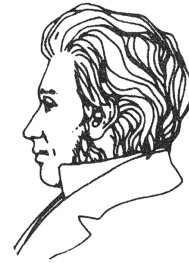


Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter

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ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS

Professor Anthony Rudd will deliver the lecture in spring 2017.

International Kierkegaard Conference

Though an exact date has not been established yet, the Library will host the Eighth International Kierkegaard Conference in the summer of 2018. Dr. Richard Purkarthofer will give the plenary lecture.

In addition, for more information from the Hong Kierkegaard Library and other news from Kierkegaard scholars and related groups around the world, please see the website of the Hong Kierkegaard Library at <http://wp.stolaf.edu/kierkegaard/>.

**K. Brian Söderquist. *The Isolated Self:
Irony as Truth and Untruth in Søren Kierkegaard's On the Concept of Irony***

Copenhagen: Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre and C. A. Reitzel, 2007

Reviewed by Will Williams

Visiting Professor of Theology and Humanities, LeTourneau University

Söderquist's work is an investigation into the nature and qualities of irony as presented in Kierkegaard's 1841 magister dissertation, *On the Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*. He concludes by supporting his argument with references to later texts in the authorship, namely *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *The Sickness unto Death*. A particular strength of this analysis is its setting the discussion of *On the Concept of Irony* into the Danish social and intellectual context of Kierkegaard's day. Figures such as Poul Martin Møller, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, and Hans Lassen Martensen are helpfully treated in such a way as to frame and inform a context that Kierkegaard may be drawing from or reacting against.

While acknowledging the contributions of earlier Kierkegaard scholarship that show an interest in irony from literary, philosophical, or theological perspectives, Söderquist is clear that he intends to narrow his focus to an existential reading of irony. *On the Concept of Irony*, he argues, is "primarily an investigation of the problems associated with a 'differentiation of the self from the other' and only secondarily of 'irony' as a rhetorical device" (2). In this way, Söderquist identifies the isolation of selfhood from one's inhabited world, including from society and other individuals, as the essence of irony. The "pure" ironist is "absolutely at odds with his or her world" and manifests "a complete *isolation* of the subject from 'actuality,'" Socratically "separating the self from the other" (86).

However, Söderquist does not stop there, observing that subsequent reconciliation with actuality is also a central concern to Kierkegaard in the dissertation. He therefore emphasizes the "double movement of irony" (2) that isolates selfhood from actuality and then seeks reconciliation with it. The ironic isolation is important because it "creates an open space, unencumbered by the authority of human tradition" which "makes possible an openness to a truth that is not simply given in culture" (25). Once the subject is ironically isolated, if he instead chooses to deny this reconciliation and remain closed off in autonomy, then he succumbs to Kierkegaard's critique of irony gone wrong. In this way, Kierkegaard's strong criticism of Romantic ironists, such as K. W. F. Schlegel, is due not to their ironic isolation from actuality, which Söderquist argues that Kierkegaard advocates, but to their poetically false reconciliation, which amounts to an attempt to replace actuality with imagination. The Romantic ironists are not open to their primitive self,

to actuality, or to God but remain inclosed in isolation, even while they create poetic imaginings of freedom. The free and healthy self is not the result of an act of self-creation from an arbitrary individual will but of the acknowledgment of dependency, where one is “defined by a divine will greater than the subject” (27). Consequently, while the isolating effect of irony is a necessary stage for development, Söderquist presents Kierkegaard as advocating not Romanticism’s isolated self but ultimate openness to the other, especially God.

Söderquist’s work is a helpful close reading of a contested text and, indeed, of a contested idea—“irony”—in Kierkegaard’s corpus. Even so, the work has its weaknesses and provokes some critical questions. One of the biggest weaknesses of the work concerns the extent of its claims. It spends its energy giving a close reading of *On the Concept of Irony*, but it is clear that Söderquist is not content to let his conclusions remain there. From the start, Söderquist posits that Kierkegaard’s dissertation is “a prism” that illuminates the rest of the authorship (1). Without denying that *On the Concept of Irony* is an early foray into themes and ideas that would concern Kierkegaard for years to come, it would be a mistake to suggest that the work should be hermeneutically central to understanding him and his authorial project. It is too much to call the dissertation “the foundation for much of Kierkegaard’s later thought” (209), especially considering Kierkegaard’s famous exclusion of the dissertation from his official authorship and his later chastisements of arguments in the dissertation, found both in his journals (“What a Hegelian fool I was!” NB21:35) and in the mocking of “Magister Kierkegaard” and the dissertation’s misunderstanding of Socrates within *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (CUP 90n, 503). Nevertheless, Söderquist wants his definition of pure irony kept in mind “whenever [Kierkegaard] refers to irony,” whether in the dissertation or in later works (97). In other words, one may understand Söderquist’s work to contain a twofold claim: 1) his account of the meaning of *On the Concept of Irony*, including Socrates, Romanticism, and irony, and 2) the claim that *On the Concept of Irony* and its understanding of irony is fundamental to understanding the rest of Kierkegaard’s authorship. Söderquist does a far better job of arguing for the first claim than for the second, which is asserted more than conclusively argued. Chapter seven does make some attempt to trace out his thesis in later works, but the examples are limited to three texts and do not so much trace “irony” as such but the theme of isolated selfhood and reconciliation with actuality, which Söderquist defines as the double movement of irony. He is correct to find this important theme extensively in Kierkegaard’s authorship, but if Söderquist is interested in showing how his definition of irony from the dissertation is hermeneutically enlightening for reading Kierkegaard, why not show how it helps us to read his later discussions of “irony” explicitly? Particularly missed here is any significant treatment of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which, together with the dissertation, make up Kierkegaard’s most concentrated treatments of the themes of irony, humor, and the comic. That would be the natural comparison to make, although one suspects that to do so would pose a strong challenge to Söderquist’s claim that, in Kierkegaard’s authorship, irony should be linked to “nihilism.”

A second and related critique, then, is Söderquist’s decision to link irony with nihilism and to identify Socrates as a nihilist. He does this, even while admitting that Kierkegaard himself never explicitly uses the term “nihilism,” on the justification that his professor, Poul Martin Møller, associated irony with nihilism. It must be acknowledged that several places in *On the Concept of Irony* do indeed describe irony with overtones that could be called nihilistic, but the word choice remains an incautious decision, since the term nihilism carries much philosophical baggage, not least from 20th century thought, as Söderquist confesses in a footnote. It would be wiser to avoid the term, both for reading Kierkegaard’s dissertation and his later authorship. In the dissertation, for example, Kierkegaard concludes by recommending not Socratic irony or Romantic irony but “controlled” irony. If irony is read as nihilism, how are we to understand this? What would “controlled nihilism” be or look like? Naming nihilism is a particularly poor decision if claims based on the dissertation are taken to be controlling of Kierkegaard’s discussions of irony in his later authorship, including discussions of that master of irony, Socrates. For Kierkegaard in his more mature thought, irony involves ethical passion (CUP 503), while Söderquist speaks of an “ethically-apathetic Socrates” who is

uninterested in any norms (56). This description would be better received if Söderquist were more rigorous in confining his claims to the dissertation, because Kierkegaard's later Socrates is an ethical teacher bordering on the religious (*CUP* 247, 503), who uses jest to work earnestly for the good (*UDVS* 96-7), and who, being a true ironist, uses his irony to conceal his ideals and ethical character (*NB31:92*). Söderquist does indicate awareness that the description of Socrates changes after the dissertation, but it is unclear what effect this acknowledgment has on his argument. He does not reflect on the notion that, while Socrates seems to become more earnest and ethical for the later Kierkegaard, he nevertheless remains identified with irony. Socrates is always the preeminent ironist for Kierkegaard, from first to last. Since Socrates' ethical earnestness may be later emphasized, without thereby denying his irony, there is *prima facie* evidence that Kierkegaard's understanding of irony itself may have shifted after his dissertation. If so, then this sharply chastens the usefulness of making definitions and descriptions from the dissertation normative for understanding Kierkegaard's later thought. Söderquist's strongest case is to associate irony and Socrates with nihilism in the dissertation alone, for Socrates begins to be associated with the ethical and virtue as early as the beginning of the official authorship in *Either/Or* (1843).

