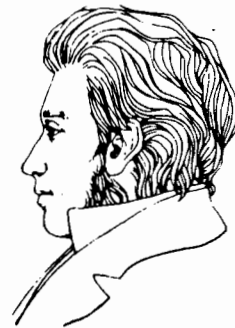


# Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter



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## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

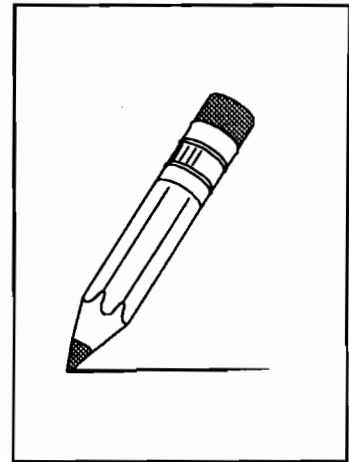
Recently, the editor was privileged to participate in the first meeting of the Research Committee of a new Kierkegaard Research Center in Copenhagen. The exciting details about this are contained in the news section.

It is clear that Denmark is finally going to give one of its true geniuses some deserved recognition and attention. Of course it is amusing to think of what Kierkegaard himself might think of all the scholarly efforts, given his comments about professors! Nevertheless, though he might be enjoying a chuckle, I think he might take a certain satisfaction that attention is being paid. Even those lovers of Kierkegaard who regard professors with disdain might be glad to think that somewhere in the halls of academe, someone will stumble on S.K. who might otherwise not have bothered. Let us hope that the new editions and new research on Kierkegaard will be truly helpful and illuminating; in the end that is what justifies the scholars who work on Kierkegaard.

## NEWS YOU SHOULD NOTE

### NEWS FROM COPENHAGEN

A new Søren Kierkegaard Research center has been established in Copenhagen, funded by the Danish National Research Foundation. The Center is under the leadership of Niels Jørgen Cappelørn. The Center has been established for an initial period of five years. It will be an independent organization, but it will be located physically in the theological faculty building at the University of Copenhagen, and will have a formal affiliation with the University.



Some of the highlights of the Center's plans are as follows:

#### Critical Editions:

One of the chief tasks of the new Research Center will be to produce new critical editions of both Kierkegaard's published and unpublished writings. These editions will be done to the highest scholarly standards, working from original manuscripts as well as first and later editions. The editions will be available in both computerized and traditional print form.

#### Research:

The Center hopes to stimulate much new work on Kierkegaard, and plans to support both Ph.D. students and offer post-doctoral fellowships. (See announcement that follows.) It will also provide a welcome home for professors on sabbatical. The Research Committee charged with overseeing this part of the Center's work includes myself (Stephen Evans), Professor Hermann Deuser of Justus-

Liebig-Universität Giessē, Professor Alastair Hannay of Oslo University, and Professor Bruce Kirmmse, who is currently at the University of Copenhagen. Professor Deuser is the chair.

#### Conference:

In 1996 Copenhagen is designated as the cultural capital of Europe. As part of that celebration, the Center hopes to sponsor a major Kierkegaard conference in the spring, perhaps to coincide with Kierkegaard's birthday. There are tentative plans to make this conference the first half of an international conference, with the second session to be held at St. Olaf in the U.S.A. in the fall. Many other events besides the academic conference are planned.

#### Society:

There has been discussion of forming an International Kierkegaard Society. This would not replace or compete with existing Kierkegaard Societies, but would be rather a "Society of Societies" that would coordinate and provide opportunities for cooperation and communication with existing societies. Though individuals could be allowed to join, the hope is that existing societies would join as societies, with membership in a national organization automatically carrying with it membership in the umbrella organization.

#### Fellowship Announcement:

The following announcement has been approved by the Research Committee of the Center:

The Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre has been established at Copenhagen University by the Danish National Research Foundation. Over the coming years the Centre will produce a new critical edition of Kierkegaard's writings and will sponsor advanced research in ethics, philosophical and theological anthropology, and hermeneutical theory. In addition, the Centre will provide a stimulating environment for scholarly work related to the thought of Søren Kierkegaard in a variety of other fields, including epistemology; metaphysics; aesthetics and literary theory; and social, political, and historical studies.

In the 1994-95 academic year the Centre will begin with pilot programs in two areas: 1. Ph.D. students who are at the dissertation stage of their work; and 2. post-doctoral fellows. The Centre welcomes applications from qualified scholars for each of these programs. Inquiries from scholars wishing to spend their sabbaticals at the Centre are also welcome.

Ph.D. students will be accommodated for a period of up to three years. Kierkegaard's thought should play a central role in dissertation projects, and Ph.D. students from abroad will be expected to learn Danish and work from original sources. The Centre will provide guidance and make available specialized seminars and/or programs. Applicants must either have an appropriate affiliation with a graduate program at their home university or enroll in a Ph.D. program at Copenhagen University. The award carries an appropriate stipend, covering living expenses and University fees.

Post-doctoral fellows should be working on projects in which Kierkegaard's thought is of central importance and must show evidence of high quality scholarly work in a relevant field. Post-doctoral fellows will be accommodated for a maximum of one year. The fellowship covers living expenses.

Applicants for either program should send the following:

Letter of application which includes a full description of the proposed project (2-3 pages)  
Curriculum Vitae

Two confidential letters of recommendation from senior scholars in their field

To: Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Director  
Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre  
At Copenhagen University  
Købmagergade 44-46  
DK-1150 Copenhagen K  
DENMARK Fax: 45 35 32 37 10

All materials must be received by May 15, 1994, and may be faxed. Applicants will be informed of the status of their application by June 15, 1994. Residency for both programs may begin either August 1 or September 1, 1994.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

### INTERNATIONAL KIERKEGAARD COMMENTARY NEWS

The International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition volume appeared in November 1993. The page proofs for International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Philosophical Fragments' were received in DeLand on 10 March. The readers' reports on the two volumes for International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or are not quite complete. As soon as the selection process for these is complete, the reading for International Kierkegaard Commentary: Early Polemical Writings will begin, at best late in the summer. Articles on the Soap Cellar, Hans Christian Andersen, the early newspaper articles are needed to fit in with those in hand.

### KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS NEWS

Works of Love will be the next volume published.

### INTERNET BULLETIN BOARD

The Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College is now sponsoring a bulletin board on Internet in order to promote the exchange of information regarding Kierkegaard and related thinkers. If you wish to subscribe, send a message using the word "subscribe" through e-mail to: [kierkegaard-request@stolaf.edu](mailto:kierkegaard-request@stolaf.edu). Once subscribed, in order to converse type [kierkegaard@stolaf.edu](mailto:kierkegaard@stolaf.edu). For further information, please contact Cynthia Lund at the Library ([lundc@stolaf.edu](mailto:lundc@stolaf.edu) or 507-646-3846).

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## ARTICLES

### A Critical Note on Edward F. Mooney's Reading of Fear and Trembling

In a recently published book, Edward F. Mooney has provided us with a reading of Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling.<sup>1</sup> The aim of Mooney's reading is to show the key existential difference between the single movement of resignation and the double movement of faith, between the knight of resignation and the knight of faith.

What is at stake for Mooney is this question: what, from all of the possible relations one can assume toward finitude, is the exact quality and nature of the knight of faith's relation to it? Mooney's answer is found in his concept of "selfless care." He says:

In this introduction ["Preliminary Expectoration"] to the "Problemata" we first meet a pair of heroes, the knights of faith and resignation. These guardians of human spirit present alternate ways to cope with the risks and vulnerabilities accompanying a life of commitment, love, and care. Here the struggle for faith is seen as an ordeal of love, a test of our capacity for selfless care. (EM,15)

One paradigm of such a relationship of selfless care is as follows:

...[N]ot all cases of love or care are tied up with proprietary claim. I may enjoy and warmly anticipate the appearance of a sparrow at my feeder. Yet I would claim no rights over this object of my enjoyment. The matter of its life and death is something over which I have no claim. Of course, I would feel indignant were someone maliciously to injure it. But in the course of things, the sparrow will come and go. Meanwhile, I will adjust myself to its goings and comings. (EM,53, italics added)

Mooney begins his discussion of selfless care by commenting on the commonplace fact that care for something is linked to proprietary claims, to attachment, to possession, and hence to the vulnerability to loss, disappointment, grief, suffering, and so forth. As well, he rightly notes that human beings have long sought for, and found in many a religious tradition, including, of course, most forms of Christianity, a technē for coping with this vulnerability to loss. The formula of such a technē is simply this: renounce ones proprietary claims, disown and detach oneself from anything that is vulnerable to loss, that is, everything that is finite and temporal. If we don't care for something, then its loss cannot hurt us. And the corollary

to this is that we ought only to care for what cannot be taken away, that is, the eternal, the changeless, the divine, etc. (EM,53).

It is just this technē of transcendence that we find in both the ethical individual who rises above the particular to the lofty heights of the universal, and in the knight of infinite resignation who forsakes the temporal for the eternal. For both, this world is the center of uncertainty, change, pain, suffering, and death. Our only salvation is to detach ourselves from it. And even while we continue to live "down here," we will not be buffeted by the effects of time and finitude if we but turn the real center of our being elsewhere. Both the ethical and the religious modes of transcendence are modes of resignation from the world, from the human. Both agree that the real disease of human beings is its condition of being human; and both agree that the remedy for this vile condition, as Martha Nussbaum suggests, is to transcend our humanity.<sup>2</sup>

There is, however, a major difference between the single movement of resignation and the double movement of faith. Movements of resignation, ethical or religious, give up, or give up on, the world in all of its finite, temporal particularity; resignation is other-worldly; it is born and bred of world-alienation. Faith, however, affirms the world; faith continually receives the world from the hands of the Eternal; faith is always essentially worldly. The knight of faith cares about the world, while ethical or religious knights of resignation have turned their interests elsewhere.

It is in the context of his attempt to characterize faith's affirmation of the world that Mooney develops his conception of selfless care. Faith as selfless care, Mooney claims, makes no proprietary claims on the world, but nevertheless continues to affirm it. Recall that a paradigm of such a selfless care is the claimless enjoyment Mooney feels for the sparrow that comes to his feeder. This paradigm would have us think that the knight of faith is called to keep his joyful eye on the sparrow, (the world), without interfering with its comings and goings, without making any proprietary claims upon it. So here is the crux of the knight of faith's relation to finitude: care for it, (love



it, be concerned for it, keep a joyful eye on it, etc.), affirm it, but make no proprietary claims in relation to it; avoid, at all costs, the making of finitude one's own. Or, as we might expect to hear from the wisdom of pop self-help psychology, learn to love and to let go!

Does Mooney's selfless care really amount to an affirmation of the world? I think that it does not. And accordingly, I think that his interpretation of Kierkegaardian faith as selfless care does not really move it beyond resignation. Mooney's mistake, I submit, is in his claim that only in forswearing proprietary claims is the knight of faith able to take up a proper affirmation of the world.

Why does Mooney think it a good thing to forswear proprietary claims? I speculate that it is because he conceives of all forms of ownership, and perhaps all forms of possession, as ultimately forms of possessiveness. If this were true, and if faith therefore requires a divestment of all of my ownership relations to the world, in what sense can I be said to receive it as my own from the hands of the Eternal? Gift-givers certainly expect us not only to receive the gifts they give, but to watch over them, to care for them, to protect them, to possess them, to claim them as our own.

Clearly it is worthwhile to point out that faith's affirmation of the world is not a form of possessiveness. Such relations fail to acknowledge the otherness of persons and things that we love and are concerned about. But why must we believe that proprietary claims of care inevitably lead to possessiveness? Can there be a non-possessive sense of ownership? It seems to me so, and importantly so.

