

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

NEWSLETTER NO. 15

EDITOR: Louis Pojman

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Philosophy and Religions
Philosophy Department
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NEWS

This year's Kierkegaard Seminar (affiliated with the American Academy of Religion) will meet in conjunction with the AAR on November 22-25 in Atlanta, Georgia. The theme is Kierkegaard's Repetition. Dr. Abraham Khan, Trinity College, University of Toronto will be presiding.

The program reads as follows:

9:00 Stephen Crites, Wesleyan University: "The 'Blissful Security of the Moment': Repetition, Recollection, and Eternal Recurrence."

Respondent: J. Preston Cole, Coe College, Iowa

9:30 David Goicoechea, Brock University, Ontario: "Repetition as the Temporality of Personal Love."

Respondent: Vanina Sechi, Weston, Ontario.

10:00 David Cain, Mary Washington College: "'Going Further', 'Revocation', and Repetition,"

Respondent: C. Stephen Evans, St. Olaf College.

10:30 Andrew Burgess, University of New Mexico: "Repetition's 'Right Hand': The Picture of Job in Repetition and in the Edifying Discourses That Accompanied It."

Respondent: Dalton Baldwin, Loma Linda University

11:00 David Gouwens, Brite Divinity School: "Understanding, Imagination, and Irony in Kierkegaard's Repetition."

Respondent: Mark Taylor, Williams College

11:27 Information and Suggestions: IKC and papers (Robert Perkins, Stetson University). The Seminar Topic for 1987 is the Philosophical Fragments. So start thinking about submitting papers for that seminar.

Dr. Khan has provided abstracts of the five papers in the last edition of the Newsletter.

There will be a KIERKEGAARD STUDIES SYMPOSIUM with the title "Acknowledged Works: Problems and Perspectives at the University of Toronto on December 6, 1986. Papers will be given by A. McKinnon, D. Goicoechea, R. Johnson, B. Polka, J. Walker, H. Nielsen, I. Nicol and N. Carigan. For further information write to Dr. Abraham Khan, Trinity College, University of Toronto, Toronto, ONT M5S 1H8.

The Soren Kierkegaard Society will meet in conjunction with the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association on December 28, 1986. The program will consist of a paper by Brad Art, "Moral and Aesthetic Freedom in Kierkegaard's Either/Or" and a paper by T. F. Morris, "Kierkegaard on Don Juan." An organizational business meeting will follow.

The Society will meet in conjunction with the Central Division of the APA, April 30 - May 2, 1987. The program will include a paper by C. Steven Evans on Kierkegaard and "Reformed" Epistemology with commentary and response by Alvin Plantinga and Steve Wykstra.

Merold Westphal, Chairperson of the Soren Kierkegaard Society, has sent in the following announcement:

For some time the Soren Kierkegaard Society has been a very informal association, operated out of the back pocket first of Bob Perkins, then of John Elrod. We are enormously indebted to these two friends for their splendid service to all of us. Responsibility for the Society has now been handed on to Merold Westphal with the hope that more formal organization would develop. The purpose of such organization would be doubly democratic. It would give to the members of the Society a voice in the way it is run, and it would provide a vehicle for sharing the responsibilities of the Society beyond a single individual. Accordingly, the purpose of the business meeting in December will be to elect an initial cabinet, whose responsibilities would be the planning of further meetings and the drawing up of a basic set of working rules or bylaws. The business meeting will also provide an opportunity for all present to share their ideas on both of these subjects.

The Department of Philosophy of the College of Wooster announces a symposium: The Grammar of the Heart: Thinking with Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, to be held March 26-28, 1987. This symposium honors Paul L. Holmer, retiring from

Yale University in May 1987. Among fifteen papers to be presented are one's given by Niels Thulstrup, Copenhagen, Denmark; Jens Glebe-Moller, the University of Copenhagen; Rowan Williams, Oxford University; D. Z. Phillips, University of Wales, Swansea; H. A. Nielsen, University of Windsor; George Lindbeck, Yale University; and H. E. Mason, University of Minnesota.

For further information write Richard H. Bell, Department of Philosophy, The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH 44691

Call For Papers

In the Spring of 1988, The Society for the Philosophy of Sex and Love will sponsor a symposium on Soren Kierkegaard's Works of Love, to be held at the Central Division meeting of the APA. Papers should be around 12 to 15 pages, standard spacing and margins, submitted in duplicate and prepared for blind reviewing. Send to Alan Soble, Philosophy Department, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA 70148, by September 15, 1987. Include postage if return of manuscript is desired.

