Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter



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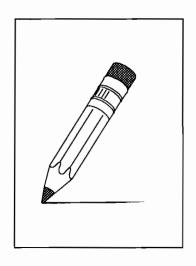
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NEWS YOU SHOULD NOTE

KIERKEGAARD SOCIETY NEWS

The following people will serve as officers of the Kierkegaard Society during 1993: President, Andrew J. Burgess, Dept. of Philosophy, University of New Mexico. President-Elect, Wanda Warren Berry, Colgate University. Secretary-Treasurer, Mark Lloyd Taylor, School of Religion, Seattle Pacific University. AAR Representative, David Gouwens, Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University. APA Representative, Merold Westphal, Dept. of Philosophy, Fordham University.



SOCIETY RECEIVES OFFICIAL AAR PROGRAM STATUS

Representatives of the Kierkegaard Society applied for and received official status at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting as a group, "Kierkegaard: Religion and Culture." This is very good news, since a similar application was denied at the time of the refounding of the society.

This means that there will be two sessions at the 1993 annual meeting that will be part of the regular program. Session 1 is on the theme "Kierkegaard and the 'the Other': Postmodernist Readings." Session 2 will be focused on <u>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</u>. New president Andrew Burgess is planning the program, and further information in due course can be had from him at Dept. of Philosophy, Humanities Building, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR SOCIETY MEETING AT APA DIVISIONS

The Kierkegaard Society plans to meet in conjunction with each of the three divisions of the American Philosophical Association during the 1993-94 school year. Papers for either the Central Division (April, 1994) or the Pacific Division (March, 1994) should be received by August 1, 1993. Papers for the Eastern Division (December, 1993) are due April 15, probably too late for most who receive this newsletter, unless a finished paper is already ready to send. All papers should have a maximum reading time of 40 minutes and should be sent in <u>duplicate</u> to Merold Westphal, Dept. of Philosophy, Fordham University, Bronx, NY 10458. In light of the upcoming volumes of the <u>International Kierkegaard Commentary</u>, papers on philosophical aspects of the following texts are especially welcome: <u>Concept of Irony</u>, <u>Early Polemical Writings</u>, <u>For Self-Examination</u>, <u>Judge for Yourself</u>, <u>Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses</u>. Members of the APA are expected to keep their membership up to date. All presenters, whether APA members or not, will be expected to register for the meeting at which they present their paper.

NEW JOURNAL WELCOMES SUBMISSIONS ON KIERKEGAARD

Richard Crouter, Dept. of Religion at Carleton College, asked me to announce that the publishing firm of de Gruyter (Berlin and New York) will establish a new journal, <u>Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte -- Journal for the History of Modern Theology</u>. This journal will begin appearing in early 1994, and will be edited by Professor Crouter, Prof. Dr. F.W. Graf, and Prof. Dr. G. Mechenstock of Germany. The journal will focus on theology since the Enlightenment, and would be

particularly interested in articles with an historical thrust that deal with Kierkegaard, and also with influences on Kierkegaard, and the impact of Kierkegaard on later thinkers.

NEW TRANSLATION OF POUL MØLLER BY REIDAR THOMTE

The Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf wishes to announce that it has obtained a manuscript of an unpublished translation, by Reidar Thomte, of Poul Møller's book Ontology or The System of Categories. Møller was of course an influential teacher of Kierkegaard's.

INTERNATIONAL KIERKEGAARD COMMENTARY NEWS

Robert Perkins, Editor of the <u>IKC</u> series, is still looking for papers dealing with <u>Either/Or I</u> and <u>II</u>, as well as soliciting papers for <u>Early Polemical Writings</u>. The volume for <u>Fear and Trembling/Repetition</u> is now in proof and should appear very shortly. Papers are now completed for <u>Philosophical Fragments</u> and that volume should go to press shortly. Robert Perkins' address is Dept. of Philosophy, Campus Box 8250, Stetson University, DeLand, FL 32720.

KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS NEWS

Concluding Unscientific Postscript (in two volumes, with all the text in volume I) has now appeared. The next two volumes to appear will be Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions and Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I am pleased to note that the number of books being sent for review seems to be increasing. My goal is to see that every book on Kierkegaard published in English receive a review, as well as many significant ones in other languages. Keep those books coming, and my thanks to those who serve as reviewers.

This issue also includes a bibliography that focuses on materials relevant to Kierkegaard's concept of the tragic hero and its relevance to moral theory. I would welcome the chance to publish similar brief bibliographies that focus on specific themes or questions.

Though I will be on leave next school year (hopefully at Oxford), I plan to continue to edit the <u>Newsletter</u> on a long distance basis, with the capable help of the managing editor, Dee Bolton. It would be very helpful next year if news items were sent by September 1 and February 1. (My goal is to publish an issue on November 1 and April 1.) This will allow time for materials to be sent back and forth to England.

