

Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter



A Publication of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library

St. Olaf College

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NEWS YOU SHOULD NOTE

Evans Announces New Editor

I wish to announce that this will be the last issue of the Kierkegaard Newsletter that I will edit. I assumed the editorship in the fall of 1989, and so I have now had this responsibility for six years. It is time for someone else to take over. I have enjoyed the chance to serve the community of Kierkegaard lovers and scholars (a group with much overlap), and look forward to continuing to contribute to the Newsletter.

For those who may not be familiar with the history of the Newsletter, it was begun by Robert Perkins, now of Stetson University, who has done a great deal for Kierkegaard studies in the last twenty years. Robert then passed on the responsibility to Lou Pojman, who performed capably for several years, and greatly expanded the Newsletter by including more articles and reviews. After consulting with Perkins, Pojman passed the responsibility to me.

As this issue explains in another place, Gordon Marino has been appointed to replace me at St. Olaf, as Curator of the Hong Kierkegaard Library, and also as teacher of philosophy. Since I have full confidence in Gordon, and also wish the Newsletter to remain at St. Olaf, I asked Gordon if he would be willing to serve as editor, and I am happy to announce that he has agreed. Thanks again for the help of many readers: for the reviews and articles, for monetary contributions, and for your general interest and support. I urge you to continue this support as Gordon Marino assumes this responsibility.

During this transition period, news items should be sent directly to Dee Bolton, Philosophy Dept., St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN 55057. Reviews and articles should continue to be sent to me until the end of the summer, when Marino will formally begin his responsibilities at St. Olaf. I will of course forward items received to him.

St. Olaf Announces New Curator

St. Olaf College is pleased to announce that Dr. Gordon Marino has been appointed Curator of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library, effective September 1, 1995. Marino has had visiting positions at University of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania, Yale Divinity School, Harvard University, and is currently teaching at Virginia Military Institute. He has written a forthcoming book, Kierkegaard's Anthropology (Marquette University Press) and is co-editor (with A. Hannay) of the forthcoming Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard. He has also published over twenty articles in various journals (such as Inquiry, International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, and Soundings) and magazines (such as The Atlantic Monthly and Commonweal). In addition to Curator, he has been appointed Associate Professor of Philosophy of Philosophy. Marino replaces Steve Evans, who accepted a chair at Calvin College after serving as Curator for a decade. For the past two years, Cindy Lund has ably served as Acting Curator, and she will continue in her role as Librarian. We welcome Gordon Marino to his new position and we welcome him and his family--wife, Susan, and sons Paul and Phillip--to the St. Olaf and Northfield communities.

Ed Langerak, Professor of Philosophy and Chair of Search Committee

KIERKEGAARD SOCIETY NEWS

The Kierkegaard Society expanded its membership by nearly fifty in the past year and currently numbers nearly 140. A good deal of this increase can be credited to the fine brochure produced under the presidency of Wanda Warren Berry, which was used in a mailing.

New officers of the Society are as follows:

President:	Sylvia Walsh 225 South Boundary Avenue DeLand, FL 32720	AAR Representative:	David Gouwens Brite Divinity School Box 32923 Texas Christian University Fort Worth, TX 76129
President-Elect:	David Cain Dept. of Classics, Philosophy, and Religion Mary Washington College Fredericksburg, VA 22401	APA Representative:	Vanessa Rumble Philosophy Department Boston College Chestnut Hill, MA 02167-3806
Secretary-Treasurer:	William Cahoy School of Theology St. John's University Collegeville, MN 56301 email BCAHOY@CSBSJU.EDU		

Make a particular note of the new Secretary-Treasurer. Anyone wishing to join the Society should send William Cahoy \$5 dues.