A third critique is that, while Söderquist gives us lengthy reflections on the structure and arguments of Socrates and Socratic irony from Part One of the dissertation as well as of Romantic irony from Part Two, there is virtually no consideration of what might be called, "Part Three," namely the concluding section, "Irony as a Controlled Element." Indeed, this final section, despite being only a few pages long, is arguably the most important section of the dissertation both for establishing Kierkegaard's own recommendation regarding irony as well as for finding themes and ideas that will be developed throughout Kierkegaard's later writings. Given Söderquist's argument, I gather that he would find resources in this final section for developing his argument that the infinite negativity of irony should not be an ending position, as with the Romantics, but should be a moment that is passed through in order to reconcile with actuality. Even so, an extended treatment is warranted, especially given the diversity of opinion about this final section in the secondary literature. Some suggest, for example, that this final section is itself ironic and not to be received earnestly, while others think that it provides the key to understanding the dissertation. As mentioned above, it is not entirely clear how Söderquist's argument for nihilism comports with a concluding recommendation for controlled irony. Also, other points, such as what it means to have a "totality view of the world" and so to master irony in one's individual existence (*CI* 325), could do with authorial explanation or insight. Again, he notes that the concluding sentence of the dissertation seems to direct the reader to Martensen's review of some Heiberg poetry, but, while Söderquist generally contributes value by framing the issues of the dissertation with examinations of figures like Heiberg and Martensen, he does little to explain the unexpected reference for us other than by suspecting that the recommendation may be ironic praise. In what way, given Söderquist's argument regarding irony, is the praise ironic? What does Kierkegaard mean by it? Some extended guiding thoughts for the reader would be appreciated, especially given the potential importance of this final section for framing and understanding the dissertation as a whole.

Critiques, though, should not receive the final word since there is much that Söderquist does well here. His decision, for example, to treat irony *existentially* rather than rhetorically or literarily is a good one, and this understanding is indeed maintained throughout Kierkegaard's authorship. He is also right to emphasize irony's role in isolating an individual from actuality, as part of irony's polemic against the finite, although it is less certain that nihilism is the best way of identifying this move, especially given the direction of later development. Söderquist does well to underscore Kierkegaard's concern about reconciling with actuality after irony's distancing move and to note that this is at the heart of his criticism of Romantics like Schlegel. The Romantic attempt to create oneself poetically is destined for failure, and what is required is the religious individual's openness to allowing himself to be created by the divine. Thus, while Söderquist must be challenged on his desire to make the dissertation a "prism" through which Kierkegaard's authorship may be viewed, there are indeed some themes there in capsule form that would be developed and clarified later,

so the Hongs' metaphor of the dissertation as a "seedbed" for the authorship is probably preferable (CI xviii). Söderquist's arguments should be considered by contemporary scholars wrestling with questions of how to interpret Kierkegaard's dissertation, and it currently stands as the most important single volume on this subject. Its claims to present particular insight into the meaning of "irony" for the rest of Kierkegaard's authorship, however, outstrip its delivery. Söderquist's work is helpful, although the extent of his claims is more limited than he supposes, and his insights—unless demonstrated otherwise—should be confined to the dissertation itself.

Steven Shakespeare. *Kierkegaard and the Refusal of Transcendence*.

London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015

Reviewed by Lucas Piccinin Lazzaretti

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In his latest book, *Kierkegaard and The Refusal of Transcendence*, Steve Shakespeare presents a thesis that is more than prolific and intriguing, and it raises a series of controversial statements. The claim that Kierkegaard's thought, mainly with regard to the relationship between the individual and God, is characterized by tendency of immanent structure, and therefore contrary to the usual transcendence with which this topic is being addressed to by commentators. This is enough to serve as a perilous thesis. However, Steven Shakespeare goes beyond the simple formulation of a bold thesis, and affirms very carefully and in detail, the elements that allow us to consider essential concepts and categories of Kierkegaard's thought under a new perspective.

The author starts with a double assumption. First, it is necessary to develop a reading of essential concepts of Kierkegaardian thought, such as paradox and repetition, to analyze whether such concepts correspond to a transcendental position or, on the contrary, correspond to an immanentist vision; second, it is necessary to develop such a conceptual analysis in a constant confrontation with contemporary interpretations and influences of Kierkegaard's work; such an exercise allows Steven Shakespeare to perform the most innovative parts of his own work.

The thesis is already stated in the first pages, where the author states that "on my account, Kierkegaard's focus on the paradox, far from preserving the transcendence of God, not only involves but also requires an assertion of identity between the transcendent and the immanent" (p. 2). In this sense the refusal of transcendence in the book's title does not refer to an absolute adherence to immanentism but it is the acceptance of a certain immanence, taken by the author as "a view of being that is neither hierarchical nor analogical" (p. 11). That means that the author defends a reading of Kierkegaard's thought following certain "transcendental immanence", i.e., a philosophical structure that makes no reference to the transcendent as part of its fundamental ground and is a philosophical structure that does not close the possibility for the appearance of the new. Thus, "the refusal of transcendence is simultaneously a refusal to explain away or suppress worldly finitude, vulnerability, and suffering" (p. 13).

Steven Shakespeare's interpretation shows itself, by the aspects highlighted, to be in debt to the markedly contemporary philosophical influences without which, the thesis of Kierkegaard's refusal of transcendence would be nothing more than a mere claim. One can't help but think about Derrida's style, mainly because of the manner in which Shakespeare uses the methodology in his book, with attention to the analysis of texts and writing intentions, which are typical characteristics of Derrida's work. Surprisingly, the author also uses

the work of another French philosopher who; for one reason or another, almost never appears in Kierkegaardian research: Gilles Deleuze.

Since the hermeneutical key used by Steven Shakespeare has its influences marked by contemporary philosophy, and therefore takes on the problems of the onto-ontological turn, the beginning of his analysis starts with the issue of analogy. Every effort is then focused on seeking to demonstrate that Kierkegaard; even though he is inserted in certain post-Kantian tradition, doesn't use the analogy as a resource to build up his own philosophy. This concerns the necessity to demonstrate that the Danish philosopher goes beyond the limits imposed by Kantian philosophy with regard to the presentation of the relationship with the absolute in an analogical or apophatic way and, thus, "a key question for us will therefore be how the absolute is manifested or expressed in the finite" (p. 28). The analogy, claims Shakespeare, is an attempt to mediate transcendence and immanence, while Kierkegaard's philosophy must be understood as a refusal of mediation. It is in this sense that the author can support his refusal of transcendence's thesis.

To understand Kierkegaardian thought as this particular refusal and, therefore, as the affirmation of a limit, Shakespeare makes a careful analysis of paradox's role as an essential concept but now interprets the paradox in a "immanentist" way, i.e., with reference to an immanent transcendence which is strongly linked to a notion of possibility of the new.