I should also like to ask that articles and reviews prepared on IBM compatible machines be sent on disk if at all possible. If you use Wordperfect 5.1, a 3 1/2" disk sent in that format would be superb. An earlier version of Wordperfect would be fine as well; just let us know what version. Otherwise, an ASCII file would probably be best. Of course, typed manuscripts are still fine for those who don't work on this format.

REVIEWS

John S. Tanner, <u>Anxiety in Eden: A Kierkegaardian Reading of "Paradise Lost."</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) viii + 209 pages. \$35.00. Reviewed by Richard J. DuRocher, St. Olaf College.

As two of the most brilliant interpretations of the Edenic story, <u>Paradise Lost</u> and <u>The Concept of Anxiety</u> "cry out," in John Tanner's vivid phrase, to be read together. Early on, Tanner announces his twofold objective for such a reading:

By reading <u>Paradise Lost</u> through the lens of <u>The Concept of Anxiety</u>, I hope to reward Kierkegaard studies and Milton criticism alike: the one with a lucid exposition and novel application of Kierkegaard's "most difficult" work, and the other with fresh perspectives from which to measure the complex artistry of Milton's masterpiece.

Given its objectives, a fair assessment of Anxiety in Eden should itself be twofold, estimating its dual contribution to Milton and Kierkegaard studies. As a professional Milton scholar and merely amateur reader of Kierkegaard, I expect to fulfill only half of that charge. Nonetheless, I shall raise a few questions that I hope will provoke Kierkegaard scholars to make their own assessments of Tanner's work. In any case, my relative weighting of philosophical and literary concerns is certainly appropriate to this case. Tanner's metaphor of The Concept of Anxiety as a "lens" held over Paradise Lost accurately implies what the book delivers: a careful, scholarly study of hidden facets of Milton's poem as seen through the instrument of Kierkegaard's text.

Structurally, Anxiety in Eden falls into two parts: Before and After the Fall. In the first part, Tanner begins by confronting a problem that has vexed readers of Paradise Lost ever since Dr. Johnson: At what point do Adam and Eve really fall? Those like Millicent Bell who argue for an early Fall stress the disturbing signs of selfishness and remorse in Milton's "sinless" characters. On the other hand, those like Stanley Fish who insist that the Fall occurs only when Eve and Adam taste the fruit rely on Milton's strong endorsements of free will both in the poem and elsewhere. As a middle ground between these two positions, Tanner adduces Kierkegaard's concept of angst or anxiety. "Anxiety is a desire for what one fears, a sympathetic antipathy," Kierkegaard wrote in his journal two years before The Concept of Anxiety was

published. Indeed this conjunction of fear and fascination matches Adam and Eve's situation before the Fall. They find ominous yet intriguing what in their innocence they cannot know, for example, death. Anxiety provides a psychological explanation of the process by which sin breaks forth, while sin itself, as the act of free agents, remains a matter not for psychology but for ethics.

Tanner applies The Concept of Anxiety to several other disputed aspects of Paradise Lost. He reads Sin's birth, fully formed and armed out of Satan's head, as a perverse instance of a Kierkegaardian "leap," a moment of reconstituting the self (and, contra Mackey in Points of View, the world) through the choice of evil. Milton's shift into allegory to describe Sin's birth has been harshly criticized: Tanner argues that a representation of the mythic Ur-fall demands a mythic narrative. This reading accords with the scriptural account of the way sin "came into the world." As Kierkegaard shrewdly observes, the Letter of James tells a story of a genuine origin, or springing forth, of sin. A fully rationalized account, in contrast, would demand an explanation of sin in terms of various factors and motives -- all of which would amount to prior sinfulness. Tanner takes a consistent view of the causal status of Satan's temptation on Adam and Eve's fall: "Milton regards the seduction as relevant to but not determinative of the Fall; he sees Satan as the catalyst of sin in Eden, but not its cause."

Tanner applies the Kierkegaardian notion of "spirit" toward another crux, Adam and Eve's Edenic epistemology. Spirit here is the conscious relationship between one's "physical" (bodily) and "psychical" (mental) nature. Before the Fall, Milton depicts Adam and Eve as quite knowledgeable--through the angel's story of the War in Heaven, and through specific warnings about excessive curiosity and sexual appetite--of evil. Because the human beings know of those dangers only through discourse, however, Tanner argues that Adam and Eve lack the deeper knowledge that fleshly as well as ratiocinative spirits demand. "Spirit" also provides Tanner with a way of contrasting Adam and Eve's responses to temptation. Eve's excited

response indicates that she is free but anxiously confronting the dizzying possibility of her freedom. At his fall, however, Adam represses his existential freedom, muttering the apparently heroic yet ultimately fatalist whimper that his resolution is to die. In terms of <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/jhe/2007/jhe/