APA Central Division Kierkegaard Society Meeting

The Kierkegaard Society meeting at the Central Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association will be on Friday, April 28, 7:00-9:30 p.m. at the Chicago Palmer House Hilton, Private Dining Room #9. The session will be chaired by Charles Creegan, and there will be three presenters:

David W. Aiken, Gordon College, "Kierkegaard's 'Three Stages': A Pilgrim's Regress?"
George B. Connell, Concordia College, "Caputo on Heidegger's Nazism: The Kierkegaard Connection."
Kelly J. Donovan, Boston College, "Philosophical Fragments: A Secondary Text of Admission."

Call for Papers for Society Meetings at APA Divisions

The Kierkegaard Society plans to meet in conjunction with the Eastern and Pacific Division meetings during the 1995-96 school year. Papers for the Pacific Division (March 1996) should be received by August 1, 1995. Papers for the Eastern Division (December 1995) are due April 15, 1995. [Editor's insertion; I am sorry that this issue did not appear sooner so as to enable readers to take advantage of this date.] Papers should have a reading time of 25-30 minutes and should be sent to Vanessa Rumble, Philosophy Department, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167. In light of the upcoming volumes of the International Kierkegaard Commentary, papers on philosophical aspects of the following texts are especially welcome: Stages on Life's Way, The Concept of Irony, and Concluding Unscientific Postscript.

A meeting of the Kierkegaard Society in conjunction with the Central Division of the APA in 1996 is under consideration. Papers should be received by August 1, 1995. Please indicate whether the submission might be considered for either the Central or the Pacific Division meetings.

Søren Kierkegaard Society and AAR Philosophy of Religion and Theology

The Søren Kierkegaard Society and the AAR Philosophy of Religion and Theology groups held a joint session at the Southwest Commission on Religions Studies program on March 11, 1995, in Dallas, Texas, on the theme "Søren Kierkegaard and Theology." Papers: George Khushf, Baylor College of Medicine, "How the Sign of Contradiction Overcomes Despair: Reflections on Christian Healing"; Michael Jenkins, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, "Dancing Lightly in Service to God: Kierkegaard's Prophetic Vocation." Respondent: Randy Hatchett, Houston Baptist University."

Special APA Symposium on Concluding Unscientific Postscript

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the publication of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript, the American Philosophical Association will sponsor a special symposium at the 1995 Eastern Division meeting in New York, December 28-30. The speakers at this Symposium will be C. Stephen Evans, Sylvia Walsh, and Merold Westphal.

Kierkegaard Days in Copenhagen, May 5-8, 1996

This special event will include a conference on "The Meaning of Meaning It" dealing with Kierkegaard-inspired work on two topics related to the human self: (1) as ethical political person after the end of the cold war, and (2) as "subject" in light of recent hermeneutical-literary theory. The Kierkegaard Days will also include tours, theater, exhibits, and other events. For further information, contact Bruce Kimmse, Acting Director of the Kierkegaard Library, Købmagergade 44-46, 1750 Copenhagen K.

Tri-Regional Meeting AAR/SBL

By the time this issue is distributed, a special meeting on the theme "Jests, Tricksters, Wit, Jest, Humor in the Authorship of Søren Kierkegaard" will have been held in conjunction with the Tri-Regional Meeting of the AAR/SBL, Eastern-International, Midatlantic, and New England Regions. The meeting was scheduled for March 30, 31 and April 1 in Boston. Vanessa Rumble was scheduled to read a paper on "A Midsummer Night's Masquerade: Humor as Religious Incognito in Kierkegaard's Postscript." Also, Abraham Khan was speaking on "Kierkegaard and Jest: Changing Emphases and Preoccupations." Also scheduled was a roundtable discussion on "Kierkegaard as Trickster and Jester" with Wanda Warren Berry and Guy V. Martin as co-chairs.

Kierkegaard, Religion, and Culture AAR Announcement

The Kierkegaard, Religion, and Culture Group will have two sessions at the 1995 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, which will be held in Philadelphia near the weekend of November 19. One session will be on "Communication: Indirection and Misdirection." The second will be on "'Purity of Heart' in Context." These sessions will be arranged by David Gouwen of Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX 76129.