To see this, we must see that possessiveness is a perversion of possession, indeed an ironic transposition of it into a form of dispossession. That is, possessiveness betokens either an inability or ultimately an unwillingness to possess, to accept, and to claim as one's own, what one cares for. When I possess something, when I have made it my own, in a non-possessive sense, I have chosen it, accepted it, consented to it, and so forth. In possessiveness, I am not free in relation to what is possessed; in fact, I am possessed (perhaps obsessed) by it. In this light, it is not surprising that the passive notion of "being possessed" is a metaphor for being in a state of unfreedom, and ultimately a state of madness; at the same time, the active notion of being "in possession," as in "self-possession," betoken both freedom and health.

While Mooney is right to caution against possessiveness, he has made the mistake of throwing the baby out with the

bathwater. Why must all forms of possession, ownership, proprietary claims, be discarded to avoid possessiveness?

Consider the difference between a marriage as a covenant of faith and the example that Mooney gives of selfless care, viz., the experience of enjoyment he feels for the sparrow that comes to his feeder. What kind of marriage would it be for one spouse to say to the other that he or she does not make any claims on the other, but will simply adjust to the other's comings and goings? And what would we think if both mutually acknowledged that in the course of things the other will go his or her own way? What does such a disavowing of all proprietary claims on the other have to do with the covenant of marriage? Isn't it just the point of the wedding vows publicly to enter into the mutual proprietary claims of each on the other? Don't we in fact say in the vows something to the following effect: "I take you to be my lawfully wedded wife/husband...?"

I suppose that Mooney would think that such proprietary claims of one spouse on the other implied in the mutual giving and taking of one another before others and before God, would be a compromise of the autonomy and independence of one or the other or both. It is as though Mooney might think that the worst possible sin in a relation is jealousy. After all, jealousy, which is all too often confused with a genuinely destructive emotion, envy, implies a proprietary claim, a desire to protect what is one's own. (I remind you that, from the biblical point of view, jealousy is a virtue since it characterizes God's care for his creatures, his own desire to be acknowledged by them: "for I the Lord your God am a jealous God..."). What indeed would a marriage be without an appropriate sense of jealousy on the part of both spouses? To be without any hint of jealousy is possible only on condition that no proprietary claim whatsoever is made. Moreover, this is possible only when one no longer cares about the comings and goings of the other. This is no marriage! This is no human relation!

And such proprietary claims certainly are involved with our children. They are, after all, our children, and we are their parents; we belong to each other in bonds of blood and/or choice. No less for Abraham and Isaac, indeed, perhaps more so. All of his hopes for the future are in his only son, the fulfillment of God's promises are found in him, he is everything to Abraham. He could not care more for Isaac, nor could he dread more the prospect of his son's having to suffer, much less of his having to die.

Is Abraham's attachment to Isaac a form of possessiveness? Does he care too much for him? Mooney

seems to think so (EM,59). In the story of the sacrifice, as Mooney interprets it, God wants to teach Abraham the lesson of how fathers must learn to let their children go, to liberate them from parental proprietary claims, to undo possessiveness. After Moriah, according to Mooney, Abraham relates to Isaac in this new healthier way: he no longer makes any proprietary claims on him; he has let him go; but he still cares, in a selfless care, for him. He now enjoys his son, now he recognizes that in the course of things Isaac will eventually go his own way, and he now knows that he must find a way to adjust himself to his son's free comings and goings.

But on Mooney's interpretation, does Abraham really get Isaac back every inch? Is he able to embrace him and care for him ever as much as he did before he gave him up? It seems to me that on Mooney's reckoning Abraham gets Isaac back only tentatively, with a kind of aesthetic distance now imposed between them that did not exist before, a distance that will not allow a full and complete embrace. That is, on Mooney's interpretation, Abraham gave up something that is not completely given back, at least not every inch of it.

Contra Mooney, I do not think that Kierkegaard thinks that Abraham is guilty of loving his son too possessively--of making inappropriate proprietary claims on him; or that he is in some way guilty of idolatry, or guilty of absolutizing "the relative." Indeed, Abraham never hesitated one moment in obeying God's command to sacrifice Isaac; and never did he flinch one moment in believing that God would fulfill his promise to him that he would be the father of a great nation. As I see it, Abraham does not need to be humbled, or knocked down, as Mooney suggests, for he is from the beginning to the end a knight of faith.

Then what is the point of the story of the sacrifice? What is it that God is trying to teach Abraham? I suggest that he is not trying to get Abraham to put an inward distance between himself and his son, as though God suspected that Isaac may be interfering with Abraham's faith, as though he suspected that Abraham was becoming too attached to finitude. Rather, and to the contrary, I suggest that it is precisely the point of the story that God is attempting to deepen Abraham's attachment to finitude, to his son, to the world. He does this not by instructing Abraham to love and care without making proprietary claims, but by teaching him another more important lesson of faith.

This lesson is that faith does not demand that Abraham withdraw his proprietary claim on his son; rather, that he

deepen it by making it more deeply personal and particular. This personal and particular deepening occurs in the context of a first person address by God that is directed to Abraham alone--an address that directs him to act in the first person. In the course of carrying forth God's direction, Abraham comes to realize the personal and particular nature of his claim on his son. Brought by God's direction to the realization that it was in his own power to withdraw his claim on his son, that it was in his own power to give Isaac up, Abraham came to see that merely siring Isaac, as miraculous as this was, was insufficient for making him fully his own son: he must also choose him, he must also lay a personal claim to him that goes beyond the necessity of biology, he must receive his son as a gift from God.

Resignation figures as an essential dialectical moment within faith's reception of the world as God's free and unmerited gift, within its subtle movement to make its proprietary claims on the world properly and fully personal. The fact is, we can truly lay such personal claims on something, truly possess it, only if we have chosen it in the first person. And we can only do this to the extent that we acknowledge that such a choice makes no sense outside of the possibility of disowning and dispossessing. Without this sense of the power to do otherwise that resignation provides, a personal claim is simply impossible. Resignation is therefore an ever-present structural possibility within faith.