In the second part of Anxiety in Eden, Tanner examines anxiety in the fallen world. His discussion of remorse mainly focuses on its inverse, that is, anxiety about the presence of goodness, which constitutes the psychological type Kierkegaard labeled the "Demonic." Tanner demonstrates the obvious relevance of this discussion to Milton's characterization of Satan. In Paradise Lost, Satan is anxious above all about God's goodness, figured for example by the genial Sun, which Satan curses. Further, Satan's resounding claim that the "mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" ironically reveals for Tanner the depth of Satan's despair. His dismissal of all limits and boundaries leads not to freedom but to its absence, for such a stance demands blindness to one's own nature and one's defining conditions. Authentic freedom, for both Milton and Kierkegaard, is enabled by proper limits. Tanner characterizes Satan's claim to freedom as a "subjectivist fantasy," presupposing two post-Cartesian premises: 1) the sharp rift between subject and object; and 2) the priority of subject to object. As an antidote to such perversion and as a close, Tanner discusses the way anxiety can lead to salvation. Like Adam, educated by images of his future descendants, one can be "educated by possibility" as one realizes the danger and freedom that we and other free agents face.

Tanner's contribution to our understanding of <u>Paradise</u> <u>Lost</u> is both original and far-reaching. Especially helpful are his discussions of the Fall as at once a psychological process and an ethical leap, of the anxiety accompanying increased knowledge in Eden, and of Satanic despair. These achievements are somewhat diminished by two egregious misreadings of Milton's poem. The "execrable shape" Satan finds disgusting in Book 2 is not Sin but Death, so the claim Tanner makes on that assumption about Satan's hatred of Sin must be discounted. Likewise, Tanner misidentifies Satan as the "Sovran" in his first speech. The "Sovran" from whom Satan hopes to escape is God, as the devil's next line makes clear: "Farthest from Him is best."

Some may question why we need a Kierkegaardian reading of <u>Paradise Lost</u> in the first place, and skeptics may balk at the notion of the influence of Kierkegaard on

Milton. Yet Tanner has a sturdy defense. In an age before the discipline of psychology, Milton's poem was preoccupied with what Macaulay called the "middle ground," the realm of imagination and experience between absolutes including innocence and sin, ignorance and knowledge, attraction and repulsion. If nothing else, it is useful to have appropriate terms for that middle ground, as evidenced by the subtitle of The Concept of Anxiety--A Simply Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin.
Miltonists particularly should welcome an account of such matters which is both philosophically coherent and theologically compatible with reformed Protestantism.

My questions for Tanner and for Kierkegaard scholars generally have to do with the literary quality of The Concept of Anxiety. Kierkegaard published the work under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis (The Watcher of Copenhagen), a didactic, Polonius-like character whose orotund rhetoric often laces his direct statements with irony. For example, consider this statement from the Preface:

When it comes to human authority, I am a fetish worshipper and will worship anyone with equal piety, but with one proviso, that it be made sufficiently clear by a beating of drums that he is the one I must worship and that it is he who is the authority and Imprimatur for the current year.

The terms "fetish," "worship," and "Imprimatur are sufficiently overstated to overturn a straightforward reading of Vigilius's remark as Kierkegaard's own view. (I take Kierkegaard here to be rejecting all human authorities, as both arbitrary and fickle, over an individual's conscience--a position Milton articulates in his Areopagitica). Yet Tanner proceeds throughout Anxiety in Eden as though statements made by the narrator were without qualification or adjustment those of Søren Kierkegaard. The Princeton edition cites Kierkegaard's comment: "After all, I always have a poetic relationship to my works, and therefore I am pseudonymous." What accommodations to the author's poetic approach should philosophers make in order to interpret The Concept of Anxiety appropriately?

The pseudonymous aspect of the work complicates as well the question of influence that Anxiety in Eden raises. Tanner is careful to point out that the connections he finds between Kierkegaard and Milton spring not from direct imitation but from certain ideological and even

personal affinities. Yet doesn't the studied oddity of Vigilius's manner restrict his utility as a clarifying "lens" for Milton's poem? More fundamentally, do Kierkegaard scholars see the author as a hermeneutic force reshaping received interpretations of texts, perhaps along the lines of Freudian readings? Or do Kierkegaard's own idiosyncracies make him an unlikely or unwilling model for other readers? Tanner's book has raised, but not begun to answer, such questions.

<u>Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt.</u> By Ronald M. Green. Albany: State University of New York press, 1992. 301 pp. + xvlii. Hardcover \$49.50, paper \$16.95. Reviewed by C. Stephen Evans, St. Olaf College.

Ronald Green's study of Kierkegaard and Kant is a fine demonstration of the value of comparative study of major thinkers. Green's book is remarkably clear and shows an impressive knowledge and understanding of the primary texts of both philosophers he examines. Even more significantly, the book puts Kant and Kierkegaard into dialogue with each other in such a way that after reading it, one feels that one understands both thinkers better. The discussion is commendably fair to both Kant and Kierkegaard, with no attempts to set up straw positions so as to demonstrate a facile superiority with respect to this or that issue on the part of either philosopher.

