

# SOREN KIERKEGAARD

## NEWSLETTER NO. 16

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### NEWS

The Soren Kierkegaard Society will meet in conjunction with the American Philosophical Association (Central Division) this Spring, April 29 - May 2.

Theme: Kierkegaard and "Reformed" Epistemology

Papers by C. Stephen Evans, St. Olaf College

Alvin Plantinga, University of Notre Dame Stephen Wykstra, Calvin College

During the Eastern Division Meeting of the APA (December 27-30, 1987) in New York the theme will be Kierkegaard and Deconstruction. Papers will be given by John Caputo of Villanova University, Louis Mackey of the University of Texas, and Mark Taylor of Williams College.

At the Eastern Division Meeting of the APA the Soren Kierkegaard Society elected the following people as members of the Council: Merold Westphal, President; John Donnelly, Vice President; Louis Pojman, Secretary-Treasurer; Robert Perkins and Sylvia Walsh members at large.

Call for Papers for 1988: The Kierkegaard Society plans to have meetings at all three of the APA conventions in 1988. Paper submissions are invited on any topic in Kierkegaard scholarship. Please observe the deadlines. Send three copies of the paper, along with an abstract, to John Donnelly, Department of Philosophy, University of San Diego, Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110. Deadlines are:

1988 Pacific Division	September 1, 1987
1988 Central Division	September 1, 1987
1988 Eastern Division	March 15, 1988

Papers for this year's discussion in the Kierkegaard Seminar at the American Academy of Religion (Boston, December 5 - 8) are on the Philosophical Fragments. Five papers will be discussed. Their authors are Frederick Sontag, Abraham Khan, Dalton Baldwin, David Goicoechea, Brayton Polka and Steve Emmanuel. The papers should be ready for circulation by the beginning of September, 1987. To request copies kindly submit \$8 to defray copying and postage charges to Dr. Abraham H. Khan, Trinity College, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1H8 Canada.

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#### Report on the Kierkegaard Studies Symposium on the Acknowledged Works

The following papers were discussed at the Kierkegaard Studies Symposium held Dec. 5 and 6, 1986 at Trinity College, University of Toronto:

John Heywood Thomas, "Kierkegaard's Contribution to a Philosophy of Death"

Ralph H. Johnson, "Getting Personal: A Look at Kierkegaard's Christian Discourses"

Brayton Polka, "The Like-for-Like of Interpretation: Neighbor and Metaphor in Kierkegaard's Works of Love"

David Goicoechea, "Erotic Deception into Agapeic Truth"

Alastair McKinnon, "Kierkegaard's Attack on Christendom: Its Lexical History"

Harry Nielsen, "Revelation: Its Dual Meaning"

W. James S. Farris, "Christ as Prototype"

Jeremy Walker, "The Lilies and the Birds: What did SK Learn from Regine?"

Maurice Carignan, "Kierkegaard's Discourses"

The Editor of the International Kierkegaard Commentary Series, Robert Perkins gave a concluding synthesis of the papers with comments about possible areas for further development.

More than thirty participants, including scholars from outside Ontario and Quebec were present. On display were research tools and some recent publications relevant to Kierkegaard Studies. The Symposium was organized by Abraham H. Khan of Trinity College, University of Toronto with support from the Department of Religious Studies, the Graduate Centre for Religious Studies, Knox College, Emmanuel College, and the Toronto School of Theology.

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Alastair McKinnon plans to offer a small, two to three day "hands-on" workshop at McGill University to help others learn and explore his new (and "friendly") PC and compatibles Kierkegaard text and research tools. Possible dates are mid-August, the last half of October or December 2 - 4 (prior to the AAR in Boston) or possibly some other time if indicated. Attendance is by invitation and will be limited but some financial assistance may be available. Participants are invited to bring their own research projects. If interested, please contact him as soon as possible. Address: Department of Philosophy, McGill University, 855 Sherbrooke St. W., Montreal, Canada H3A 2T7. Tel (514) 392-4928 (after April 20th, 398-6065) or (home) (514) 937-6500.

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#### 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.

'Salighed' As Happiness? Kierkegaard on the Concept 'Salighed, by Abraham H. Khan. Waterloo, Ontario: Winfrid Laurier University Press, 1985. xiv + 148. \$18.95; \$21.95 in U. S.