But we must be careful here: faith is not, as Mooney seems to suggest, simply another mode of resignation from the world. Even though resignation must be included within faith, it must be included as a negated possibility, as a possibility the knight of faith must continually annul. Resignation (not faith, as Mooney suggests) betokens the withdrawal of our proprietary claims. Faith, by contrast, acknowledges the possibility of withdrawing proprietary claims, but says "no" to this possibility. The paradox of the knight of faith's resolve continually to say "no" to resignation is that it opens the possibility for him to make his proprietary claims all the more deeply his own.

Ronald L. Hall  
Francis Marion University

## Notes

1. Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, (New York: SUNY Press, 1991). [Hereinafter parenthetically cited as EM]

2. See Martha Nussbaum, "Transcending Humanity" in Love's Knowledge: Essays in Philosophy and Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 365-391.

## Response To Hall's Remarks

I would differ first with Ronald Hall's opening characterization of my aim in *Knights of Faith and Resignation*. The contrast between faith and resignation weaves throughout *Fear and Trembling*, but if Johannes de silentio were only interested in that distinction, *Fear and Trembling* would be a much shorter book, and my *Knights of Faith and Resignation* would be shorter, too. What I find insightful in Johannes de silentio's approach is the number of collateral issues raised, and the number of different ways he goes at the enigma Abraham presents. Hall misses this, thinking that a passage of mine interpreting the young lad in "Preamble from the Heart" sums up my thesis. But "Preamble from the Heart" (or "Preliminary Expectoration") is only number four or five of dozens of attempts by Johannes de silentio to get at Abraham.

The aim in my book is not to stop with one passage in this early "ordeal of love," but to capture aspects of that ordeal and then move on, as Johannes does. The youth suffering unrequited love can't be Johannes' last word, because a) the youth doesn't have to "suspend the ethical," and b) the youth doesn't trust the princess will be returned. *Fear and Trembling* (and my commentary) deal with these issues (the suspension of ethics and the return of "the universal") at length, not to mention several other ideas: the idea of a "post-suspension" ethics where knights are reengaged with the world, the capacity of poetry to capture faith, the "invisible" shopkeeping knights, the silence at the heart of faith, reason's running into the absurd, failed attempts to master time, failed attempts to approach faith in the guise of a knight or warrior. So it seems unfair to stop so early in the game, with the Preamble's disappointed young lover, as if saying something about *his* condition could finish off the whole of *Fear and Trembling* (and my views on it).

Hall's criticism is that I mistake resignation for faith. And if all we had for text were the young lad who has lost his

princess, then what we would have is indeed resignation, not faith. The lad lacks faith's second movement, trusting in the restoration of his beloved. Johannes says (as I point out) that he would be hesitant were the princess returned. It would embarrass him. He has given up on the hope of ever actually having her again. So he fails as a paradigm of faith. The "Preamble" is a preamble.

There is another problem with drawing a conclusion from a single passage (whether in *Fear and Trembling* or in my commentary). This is related to Kierkegaard's invention of pseudonyms with their own problems of perception and comprehension. Johannes de silentio introduces the love-sick lad as a step in his ongoing exercise of coming closer to Abraham. He knows he has trouble with Abraham, so he thinks the youth-example may help him toward his goal. He approaches faith, in the Preamble, as "an ordeal of love." The example is his. I try to make something of it in terms of a test of care, and I suggest a capacity for selfless care may be at the heart of faithful love--one element among others. I elaborate this suggestion with the example of a bird alighting on a feeder, a creature we could cherish without proprietary claim. We can't conclude from this bit of interpretation either that "selfless care" will be Johannes' final view of faith (it isn't) or that it is my final view of Johannes' view of faith (it isn't). I offer a reading of two pages in the Preamble, with the understanding that what Johannes means there, in those two pages, is at issue. Johannes de silentio shifts his ground, and each approach to Abraham is only an approach, an approximation. The attitude I have toward a bird returning to my feeder can't work as a full portrait of Abraham's attitude toward Isaac because, at the least, no teleological suspension of the ethical has been spelled out, and certainly, the bird passage fails to register the depth of trust in return which is faith's essential second movement.



Giving up the world (in resignation) is part of faith, which includes also a trust in the world's return. Resignation means giving up proprietary claim. Hall makes some useful suggestions about this. And these could be reviewed. But I don't think he finally makes his point. I take the upraised knife to signal the severing of a proprietary claim, the undoing of a selfish possessiveness. Hall suggests that the upraised knife signals the particularity of Abraham's position, and the idea that Abraham will be even more connected to Isaac. In the long run, I think he's right about particularity and connectedness. But the command from God is not a command to connect but a command to sever. In the short run, the terrifying part of God's command is that Abraham must give Isaac up.

Why should giving up Isaac be part of a trial of faith? I try an explanation that rests on the importance of recognizing the independence and inestimable worth of another, and on the need to resist the tendency to become possessive about kin (and worldly things in general) in a way that blocks both our own independence and the independence of others to whom we're tied. Hall objects to this reading. But he leaves us pondering what will replace my reading. Granted Abraham will be closer to Isaac (Abraham will get back the world, transformed). Why, in Hall's terms, should a sacrifice of Isaac be necessary to accomplish this?

One final remark. If faith is a double movement, it can't possibly be reduced to the "pop psychology" idea of "love and let go." This characterizes Johannes' "paltry slaves of

mediocrity," the "frogs in life's swamp," who counsel the youth to forget his beloved and find another gal. In pop jargon, faith would have to be "love and let go and get back." And the getting back (which I discuss especially in chapters six and seven) places Abraham in the world and subject to the demands of "the universal." Hence the bonds of marriage, the duties of parents, the injunctions against lying, stealing, murdering, and so forth, are all fully in force. So marriage can't be the trivial affair Hall suggests I take it to be. Faith, in my view (of Johannes de silentio's view) means that we take our finitude, our connection with the temporal, our everyday connections, with utmost seriousness. I take shopkeeping knights seriously, more seriously than flighty birds or love-sick youths. I spell out the idea of everyday commitment to the world and others being expressed through a cluster of virtues, including responsible individuality, or integrity (cf. *Knights of Faith and Resignation*, p. 99). Rejecting the cloister of resignation for worldly bonds and "life in the universal" comes out loud and clear in my book. "[The individual] does not divest himself of the manifold composite garment of the finite." (cf. *KFR*, p. 111) This marks Abraham's advance on Socrates. But one would miss it if one looked only at half a page of comment on one of Johannes' early prefaces.