Green begins with an overview of what Kierkegaard knew about Kant, discussing broad cultural influences in the period, Kierkegaard's university training, and specific works of Kant that Kierkegaard definitely read, and others that he most likely read. This is followed by an overview of Kant's philosophy, focusing particularly on Kant's epistemology, ethical theory, and the philosophy of religion that is so intimately linked to both. This chapter is very valuable, in that it makes the book understandable to readers who lack a thorough knowledge of Kantian philosophy. Though of course such an overview is necessarily very brief, I found it remarkably insightful; it would in fact serve as an excellent brief introduction to Kant for the general reader. Nor is the chapter without value to the professional philosopher, for Green challenges many misconceptions about Kant that are prevalent among philosophers today.

These introductory chapters are followed by two chapters dealing with "points of contact" and "deep engagements" between Kant and Kierkegaard, the difference between

the two being largely a matter of degree. In the first of these chapters, Green focuses particularly on similarities in epistemology and in ethics. Sometimes I felt that Green was too quick to infer influence from similarity; for example, an emphasis on the role of judgment in perceptual knowledge is a common enough position in philosophy to make attribution of influence dubious. Nevertheless, the similarities he points out are real and substantive, and they are worth pointing out, regardless of the question of biographical influence, for they show Kierkegaard wrestling with Kantian questions and often giving Kantian answers to them. Moreover, in some cases the common positions, such as unyielding opposition to eudaimonism in ethics, seem distinctive enough to make plausible some kind of influence on the part of Kant, especially given what we know about Kierkegaard's study and reading of Kant. Kierkegaard's ethical thinking undoubtedly shares many deep themes with Kant, such as the depreciation of "results" as a test of moral rightness. Green points out these obvious affinities, but many less obvious ones as well, such as a concern for inwardness and for the dignity and equality of every human being. This is not to deny that there are Hegelian themes in Kierkegaard's ethical thought as well, but a good case can be made that at certain crucial points Kierkegaard is more Kantian than Hegelian.

In the chapter on "Deep Engagements," Green discusses the critiques both philosophers give of the proofs for God's existence, their basic concepts of God, and their understanding of faith's relation to reason. Here again there are occasionally other possible explanations for similarities than direct influence. For example, in some cases themes in both Kant and kierkegaard may be traceable to Hume, with that influence for Kierkegaard

streaming through Hamann. Nevertheless, I think Green shows that on most of these issues Kierkegaard's position is far closer to Kant than many might have thought, and even points of disagreement often show that Kierkegaard is grappling with a problem that has been posed in a Kantian manner.

The greatest part of the chapter on "Deep Engagements" is devoted to the issues of sin and redemption. Here I think Green is absolutely right in maintaining that Kierkegaard grapples with a problem that Kant himself posed but was unable to solve. In Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone Kant develops a rigorous account of radical evil, an evil so pervasive that it appears that an act of human willing cannot solve the problem; nevertheless Kant's insistence on denying the need for "historical faith" or "ecclesiastical religion" bars the door to the kind of revealed atonement that appears to be what is needed. Here Green, in tracing out a real disagreement between Kant and Kierkegaard on the need for a historical redeemer, argues very effectively that Kierkegaard in a way is following Kant even by disagreement with him, in that an historical redeemer seems to be exactly what Kant's theory of radical evil demands. Having shown that historical redemption seems necessary on Kant's own terms, I would have liked to have seen Green go further by explaining how Kant's own epistemological and ethical objections to such atonement could be met. Here some of Philip Quinn's recent work on the atonement, which considers both Kant and Kierkegaard, could have been consulted with profit.

The chapter on "Deep Engagements" is followed by a chapter in which a Kantian rereading is given of Fear and Trembling. Here Green argues that the central problem of Fear and Trembling is not that of a morality of divine commands; it is rather whether the individual can gain personal integrity via a relationship to God in history, rather than through a life of moral striving. The context which makes the book intelligible is the problem of sin and radical evil and the need for redemption and atonement, even though this context is only hinted at in the book at a few points. The significance of Abraham, as a "guiding star that saves the anguished," only comes into view when we see his life as a story that illustrates the position of the Christian, who also relates to God not simply by following some moral ideals, but by a relationship to God in history, a relationship that offers healing and redemption. I found this chapter to be the most satisfying in the entire book; I think Green is entirely right to read the book this way, and in fact I

provide a similar reading in a forthcoming article that will appear in the IKC volume on Fear and Trembling.

