Perhaps the most familiar of Kierkegaard's attacks on Hegel involves the issue of systematic thinking. In the pseudonymous works and under his own name, he frequently ridicules the abstractions and self-deceptions of Hegelian system-building. To an existential thinker, the formal patterns of a conceptual system cannot do justice to the vagaries of concrete life.

A brief passage from the Preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a good example of what Kierkegaard criticizes:

That the True is actual only as system, or that Substance is essentially Subject, is expressed in the representation of the Absolute as *Spirit* — the most sublime Notion and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion. The spiritual alone is the *actual*; it is essence, or that which has *being in itself*; it is that which relates itself to itself and is *determinate*, it is *other-being* and *being-for-self*, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is *in and for itself.*

The irony is that Hegel seeks actuality in the spiritual, and Kierkegaard attempts to penetrate "concrete particularity with thought" (*CUP*, p. 267); yet they pursue these similar goals in diametrically opposed ways. Hegel maintains that "the True is actual only as system," and characterizes this actuality by describing a triad of dialectical moments: an initial in-itself moment, in which the phenomenon under discussion appears as a simple unity; a for-itself moment, in which the phenomenon becomes other to itself, self-externalized and self-contradictory; and a final in-and-for-itself moment which unites the abstract unity of the first moment with the concrete otherness of the second. This third moment is the almost mystical key to Hegelian thinking: it is an *Aufhebung*, an untranslatable word which means both to perish and to preserve. The in-and-for-itself moment annuls the previous moments insofar as they both are one-sided and negatively related to one another, but it preserves them in their true relation as moments within a new and larger whole.

Kierkegaard, in the guise of a non-Christian philosopher and humorist named Johannes Climacus, minces no words where the concept of *Aufhebung* is concerned:
Whether it is a good trait in a word to admit of contrary meanings, I do not
know, but anyone who desires to express himself with precision will be dis-
posed to avoid the use of such a word in the crucial passages of his exposi-
tion. We have a simple phrase current among the people, used humoristically
to indicate the impossible: "To talk with one's mouth full of hot mush." This is just about the trick that speculative philosophy contrives to perform, in thus using a word with opposite meanings. (CUP, 199)

Kierkegaard rejects not only the claim that one-sided phenomena can be recon-
ciled in such a way that they both perish and are preserved in a larger whole, but also the triadic framework in general. Again speaking as Johannes Climacus:

The subjective thinker has a form, a form for his communication with other men, and this form constitutes his style. It must be as manifold as the opposites he holds in combination. The systematic ein, zwei, drei is an abstract form, and must therefore fall when applied to the concrete. In the same degree as the subjective thinker himself is concrete, his form will become con-
cretely dialectical. (CUP, 319)

In short, a thinker must choose between abstract systems based upon self-contra-
dictory concepts and concrete thought, which alone is capable of precision.

Thus far, the rhetoric is clear, and even the briefest glance at interpretations of
Kierkegaard will show how influential it has been. Climacus' axiom — that "an existential system is impossible" (CUP, 107) — has found expression in twentieth century existentialism, phenomenology and theology, and has widely influenced literature and the arts. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that Climacus himself proposed that axiom in a work which is in fact a systematic portrayal of religious inwardness. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate as briefly as possible the existence of a systematic dialectical structure of religious inwardness in Concluding Unscientific Postscript.

The claim that "an existential system is impossible" concludes part one of book two in the Postscript, a section which treats Lessing's distinction between truths of reason and truths of history. The first book is devoted to refuting all efforts to argue for the truth of Christianity on so-called objective grounds. This leaves the main business of the book for the five chapters of book two, part two, which do in fact constitute more than four-fifths of the entire work. It has been noticed by other scholars that Climacus employs vaguely triadic patterns in chapter IV, both for religiousness A and religiousness B. Louis Mackey has even pointed to a cor-
respondence between these two patterns. But that the entire discussion of sub-
jectivity constitutes the first part of an over-arching systematic dialectic has never, to my knowledge, been observed.

Chapter I bears the title, "The Task of Becoming Subjective," which Climacus defines as "the task of separating the ethical from the external" (CUP, 123). He understands this task as a direct repudiation of Hegel's philosophy of history, in