Edward F. Mooney  
Sonoma State University

## BOOK REVIEWS

Klaus Otto Kappel, et al. Søren Kierkegaard: Philosophy. Schriftsteller, Theologe [Vorträge des bulgarisch-dänischen Seminars, Sofia, 31. März--2. April 1992], Sofia: Internationale Kyrill und Method-Stiftung, 1992, 125 pp. Reviewed by Richard Crouter, Carleton College.

Periodic reports from Fulbrighters and in the scholarly press are making us aware of the renewed interest in Kierkegaard in eastern Europe, Russia, and the nations of the ex-Soviet empire. This little volume--the result of a Danish-Bulgarian cultural exchange that occurred in 1992--testifies to the ongoing vitality of Kierkegaard within nations where a collectivist and materialist outlook on the human condition was enforced from above.

More a conference report than a finished volume, the book appears to have no editor (Kappel is Danish ambassador

to Bulgaria), fails to give bibliographic information (titles and locations) for its Danish and Bulgarian participants, and occasionally lacks the precise expression that we usually demand of the written word.

Yet the book's interest lies in other directions. Its powerful testimony makes one wish one had been privy to this rich encounter with the legacy and meaning of Kierkegaard. To appreciate this exchange of papers is to drop certain of our present preoccupations (there is no mention here of what our North American literary friends now call "PoMo

readings") and step into a situation where Kierkegaard is being read with great intensity for his ability to shed light on the foundations of human experience. Papers in German and English by five Danish and six Bulgarian representatives provide a window into the thematic shape of the conference. Judging from footnote references to Bulgarian sources and translations the reception of Kierkegaard in Bulgaria appears to be at an "early Lowrie" stage of transmission. Hence the importance of such encounters for the study of Kierkegaard. Anyone who cut his or her teeth on such texts prior to the 1970s knows how difficult it is to find one's intellectual bearings and also that the matter doesn't automatically become easier for our having so many excellent resources and translations available in English.

Two English-language contributions, Julia Watkin's suggestive overview of the relevance of Kierkegaard's view of the self for our scientific age, and Birgit Bertung's essay on male-female roles, especially in Sickness unto Death, speak to immediate concerns and interests. Watkin documents the attack on the purported "objectivity" of the natural sciences, while Bertung reads Kierkegaard in a way that emphasizes his ironic criticism of the traditional gender roles and the subordination of women. Most other contributors take their bearings within the roots of existential thought in the 19th century or among its 20th

century exponents. Isaac Passy places Kierkegaard in relation to the (exiled) Russian philosophers, Chestov and Berdyaev, Radosveta Theoharova draws parallels between Kierkegaard and Schelling, while Charalampi Panizidis presents a set of observations and theses on the theme of sorrow as a methodology of coming to self-awareness. Karl Jaspers' existential thought looms large in German essays by Christo Todorov and Hermann Schmid, while Vladimir Theoharov strikes parallels with Nietzsche and Emilia Mineva presents a set of theses that compare and contrast Kierkegaard and Marx. Large comparisons of overall accounts of the human condition thematized around time and subjectivity stand in the center of interest. Two essays are problem-oriented or text-specific. Paul Müller writes on Kierkegaard's literary tactics and stratagems under the idea of an "ethic of communication" while Poul Lübke takes the philosophy of "A" in "The Rotation Method" of Either-Or (Vol. I) as the quintessential aestheticism with which Kierkegaard is preoccupied throughout the authorship. Readers of the Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter may well want to scan future Fulbright (or other) listings in order to experience this kind of challenge first hand.

George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans, editors, Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, and London: Humanities Press International, 1992) xxii + 244 pages, including index. \$45.00. Reviewed by David B. Fletcher, Wheaton College.

Does Kierkegaard have a positive perspective on the social and political aspects of human life, or is he an asocial, or even antisocial thinker? Those of us who were writing in defense of a positive reading of Kierkegaard's social thought well over a decade ago could find relatively few allies.<sup>1</sup> The prevailing opinion seemed to have been formed in the 1950s, on the basis of negative judgments on Kierkegaard's social thought offered by such thinkers as H. Richard Niebuhr, who said that Kierkegaard gave "up the culture problem as irrelevant to faith....having abstracted the self from society as violently as any speculative philosopher ever abstracted the life of reason from his existence as a man,"<sup>2</sup> and by Marjorie Greene, who accused Kierkegaard of turning "completely away from any conception of human community," so that "there is indeed nothing but the individual as nothing before God."<sup>3</sup>

In the 1960s Martin Buber accused Kierkegaard of seeing religious concerns as contrary to social ones, and more recently, Mark C. Taylor says that for Kierkegaard "social relations abrogate unique individuality."<sup>4</sup> Surely there is a wealth of material in Kierkegaard's writings to support the claim that he is an asocial or antisocial individualist. His aristocratic and materially comfortable life, his intimacy with the Danish king, his almost obsessive emphasis on the individual in his journals and published works, and his vehement polemics against the "crowd," the media, and the Church make him appear to be an arch-conservative aristocrat, jealously protective of class privileges, and an individualist unconcerned with public life. His religious preoccupations also might be taken as support for an asocial or antisocial interpretation of his thought, since he attests that his entire authorship was addressed to the

single problem of "becoming a Christian," a condition that he places at a "heaven wide distance" from politics.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while living in a time riven with social and political upheaval, an era that produced the likes of a Karl Marx, Kierkegaard seems to have been content to ponder the interior spiritual life in bourgeois comfort.