One of the most interesting points of the book lies in the meaningful reading that the author does with reference to the use of the term *uhyre*, which is normally translated as "gigantic", "prodigious" or "enormous". Meanwhile, Shakespeare suggests as a possible translation the figure/word of "monstrous". The use of that translation shows the meaning of limit and tension that is proper of a monstrosity that according to the author, would be present in the way that Kierkegaard develops his considerations about the paradox, God and even of Christ.

Kierkegaard and the Refusal of Transcendence is a book that can create new openings for Kierkegaardian studies, not only for the merits of developing a comprehensive and innovative conceptual analysis, but also for carrying out such a development in a constant debate with contemporary commentators and, even more, with contemporary philosophy, making us realize once again the importance of Kierkegaard in philosophical terms.

Wang Qi (王齐). *Unto the Abyss of Despair—Kierkegaard's Aesthetic Sphere of Existence*
(走向绝望的深渊——克尔凯郭尔的美学生活境界)

Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe (中国社会科学出版社), 2000.

Reviewed by Chingshun J. Sheu

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Wang Qi occupies a central position in one of China's few lines of Kierkegaard scholarship following the relatively recent acceptance of religious studies as an ideologically acceptable field of research. At the time of its completion as a doctoral dissertation, *Unto the Abyss of Despair* was a groundbreaking study in China of Kierkegaard's thought, and its publication (with revision) as a volume in the continuing series "A Library of Doctoral Dissertations in Social Sciences in China" recognizes it as such. As one of the first serious and comprehensive studies of Kierkegaard in simplified Chinese, it is mostly introductory in nature, outlining the key elements of Kierkegaard's thought with a view toward encouraging further research in mainland

China; this has borne fruit, not only in Wang's subsequent work, *Life and Belief* (生命与信仰, 2010), but also in a recent study undertaken by a next-generation Kierkegaard scholar, Wang Changzhu's *Ethics of Life* (生命的伦理, 2012). Thus, for the reader interested in Kierkegaard's academic reception, as well as the continuing trajectories of Kierkegaard research today in modern China, this work is indispensable. (For more on Kierkegaard's reception in China, see Wang Qi's "The Chinese Reception of Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard's International Reception: The Near East, Asia, Australia and the Americas*, Tome III, vol. 8 of the monumental *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Receptions and Resources*.)

In this work, Wang details the key aspects of Kierkegaard's ethical thought, starting from its historical context as a reaction to Hegelianism, moving on to delineate his three spheres of existence, and then drawing comparisons between each sphere. The final chapter is an introduction to, and comparison with, the thought of 20th-century French existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, whom Wang sees as "responding to" Kierkegaard's ideas (140).

After a brief introductory overview, Wang starts off her exploration of Kierkegaard's thought by examining his reaction to his times, pointing out his opposition to what he sees as the "homogenization" of the age, which leads to a merely superficial equality (10). Wang observes that, as a rebuttal to the then-prevalent Hegelian dialectical syntheses of the absolute Spirit, Kierkegaard notes that the point of origin of a logical system must stem not from logic but from a "determination of the will," and that this means that the entire system is grounded on "nothingness." In her pursuit of such logical systems, the Hegelian philosopher has long forgotten that she, too, is "an existing individual" (16-17). Kierkegaard's alternative, as Wang sees it, is for us "to concentrate upon inwardness in existing," to pursue not the "necessity" of "objective truth" but the "possibility" of "subjective truth," which leads to ineluctable "Angst" (21, 37).

Chapter Two outlines Kierkegaard's three spheres of existence. Wang delineates how Kierkegaard understands the ethical sphere to be allied with Hegelianism (50); but regarding his preference for the religious sphere instead, Wang enlists the aid of James Collins's *The Mind of Kierkegaard* to suggest that Kierkegaard's position against necessity prevents this preference from being anything more than a recommendation—logically speaking, each sphere should be equally valid as long as one chooses based on subjective truth (63, 46-47). In the same vein, according to Wang, only Religiousness A can be logically concluded from Kierkegaard's stated position; Religiousness B is the result of his own subjective truth (64-5).

The subsequent chapter is an in-depth guide to Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere, in which is set forth the sensuous immediacy of Don Juan and the spiritual immediacy of Faust. Just as ethical man escapes the reality of existence by constructing logical systems, aesthetic man does so by constructing sensuous or spiritual "flights of fancy"; unlike ethical man, these fanciful constructions are based on a subjective experience of Angst and nothingness and thus allow for the possibility of atoning for one's sins and leaping to the religious sphere (102, 138). Interestingly, Wang mentions in a discussion of Kierkegaard's critique of Romanticism that, when aesthetic man repudiates the subjective choice to adhere to the ethical, he also falls afoul of an "authoritarian" thinking akin to ethical man's; this constitutes Wang's Kierkegaardian criticism of the Orestes of Sartre's *The Flies* (120, 149-50).

The final chapter is a look at Kierkegaard's thought from the viewpoint of 20th-century French existentialism, specifically Sartre's *Nausea*, *The Flies*, and *The Words* and Camus's *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. While noting Kierkegaard's pioneering insights into inwardness and subjectivity, Wang excoriates him for lacking the scientific rationalism of Marx (who must be present in some form in Chinese cultural criticism) and the social activism of Sartre and Camus (11, 65, 148-49, 169-70). Wang concludes that, although neither existentialist subscribes to Kierkegaard's version of Christianity, they both

locate a form of “the eternal” in actions aimed at others. Thus, in direct contrast to Kierkegaard’s own faith, Wang sees “subjective choice” as the most important lasting contribution of Kierkegaard’s thought (171).

As the reader can see, *Unto the Abyss of Despair* already has enough on its hands parsing the basics of Kierkegaard’s ethical thought to delve into more complex issues such as pseudonymity, etc. Nevertheless, it is a solid introduction that effectively communicates Kierkegaard to the reader of simplified Chinese, and thus offers a glimpse into how Kierkegaard is received and studied today within the context of Mainland Chinese academia.

Philosophical Fragments: The Infinite Comic Drama

Anthony Eagan

-Part I-

The Motto and Its Context

My objective for this investigation is to explore the harmony between literary form and theoretical content in Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments*. This seemingly simple objective will in fact entail a somewhat complex process. The difficulty arises because, abstractly put, the content of *Philosophical Fragments* pertains to the idea that when a communicator wishes to deliver a message of any magnitude and human consequence, the actual correspondence between the message itself (the content) and the manner in which it is delivered (the form) becomes a matter of supreme importance.¹ Already we can sense the disorienting aspect of the issue at hand, then, namely that we will need to observe how *Philosophical Fragments* is a work that seeks to express, in a strange sort of reduplication, the communicative value of harmonizing form and content *by virtue of its own exemplary harmony between these two elements*.

For this reason, I have divided my effort into two distinct parts. In the first part, I will direct our attention to the basic form of *Philosophical Fragments* by arguing that the writing assumes the structure and tropes of Shakespearean comedy.² In the second part, I will delineate more specifically the numerous parallels between *Philosophical Fragments* and Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*—and in so doing I will attempt to express the significance of the challenging content that Kierkegaard’s fictitious author, Johannes Climacus, wishes to discuss—thereby bringing us closer to the paradox of communication that is so relevant to the text as a whole. This paradox is the belief that the inexpressible *can be expressed* if strict attention is paid to the structure or form employed as the vehicle for that message.

