<sup>574</sup> and “everyone, as quickly as possible, makes an attempt to determine his own crumb of existence [*Smule Existents*] in relation to the age.”<sup>575</sup> In the same vein, Climacus unearths the attempts to appropriate the truth by numbers: “...to become more than one is, by joining forces socially in the hope of impressing the history of spirit by numbers.”<sup>576</sup> In all these attempts Climacus diagnoses the symptoms of “despair over being a human being” facing “the horror of existence.”<sup>577</sup>

Climacus’ critique is twofold: against the Christian doctrine as metaphysical truth and against any aggregate (e.g., the State, the Church, Christendom) taking the position of a metaphysical truth. He shows the confusion between the definitional question “Who is Christian?” and the presupposition that “in Christendom all are Christians.” In this regard, we might find help in Alastair Hannay’s remark that “in literary context ‘fragments’ suggests detached parts of a composition...fragments that as with a jigsaw puzzle might conceivably be put together to form a whole again. Crumbs, however, will never make a loaf.”<sup>578</sup> What Socrates saves with “his ‘crumb’ [*Smule*] of uncertainty”<sup>579</sup> is his own crumb of existence, which is not reducible to a whole; the remainder of the possibility to relate to the eternal truth with the infinite passion of inwardness.

Taking the motto as our point of departure—and our point of entry into the *Postscript*, we are led to paths and nodes of various texts and scholarly resources with the figure of Socrates being ubiquitously present. In our reading process, the jesting of the epigraph brought to the fore a deeper engagement with the philosophical content of the *Hippias Major*, a dialogue which otherwise remains marginal in Climacus’ (and Kierkegaard’s) authorship. Kierkegaard envisaged certain analogies between Climacus’ “Mimic-Pathetic-Dialectic Compilation” and Plato’s “witty [*urbanissima*] derision” of the sophists,<sup>580</sup> according to Stallbaum’s felicitous characterization of the *Hippias*. How to become a Christian, just like the idea of the beautiful, resists discursive anal-

<sup>574</sup> SKS 7, 317 / *CUPH*, 290 / *CUP1*, 346.

<sup>575</sup> SKS 7, 325 / *CUPH*, 299 / *CUP1*, 356.

<sup>576</sup> SKS 7, 126 / *CUPH*, 112 / *CUP1*, 135.

<sup>577</sup> SKS 7, 324-5 / *CUPH*, 298 / *CUP1*, 356.

<sup>578</sup> Alastair Hannay, “Translating Kierkegaard,” *The Oxford Handbook to Kierkegaard*, ed. John Lippitt and George Pattison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 392.

<sup>579</sup> SKS 7, 185 / *CUPH*, 170 / *CUP1*, 202.

<sup>580</sup> Stallbaum, *Platonis opera omnia: continens Menexenum, Lysidem, Hippium Utrumque, Ionem*, 159.

ysis and, therefore, a comic Socrates—"the greatest Sophist"<sup>581</sup>—was needed to articulate this failure of discourse. Yet, it is the author's "inwardness" in his own subject,<sup>582</sup> as Kierkegaard puts it, in this case, the subject of the *Postscript*, which calls forth the epigraphic text; it is precisely with this inwardness that our reading response is striving to attune.

*Section V:  
Greek Philosophers Other than Socrates  
and Plato*

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<sup>581</sup> SKS 1, 189 / CI, 139.

<sup>582</sup> SKS 1, 48 / EPW, 93.