Kierkegaard scholarship in very recent years has begun to take seriously the positive social perspective embodied in his famous critique of Church and society, joining the once sparse ranks of such earlier thinkers as Werner Stark and James Collins.<sup>6</sup> This new development can be seen in such excellent studies as Merold Westphal's Kierkegaard's Critique of Religion and Society<sup>7</sup> and Bruce Kirmmse's Kierkegaard in Golden-Age Denmark,<sup>8</sup> as well as much important recent work in Danish such as that by Johannes Sløk.

A major recent contribution to this movement is Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard.<sup>9</sup> The chapters of this book trace their origins to an interdisciplinary conference of philosophers, sociologists, religious studies scholars, and historians held in 1988 at the Howard V. and Edna H. Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College on the topic, "Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker." George B. Connell of Concordia College (Moorhead, Minnesota) and C. Stephen Evans of St. Olaf College, the book's editors, perceived a "broad sensitivity to the communal dimensions of Kierkegaard's thoughts" and a "clear theme of community, ethics, and politics" in these contributions, all the more "striking given that the essays focus on a wide variety of Kierkegaardian texts and employ quite different methodologies."<sup>10</sup> They have organized the chapters into three headings: Kierkegaard's religious vision, his ethical perspective, and his social and political thought.

In the section on the religious vision, the editors see each essay as focused on "the dialectic of immanence and transcendence in Kierkegaard's religious thought."<sup>11</sup> Michael Plekon leads off the section on the religious vision with a contribution on the roots of Kierkegaard's theology in Works of Love, the book that Kierkegaard himself believed should correct the asocial reading of his thought. For Plekon, Kierkegaard draws his communal reflections from the community of the Church and its fundamental theological self-understanding. Stephen Dunning examines Kierkegaard's view of authority and considers Kierkegaard's criteria for discerning true prophets from false. Mark Lloyd Taylor examines the antisocial interpretation typically given of Kierkegaard's treatment of the Abraham and Isaac story, that for Kierkegaard the

isolated individual is called upon to obey a morally repugnant divine command.

The ethical implications of Kierkegaard's dialectic of transcendence and immanence are explored by George Connell, who explores Judge William's letters in Either/Or II, Edward Mooney, who wrestles with Abraham's renunciation and suspension of the universal in Fear and Trembling, and Louise Carrol Keeley, who examines Kierkegaard's emphasis on the interior dimensions of works of love rather than their effects. All three see Kierkegaard as advocating a dialectical movement which is a retreat into subjectivity, to be sure, but one that is only completed as the individual reinvolves herself into the social world.

In the final section the authors focus entirely on Kierkegaard as a social and political thinker. Merold Westphal discerns a development in Kierkegaard's conception of Christian experience from the internal to the external, as Kierkegaard attempts to expose the self-absolutizing tendencies of society by placing it under the light of the Absolute that relativizes all that is merely human. Eric Ziolkowski considers the fate earned for Kierkegaard's Don Quixote by his idealism in a coldly pragmatic society. Bruce Kirmmse argues that Kierkegaard's individualism is meant as a corrective to the false individualism produced by modernity's instrumentally rational economic maximizers. Stephen Crites deconstructs The Sickness unto Death and finds therein, ironically, an application to social life. Michele Nicoletti defends Kierkegaard from the old charge of arch-conservatism, and mentions that Kierkegaard inspired German theologians such as Erik Peterson to oppose Hitler in the 1930s. Wanda Warren Barry considers the relevance of Kierkegaard to feminist theology, addressing Kierkegaard's "participation in the collective sin of patriarchy" and offering to him the forgiveness that he taught. Finally, Charles Bellinger uses Kierkegaard to comprehend violence, particularly as seen in the twentieth century monstrosities of Hitler, Stalin, and the Cold War.

One can hardly do justice to the richness, subtlety, and creativity of these chapters with such brief notes, but suffice it to say that any worries that this book suffers the defects of the usual "conference proceedings" can be put to rest; this volume shows both uniformly high quality in the contributions and significant thematic unity. Several of the chapters will generate scholarly controversy, perhaps in particular those by Plekon, Dunning, Mooney, and Crites. To anyone interested in grasping the complex connections between Kierkegaard's religious thought and his

perspectives on social life, this volume will be absolutely essential. The book goes a long way toward correcting the persistent asocial and antisocial misinterpretations of Kierkegaard, and promises to stimulate ongoing debates both in Kierkegaard scholarship and in social thought.

#### Notes

1. David Bruce Fletcher, Social and Political Perspectives in the Thought of Soren Kierkegaard (Washington, C: University Press of America, 1982).
2. H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), pp. 243-244.
3. Marjorie Greene, Introduction to Existentialism (Chicago: Phoenix Press, 1959), pp. 38-39.
4. Martin Buber, Between Man and Man (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 50; Mark C. Taylor, Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1980), p. 179 (cited in the book under review).
5. Søren Kierkegaard, The Point of View for My Work as an Author: A Report to History, Walter Lowrie and Benjamin Nelson, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 5-6, 107.
6. Werner Stark, Social Theory and Christian Thought (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959); James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1953).
7. Merold Westphal, Kierkegaard's Critique of Religion and Society (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987).
8. Bruce Kirmmse, Kierkegaard in Golden-Age Denmark (Indiana University Press, 1990).
9. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans, editors, Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community; Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, and London: Humanities Press International, 1992).
10. Ibid., p. x.
11. p. xiii.

Mary E. Finn, Writing the Incommensurable: Kierkegaard, Rossetti, and Hopkins (University Park; Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992) 180 pages. Reviewed by Eric J. Ziolkowski, Lafayette College.