Before moving into the relevance of Shakespearean comedy, however, and for some further clarification, let me dwell on this second point for a moment. I have suggested that in efforts to communicate any message that extends beyond the reach of objective facts, the need for an aesthetic correspondence between form and content increases with respect to the magnitude of the message the communicator wishes to deliver. The more subjective or inexpressible the content of a message, the more the burden of communication must be distributed to the form in which that message is offered. Whether or not this assertion is valid or invalid is a question that is, strangely enough, extraneous to this examination, for I intend to show that my

¹ To render this comment more precisely, we can say that, *in* the text, a character named God wants to reveal a divine message about Godliness to human beings; paradoxically, his divine message assumes the *form* of a human.

² To render this comment more precisely, we can say that, *with* the text, a character named Johannes Climacus wants to reveal an earnest message about individuality to his readers; paradoxically, his earnest message assumes in the *form* of a jest.

assertion is the guiding concept behind *Philosophical Fragments*, a text which itself places the burden of communicating that concept into the most ingenious form imaginable for such endeavor: a five-act comedy.

At all moments, whether he or she is aware or not, the human individual faces a crisis of communication. If it is true that we are gifted with an infinite imagination and if, accordingly, we hold the belief that we have the freedom both to act upon the possibilities conceived by this imagination and the ability to communicate our wishes, desires, and emotions; and if, at the same time, the world consists of merely finite or limited means through which to achieve these freedoms of conduct and expression, then we live under two seemingly irreconcilable beliefs. Hence the crisis. For how can I transfigure my infinite self of imagination and possibility into the realm of finite objects and relations? I summarize this problem now because, as we navigate first Shakespeare's comic genres and later the comic amplitude of *Philosophical Fragments*, we should bear in mind that Johannes Climacus sees this as a paradox that can be resolved through an individual's faith in communication itself: faith, specifically, that a structure can be discovered and employed that, despite expectations, is a perfect vehicle for the unwieldy or boundless communication it aims to convey; and faith, furthermore, that the recipient of the communication will detect (even if unconsciously), the harmonic tension of the form.

Consequently, if the reader can experience an endlessly reverberating harmony between, on the one hand, the synthesis of form and content that is the textual *gestalt* of *Philosophical Fragments*, and on the other hand the mere content of the text—which, to repeat, pertains to the synthesis of form and content in the communication goals of a human character Climacus calls *the god*—then, in effect, the text communicates the author's own boundless message by virtue of his limited linguistic means. This is the simple objective to which I referred a moment ago: together as readers to discern the infinite reverberation between the text's message of infinite possibility and the paradoxical confines of its fixed and finite language. Assuming we can discern this reverberation, we will have established that, in one case at least, a seemingly inexpressible subjective communication is indeed possible with finite means, because, understood at its most profound level, *Philosophical Fragments* achieves the very synthesis of form and content that is the basis of its most fundamental content.

To begin the investigation, let's imagine rather reductively that Shakespeare's comedies can be divided into two different types. In the first type, the *green world* comedy, the prominent figures of the play's society are morally tyrannical or spiritually stagnant. In their roles as dominant and unflinching local authorities, they act as obstacles to the socially inferior hero or heroine's erotic fulfillment. The developing five-act struggle portrays the liberation of the protagonist and his beloved from the *status quo* as established under the unfree mentality of one or several of these ruling adversaries. The overbearing society in question—take Venice in *The Merchant of Venice*, for example—is cast into relief by an alternate, fantastical world not subject to the prior oppressiveness or patriarchy—a place such as Belmont. In order to achieve happiness together, the young lovers must escape the real world of legalism and venality for a more fantastical and flexible realm where, eventually, they discover regeneration and equilibrium, new moral freedoms, and the consummation of their desires. In addition to *The Merchant of Venice*, this category would include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Cymbeline*, and *A Winter's Tale*.

The second type, the *closed world* comedy, does not involve this fantastical or figurative escape. Even if the settings within the play are multiple—with action occurring in places as varied as a Duke's palace, a nearby coast, and a lodging on the outskirts of town—still the same policies, attitudes, and social patterns apply to each milieu within the fictional universe. The protagonists' dramatic collision is not with an authoritative regime or some social order; for rather than demonstrating the need for flight from an overbearing socio-political environment, these characters demonstrate the need for a kind of spiritual or psychological intrusion from a different world. In other words, the problems the protagonists confront are not primarily public or legal or even exterior. Rather they are personal and insular problems. In a sense, the individuals

concerned are at odds with their own possibilities for happiness, freedom, reflection, and fullness of self. An improved subjective and interpersonal condition becomes likely for these protagonists only when a previously unknown and “different” individual arrives, an outsider invading or disrupting the psychological-spiritual *status quo*. This category would include *The Comedy of Errors*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love’s Labors Lost*, *The Tempest*, and *Twelfth Night*.³

In order to emphasize one angle of this categorical distinction, let’s also imagine that each of these two styles of Shakespearean comedy can depict two general types of character. The first type is called the *humorous* individual. This is the sort of figure who is neurotic, ritualistic, obsessive, infatuated by some pursuit or social construct, or dominated by one single so-called “humor” or disposition. In the green-world plays, the *humorous* character will be the ruling adversary, the patriarch or duke who maintains the prevailing obstacles to individual freedom within the public sphere. The second type is the *normal* individual. This is the sort of figure who is representative of a newer, freer moral outlook, namely a person who struggles against the conventional moral mistakes that are established or maintained by the *humorous* figures and who is more broadly a self open to experience and possibility.⁴

In separating the characters in this way, together we can devise our own convenient means of conceptualizing the major difference between green-world and closed-world comedies: in green-world comedies, the protagonists and lovers are the *normal* characters, whereas in closed-world comedies, the protagonists and lovers are themselves the *humorous* characters—an idea which suggests also that, since a comic resolution is usually happy, the closed-world comedy’s *humorous* characters are at least potentially *normal*: they can change and become more open to possibility. In this sense, a closed-world comedy does not require a typical antagonist or external collision. The closed-world heroes, as *humorous* characters, have some prerequisite for the desire or ability to attain self-reflection and to overcome self-bondage, as we expect them to do within the five acts of the play.

I assume that if Shakespeare’s comic dramas could be simplified into such broad categories, Kierkegaard surely would be more drawn to the latter type, the so-called closed-world comedy, persistent as he was in attempting to coax individuals out of their comic and pathetic self-obstructions and to endorse subjectivity, reflection, and what he sometimes calls “concern.”⁵ Kierkegaard might even feel so much affection towards the closed-world comic archetype, and even hidden sympathy for the *humorous* individual *qua* dynamic protagonist, as to feel the urge to write a closed-world drama himself. Despite appearances—insofar as Kierkegaard was writing over one hundred years before literary critics used this dual-world terminology to fathom the Shakespearean experience—this is not an anachronistic and arbitrary sort of statement. With his dramatic knowledge and poetic inclinations, his notions of category, his fondness for theater and performance and the stage, his consistent and career-long analysis of acting, opera, epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, and farce, and his interest in and pseudonymous employment of idealist aesthetics, Kierkegaard

³ For a detailed development of these dramatic categories, see Frye, Northrop, “The Argument of Comedy,” in *English Institute Essays*, ed. by D.A. Robertson, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1965): 58-73. See also Hawkins, Sherman, “The Two Worlds of Shakespearean Comedy,” in *Shakespeare Studies*, 3 (1968): 62-80. Frye’s essay establishes the comic archetype of the so-called green-world comedy and applies it as an umbrella category to the majority of Shakespeare’s comedies. Hawkins, Frye’s disciple, credits Frye with establishing this genre and creating “a poetics of comedy,” but in so doing he suggests that the “green world” theory, for all of its relevance and impact, leaves out a large number of Shakespeare’s specific plays, which variety he proceeds to establish under the category of *closed-world* comedies.