Jessica Lange's Kierkegaard Quote

On a lighter note, readers will be interested to know that actress Jessica Lange keeps a quote from Kierkegaard on her refrigerator. The quote, from the Journals and Papers, (actually from a letter of Kierkegaard) is in her home in Virginia, and this interesting fact is revealed in a long article about Lange in the March 1995 issue of Vanity Fair. The editor does not normally read Vanity Fair, incidentally, but found out about this when the fact-checker for that magazine called him to ask if the quote really was from Kierkegaard and where it could be located. (It took about five minutes to find.) The quote, as given in the magazine, is as follows:

Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it. . . But by sitting still, and the more one sits still, the closer one comes to feeling ill. . . If one just keeps on walking everything will be all right.

INTERNATIONAL KIERKEGAARD COMMENTARY NEWS

As previously announced in this Newsletter, we shall coordinate the sesquicentennial of Postscript with the publication of the International Kierkegaard Commentary. The call for papers has brought forth a plethora of correspondence from prospective authors. If you are interested in making a contribution to this volume you should write the editor at once in order to discuss the remaining list of "must articles." Articles on other subjects will be considered.

Post Postscript volumes.

Following work on Postscript we shall return to the regular sequence The Concept of Irony and Stages on Life's Way in that order. (The "regular sequence" follows the order of the appearance of the volumes from Princeton University Press.) We know that our regular contributors are thinking about these volumes, for an article was received for consideration for inclusion in the Stages volume a few weeks ago. We invite persons who have not previously contributed to consider offering a study.

Either/Or and Early Polemical Writings.

A few persons are working on revisions of articles for the volumes on Either/Or. There has also been an inordinate amount of difficulty with the diskettes and the turn-over from one computer language to WP5.1. It is still possible to send an article for Early Polemical Writings, for the collection has not yet gone to the readers, alas. Any prospective author needs to CALL the editor.

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KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS NEWS

Works of Love will be published in June.

INTERNET BULLETIN BOARD

The Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf announces that in addition to sponsoring the Kierkegaard list (bulletin board) on the Internet, it can now receive scholarly articles for request by members of the list. Please notify Cynthia Lund at lundc@stolaf.edu if you wish to forward an article. The article should be sent to her email address. It will then be put into a special file for access through Gopher by list members at their request. The accepted rules of copyright apply to all materials distributed in this way. This procedure also prevents list members from receiving lengthy unwanted postings of articles. Special thanks to Charles Creegan for submitting the first article, "Kierkegaard's Ecclesiology," and assisting us with developing this method of sharing scholarly work."

REVIEWS

Sylvia Walsh, Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) xiv and 294 pages. \$39.50. Reviewed by George Connell, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN.

More than twenty years have now passed since Louis Mackey made Kierkegaard's self-description as "a kind of poet" the basis of his readings of Kierkegaard's texts. The lasting significance of that book is due not only to Mackey's sensitive and insightful readings, but also to the profound rightness of his insistence that we acknowledge and respect the "poetic" character of those texts. But what does such acknowledgement and respect involve? Many who agree with Mackey that attention to the literary character of Kierkegaard's texts is a must nonetheless disagree with his radical inference

that "Kierkegaard is not, in the usual acceptance of the words, a philosopher or theologian,"(ix) and that "whatever philosophy or theology there is in Kierkegaard is sacramentally transmitted 'in, with and under' the poetry."(xi) Since the publication of Mackey's book, many students of Kierkegaard have joined this issue. But Sylvia Walsh's Living Poetically: Kierkegaard's Existential Aesthetics is unrivaled in the scope, detail, and clarity of its reconstruction of Kierkegaard's understanding of, hopes for, and concerns about the

poetic or, more broadly, the aesthetic dimensions of human life.