THE KIERKEGAARD NEWSLETTER is published twice a year (in October and April). We welcome news, short articles, and reviews concerning Kierkegaard scholarship. We have a circulation of about 400 persons. We welcome gifts to help off-set the cost of printing and mailing. We will also consider printing or distributing advertisements of suitable Kierkegaard material.

REVIEWS

H.A. Nielsen, Where The Passion Is: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments, Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983. pp. x + 209.

By Abraham Khan

This book is a literary microscopy of a philosophical text by Johannes Climacus, a Kierkegaard pseudonym. Its two goals reflect the extent of the microscopy. According to Nielsen, one of its goals is to discuss some textual difficulties connected with an algebraic treatment of Truth and Error in the text, to shed light on these and other problems which he has seen crop-up time and again over a fifteen year period of reading the text with students. The other is to show that Climacus, in the Philosophical Fragments, anticipates some twentieth century problems in the philosophy of religion. In nine chapters the book accomplishes both of its goals, following closely the thought-structure of the text without countering Climacus' intention as a writer, viz., to make the task of becoming a Christian more difficult but yet not any more difficult than it really is. Consequently, the book not only requires familiarity with the Fragments but is also demanding on the reader's ability to think clearly and consistently about matters connected with a condensed treatment of crucial concepts in the pseudonymous text.

Nielsen's reading is essentially an internal and self-propelled dismantling of the text, an act of deconstruction, by which its meaning or thesis unfolds. Without altering the text, Nielsen overturns some deep assumptions about a set of concepts (e.g., Truth, Error, the Moment, Absolute Paradox, Faith and Passion). The commonly held assumptions about these concepts, Nielsen claims, give the false impression that philosophy can handle the idea of revelation, and, as such, they hinder a reader of the New Testament by making him think

that the project is reducible to a set of substantial knowledge claims that require shoring up by philosophy.

In order to overturn such assumptions, Nielsen takes an approach in the tradition of linguistic analysis. Accordingly, the approach might include isolating a certain passage, posing rhetorical questions, probing, teasing, clarifying, making criss-crossing connections, drawing distinctions, anticipating objections or filling out a picture - whichever is most appropriate to enhance the radical difference between philosophy and Christianity in the Fragments and to suggest possibilities consistent with this particular text in the Kierkegaard corpus. More specifically, Nielsen's analysis proceeds along certain sidepaths opened up by Wittgenstein.

Two examples show both his adeptness in using linguistic analysis to make the main aspects of the text more accessible to a reader. One example is his defense of Climacus' position that a proof with respect to the Moment hypothesis is hardly to be considered audacious. Nielsen argues for seeing the proof in this case both as a device intended to bid the reader to take notice of a thought whose origin cannot be ascribed to a human thinker, and as an expression of Climacus' astonishment at the strangeness of such a fact. The assumption targeted to be overturned is that thought in the world has to be the thought of a human person. Whereas to demand proof for the existence of God is a folly, to do so for the Moment hypothesis is clearly not. Nielsen explains that in the latter case proof is interpreted as both helping the reader to take note of the possibility of thought that has a non-human origin, and as a means of freeing the reader from the spell cast by the aphorism that any thought source (p. 24). Of course, this understanding of proof is consistent with seeing Climacus as a practitioner of the art of noticing.

The second example of Nielsen's dexterity as a linguistic philosopher is his treatment of "the God" as a concept. More specifically, he shows against Climacus that "the God" is the name of an entity existing in its own right. He argues for a "grammatical knowing" based on Climacus' own position and inspired by Wittgenstein's remarks about grammar and essence. The end result is that Climacus is exposed as trading on some knowledge of the God - attributes of the God figure - in his reasoning (p. 65). Nielsen contends that such knowledge has to be understood as markers which show where the appropriate leaves off in discourse about God. Predication of a property to God "is used catechetically and formally to teach souls about where those limits lie, and on occasion as corrective, admonition, or caution against going beyond them" (p. 71). Nielsen recognizes that this and kind of knowing about the deity is not substantive but analogical and only skin deep. Climacus' refusal to give up this kind of knowing leads Nielsen to suggest that Climacus might consider treating it as substantive knowing. As Nielsen rightly notes, however, to treat grammatical knowing as substantive knowledge would encourage theistic lines to which Climacus is clearly opposed.