⁴ Frye identifies these types of character in a different essay, “A Conspectus of Dramatic Genres,” *Kenyon Review* Vol. 13, No. 4 (Autumn, 1951): 543-562. The first explicit commentary on the idea of a dramatic character as a *humor*, however, appears in the “Induction” to Ben Jonson’s play, *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599). Jonson writes, “Some one peculiar quality/ Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw/ All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,/ In their confluxions,/ all to run one way.”

⁵ See, for example, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, passim, and *The Sickness unto Death*, pp. 5-6

was assuredly perceptive to the formal elements Archetypal Criticism belatedly identified in Shakespeare—which is to say that Kierkegaard surely knew what Shakespeare’s comedies could accomplish and how different dramatic collisions operated upon the flawed characters in question.⁶

To repeat something that I hope to make increasingly evident, Kierkegaard could easily have utilized models of dramatic comedy, specifically closed-world Shakespearean comedy, the better to synthesize with comic form the content of his *maieutic* work regarding the possibility of an individual’s relation to truth and freedom. *Philosophical Fragments*, by way of its epigraph, pays swift and direct homage to *Twelfth Night*—Shakespeare’s closed-world comedy *par excellence*.⁷ A reader opens the book and, flipping past the title page, encounters the following epigraph:

Better well hanged than ill wed.
SHAKESPEARE.⁸

It will be worthwhile to examine the context of this quote from *Twelfth Night*, alongside some general aspects of *Philosophical Fragments*, in order to discern whether Johannes Climacus’s motto is arbitrary and thematically isolated from the subject matter of *Twelfth Night*, or whether it is strategic and indicative of a more extensive textual kinship between the two works. In this manner, we will be able to search for some value in my assertion that Kierkegaard might have employed the form of closed-world comedy to the benefit of communicating more successfully the content of the text.

The scrap of misquoted dialogue Johannes Climacus uses for the epigraph appears in Act I, scene v of *Twelfth Night*. Feste, the professional clown, after a long and mysterious truancy, has just returned to the house of his employer, Countess Olivia. Although he seems indifferent to the consequences of his unexplained absence, Maria, the gentlewoman-in-waiting of the house, has been reprimanding Feste for his insolence and urging him to create a plausible excuse to avoid punishment or termination. In response to her histrionics, Feste delivers his erotic play on words:

Maria: Yet you will be hanged for being so long absent. Or to be turned away:
is that not as good as a hanging to you?

Clown: Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage, and for turning away, let
summer bear it out.

(V.v, 15-19)

It is fitting that the clown has been “so long absent” from Illyria, for among the cast of characters, he is the individual most capable of observing and articulating the truth of human folly (of which the audience has observed plenty by the time of his entrance into the play).⁹ His personality also happens to be diametrically

⁶ Cf. “The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama,” (EO I 137-164); “The First Love,” (EO I 231-279); the discussion of theater and farce in *Repetition* (R, 154-169); “Problema III” (FT 82-120); “A Crisis and the Crisis in the Life of an Actress” (CD 301-326); *Stages on Life’s Way*, passim, etc.

⁷ The opening two sentences of *Philosophical Fragments* read: “Can the truth be learned? With this question we shall begin” (PF 9).

⁸ Joseph Westfall has written an intriguing article on the matter of this epigraph and Climacus’s supposedly intentional mistake of attributing the paraphrased quote to Shakespeare rather than to the clown, Feste, who speaks original line. See “Reading the Epigraph to *Philosophical Fragments*,” *Kierkegaardiana* 23 (2004): 126-141. Although Westfall takes an entirely different approach from this starting point, his article suggests something quite relevant and ultimately similar: that the authorship of the text assumes the same paradoxical form as the content.

⁹ This is not to suggest that the clown is the intruding element in *Twelfth Night*. Despite speaking the truth to characters, the clown is a reagent to blindness and human folly, thus not a presence of qualitative *otherness*. That role falls to the

opposed to the personalities of the aristocratic characters we have met. Throughout the foregoing scenes of the first act, for instance, the two most prominent individuals of Illyria, Duke Orsino and Countess Olivia, have shown themselves to be prisoners of their own very strong illusions. Despite the seemingly tyrannical conditions of Feste's employ with Countess Olivia, his physical freedom to roam and his liberality of both attitude and language reveal a behavioral implication against the self-imposed burdens and rigidity of his superiors, those two nobles of Illyria who subsist in erotic impasses of their own devising.

To take the more obvious example: Duke Orsino, Illyria's governor, has opened the first scene of the play with his famous speech about music as the food of love—for it seems he is infatuated with the sequestered countess-in-mourning, Olivia. Under the influence of this unrequited desire, the duke has lost interest in any recreation or diversion, including his beloved pastime of hunting. He simply fusses about his palace accompanied by lords and musicians, awaiting opportunities to illustrate and expound upon his singular suffering (i.e. the suffering that he believes makes him singular).

The drama begins in Orsino's palace. He enters with attendants and musicians. The band strikes the final notes of a bittersweet song, and Orsino urges them to continue:

If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again, it had a dying fall;
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odor. Enough, no more;
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love, how quick and fresh thou art,
That notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical. (I.i.1-15)

Early in these lines, Duke Orsino claims to want to be rid of his yearning; a moment later, however, this claim is overthrown when he admits that nothing compares to or competes with the extravagances of his desire, a desire that consumes and corrodes all other experience. This unhappy love elevates the duke's persona and intensifies his eloquence, allowing him to consolidate and substantiate all worldly involvement within the familiar identity of an honorable sufferer. What he determines to vanquish at the opening of the speech—his sad longing—emerges as victorious by the closing, for to achieve the initial poetic wish would be to destroy the poetry that made the wish possible. We may call this poetic tendency *autoeroticism* or, following Kierkegaard, "victory over the world."¹⁰ In this instance of speech-discovery, then, Orsino does not really reflect and then discern the truth so much as he unearths an appealing option for the avoidance of

heroine, Viola. After a shipwreck strands her on the coast of Illyria, she disguises herself as a boy named Cesario, gains employ with the duke, and begins to effect major changes in the lives of the other primary characters. We will take a closer look at her presence in part two of this essay.

¹⁰ "If we ask what poetry is, we may say in general that it is victory over the world; it is through a negation of the imperfect actuality that poetry opens up a higher actuality, expands and transfigures the imperfect into the perfect and thereby assuages the deep pain that wants to make everything dark. To that extent, poetry is a kind of reconciliation, but it is not the true reconciliation, for it does not reconcile me with the actuality in which I am living..." (CI 297). More on this below.

reflection and action in the face of future experience. We can imagine that if the clown were onstage during this speech, he would interrupt here and there to ridicule Orsino with esoteric insults and subtle puns about the inanities of self-absorption.