The publication of this monograph by Abraham ("Ivan") Khan is noteworthy in several respects. First, it provides the only extensive treatment of Kierkegaard's concept of "Salighed", which the author regards as "a prime candidate for the Archimedean point" of Kierkegaard's thought. Second, it employs a sophisticated computer based method of analysis, demonstrating how that kind of approach can be utilized for the study of Kierkegaard beyond an elementary gathering and organizing of data for concordances and indexes such as those produced by Alastair McKinnon some years ago. Third, it carries the analysis to interpretive levels which efforts at computer analysis thus far have been short of providing.

There has been considerable negative reaction to the computer method of analysis in Kierkegaard studies. While scholars are grateful for the research aids supplied by Professor McKinnon, many are reluctant to use and in some cases even to recognize the worth of computer analysis for the substantive analysis and interpretation of Kierkegaard's thought. Khan and McKinnon are to be admired for sticking doggedly to their approach in the face of sometimes virulent attacks on their method. In the present work, Khan defends their procedure on the grounds that it brings "greater objectivity, order, and methodological rigor" to the study of Kierkegaard. From the standpoint of some critics, greater objectivity is not a virtue but a liability of the approach, as it presumably leads the reader away from a subjective encounter with the literature which is the goal of Kierkegaard's communication. But are not all academic studies of Kierkegaard's thought essentially "objective" in nature? In this respect, the computer approach is merely quantitatively, not qualitatively, different from traditional methods. Who among us, then, is justified in throwing stones? As I shall spell out below, my reservation about this approach is not that it is too objective but that it is not objective and comprehensive enough.

Khan does an excellent job of explaining his methodological procedures in a manner understandable to readers who are not acquainted with computer terminology and usage beyond simple word processing. As a basis for his analysis, Khan first determines the frequency of occurrence of the key term, its variants, and associated words in texts where the key term appears. From these he constructs a three-dimensional conceptual model or "map" which displays the patterns of interrelations among terms associated with the concept. Then he employs a kind of post-structuralist "strategy of discovery" to uncover the meaning of the term through a reconstruction of the text in the form of a critical mini-text built up from clusters of statistically significant terms associated with (occurring in proximity to) the key term.

Following this procedure, Khan examines the use of the term "Salighed" in three sets of works from the Kierkegaard corpus, selected on the basis of frequency of occurrence of the word and its variants in the texts. The texts chosen are the Eighteen Edifying Discourses, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, and a set of religious works including Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits, Works of Love, and Christian Discourses. Khan points out that the word and its variants rarely occur in other works of the corpus and is absent altogether in seven works. That leads one to question whether the

concept is as central to Kierkegaard's thought as Khan claims, but certainly it occurs frequently enough to qualify as a very important one in his understanding of ethical and religious life.

In the works selected for study of the concept Khan sets out to do three things: 1) to identify the significant features of the concept in relation to other concepts; 2) to determine whether the concept undergoes any change or development; and 3) to point out the theological and philosophical import of the concept. Of these, the second task emerges as the central concern of the study. Khan determines that there is a shift of vocabulary among the sets of texts examined and that this shift corresponds to a conceptual development which the term undergoes in these works. Since there is a continuity of meaning within this development, Khan does not regard it as involving a radical change of meaning. Moreover, he claims that it is intentional and rhetorically devised and should not be interpreted as a development in Kierkegaard's understanding of "Salighed". I find that claim rather doubtful, however. One can detect development in Kierkegaard's understanding of various concepts throughout the literature. Why should we assume that he did not grow in his understanding?