To make sense of grammatical knowing within the context of the thesis, Nielsen suggests that Climacus be understood as presenting a coherent alternative to theism. The cue for this alternative is in Climacus's claim that "the God" is a concept, rather than a name. In the idiom of twentieth century linguistic philosophy, it is one of those concepts that "are so enmeshed in the human form of life that to remind ourselves of the part they play comes very near to reviewing the basics of being a man" (p. 74). In short, "the God" does not have either to be or to conform to any specification in order to round out a coherent picture of human life. And this is precisely the reason for Climacus' concept of deity being quite different from what Pascal calls "the God of the philosophers." The difference between them is a logical one. Note, however, that both concepts - that of Climacus and that of the philosophers - are

abstracted from a Biblical understanding of God and devoid of any anthropomorphism. Nielsen does not seem to worry about the abstraction in the case of Climacus. This is because he has not lost sight of the central question in the text: How is a thinker to become related to the Truth/Moment?

In connection with his penchant for moves in linguistic philosophy, Nielsen advances a claim that Climacus' thought-project anticipates the recent clamour regarding the unverifiability of religious statements. More specifically, the claim is that the project, by hypothecating that "the learner is in Error by his own guilt," contains at least one eminently verifiable proposition. Such a claim rests on drawing internal distinctions within the concept of self-scrutiny, on distinguishing between the fact of making a self-discovery and the content of such a discovery. The fact of discovering something in oneself and confessing it is hardly subjective in the same sense as the content of one's discovery. The confession that one is in Error has, according to Nielsen, the same weight as a confession about love and hate (p. 48). Both represent a type of judgment that is falsifiable. If Nielsen is correct, then his book offers important insights about not just Climacus' thought-experiment, but also about the concept of self-discovery. One thing which is not clear in the book is whether it is the confession or the discovery or the two together that has epistemic significance. Even if it was settled as to which of the three has epistemic significance, a question still lurks: Might not the discovery, and hence the confession, refer to one's own intellectual inadequacy, and not to the fact that one is in Error? One thing is clear, however. That is, according to the distinction, the content of one's discovery is merely subjective opinion and therefore hardly an objective fact.

Nielsen, having either explained, analyzed, or explored certain lines of thought in the text, contends that Climacus has clarified our perceptions of Judaism to the extent of restoring the God concept in its Old Testament majesty (p. 203). This claim does not seem to have the kind of firm footing that he would like to give it. The fact that in Climacus' interpretation ordinary and scriptural language of transcendence disappear altogether is hard to square with the fact that the majesty of God in Judaism and Christianity implies more than a being who does not conform to any specification of human reason. To recall, it implies also that deity has an anthropomorphic tone in so far as he becomes angry, makes covenants, accepts sacrifice, communicates with man, forgives, etc. In short, Nielsen's understanding of the majesty of God remains more philosophical than Biblical.

Finally, the book bypasses a consideration of the possibility that Climacus' thought project might be biased from the outset. This bypass seems to result more from the presuppositions of deconstruction rather than from the author's deliberations. But that possibility cannot be overlooked in a situation that presses the uniqueness-claim of Christianity or the claim that Christianity alone meets the condition that is central to the thought-project in the Fragments. It is true that the book does consider other traditions with a historical content and an idea of eternal happiness. But it does not say how the situation stands with the project when the Koran is theoretically considered. Hardly a paradox in Islam, the Koran is both the created and uncreated Word of God. In Western scholarship on Islam, the Koran as the Word of God is to Islam what Christ is to Christianity. That being the case, it would be interesting to see how the project might be affected and whether the uniqueness-claim, as explained on page 190f, is weakened by the concept of Koran.

The book, however, is definitely an important contribution to expository literature on the Fragments. It employs the text's own strategic and economic resources in creatively reflecting on concepts and arguments, unpacking and evaluating the latter without diminishing the brilliant contrast between the

core content of the New Testament and philosophy achieved by the text. It is not a survey, but a specialized guide. Students in analytic philosophy of religion will find this book a welcome challenge.

Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety, tr. Reider Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 273 pp. \$18.50. From the original Danish text Begrebet Angest. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1844.