As the object of Orsino's love, Countess Olivia is not very different from her pursuer. Just a few moments after the duke concludes his speech, we learn that he has already sent a pageboy named Valentine to her house with a fresh round of tender entreaties. Regrettably, Valentine has been unable even to gain audience with the countess: for, in a conspicuous fashion, she has imposed upon herself a seven-year system of bereavement for her deceased brother. Under her own protocol, she has obliged herself to wear a black veil and to weep daily and with such industry that her floors are repeatedly touched with saltwater reminiscent of the saltwater of Orsino's desire. "All this to season a brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh and lasting in her sad remembrance" (I.i.31-33).¹¹ The nature of Olivia's grief, which conveniently "seasons" and sustains the sad event at its source—a grief, in short, which she wishes to keep alive as her distinguishing feature—and furthermore the preposterous pledge to inhabit a single emotion for seven years, together constitute the perfect *humorous* counterpart to Orsino's own *humorous* self-involvement. In this reciprocal arrangement of desire and grief, then, both individuals unwittingly exploit the situation to the superficial enhancement and preservation of their own public identities.

Orsino and Olivia have become comic versions of what, as I have suggested, Kierkegaard often calls "the poet."¹² Their privations produce seemingly higher forms of self-expression and allow each figure to nurture a convenient, self-satisfied, beautiful distance from reality. As spectators, we sense that these two prefer relishing the fixed idea of sorrow to exploring the possibilities inherent in the achievement of erotic love or some higher interpersonal connection. Thus they form the battery of the perfect *closed-world* comic mentality. Unlike green-world or *normal* heroes who are at odds with the more powerful *humorous* individuals, each of these two is in conflict with his or her own best interests as future individuals and each inaugurates the very attitude that must be overcome if the initial comic impasse is to end with happy marriages and the typical comic resolutions. They are essentially comic because each possesses a subjectivity that wants to assert itself in pure form over and above—or removed from—actuality.

Separately, Orsino and Olivia attribute to fate the specific suffering they actually have enhanced of their own volition. To put it another way, they project limited personalities upon the temporal circumstances in an effort to transform the rather indeterminate and commonplace situation into something like a remarkable tragic fate, a channel of meaning sealed off from possibility and therefore soothing in its distance from the anxiety of confronting a future self in the responsibility of a free will. As Johannes

¹¹ It is fascinating to note Shakespeare's use of language and inversion here. The saltwater of Orsino's desire is corrosive of that which can be gained, whereas the saltwater of Olivia's grief is preservative of that which was lost. This is a wonderfully subtle example how the behavior of each character manifests their identical fear of possibility. By consolidating all experience under the banner of one emotion, each eradicates the challenge of communication and true human interaction.

¹² Although Kierkegaard discusses "the poet" throughout his writings from *The Concept of Irony* onwards, perhaps the most apt treatment appears in the late discourse, "The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air." He writes, "In the silence out there the poet daydreams about the exploit that he will never carry out—because the poet is certainly not a hero; and he becomes eloquent—perhaps he becomes eloquent simply because he is an unhappy lover of the exploit, whereas the hero is its happy lover, consequently because the deficiency makes him eloquent, just as deficiency essentially makes the poet—he becomes eloquent; this, his eloquence, is the poem. Out there in the silence, he devises great plans to transform and beatify the whole world, great plans that never become actuality—no, they become the poem. Out there in the silence, he broods over his pain, makes everything—yes even his teachers, the bird and the lily, must serve him instead of teach him—he makes everything echo his pain. This echo of his pain is the poem" (WA 18). If this is an accurate description, then yet another way to define a closed-world comedy might be to say that it depicts the protagonist's transition from poet to hero.

Climacus might put it, Orsino and Olivia “acquire legitimacy” through disproportionate, absolute participation in merely apparent truths. Really, their behavior in the first act evokes the feeling that, given these respective styles of self-ignorance, Olivia and Orsino would be able to achieve total serenity and ease were they to live forever within the deadlock. We can guess that were Valentine the pageboy to return from Olivia’s one day with news that Olivia had finally changed her heart and fallen in love with Orsino, then he, Orsino, might face a major life-crisis.¹³

As agents of self-inflicted seclusion and personal limitation, then, Orsino and Olivia perpetuate suffering by idealizing sorrow and making the suffering greater than what it is. Escape to a green world would be futile, precisely because with such inverted but similar and similarly *humorous* mentalities, these two Illyrians could never work themselves loose from the erotic stalemate: neither individual possess the obvious truth of his or her own self-binding comic attitude. Nor would either character ever think to escape in order to improve his or her own circumstances, since the stalemate wants nothing more than this present effortlessness of identity and action, this absence of anxiety. They are perfect for one another so long as each remains in seclusion across town.

This stalemate and its consequences constitute the status quo in Illyria when Feste says that “Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage.”¹⁴ The nature of Orsino and Olivia’s fixedness endows Feste’s use of the word “marriage” with connotations of perpetuity under the mistaken idea—not only psychological interdependency with the distant and highly imaginary erotic other, but also marriage to one’s own illusions. This is a life-circumstance to which, on one level in the ironized domain of the wise clown, even death is preferable.

Emphatically, Johannes Climacus understood this to be Feste’s connotation. As he writes in the follow-up, his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus belatedly explains his intention for the epigraph: “Better well hanged than by a hapless marriage to be brought into systematic in-law relationship with the whole world” (CUP 5). Better, that is, to endow oneself with the certainty of death than to persist in the comic misbelief that experiential knowledge can be established, consolidated, and thereafter recollected or relived *ad infinitum* and as a guarantor of selfhood. Behind the curtain of his own fiction, Kierkegaard deliberately associates the clown’s observations about Illyria with Climacus’s comic observations about speculative philosophy, religious hypocrisy, poetic grandiosity, or any misguided attempt to idealize and organize experience into easy and immutable categories of truth. To relate to the present through the vehicle of a fixed idea is to live in the past. And while “scientific-scholarly endeavor” (or speculative philosophy) is superficially quite different from the behaviors of these Illyrian aristocrats, both tendencies obviously arise from the human urge to create, now and for the future, self-satisfaction, legitimacy, and “victory over the world.”

Climacus does not believe one can validate all worldly involvement under a predetermined idea or a “hapless marriage.” This is to say that the entire project of *Philosophical Fragments* is to examine the question of whether we can move beyond the assurance of Socratic/Platonic recollection (or Hegelian dialectic) and into a happier marriage with an idea flexible enough to incorporate possibility, free will, and individual human change. “Whereas the Greek pathos focuses on recollection, the pathos of our project focuses on the moment, and no wonder, for is it not an exceedingly pathos-filled matter to come into existence from the state of ‘not to be?’” (PF 21).

¹³ In fact, as Johannes Climacus or some other Kierkegaard pseudonym might say, this situation would make an excellent comedy: for a skilled author to trace all the ways in which a lovesick Orsino-type attempted to avoid the fruition of his *ultimate desire* in light of its sudden likelihood.

¹⁴ Actually, the intruder, Viola/Cesario, has already arrived in Illyria, but at this point Feste is unaware of her ambiguous presence.

The individual who attempts self-consolidation through lavish melancholy or seven years of bereavement or, likewise, through the systematization of experience into an apparent logic, attempts to fix subjectivity (which is movement, change, and possibility in light of the necessity of the physical world) into pure form—a mistake that is rendered more comically incongruous when one observes that both types, the poetical duke and the scholarly-scientific professor, embody the antithesis of their claims. Orsino asserts his identity as a lover of the most capacious sentiment, but he lives in isolation, far from the challenges of real love, communication of self, and human duty. The Hegelian “assistant professor” claims to begin with doubt, and then to build his system of knowledge from this blank slate, but he fears nothing more than the lack of some conclusion; rather, his true beginning is from the presupposition that immanent knowledge is closing in upon the *telos* that will put our minds in touch with the absolute. As Climacus writes of these individuals, “what the Hegelians say about it [doubt] 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” (PF 82).