In the Edifying Discourses the focus, Khan finds, is on earnestness and the wish for "Salighed". The religious works sustain the demand for earnestness but associate with it the concepts of suffering, love, and grace rather than heaven, soul and wish as in ED. Furthermore, the rather vague notion of "Salighed" in ED gives way to a definite shift of meaning in the religious works, which equate it with loving God. However, loving God is not a sufficient condition for "Salighed". Khan emphasizes, quite rightly I think, the necessity of grace for receiving "Salighed" and the sense of helplessness one feels in relation to achieving it. But he is quite wrong in suggesting that in the Postscript "there is no familiarity with the idea of helplessness vis-a-vis Salighed" (80). On the contrary, a major point of that work is to suggest that ethical optimism fails in the attempt to transform the self into conformity to the ideal and comes increasingly to a complete sense of helplessness in the totality of guilt-consciousness. Suffering, which is the essential expression of religious pathos, has its significance in the "principle that the individual can do absolutely nothing of himself, but is as nothing before God" (CUP, 412). "Religiously", Climacus says, "it is the task of the individual to understand that he is nothing before God, or to become wholly nothing and to exist thus before God; this consciousness of impotence he requires constantly to have before him, and when it vanishes the religiosity also vanishes" (Ibid). Although Khan includes guilt-consciousness in the cluster of terms by which he determines the conception of "Salighed" in the Postscript, he does not extend his analysis far enough to discern the meaning of guilt-consciousness in the work and to see the progressive movement of the work toward a culmination in the consciousness of impotence in the forms of guilt in Religiousness A and sin in Religiousness B. This illustrates what seems to me to be the real danger of Khan's procedure. That is, in its narrow, concentrated focus on selected terms and words associated with them, it is easy to miss the large picture or "map" of a given work and thus not to read the smaller, "local maps" of terms and their associates in the context of the "region" (the whole work) and "globe" (the total authorship and viewpoint).

I have some problem, too, with frequency of occurrence as a basis for analysis. Might not a single nor infrequent occurrence of a term or phrase

(such as "teleological suspension of the ethical" in Fear and Trembling or "feminine" and "masculine" despair in The Sickness Unto Death) be conceptually significant for understanding a particular concept or importance of that concept in a particular work? Why not include all references to a term in the corpus? Would not greater objectivity and comprehensiveness of analysis be served if one did? Why rely only on associated terms that are statistically significant? In presenting his procedure of selection, Khan admits that "quite possibly, a significant term might be excluded in the process, but this is the risk, a minimal and unavoidable one, which must be taken if terms occurring by chance are to be excluded" (14). By capitulating to the dictates of statistical analysis, however, his analysis loses some of the comprehensiveness which it purports to achieve.

Another question I have concerning Khan's method has to do with reconstruction of the text. If the clusters of terms associated with a particular concept were given to two or more individuals for construction of a mini-test, I wonder how similar their reconstructions of the text would be. Is not this procedure a highly interpretive feature of the methodology which compromises its claim of objectivity? Perhaps some better way of organizing and making sense of the data needs to be devised.

In the final section of the book, Khan expounds the meaning of "Salighed" supported by his analysis. To a considerable extent, however, the meaning of the term is determined on the basis of etymological analysis of the word. Khan traces the term back to the English word "silly", which can mean, in addition to its ordinary meaning, "weak or helpless", "being touched" (by God), and "plain and simple" or singleminded. All of these meanings capture dimensions of Kierkegaard's understanding of "Salighed", Khan claims, but the main aspect is to be found in the word "seely", a fifteenth century variant of "silly" which connotes spiritual blessedness. That is the primary meaning of "Salighed" for Kierkegaard as well as for the New Testament, with which Khan briefly compares Kierkegaard's view. Although Khan accepts "happiness" as an equivalent term for the possible English translation of "Salighed", he seems to opt for "bliss" or "blessedness" as more appropriate translations since these terms are more precise and preserve the spiritual quality of the concept. Finally, however, he concludes that none of these terms constitutes an adequate translation because the concept of "Salighed" implies more than what is meant by any of them. That "more" is its "self-involving" aspect, which commits the believer to a process of transformation toward the actualization of "Salighed" in personal existence. Khan thus recommends that the word be left untranslated since its English equivalents give only an approximation of its full meaning. Ironically, clarification of the concept, which is the study's aim, leads in the end to an indefiniteness in translation!

The study concludes with a determination of the theological and philosophical import of Kierkegaard's understanding of "Salighed". Theologically, the primary significance of Kierkegaard's view is that it restores the balance between grace and striving which was lost in Luther's thought and grossly distorted by the Danish State Church of Kierkegaard's day. Philosophically, his view is significant in that it does not make epistemic certainty a requirement for "Salighed". Furthermore, by its insistence on