Green concludes with a chapter in which he argues that the deep influence of Kierkegaard on Kant has been intentionally suppressed, and speculates as to why Kierkegaard might have done this. Green's ideas are not unreasonable; it is certainly plausible that Kierkegaard wanted to see himself as an original thinker, and plausible that he would not have wanted his contemporaries, taken as they were with "going further" than Hegel, to dismiss his work as simply recapitulating the work of a philosopher they considered outmoded. However, I suspect that matters are simpler than Green claims. Many places where he thinks that attribution has been intentionally suppressed may be places where the Kantian character of the ideas in question was so obvious and so well-known as to require no attribution. In other cases Kierkegaard may have simply absorbed Kantian ideas that were "in the air" or so thoroughly internalized ideas that he took from Kant as to forget their source. In any case I find such issues not to be terribly significant from a philosophical point of view. Far more important than whether Kant actually was a biographical influence on Kierkegaard or whether Kierkegaard suppressed such influence are such questions as to whether Kant and Kierkegaard can be read as answering the same questions. Regardless of what one thinks of Green's biographical speculations he has succeeded in showing how useful it is to read Kierkegaard in relation to Kant.

Some minor criticisms deserve mention. I have already claimed that Green is too quick in some places to view similarity as a sign of influence. I also think that Green overestimates somewhat the originality of his interpretation of Kierkegaard as deeply influenced by Kant. He himself cites quite a number of works that anticipate some of his points, such as my own Subjectivity and Religious Belief. Though he mentions such works, he does not really discuss them in detail or note points where his views were anticipated. In addition, there are lots of treatments of Kierkegaard that do not make the relation of Kant to Kierkegaard a major theme, but nevertheless make some of his points in passing. For example, once more to cite my work just because of my familiarity with it, Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript contains numerous discussions of Kierkegaard's relation to Kant, almost all of which anticipate points made by Green.

I don't mean to detract from the originality and power of Green's work. No previous work has treated the relationship of Kierkegaard to Kant in such depth and detail, or argued the similarities with such care. And quite a number of points made are genuinely new; for example, while I was already aware of the Kantian background to Kierkegaard's discussion of religious historical knowledge, Green convinced me that the discussion of the "leap" in Concluding Unscientific Postscript owes more to Kant than to Lessing. Other points are not so original, but it is very valuable for Green to collect all of these issues and discuss them together. My point is that Green sometimes seems to make it appear that he is pointing out things that no one had noticed in Kierkegaard before, a tone that actually undermines the book's credibility, since it is unlikely that such fundamental similarities could have remain undetected. But this is a minor quibble about a book that will serve as the definitive study of Kierkegaard's relation to Kant, a book that students of both Kant and Kierkegaard should take to heart.

C. Stephen Evans, <u>Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's 'Philosophical Fragments'</u> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), xii and 205 pages. \$29.95. Reviewed by George Connell, Concordia Coilege - Moorhead, MN.

Kierkegaard writes that the true test of a preacher would be to return to the same sermon text week after week for a year. C. Stephen Evans has submitted to a similar test by authoring this commentary on Philosophical
Fragments less than a decade after his Kierkegaard's
Fragments and 'Postscript': The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus. The challenge of saying something new is further heightened by Harry Nielsen's and Robert Roberts' recent commentaries on Fragments. Why is Fragments suddenly the focus of so much scrutiny?

At least two reasons come quickly to mind. First, the subject matter of Fragments makes it one of the texts in the authorship best suited to bringing Kierkegaard into conversation with contemporary philosophy and theology. Evans notes in his Preface two broad themes that guide his reading of Fragments: the historical dimension of the Christian faith and the interested character of reason. Both of these themes relate directly to issues of contingency and finitude that so captivate the contemporary mind.

Second, Fragments is an ideal place to take on the thorny question of how to read Kierkegaard and his

pseudonyms. In Fragments, we find substantial philosophical argumentation and even doctrinal exposition, but the how of Climacus' presentation throws into question its what. In Postscript, Climacus derides a German reviewer of Fragments who reproduced the content of the book accurately enough but who uneasily admitted that there might be a bit of irony in the form of its presentation. Any commentator who seeks to read Fragments seriously, to make sense of the text (as Evans promises in his subtitle), to identify in it true claims and sound arguments, risks falling into the very error of the hapless Teutonic reviewer. Evans indicates in his Preface that he now sees his earlier commentary. organized as it was on the basis of themes rather than literary structure, as subject to that criticism, and he hopes that by following the structure of Fragments in this commentary he will be better able to identify and engage the ironic dimensions of the text.