Although the effort to analyze the writings of Kierkegaard in conjunction with those of major literary artists can be traced back at least as far as Werner Möhring's Ibsen und Kierkegaard (Leipzig, 1928), perhaps a chief impetus for more recent such studies was furnished by Louis Mackey's oft-cited 1971 book which interprets Kierkegaard himself as "a kind of poet." Since then, monographs have appeared comparing Kierkegaard with the contemporary Irish

playwright Samuel Beckett (by Steven J. Rosen, 1976), and with two eighteenth-century epistolary novelists, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos of France and Samuel Richardson of England (by Betty Becker-Theye, 1988). In addition, there have appeared articles relating Kierkegaard to the late Japanese novelist Shusaku Endo (by Patricia Altenbernd, 1984), and, more recently, to the putative "father" of the modern novel, the Spaniard Miguel de Cervantes, and to

the Victorian English man of letters, Thomas Carlyle (by the present author, in separate articles, both published in 1992). And now, within the last several years, two more books have been added to this tradition: in 1991, a study by Lorraine Clark comparing Kierkegaard and the early English Romantic poet-prophet William Blake,<sup>1</sup> and, a year later, the volume by Mary E. Finn presently under review.

Why draw the works of Kierkegaard into comparative analysis with poems by Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)? There are, of course, no direct historical connections between Kierkegaard and this pair of Victorian English bards. Neither Rossetti nor Hopkins knew of the Dane or his works. And, religiously and theologically speaking, the former two would seem, at least at first glance, far removed from this man who pitted himself as "single individual" against the church establishment of "Christendom." Both of them having been raised in devout High Anglican atmospheres, Rossetti came under the influence of the Tractarians (known also as the Oxford Movement), who sought to reaffirm the divine status of the Church of England, while Hopkins converted to Roman Catholicism in his early twenties and resolved to join the Society of Jesus.

That Finn does not address such biographical differences is understandable, since they do not really pertain to the more or less strictly textual level upon which she draws her comparisons. For her, Kierkegaard "meets" Rossetti and Hopkins "in the maelstrom that is nineteenth-century subjectivity" (p. 5). What their works have in common, she persuasively contends, is that they "all assume a justified hiddenness, a justified incommensurability": what is "hidden" is God, and what is "incommensurable" is subjective, personal belief with its means of expression" (p. 8). To be sure, the traditional theological "apparatus"--including theodicies, atonement doctrines, myth of original sin, leaps of faith, and so forth--tries "to mitigate the threat of what in a system of benevolent Godhood seems evil but must be called 'good'" (p. 9). But the texts of these three authors work through "a series of incommensurables, . . . interrogat[ing] these strategies of belief and the contradictions they must accommodate: failure as success; innocence as proleptic guilt; self-effacement as self-promotion; imitating the good only to perform the bad" (p. 9).

Divided into six chapters, this interesting study begins with a kind of prolegomenon to reading Hopkins and Rossetti as "aesthetic writers" in Kierkegaard's sense (chap. 1), and then proceeds through general discussions of such

prominent Kierkegaardian themes in their poetry as anxiety (chap. 2) and "self-effacement" à la the silent Abraham of Fear and Trembling (chap. 3). These discussions are followed by extended analyses, on the basis of Kierkegaard's Repetition, of certain problematics and complexities of belief expressed in Hopkins's "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and "The Loss of Eurydice" (chap. 4.) and in Rossetti's Later Life and Monna Innominata (chap. 5). The final chapter then proffers a compelling argument for "the peculiar modernity of Kierkegaard, Hopkins, and Rossetti, not in spite of the religiosity of their work, but because of it" (p. 157--an argument that would seem to support the even more recent challenge issued by Ronald L. Hall to those who have sought to adapt Kierkegaard as a postmodernist avant la lettre.<sup>2</sup>

Given the specialized interest of this Newsletter's readers, it should be emphasized here that Finn's book attempts not so much to set Kierkegaard alongside Rossetti and Hopkins for comparative analysis, as to employ Kierkegaard's writings as media through which to interpret poems by the other two--much as the earlier-mentioned book by Clark employs Kierkegaard's works as media through which to read Blake. Thus, for example, the dramatic monologues and apostrophes by Hopkins and Rossetti are "read within the context of," or in "an analytical framework" furnished by, The Concept of Anxiety (pp. 11, 20). Fear and Trembling is viewed as "a metatext" for these two poets' "symbiotic pairing" (p. 57). Repetition is seen as "clarify[ing] the underlying paradoxes" in both poets' works (p. 101; cf. 99, 131, 136-37). And, of Rossetti's "The Convent Threshold" and Hopkins' "A Voice from the World," it is contended that they "create and therefore converge around a Kierkegaardian chasm," a reference to their "becoming two mutually exclusive choices that are resistant to mediation" (p. 156). So the import of this study for Kierkegaardians lies not in what it has to say about Kierkegaard per se, but in how it employs his oeuvre, particularly his "aesthetical" writings, as a lens through which to read two poets whose spirits seem somewhat akin to his.

Taken as a Kierkegaardian reading of Rossetti and Hopkins, this is an insightful, critically sound book, whose author's judgment strikes me as questionable only on several specific points. First, "The Everlasting No" in Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, a text which Finn relates to Rossetti's "An Old-World Thicket," does not signify "no to Satan," as she parenthetically suggests (p. 80, emphasis mine). Rather, as an allusion to the self-description of Goethe's Mephistopheles (Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint), "The Everlasting No" encapsulates the



hopelessness, unbelief, denial, and despair of Satan-attitudes that constitute the transitional spiritual-philosophical stage of negation through which Sartor's protagonist, Professor Teufelsdröckh (like Carlyle himself), had to pass before proceeding through "The Centre of Indifference" to "The Everlasting Yea."

Second, with regard to William Rossetti's characterization of his sister's "habits of composing" as "eminently of the spontaneous kind," it seems hermeneutically heavy-handed of Finn to impose her own late-twentieth-century standard of judgment upon that depiction, when she calls it "damaging . . . because it implies a lack of seriousness, as if [Rossetti] were a scribbling versifier" (p. 131). Taken, as it should be, in the context of nineteenth-century Romantic poetics, William's characterization bears no such negative implication. On the contrary, in summing up Christina's writing as "spontaneous," he was appealing to what had been one of the Romantics' foremost, positive aesthetic criteria. Undoubtedly he had in mind Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," the same definition which (as M. H. Abrams has pointed out) inspired John Stuart Mill to distinguish "two kinds" of poet: those who are poets "by nature," and those who are, "by culture." In Mill's view the former are the "higher" kind, as they supposedly produce their work out of spontaneous feeling, while the latter, "lower" kind, write with a distinct conscious aim.