By Louis P. Pojman

The Concept of Anxiety is an attempt to submit the Christian doctrine of Sin and the Fall to a psychological examination. Kierkegaard's (henceforth 'SK') thesis is that psychology comes closest of all the sciences to approximating the meaning of the Christian doctrine of Sin, the Fall, and Freedom. However, as a science, psychology cannot completely capture the Christian meaning of man, for Christian theology depends on revelation, which is out of the range of science. In this study SK, through his pseudonym, Vigilius Haufniensis (literally "Watchman of the Harbor"; note that 'Copenhagen' means "merchants' harbor"), shows the relationship of anxiety (Angest) to sin, the fall and human freedom. Anxiety is the disturbing factor, a catalyst, which causes the unrest and insecurity that tempts humans to grasp finitude instead of infinity, that which relates to the temporal order instead of that which relates to God. Anxiety predisposes us to the fall into finitude, but we are still free to choose Good. If one so chooses, anxiety may become a servant, pointing to our God relationship by making us dissatisfied with the world.

The chief contributions this study makes to the history of ideas, philosophy and theology are (1) the ingenious and elaborate analysis of the concept of anxiety which predated and influenced Freud's later study of Angst and (2) the radical reworking of the Christian doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin, arguing that the Fall is not something that simply happened once for all with Adam, but rather is that which occurs again every time a person chooses finitude over against his relation to the infinite, thus solving the problem of how we can be counted guilty for an original sin we didn't have anything to do with.

The Concept of Anxiety is a difficult work whose style alternates between the turgid and the tortuous, occasionally combining these traits into a textual nightmare. It may be the hardest of Kierkegaard's works to read, let alone to translate. Walter Lowrie, who did so much for SK studies in the English-speaking world with his two biographies of SK and thirty translations of SK's works, probably did his least impressive work in giving us our first English translation of this work. He tells us in the preface of the work (The Concept of Dread, Princeton, 1944) that he completed the translation in one month, working twelve hours a day. The work bears the marks of haste and has stood in need of replacement from the day it was published. Whatever else one may say against the project of issuing new translations of SK's works where may seem quite good (and I for one still prefer the Lowrie lyrical translations to some of the more prosaic recent renditions), the need for a new translation of Begrebet Angest has been recognized by every SK scholar with whom I have spoken on the matter.

The question, then, becomes: is this present translation by Thomte the sort of translation that we need? Should we be content with it? In my judgment the answer to these questions is an affirmative one, though I have some reservations about the work. Let me elaborate.

The most striking thing about the new translation of The Concept of Anxiety

is its unrelenting faithfulness to SK's own style. By contrast, Lowrie will be seen as improving of SK, varying the terminology (taking advantage of the relatively richer abundance of adjectives in English), adding exclamations, lending a sense of urgency to the text that does not appear in the original. Lowrie must be seen as an evangel of Kierkegaardiana as well as a translator. Thomte's style is more plodding, more prosaic, and less interesting, but reflecting the author's style quite accurately. As Thomte states in his Preface, "...readers may think this translation both stilted and long-winded. The Concept of Anxiety does not read like a popular book on psychological problems. There is an inordinate number of categorical terms and substantive phrases, and clause upon clause in sentence upon sentence leaves the reader breathless" (xviii). Thomte then tells us that he is committed to emulate the master here and everywhere. He succeeds. The result is less interesting reading, but a more reliable text for scholars. In the Lowrie translation even the pages seem to wobble (due in part to the uneven margins in the Princeton edition) as one reads of the dizziness caused by gazing into the abyss of dread. In the new translation one must concentrate in order to keep the thread of thought. Some readers will no doubt become disenchanted with the melancholy Dane without Lowrie there to interject adjectives and exclamations!

Let me deal with some important details of this translation. Several crucial decisions were made on the proper English terms to be used for Kierkegaardian concepts. Most important is the choice of "anxiety" instead of "dread" (Lowrie) or "anguish" (Unamuno). I doubt whether any of these is adequate to convey what SK means by Angest, but the connotations for the reader will be changed from those related to "dread," suggesting deep perturbations in the face of the unknown, to those related to "anxiety" suggesting worry, uneasiness, and even impatience. The point is that Angest includes both sets of connotations. This is not a happy choice, but I would suggest the German Angst as preferable to the others, since it is the German for Angest and is used quite widely in English works in psychology and philosophy, so that it has become part of our technical vocabulary.