But Evans has no truck with those who would read this or any other works by Kierkegaard as self-consuming artifacts that ironically place themselves under erasure, that revoke and subvert themselves leaving only a Cheshire cat grin behind. Evans doesn't directly confront

such deconstructive readings of Fragments (an excellent example of which is Louis Mackey's "A Ram in the Afternoon"), but rather validates a very different hermeneutic by demonstrating its fecundity. He sets out to read Fragments charitably, to discern sense throughout, to enter into serious conversation with Climacus on the issues raised in the book, to disagree with Climacus on occasion but always to find in him a profound and serious thinker on matters of fundamental import. I fear that in doing so, Evans strains against his own resolve to pay "a great deal more attention...to the literary form of these works and the irony that pervades that form"(xi) than was paid them in his earlier book on Climacus. What he has done is to show how much more fecund a charitable reading (that is, a reading that construes a text so as to maximize its coherence, plausibility, and insightfulness) can be than one hell-bent on showing how a text subverts itself. I come away from Evans' commentary not only with a sense of understanding the text of Fragments better but, more importantly, with a clearer grasp of the issues raised. In contrast, I come away from Mackey's "A Ram in the Afternoon" with awe at Climacus' ironic powers and admiration for Mackey's perceptiveness, but also with exasperation at the ultimate sterility of Mackey's reading. Climacus notes that humor and seriousness are quite compatible, but I have yet to find a commentator who manages to capture the two in the seamless unity characteristic of Climacus' texts.

Even if such a remarkable commentator should appear, she or he would not be able wholly to bridge the gap between interpreters like Evans and the "postmodernists." Evans devotes his second chapter to "sketching the book's overall project..."(13), thus postulating just the sort of unitary meaning deconstructive readings call into question. (The very word "book" is held in deep suspicion by many literary theorists for this reason.) He similarly ascribes unitary selfhood and unitary practical agendas to God and human agents (see e.g. 35 and 123). Further, he employs a metaphysics of essences and accidents when speaking of human nature, divine nature, and the Christian faith. He even declares that the Fragments generally and the Interlude specifically are "robustly metaphysical."(121) While this statement is directed toward Wittgensteinians like Nielsen and Roberts who construe Climacus' claims as "grammar" rather than metaphysics, it is equally at odds with post-modernists who aver that metaphysical thinking is hopelessly dated and just the sort of thing an engagement with Kierkegaardian texts can help us get beyond. Thus, in

spite of his stated intention to achieve a synthesis between what he calls the philosophical and the ironical (=deconstructionist) approaches to the reading of Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms(3), Evans remains very much a traditionalist in this commentary both in his hermeneutic approach (to be "faithful to the text"(2) and in his commitment to the coherence and importance of questions of rationality, responsibility, truth, human nature; God's existence, etc. What Climacus (and Evans with him) has to say on these matters is sometimes far from traditional, but Evans locates this Kierkegaardian pseudonym squarely within the ongoing conversations that constitute the philosophical tradition of the West.

As noted above, Evans sees two particular areas in which Climacus' contributions to those conversations are especially significant: the historical character of the Christian faith and the nature of rationality. Evans accentuates the latter of these in his title, Passionate Reason. Such a combination of terms is oxymoronic on many traditional construals of rationality, but the farreaching criticisms Cartesianism has met at the hands of both Anglo-American and Continental philosophers creates an opportunity for a reassessment of the old vision of Kierkegaard and his pseudonym, Climacus, as arch-irrationalists. Evans clears the way for this reassessment by compellingly refuting both the persistent view that Climacus identifies the Christian faith as the acceptance of a logical contradiction and recent assertions that Climacus is normatively and descriptively a direct epistemic volitionalist. But there is also a constructive dimension to Evans's renovation of Climacus' reputation. Evans works to elucidate from Climacus' often cryptic remarks an attractive third option between Cartesian objectivism and epistemic nihilism. This third option involves the claim that there cannot and should not be walls separating reason and subjectivity. That there cannot be such separation is a function of our being the sorts of creatures we are. Evans writes, "It is a plain and evident fact of human psychology, like it or not, that how we interpret evidence, even what we consider to be good evidence, is heavily shaped by our desires."(137) Evans follows Climacus beyond this modest claim to note the joint epistemic and emotional significance of sin. On the hypothesis that the learner lacks the truth before receiving it from the teacher (the hypothesis on which Fragments is constructed), reason, with its imperialist predilections, with its pretensions to master all that comes into its ken, will have its own subjective, passional grounds for offense when confronted by the truth. But even as subjectivity can block access to the truth, it can also be the basis of its

reception. As Climacus notes, faith is the happy passion of reason before the Paradox. So, subjectivity, the passions, the love inspired in the disciple by the teacher, prove to be the sine qua non of the normative functioning of the disciple's intellect: in this case, reason is only rational when passionate and passionate in the appropriate way.