The task Walsh takes on is formidable. First, the term "aesthetic" is notoriously equivocal in Kierkegaard. It designates, in line with contemporary usage, theoretical and critical approaches to art. Thus, Walsh attends to Kierkegaard's and his pseudonyms' ventures into art theory and criticism. But "aesthetic" also designates for Kierkegaard a mode of existence, so Walsh has to engage the issue of Kierkegaard's theory of the stages. It further designates the immediate, sensuous dimension of human existence. Accordingly, Walsh considers Kierkegaard's philosophical anthropology as the theoretical background to both his theory of the stages and of art. To complicate matters further, Kierkegaard refers to his pseudonymous writings generally as his "aesthetic" writings, so the term gets caught up in Kierkegaard's theories of communication. When one adds to the problem of equivocality the difficulties of pseudonymity and the development of Kierkegaard's views over time, one faces a horrifically tangled interpretive knot. That is no doubt why previous engagements with these issues have tended to separate out one strand or another. One interpreter treats the aesthetic stage, another Kierkegaard's theories of art, another his anthropology. But Walsh achieves the remarkable feat of showing how everything hangs together. In doing so, she not only demonstrates the profound coherence of Kierkegaard's thought but also shows that its fundamental vision, its guiding ideas and metaphors, are drawn from the world of art. But while interpreters who emphasize the artistic dimension tend to follow Mackey in denying that Kierkegaard is a positive philosopher or theologian and instead read Kierkegaard as a sort of proto-deconstructionist, Walsh not only differentiates Kierkegaard's "existential aesthetics" from various postmodernisms but argues that these contemporary tendencies closely resemble the very romantic irony and aestheticism against which Kierkegaard developed his views.

While Walsh saves her explicit polemic against the postmodernists for the chapter-length epilogue, that polemic is implicit from the start. In contrast to those who stress discontinuity and internal fracture, Walsh identifies a fundamental concern and conviction as effective in the earliest period of Kierkegaard's authorship and then spends the book showing how that fundamental concern and conviction develops but remains as the unifying focus of the whole authorship. The concern, as the title suggests, is how to "live poetically." This concern, as Walsh notes, is one Kierkegaard shares with the romantics. But where the romantics pursue this goal

fantastically, irresponsibly, and self-defeatingly, Kierkegaard devotes his authorship to showing that living poetically involves passionate personal engagement with the task of ethico-religious selfhood.

After an introductory chapter, Walsh refreshingly and surprisingly finds the initial expression of the guiding theme of Kierkegaard's whole authorship in that most overlooked and even dismissed of Kierkegaard's work, From the Papers of One Still Living. In this little work criticizing a novel by Hans Christian Andersen, Walsh finds Kierkegaard transposing aesthetic concepts into an existential key, thus raising the issue of living poetically. Initially, he criticizes in Andersen specifically and the age generally a negative attitude toward actuality. In this, Walsh finds a clear statement of Kierkegaard's aversion to the romantic mode of living poetically. But Walsh sees a positive agenda in this book as well. She carefully reconstructs Kierkegaard's argument that an appropriate life-view and life-development on the part of the author are preconditions of aesthetic production. On the basis of this argument, Kierkegaard suggests an alternative to the romantic ideal of living poetically: an existential ideal in which one's very being is the medium of aesthetic expression. Walsh's next chapter traces the two rival visions of living poetically through The Concept of Irony. She then devotes two chapters to Either/Or, showing that the romantic vision of living poetically dominates Volume One and the genuinely Kierkegaardian vision Volume Two. Walsh does not totally elide the differences between Judge William and Kierkegaard. Nor does she hide her distaste for his evident sexism. But she does argue convincingly that Judge William's belief that personal existence is the ultimate artistic medium is Kierkegaard's own. She follows with a chapter broadening the theme of living poetically into the religious as it is explored in Repetition, Fear and Trembling, Philosophical Fragments, and The Concept of Anxiety.