A closed world comedy such as *Twelfth Night* depicts characters who, under the influence of an outsider’s intrusion, are capable of overcoming the temptations of pre-formed identity or moral limitation and thus submitting to new possibilities. Our awareness now that Johannes Climacus begins his project by referencing the dramatic context in which this idea is beginning to unfold, reveals that Climacus, too, might believe in the capability of an outsider’s intrusion to initiate rebirth for the individual. This is not to say that the common reader, simply by glancing at the epigraph to *Philosophical Fragments*, should recognize all of the points I have made and intuit that the book is structured to mimic closed-world comedy, nor even that familiarity with closed-world comedy is terribly helpful for fathoming the profound challenges of *Philosophical Fragments*. Were everything so simple, *Philosophical Fragments* would be somewhat superfluous as a work, if not entirely self-defeating. Yet even if the reader does not examine the motto in too much detail, its placement efficiently prepares him or her for the comic undertaking that follows—an undertaking that seeks to reveal the nature of self-misunderstanding and the function an otherworldly invasion can have in eradicating that misunderstanding—even if, as I say, this goes unrecognized, still the stamp of the clown’s erotic-ironic tone tends to promote the same reader’s openness to the province of jest, to indirect criticism, to the call for subjective examination, and to the intrusion of something new. Perhaps it does so even more effectively if such perception remains consciously undefined and in the realm of mood.¹⁵

As readers, we have yet to appreciate what effects the intrusion of Viola/Cesario might have upon the aristocrats in *Twelfth Night*. Similarly, we have yet to examine Johannes Climacus’s *absolute paradox* in any detail. Nevertheless, having established the comic context of epigraph—the motto of *Philosophical Fragments*, as it were—we are now in a position to look more closely at the structure, characters, motifs, themes, and dramatic tensions as they develop within the five chapters or acts of *Philosophical Fragments*, the better to gather the validity of a comparison between the two texts, and the better to ascertain just what the invasion of an outsider might accomplish both in a Shakespearean closed-world comedy and in the unfolding drama of what Climacus would call our “comic misrelation” to the question of truth. This being attempted, we will discover whether, in either case, a happy marriage based on the mutual communication of selves is indeed *possible*.¹⁶

¹⁵ I do intend to use this term, *mood*, in the full Kierkegaardian sense. If, as Judge William points out in his criticism of aesthetics, the personality’s disappearance into mood brings an individual into the moment, “and this in turn is the most adequate expression for the aesthetic existence,” then the use of aesthetics (in this case the comic-dramatic archetype), might have reciprocal purpose in clearing away the personality to make room for the sort of religiousness in which the moment is to *acquire decisive significance*—and which, after all, must involve the sort of desire necessary for a mood to exist. See, for example, *Either/Or Part II*, p. 229-230 and *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 13-16.

¹⁶ For their various *forms* of generosity and insight, I would like to thank Richard Purkardhofer, Gordon Marino, Eileen Shimota, Erik Hong, and Richard McCombs. This essay could not have been written without their helpful presence.

Tribute to David Kangas,

(1964–2016)

Martin Kavka
Florida State University

David Kangas was, in his work, a critic of human capability. He had little patience for the kind of subjectivism and egoity entailed in talking about humans and their projects and their telē. David Kangas was, in his life, one of the most capable people I've ever known. In the weeks since September 9, when his years-long battle with lung cancer came to an end, I have come back to this paradox—like all paradoxes, arresting and deeply generative—again and again.

I was David's colleague in the Department of Religion at Florida State University from 2000 through 2006, and in that time I team-taught two seminars with him. To watch him explain Heidegger and Levinas to students was to watch a master at work. He could make the most challenging paragraphs of these thinkers' texts sing, and clarify them without leaving their rigorous phenomenological vocabulary behind. To hear him generously respond to—and deepen the stakes of—comments from students (and from his co-instructor) was to hear someone who wanted to produce thinkers, and not epigones.

Because these habits were also on display in his undergraduate classroom, students flocked to David. A former undergraduate student of David's recently wrote to me about an class on existentialism that she took with him in the mid-2000s changed her view on what the good life could be. In part this was because she learned that thinking and critique were integral to flourishing—as in any course on philosophy, or philosophy of religion—but also because of the specific content of David's course.

Reading Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* led me to think about what it is to live in the present, and taught me how not to dwell on the past, whether it was good or bad. Reading Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* led me to realize that the achievement of our goals would always be fleeting, if we even ever reach those goals, or if they even turn out to be what we expected them to be. And reading Sartre taught me that our own freedom and good is connected to whether all others are free and have a good life.

I asked her whether she had gone back to class notes before writing me about this. She responded in the negative: "That class, and he, have been in my mind—and not stashed away in some corner—for the last twelve years." David won a teaching award in 2005, while still at Florida State. This must have been the easiest decision on the part of the award committee ever. After he left Florida State and began teaching in the philosophy department at California State University—Stanislaus, we spoke on a few occasions about the practices he used to get first-generation college students engaged by the philosophical tradition. These also met with success.

Wherever he taught, David made thinking seem easy. This was also true in his publications. When I was working on Abraham Joshua Heschel's posthumously published *A Passion for Truth*, in which Heschel offers a commentary on Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*, I would regularly scratch my head over Kierkegaard's own writing. I would then turn to the pages in the last chapter of David's *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings* (Indiana University Press, 2007), which treated that text. Now Kierkegaard made far more sense! Not only did it seem as if Kierkegaard had been translated into words I could understand, but it also seemed as if Kierkegaard was now, suddenly, speaking directly to me.

The chapter in *Kierkegaard's Instant* that treats *The Concept of Anxiety* raises issues that regularly appeared in David's scholarship. Anxiety discloses "that every *calculable order of things* through which the ego can assure and console itself ... constitutes a projection of that same ego." And so to remain in anxiety, on David's reading of Kierkegaard, is

to let go of any self-understanding that allows, however secretly, the gesture of mastery; it is to become "absolutely educated" concerning one's non-ultimacy, one's nothingness. Anxiety becomes a serving spirit insofar as it effects a detachment of the subject from its own understanding of itself as originally capable. . . . In and through anxiety the subject is *offered* nonbeing—not as what it posits or can be shown to have posited, but as what prevents it from coinciding with itself. (194)

This passage is a miniature of David's capable refusal of capability. To acknowledge that one is not the ground of the world, to give up security in one's projects, one receives something in return: that which is infinite, what exceeds a subject's efforts to know, determine, and enframe the world in which it is situated. David read this as continuing a tradition of Western thought found most readily in Meister Eckhart, and as overlapping with the analysis of temporality and exposure found in Emmanuel Levinas's *Otherwise than Being*. Nevertheless, this passage is not only a translation of Kierkegaard into others' philosophical lingo, but it is also something deeply therapeutic. To critique the power of the subject is all too easily dismissed as a recipe for a kind of masochism; those scholars who regularly work on Levinas know this criticism all too well. David taught how one might appropriate Kierkegaard (and Eckhart and Levinas) so as not to abase oneself before God, or before human authorities, whether religious or political. In affirming that which is outside the ego, in giving up the ego, one also gains the strength to critique those authorities who demand that we see the world as they claim to know it.