Evans clearly believes that this validation of the subjective dimension of reasoning has much broader scope than the disciple's encounter with the teacher. For example, in the final paragraph of his previous book on Climacus, Evans asserts the intellectual significance of "[t]he quality of passion that informs a person's life, be it aesthetic, ethical, religious, or Christian passion,..."(291) Nevertheless, both Climacus and Evans have a particular stake in framing an account of the intellect and its workings that readily accommodates the believer's experience of a personal, transformative encounter with the risen Christ. Such private, unconfirmable, emotionladen experiences are viewed as uncertain, unreliable and inadmissible by traditional standards of evidence. But with delicious irony, Climacus turns the tables, using the last two chapters and the Interlude to raise doubts about the reliability of sensory experiences and historical evidence. On the basis of these doubts, Climacus asserts that faith and offense are equally passionate responses to objectively uncertain evidence.

This brings us to the second of the two foci of Evans' commentary, the historical dimension of the Christian faith. As M. J. Ferreira has noted, Climacus works at cross-purposes to himself in on the one hand emphasizing the god-in-time as teacher and on the other demeaning the significance of historical evidence about this teacher. If the sole basis of the believer's faith is a present personal encounter with the teacher occasioned by a "world historical nota bene" that someone at some time "believed that in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died," then the believer's faith has a decidedly ahistorical and abstract character. Ferreira wonders whether there is enough specificity in such a belief to fix its historical referent.

Evans is sympathetic with both Climacus and the critics on this point. As we already saw in his discussion of "passionate reason," Evans agrees with Climacus that faith must not be made to wait on the results of historical scholarship. Further, he thinks Climacus can be defended against criticisms like Ferreira's by carefully distinguishing between the content of a belief (which is

objective - the divinity of a historical personage) and its ground (which may be subjective - the believer's transformative encounter with the teacher). But Evans argues here, as he argued in his prior Climacus book, that Climacus goes too far in demeaning the significance of historical evidence. First, there is the issue of conditions of identity raised by Ferreira. But more significantly, Climacus' dismissive attitude toward historical evidence threatens to undo Evans' efforts to exonerate Climacus from the charge of irrationalism. Evans writes, "If I have a belief in Jesus of Nazareth, that is a belief with historical content, and it cannot be isolated from my other historical beliefs. Unless God produced my belief by overriding my normal thought processes, it is hard to see how I could regard massive evidence that Jesus never existed, or never said any of the things attributed to him, as utterly irrelevant to my faith." (158) Evans advocates a more moderate version of Climacus' principle: the believer will (or should) attend to purported evidence for and against his belief but the experience of a personal encounter with Christ (the real ground of the belief) will decisively influence the way the believer construes that evidence. In a similar vein, Evans takes issue with Climacus' thoroughly negative appraisal of apologetics: since there is no reason to exclude the possibility that God could use rationally convincing evidence as the occasion for a transformative encounter leading to belief, there is no basis for a blanket dismissal of apologetics.

While I acknowledge the plausibility of this point, I worry that Evans is blunting the edge that makes Climacus as interesting and challenging as he is. When another pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, describes apologetics as the second Judas, his point is not to limit God's options but to stress the necessary tension between Christianity and the "natural" human way of viewing the world. Evans is quite aware of Climacus' views on this tension and nicely explains his reasons for holding those views. (See 89-90.) But Evans consistently tones down the tension, denying that there is any necessary conflict. For example, he writes, "there is no conflict between faith and reason if reason can accept the limitations of reason."(108) I grant that this is a plausible restatement of Climacus' claim that faith is the happy relationship of reason and the Paradox. But in consistently emphasizing the possible congruence of faith and reason and softening Climacus' talk of their collisions, Evans misses something of the tone of the book. I worry that the Climacus I meet in these pages could fit in rather too well at a Society of Christian Philosophers meeting. (See page 91 where Evans speaks of a Christian

philosophy "which does not attempt to replace revelation with reason, but argues for the reasonableness of recognizing the limits of reason and the need for revelation.") Perhaps such a difference in tone is inevitable in a commentary that tries to correct years of misreadings of Climacus as an irrationalist of a very crude sort. And, finally, Evans is correct when he says that Climacus himself, in spite of all he says about the scandalous and offensive character of Christianity, is himself making sense of the incarnation in <u>Fragments</u>.

Interestingly, Evans' final chapter contains some sharp and testy passages that contrast decidedly with the tone of moderation that prevails through the volume. As with Robert Roberts, Evans pointedly turns Climacus' "thought experiment" against liberal theologians who "Socratize" Christianity, who sacrifice the unique significance of Christ on the altar of multi-faith ecumenism, who continuously evidence a desire to be fashionably modern. He calls their misappropriation of the word "Christian" "intolerable,"(175) and compares them to pimps.(178) On this count, Evans unquestionably voices an outrage Climacus (and Kierkegaard) would feel if confronted by much of what passes for Christian theology today. But Evans' argument for denying such theologies the label "Christian" strikes me as oddly unkierkegaardian. "There are millions of Christians today who continue to use 'Christianity' to designate a faith that implies that Jesus was uniquely God's son, a faith that rests on an authoritative, historical revelation, a view of Christianity which clearly makes it logically exclude Socratic perspectives on the Truth."(175) Such an argument from what the millions take Christianity to be would carry little weight, I fear, with the scourge of Christendom.