Thomte makes some good improvements over the Lowrie translation. The most notable one is in translating Virkelighed as "actuality" instead of "reality" (Lowrie) and thus doing justice to the technical aspect of the concept which has its location in the Aristotelian (and later Hegelian) dialectic of "possibility/actuality." Translating the difficult Indesluttede as "inclosing reserve" (to contrast it with "disclosing" of the self) is a substantial improvement over Lowrie's "shut-upness," and the translation of sjelig as "psychic" rather than Lowrie's "soulish" seems a change for the better. (However, Thomte seems carried away by the doctrine of linguistic consistency when he goes on to translate Sjel as "psyche" rather than simply "soul," a perfectly good word for depicting what SK means when stating that humans are composed of "body and soul.") Thomte corrects weak Lowrie translations in several places, one being where Lowrie translates Intet as "not anything," thus missing the substantial use of the negative. Thomte changes this to read "nothing" ("Freedom is infinite and arises out of nothing," p. 112). He also breaks up paragraphs where Lowrie ran them together, creating needless cramming.

On the other hand, Thomte repeats Lowrie's weakness of translating tvetydig as "ambiguous" instead of "ambivalent" (the context making it clear that it is an emotional, not conceptual discrimination, an attraction/repulsion that is meant here), speaks of passion "wishing" (p. 109), which seems contradictory (onskende should read "longing" here), and translates the Fichian notion of freedom as Kraft by the word "force" instead of "power" (as in the power of freedom to effect change, to act beyond causal determinants) (p. 108). On occasion, Thomte's translation is even worse than Lowrie's, striving for literal-

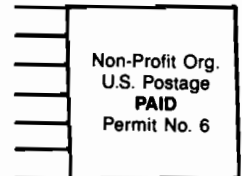
ness to the point of prolix (cf. the translation of Hamann in the footnote on p. 162). However, on the whole, the improvements far overshadow the liabilities of the translation.

There is a very good Supplement, consisting of passages in SK's private papers related to The Concept of Anxiety, and thirty-five pages of notes commenting on the text, a feature that has been sadly lacking in previous translations. However, the weakest part of this edition is the Historical Introduction at the beginning of the work. While it mentions some of the key influences on SK's thought in writing this work, it does so inadequately. We should like to know what Descartes' and Leibniz' notions of freedom were (rather than being told simply how SK reacted to them - what did he react against?). It is not very helpful to announce that there is disagreement on how much Hegel influenced SK. One would like to see relevant considerations set forth. English editions of SK's works have suffered from the lack of good introductions, and unfortunately, this work shows no sign of a remedy.

In summary, although I think there are some weaknesses in the translation and, especially, in the introduction to the translation, as a whole this is a valuable work, the translation being of a very high quality, faithfully representing SK's style and reliably communicating his message. There is no doubt that it is superior to what preceded it. Scholars should welcome it as a long overdue treatment of a major work in Existential psychology as well as in Kierkegaard studies.



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Contributor's Notes

International Kierkegaard Commentary

Robert L. Perkins, Editor

Number Five, 14 October 1986

1. Having returned to the classroom I now have time for research and editing. IKC: The Sickness Unto Death has been mailed to the publisher.
2. Work on IKC: The Corsair Affair begins in earnest now. My correspondence on this volume (and the subsequent volumes) is stored and not available while I am in a makeshift office. Therefore, I request that all who plan a contribution to write and clarify the projected time of delivery of the article. In fact, the level of chaos is so high around here that I hope to hear from all parties, even those who have sent articles. I need the promised and planned articles by 1 February 1987. If you plan an article that cannot be delivered by that date, please write to me. If you have plans, but have not written me about them, do write very soon so I can plan. See remark in Contributor's Notes, No. 4.
3. The collection for IKC: Fear and Trembling is going well. I will need the articles by 1 June 1987. I have several articles in hand, but if you plan to write one, do let me know now. I may need to shift your focus in view of articles already received.
4. IKC: Repetition will be the subject of the Kierkegaard Seminar at the AAR in November, 1986 in Atlanta. I will need the essays by 1 October 1987. It has been decided to have volumes on both Fear and Trembling and Repetition.
5. There are sigla to follow and I will send each potential contributor a copy upon request. I will attempt to develop guidelines for the use of the sigla, but such can be derived by each of you from the usage in IKC: Two Ages and IKC: The Concept of Anxiety. Footnotes should follow the Chicago manual of style.
6. I appreciate the patience of many whose articles I have held for too long. I intend to dedicate every Monday to IKC and so this project will now move along.