In contending that Rossetti's poems are "not spontaneous, but obsessive," Finn is able to link them with the titular concept of Kierkegaard's Repetition, since, in her words, "obsession yields repetition" (p. 131). However, had she not dismissed outright William Rossetti's comment on his sister, Finn might have broached yet another fascinating homology: the one between the Romantics' aesthetic ideal of spontaneity, and the existential immediacy of the Kierkegaardian aesthete.

Finally, I shall lodge a stylistic complaint. Although, for the most part, this book is written in lucid prose, its author in some instances lapses into jargon that verges precariously upon mumbo jumbo--e.g., "Contentio enables an understanding of the poem as using, exploring, and imaginatively rendering 'initial bifurcation' ([J. Hillis] Miller's phrase) not to elide the gaps between the dualities, dichotomies, and chasms present in the poem, but to announce their existence . . ." (p. 120). She also has a habit of using neuter pronouns to refer to personal nouns--e.g., "the speaker [in a poem by Rossetti] identifies itself" (p. 78); "the speaker [in a poem by Hopkins] makes itself into a spectacle" (p. 92); "the [single] individual becomes incommunicado, its story removed from the realm of publice juris" (p. 81). Authors today, notwithstanding their justified and applaudable quest for "gender neutrality" in verbal expression, should avoid referring to human persons--even such hypothetical persons as a poet's "speaker" or Kierkegaard's "single individual"--as "its." No appeal to Martin Buber or George Orwell should be necessary to perceive the inherent dangers of casting persons, through language, as "its."

#### Notes

1. Lorraine Clark, Blake, Kierkegaard, and the Spectre of Dialectic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
2. See Ronald L. Hall, Word and Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or: A One-Volume Abridgment in a New Translation, edited by Steven L. Ross, translated by George L. Stengren (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), 227 pp. Reviewed by David Cain, Mary Washington College.

I know. The point is tiresomely made, though perhaps not as often as it is ignored. "Søren Kierkegaard" did not write Either/Or, in spite of what most of Copenhagen may have guessed already in 1843. The name must be there, especially in a volume aimed at introducing Kierkegaard *via* Either/Or to persons who might be put off by the massive whole; but why not in parentheses, accompanied by "Victor Eremita, editor" (after that, complications multiply)? The "whole" in the third Danish edition is 777 pages (this beats "666"), including notes. Compare this with the 837 pages of the Swensons-Lowrie-Johnson English translation (Anchor Books, 2 vols., 1959) or the 799 pages (subtracting "Supplement" pages) of the Hongs' translation (Kierkegaard's Writings, vols. III-IV, 1987). To produce an inviting little volume roughly one-fourth the size of the Danish (and English is wordier) is an act of courage. Is it also desecration?

This question is foreign to neither Steven Ross nor George Stengren. In his perceptive "Editor's Introduction," which moves from helpful orientation to subtle interpretation, Ross speaks to the matter of abridgment (p. xvii); and Stengren begins his "Translator's Foreword" with a confession of reluctance to invest precisely in abridgment, not least of a work regarding which Kierkegaard proclaims that one must ". . . read it at all" (p. xix).

Granted the price paid is priceless, let us attend to what is here rather than to what is not; though I would have suffered a few more pages to register that knotty, repelling-alluring bleep of the Jylland pastor's sermon in the anything-but-concluding "Ultimatum." (Ross' selections do indicate something of the weight of the religious in the judge's articulation of the ethical.) Gains are a comfortable volume physically and an enticement, in no way a replacement, an impression in well-chosen flashes assembled and spliced with care and imagination. Another gain surprises: proximity of passages suggests resonances and relationships sometimes hidden in the dense forest of the full text but now standing forth in this more manageable copse. We are reminded of how much of the authorship ("authorships") is signaled in Either/Or and are impressed by the remarkable, unifying profusion of plays on "external"/"internal."

George Stengren is a gifted translator. He establishes a voice of fidelity and economy—even voices, A and B—and draws the reader in with a fondness for controlled alliteration. For example, his judge writes to A: ". . . one is struck by the calculating cleverness which permeates everything you do in the short time when you are moved by passion" (p. 192). Stengren's lines bear reading aloud, a consideration Kierkegaard would have appreciated. Compare:

. . . *hør Lidenskabens tøilesløse Begjæring, hør Elskovens Susen, hør Fristelsens Hvisken, hør Fortørelsens Hvirvel, hør Øieblikkets Stilhed--hør, hør, hør* Mozarts Don Juan.

. . . hear the unbridled demands of passion, hear the sighing of love, hear the whisper of temptation, hear the whirlpool of seduction, hear the stillness of the moment—hear, hear, hear Mozart's *Don Juan!* . . . (Swensons-Johnson)

Hear the unrestrained craving of passion, hear the sighing of erotic love, hear the whisper of temptation, hear the vortex of seduction, hear the stillness of the moment—hear, hear, hear Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. (Hongs)

. . . hear the dissolute demand of passion, hear the sigh of love, hear the whisper of temptation, hear the maelstrom of seduction, hear the tranquillity of the moment—hear, hear, hear Mozart's *Don Juan!* . . . (Stengren, p. 49)

Stengren's notes are sparing and useful, evidencing knowledge of Latin and Copenhagen as well as of Danish.

"To choose or not to choose: that is the question"—not whether to choose either the aesthetic or the ethical. Asymmetry reigns. The "choice" of the aesthetic is and is not choosing. There is choosing and choosing. Either/Or is Either/Ors; for the aesthetic construal of either/or is unlike that of the ethical. We have this volume to thank for enlivening such themes and thoughts. On its own terms and beyond them, it succeeds.

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