This stance of affirmation—I hesitate to call it a "theme"—extends through David's writing, and also his teaching. To affirm the exterior is to affirm all one's students (but not necessarily one's administrators!). To lead students into a philosophical text is to wear that knowledge as lightly as possible and to disdain mastery (while students and colleagues flock to the master!), because there is something outside of philosophy that is just as worthy, if not more worthy, of affirmation. On the final pages of *Kierkegaard's Instant*, David promised a longer treatment of Kierkegaard's edifying discourses, which he saw as addressing "the human condition in terms of this irremissible exposure, this suffering, its inability to posit time" (198), this inability to make life proceed as one wishes. Some bits of these analyses appeared in the last few years. In 2009, Aaron Simmons and David Wood were kind enough to publish an exchange between David and me in their edited volume *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*. There, David insisted that the biblical character of Anna (from Luke 2) in Kierkegaard's "Patience in Expectancy" is a figure for how one can see time as "fulfilled without closure" after giving up self, project, and their concomitant teleology. Last year, he published a small essay in *Konturen* on Kierkegaard's 1847 "What We Learn from the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air," in which he argued that we should allow a kind of "anarchy, what already structures life prior to and after the mediations of self-consciousness, greater place." To take the world in this anarchic way was nonetheless productive: "faith finds reason for affirmation precisely in this groundlessness. Losing everything, it receives everything: not in a dialectical sense, but in the sense that its losing everything is its receiving everything" (*Kierkegaard's Instant*, 194). It does not give the self more power, but it guides the self to be a person who makes friends with the world, who refuses to see it as an enemy of the self and its projects.

To read Kierkegaard, and so many who are influenced by him, is to ask oneself "Can one really receive everything through losing everything? Really?" It is tempting to look at David's life and answer yes. It is tempting to take the fact that David remained strong enough to fulfill his promise of a book on Kierkegaard's edifying discourses, although he did not live long enough to hold that book—*Errant*

Affirmations: The Philosophy of Kierkegaard's Religious Discourses, which will appear with Bloomsbury at the end of this calendar year—in his own hands. It is tempting to look at David's own joy and his own affirmations—whether of the mountains of Yosemite, fine cheese, or cancer—as something that we could take up as a project. This he would have resisted. He would have rightly called it out as something philosophically false, as a sophistic way to evade the risks that are endemic to being human, risks that are to be affirmed. (Soon after his diagnosis, I emailed him some words of that cloying sort that the living say to the dying. He immediately wrote back: “Martin, we are *all* dying. I am just dying more quickly than most.”) In an essay that will appear soon in a volume edited by Vishwa Adluri, devoted to the work of Reiner Schürmann—a thinker with whose work David spent a great deal of time in the last decade of his life, and a thinker who also died too soon (at almost the same age as David)—David argued that there should be love of the tragic. Returning to Schürmann's introduction to his 1989 edited volume *The Public Realm*, David endorsed Schürmann's claim that the insight to be gained from Antigone and Oedipus is not to “affirm life against death,” but rather to affirm “death *in* life.” Yet David also insisted that Schürmann's affirmation of death in life had to be maintained alongside Schürmann's 1970s work on Meister Eckhart and its affirmation “itinerant joy”; indeed, these affirmations were for David one and the same.

To learn from David, then, cannot be to copy him as if he offered some kind of stratagem. But this does not mean that learning from David is impossible. It simply means that learning from David involves affirming him, hearing what he still has to say, taking his life as equally as complex as one of Kierkegaard's edifying discourses, and trying to go on in one's own life while engaging in the difficult labor of always keeping in mind everything about which David so beautifully wrote and lived: anxiety, incapability, tragedy, anarchy, affirmation, joy.

Tribute to Per Lønning (1928–2016)

Rune Engebretsen

On Sunday, August 21, Per Lønning—sometime bishop, professor, and politician—died in Oslo. He was 88. The funeral took place at noon, Monday, August 28, at the Ullern Lutheran Church in Oslo. He is survived by his wife, Ingunn, four children and their spouses, eight grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

In the Norwegian press, Harald Stanghelle, the editor-in-chief of *Aftenposten*, described Lønning as “bishop, politician, hymn writer, author, debater, thinker” and “the most noteworthy theologian of his time.”

The Rt. Rev. Ole Christian M. Kvarme, Bishop of Oslo, spoke of Lønning “as a luminous figure” in the life of the Church over several decades—someone who “was in constant conversation with his contemporaries.”

At 26, Lønning received his doctorate of theology from the University of Oslo, with a dissertation on Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity. Four years later, he added a second doctorate in philosophy. This dissertation was on Pascal. Both are landmarks in their fields. While working on his second dissertation, Lønning was also elected to the Norwegian parliament as a representative of the conservative party.

In her eulogy, Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg lauded Lønning as a formidable political force combining brilliant oratorical skills with professional substance. In his *in memoriam*, Rune Slagstad, professor of sociology, portrayed him as a significant public intellectual, “a highly unique and formative agent of theological mettle.”

A person of remarkable breadth and depth, Lønning published 50 books, an equal number of hymns, and hundreds of articles and essays. Nationally and internationally, he stood tall in public and cultural debates, adroitly fending for enduring values and the faith. For a decade, he was a leading member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

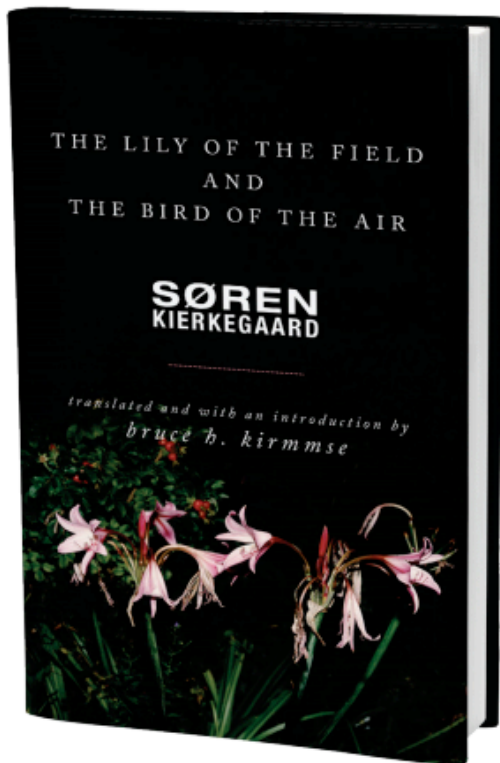
He was a member of The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, of The Royal Norwegian Society of Science and Letters, and received numerous awards, including The Pax Christi Award from St. John's University in Collegeville, and an honorary degree from St. Olaf College.

Lønning's commitment was deep, his outreach encompassing, his contributions to ecumenicity and interfaith dialogue legendary. First and foremost, he was a man of the Church, who sought to live the Christian faith and to encourage others to do the same.

Many of you knew Lønning and his work. For twenty-three years, he was an active and highly respected member of the International Advisory Board of *Kierkegaard's Writings*. And his own incisive writings stand as a testimonial to "that single individual," whom Kierkegaard called his reader.

Lønning held academic posts at the University of Oslo, the University of Aarhus, and at Strasbourg. He also taught in Jerusalem, the Cameroon, and several places in the United States. He frequently returned here to teach, preach, and confer, last in 2005, when he gave a major paper at the International Kierkegaard Conference at St. Olaf, with Dr. Andrew Burgess as respondent.

Per Lønning was a good friend and colleague. He is sorely missed. Blessed be his memory.



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Søren Kierkegaard

Translated and with an introduction by Bruce H. Kirmmse

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