The chapters discussed thus far (2-5), represent the first part of Walsh's study, although they aren't set apart explicitly in the table of contents in that way. In her introductory chapter, however, she characterizes these chapters as the initial, positive treatment of living poetically. "The notion of living poetically thus serves as the basic idea upon which a fundamentally positive view of the poetic in an ethical-religious and existential context is initially sketched and developed in the early literature in contrast to German romanticism."¹⁶ Chapter 6 represents a counter-vision, exploring the negative aspects of Kierkegaard's vision of art, that are especially prominent in works published between 1845 and 1848. In these works, "Kierkegaard focuses on the dangers and limitations of poetry or the creative imagination and urges

a movement away from a poetic relation to actuality and toward an ethical-religious one.”(17) Walsh substantiates this generalization in a tour de force performance of taxonomy and crisp, concise summary. Focusing on the four large and frequently meandering books from this period in the authorship (Stages, Postscript, Works of Love, Practice in Christianity), she distills Kierkegaard's concerns about the aesthetic down into nine clearly stated propositions. Unquestionably, many readers will be concerned about such an approach, disregarding as it does the pseudonymity of the works and the placement of individual passages in a larger context. Walsh herself pays close attention to these factors in other parts of her book. But the fecundity of Walsh's approach here convinces me of its validity. Her statement and concise discussion of the nine points of concern Kierkegaard has with the aesthetic focuses his rather diffuse statements of those concerns and thus prepares the way for a fruitful debate over whether and to what extent his concerns are justified.

To complete a quasi-Hegelian triadic structure, Walsh then devotes Chapters 7 and 8 to a synthesis of the positive and negative. “While recognizing that poetry can become a substitute for actuality and thus antithetical to existential striving, Kierkegaard, in the third and final phase, comprising journals and a number of specifically religious writings from 1849 to 1852, nevertheless views imagination and possibility as necessary for poetically presenting and striving toward a spiritual form of existence through imitation of Christ.”(17) In Chapter 7, Walsh argues convincingly that the subjective thinker of the Postscript is an artist whose medium is existence. “As thinking individuals, we are thus challenged by Climacus to don the artist's frock, take up our palettes and sketch our own self-portraits in existence, reproducing in ourselves the human ideals toward which we strive.”(209) Chapter 8 turns to Kierkegaard's last, most decisively Christian writings. There, Walsh points out Kierkegaard's self-identification as a “Christian poet and thinker,” his understanding of imagination as an integral aspect of all forms of human existence but Christian existence above all, and even the suggestion that “God is like a poet.” (JP,2:1445).

Confining our attention for the moment to Chapters 1-8, Living Poetically is clearly a major contribution at several different levels to Kierkegaard studies. It is at once the most complete monograph on Kierkegaard's understanding of the aesthetic (in all its varied uses) and an ambitious, plausible attempt to see Kierkegaard's thought and writings as a coherent, developing whole. It offers, in some of its chapters (especially those on the early writings), so detailed a commentary as to qualify as

a useful aid to beginning readers of Kierkegaard while many of its finer points will only be appreciated by those already familiar with his writings. It confines its main text to direct discussion of the primary texts while the footnotes demonstrate a thorough command of the secondary literature in all the major languages of Kierkegaard studies.

But another quite significant dimension of this book only becomes explicit when we consider Walsh's Prologue and Epilogue. There she states that beyond simply making better sense of Kierkegaard's thought and writings, she is out to “reclaim Kierkegaard as a poetic thinker and writer from those who interpret him as an ironic practitioner of an aestheticism devoid of and detached from the ethical-religious...”(4) Walsh goes a step beyond challenging such readings of Kierkegaard as a proto-deconstructionist. In her epilogue, she shows that Kierkegaard's arguments against romantic aestheticism are quite apt when applied to contemporary deconstructive generally and French feminism specifically. I hope and anticipate that Walsh's epilogue will provoke vigorous rejoinders from those inclined to ally Kierkegaard with French postmodernism. But however that debate proceeds, Walsh deserves much credit for engaging her interpretive adversaries on their own turf: the aesthetic and poetic, the distinctively literary and artistic aspects of Kierkegaard's thought and writings.

Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library
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