making the ethical task one of "character formation" rather than an ordered social life, it presents a different understanding of morality than is commonly held. Khan expresses some reservation toward Kierkegaard's final view of "Salighed" as a specifically Christian concept and Christianity as a condition for receiving it. He thinks this implies that the concept is "clearly meaningless" for anyone unacquainted with Christianity. Certainly the relation of specifically Christian concepts to other forms of ethical-religious existence was a thorny one for Kierkegaard which he may never have satisfactorily worked out, but surely the implication Khan draws concerning it is not warranted, even by his own study, where the concept is shown to be an important one in the Edifying Discourses and Concluding Unscientific Postscript, which are not specifically Christian works. On the whole, however, Khan has produced a careful and insightful analysis of "Salighed" in Kierkegaard's thought. My reservations, criticisms, and questions concerning his method and analysis have been raised here not to debunk his approach but to engage in dialogue with it. Some of them no doubt reflect the fact that I am a novice in the realm of computers and as such am not technically qualified to judge Khan's procedures. But they represent concerns which other novices in the Kierkegaard community may also have and which need to be considered if computer based analysis is to gain acceptance by that community. Since this approach is still relatively new, it will probably be further refined in the future. It is hoped that my comments will be a benefit toward that end.

Sylvia I. Walsh  
Clark College, Atlanta, GA

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#### Walsh on Salighed As Happiness?

Walsh acknowledges that her concerns about method and analysis in Salighed As Happiness? reflect an unfamiliarity with computer based applications and analysis in literary studies, and offers an invitation to enter into a dialogue about them. That invitation and the opportunity provided by the editor of Soren Kierkegaard Newsletter for an exchange between author and reviewer are both appreciated. I note too that, notwithstanding these concerns, the judgement of Walsh's review is that the study "has produced a careful and insightful analysis of "Salighed" in Kierkegaard's thought".

One of her concerns relates to the concept Salighed in the Postscript, especially to "the idea of helplessness via-a-vis Salighed" (p. 80). Indeed, Climacus enunciates a principle implying man's helplessness before God. Without contradicting Climacus, the study contends that insofar as each person receives his Salighed only through God's grace, which in turn necessarily requires for a response loving God, the Postscript falls short of presenting a full blown picture of the primary meaning of Salighed. Stated differently, from the perspective of the Religious Works, Salighed implies a specific notion of grace which the Postscript misses. That notion of grace has as its correlates the ideas of unspeakableness and fear and trembling as discussed in the study. Climacus, a literary personality who does not represent Kierkegaard's personal view, is not endowed with a Christian understanding of Salighed. He lacks a first hand acquaintance with the Christian doctrine and experience of grace. To say that in "the Postscript's Treatment of the concept Salighed,

there is no familiarity with the idea of helplessness vis-a-vis Salighed," (80) is not to deny Climacus' familiarity with an idea of human helplessness before God, but to say something about Salighed which the Postscript fails to say as a result of having limit itself to stress the unconditional condition for becoming a Christian.

The crux of the matter might be expressed in the form of the following question? Does the Postscript acknowledge a concept of grace as understood by Christianity (the Religious Works). There is no evidence that it does. Of course, one would first have to be clear about the concept of grace. Shown in the study (pp. 95, 96, and 97), that clarity implies a recognition of what Kierkegaard calls two instances of grace. The person Johannes Climacus, it might be argued, would be one who experiences "grace in the first place", but not in the second. Salighed, Christianly understood, necessarily implies the experience of "grace in the second place". This second instance is correlated specifically with the experience of fear and trembling, and it is the notion of fear and trembling that sets apart Kierkegaard's conception of grace and hence a Christian understanding of grace from other theistic concepts of grace. If Climacus has a conception of grace, it is at best theistic, but not peculiarly Christian. Of course, Climacus needn't have a Christian understanding of grace for the task he undertook as author.

A second concern of the review is with respect to Kierkegaard's own personal understanding of Salighed. To set the record straight, the study does not assume what the review imputes, viz., that Kierkegaard "did not grow in his understanding" of Salighed. Rather, it asserts that conceptual changes in this case are more explainable in terms of the intention of each of the three sets of texts in the authorship (pp. 80, 81, 84) and do not necessarily imply a shift in Kierkegaard's personal understanding. Very likely Kierkegaard developed over the years in his personal understanding of Salighed. But the extent of changes in vocabulary shown in the study and the fact that later changes are foreshadowed do not warrant the assertion of a radical shift in his personal understanding of the concept itself. An argument from conceptual changes to shifts or development in personal understanding is likely to be tenuous or even spurious in this case. Denial of a necessary connection between changes and shifts is not a denial of growth in Kierkegaard's personal understanding of the concept. To determine the extent of such a growth, it might be better to look to the Papirer, given the scope and results of the study undertaken in Salighed As Happiness?.