Whatever one's verdict on Evans' handling of the ironic dimensions of the text, <u>Passionate Reason</u> is surely the best commentary on <u>Fragments</u> to date. Evans doesn't just summarize and repeat, he thinks through the issues with Climacus. Every chapter of the book represents an original contribution to current philosophical debates as well as a clarification of Climacus' text. Perhaps the dialogic tension between ironic, elusive, scandalizing Johannes Climacus and serious, moderate, clear Steve Evans is the perfect inducement for our own continued struggles with this text.

Notes

^{1.} M.J. Ferreira, "The Faith/History Problem and Kierkegaard's <u>A Priori</u> 'Proof'," Religious Studies 23, 337-345.

Heinrich M. Schmidinger, *Das Problem des Interesses und die Philosophie Sören Kierkegaards* (Freiberg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1983), 440 pp. Reviewed by Marilyn Piety.

Yes, this book is almost ten years old. So why is it being reviewed here? First, because it has not, to my knowledge, previously been reviewed for an English-speaking audience; and second, because it is, I believe, an outstanding piece of Kierkegaard scholarship.

The first half of the book deals with the history of the treatment of the concept of interest in philosophy. It begins by looking at this concept of interest in philosophy in the twentieth century and, in particular at the treatment it receives in the work of such individuals as Adorno, Gadamer and Habermas. The author then turns to the treatment of interest in the period from Kant to Hegel, with chapters devoted to Kant, Schiller, Fichte, the German romantics and finally, Hegel.

The second half of the book is devoted to the concept of Interest in Kierkegaard's authorship. Chapter eight looks at the authorship from its beginnings until April of 1843. Chapter nine covers the period from April 1843 until March of 1846. Chapter ten covers the period from March of 1846 until Kierkegaard's death in 1855. Chapter eleven is entitled: "Kierkegaard in relation to philosophical thought since Kant," and makes a systematic comparison of Kierkegaard's claims about the nature of interest with those of Kant, Schiller, Fichte, the German romantics and Hegel. The final two chapters look at the relation between Kierkegaard's views on the nature of interest and the views of both the German idealists and what Schmidinger refers to as the "interest-philosophy" of the twentieth century.

Schmidinger argues that Kierkegaard "makes interest a fundamental structure of mind or spirit' (*Geist*) (p. 213). "Consciousness itself," he continues "is defined by Kierkegaard as interest. That is, interest is not merely something that consciousness possesses, but rather something which characterizes it in its very essence" (p. 214).

This book is important, however, not merely because it examines a concept that is among the most central to Kierkegaard's thought, but also because it contrasts Kierkegaard's understanding of 'actuality' with that of the philosophical tradition within which he was working.

Schmidinger argues that the fundamental problematic of Kierkegaard's philosophy grows out of his relation to the late philosophy of Schelling and that, in fact, his relation to German idealism in general is decisively exhibited in his response to this thinker (p. 375). "According to Schelling," argues Schmidinger, "actuality"...is the completely abstract universal being of divine worldreason [Weltnernunff] not yet manifested 'in actu,' whereas according to Kierkegaard, it is the existence of an individual, concrete human being" (p. 376). Kierkegaard's interpretation of actuality "stands in direct opposition," argues Schmidinger "to the interpretation of actuality by the German romantics and contemporary philosophy of subjectivity" (neuzeitlichen Subjektivitätsphilosophie) (p. 392). Unfortunately, the similarity of Kierkegaard's language to that of the German idealists occasionally helps to obscure this distinction. Schmidinger's treatment of this issue leaves no doubt, however, in the mind of the reader as to the opposition between Kierkegaard's understanding of the nature of actuality and that of the other thinkers examined. The reader who does not have a particularly strong background in German idealism will also be grateful for the clarity with which the views of this school are presented in connection with this issue.

This book represents a profound grasp of the substance of Kierkegaard's thought. What makes it so exceptional, however, is that it does not merely present us with a clearer picture of that substance than we find in the authorship itself; it places Kierkegaard's thought in an historical context which is portrayed in detail as rich as that which characterizes the treatment of Kierkegaard's views. It is also invaluable to the Kierkegaard scholar in that the profusion of detailed references to secondary literature on Kierkegaard helps the reader to navigate his/her way through this literature more effectively.

This book is such a masterful piece of scholarship that it is important not merely for Kierkegaard scholars, but for anyone who is concerned with the philosophical issues of the nature of interest as well as anyone who has anything to do with German idealism or the Frankfurt school. It is quite simply destined to become a classic.

Select Bibliography for "An Exploration of Kierkegaard's Tragic Hero & Its Implications for Moral Theory"

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