A third concern, relating specifically to method and organization of data, might be alleviated by keeping in mind that method is simply a deliberate way of systematically gathering and organizing data. The study has done just what Walsh requests, a fact acknowledged by what is said in the third paragraph of her review and more specifically by her own words: "Khan has produced a careful and insightful analysis of 'Salighed' in Kierkegaard's thought". Further, the claim of objectivity made by the study is primarily with respect to identifying and organizing relevant data for a hermeneutical undertaking. However, objectivity does not rule against but relies on a subjectivity indicated by the exercise of personal judgement and interpretation of data. Indeed, the same data might conceivably be interpreted differently by two or more individuals. But differences in interpretations or reconstructed texts (section B of chs. 3, 4, and 5) would be more with respect to style than to substance, analogous

perhaps to differences in the way two individuals might proceed to fit together the same pieces of a jig-saw puzzle to result in a picture comparable with that provided by the manufacturer. When the pieces are literary data, however, the reconstructed text is comparable to what is inscribed in the original text and sometimes concealed from its reader's first glance but recognizable by a reader with a firsthand and in-depth acquaintance of the original text(s). Given this line of explanation, it might be rightly inferred that method facilitates but does not replace interpretation on the whole. To quote a Renaissance Humanist figure, Girolamo Borro, method "is simply a brief way under whose guidance we are led as quickly as possible to knowledge". If method is to be faulted, it certainly cannot be on the grounds that the data made available and organized by the method has to be interpreted.

Concern about the centrality of the concept to Kierkegaard's thought arises from failing to heed a distinction between word and concept. The word "Salighed" is a name or label for the concept. There are other ways to refer to the concept Salighed. The method employed in the study has led us as quickly as possible to identify or confirm some of the expressions used to refer to the concept. However, a concept could conceivably be integral to a text and still not be mentioned by name. This is the case with Salighed. That it is a central concept in Kierkegaard's thought does not mean, however, that the name itself "Salighed" should appear in every text of the corpus. Its centrality is with respect to the way in which it unifies the authorship as a whole, making it religious from first to last. A disciplined and discerning mind with firsthand knowledge of the corpus would quickly recognize that Salighed, properly understood, is indeed as the study claims - a prime candidate for the Archimedean point about which Kierkegaard himself spoke.

The suggestion by the review that all occurrences of a term in the corpus should be included in order to achieve comprehensiveness in analysis tags another concern with method. Very briefly, the review has not shown that, given the aim and scope of the study, a significant occurrence has been excluded. Further, the examples it offers have no bearing on Salighed and are misleading. One of them, the phrase "feminine despair" indeed seldom occurs in Sickness. Given the original Danish text, the logical search-term for a study on feminine despair is "Svaghed" which, those with firsthand acquaintance of the text know, corresponds to feminine despair. That aside, it should also be kept in mind that the idea of comprehensiveness is often associated with the notion of breadth or width, as in "comprehensive knowledge", and hardly the idea of taking into account every single detail or, in this case, every single occurrence of the term "Salighed" in the entire corpus.

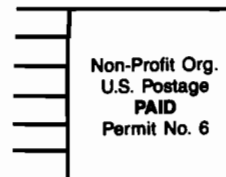
Finally, the craving to have an English word, such as "happiness" or "blessedness", for "Salighed" is likely to distort rather than to promote clarity in the distinctive meaning of Salighed that is integral to Kierkegaard's writings and shown by the study. In certain cases lexical equivalents blur rather than aid in seeing that between word and concept is a crucial distinction which has to be kept in mind to overcome the craving. Borrowed terms such as "Anfechtung" in our language suggest that what is distinctive of a concept in another language might be conveyed when there are no lexical equivalents in English. Furthermore, a high degree of clarity in the meaning of the concept in question is required in order to



determine that lexical equivalents do not adequately express the concept, especially a concept such as Salighed. Walsh knows quite clearly that the study has preference for a certain translation even though it has reservations about that translation. Given her commendation of the study, clearly "indefiniteness in translation" does not pose a problem for English-speaking readers in understanding the meaning of Salighed.

Abraham H. Khan  
Trinity College, University of Toronto

The University of Mississippi  
College of Liberal Arts  
Department of Philosophy and Religions  
University, MS 38677



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