

Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter



A Publication of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library

St. Olaf College

Northfield, Minnesota

CONTENTS

	Page
NEWS AND NOTICES	2
"News from Copenhagen" M. G. Plety	4
REVIEWS	
Søren Kierkegaard, <i>Prières et Fragments sur la Prière (Extraits du Journal)</i> . Traduit du danois par P[aul] H[enri] Tisseau <i>The Prayers of Kierkegaard, Edited with a New Interpretation of his Life and Thought</i> by Perry D. LeFevre <i>Søren Kierkegaard: The Mystique of Prayer and Prayer. Prayers of Kierkegaard never before translated in English</i> Reviewed by Donald Fox, Pastor, United Church of Christ, LaCrosse, Wisconsin	6
David Law, <i>Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian</i> Reviewed by David Kangas, Yale University	9

Editor: Gordon Marino
Associate Editor: John D. Poling
Assistant Editor: Cynthia Lund

NUMBER 33
APRIL 1996

NEWS YOU SHOULD NOTE

NEWS FROM THE HONG KIERKEGAARD LIBRARY

DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

Information was included in the November issue of the Newsletter concerning the nature and purpose of the collection.

PROGRAMS

The Summer Scholars Fellowship Program was also outlined in the last issue. In summer 1996, we will have twelve scholars coming to the Library. The application deadline for summer 1997 is March 1997. For further information, please contact Gordon Marino.

SPECIAL EVENT

A dedication of the new quarters of the Library will take place on May 23. The dedication also marks twenty years since the Hong's gift of the Library to St. Olaf College. A Luncheon followed by greetings from visiting dignitaries, including the Danish ambassador to the United States, will take place at 12:00 noon in the Kings Room at St. Olaf College. The dedication ceremony itself will take place in the Library at 2:00 followed by a reception. Anyone interested in attending either or both events should contact Cynthia Lund as soon as possible. Telephone:507-646-3846. Email: lundc@stolaf.edu.

FRIENDS OF THE KIERKEGAARD LIBRARY

A meeting of the Friends will take place at 10:30 AM in the Manitou Room at the St. Olaf Center on May 23 preceding the dedication special event. All are welcome. Anyone who needs further information should contact Gordon Marino.

A core group of the Friends met on January 16, 1996 in the Kierkegaard Library. Thanks to the efforts of George Aker, Jim Enestvedt, and Michael Daugherty the relations between the Friends and St. Olaf College have been formalized.

The Friends of the Kierkegaard Library exists to "further and support the educational purposes of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library" and "to promote the interests of the Library." Projects of the Friends include raising funds to support visiting scholars, and for book acquisitions and preservation.

VISITORS

Visitors to the Library during the last five months included President Mark Edwards of St. Olaf College; Professor Alastair Hannay from the University of Oslo; Marta and Manuel Gamper from Saint Cugat near Barcelona; Wu Dessiang from East China Normal University; Keiji Amori from Tokyo; Professor Arthur Krentz from Luther College, University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada; Professor George Key from the University of Maryland; Professor David Hopper and his Kierkegaard class from Macalester College in St. Paul; Dale Patrick and his class from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, as well as a number of Carleton and St. Olaf students using the Library for senior projects and term papers. David Kangas, omitted from the last issue of the newsletter, spent several weeks here as a Summer Fellow in 1995. He is the recent recipient of an American-Scandinavian Foundation grant for study in Denmark.

NEW ACQUISITIONS

Gifts to the Library were received from Kinya Masugata; Gordon Marino; Howard and Edna Hong; Julia Watkin; Louis Pojman; and Donald Fox. Aage Jorgensen made a number of titles available by purchase. Howard Hong located over 200 new titles at auctions in Copenhagen in the fall. Included in these were titles by members of the Fibiger family; a collection on Kai Munk; works by Hauch, Madsen, Winther, Hostrup, and Paludan-Miller. Holdings were increased in the Related Thinkers section of primary works by Levinas, Girard, Derrida, and Adorno. New titles by David Gouwens, Sophia Scopotea, Steven Emmanuel, Otto Bertelsen, and Orla Villakjaer were also added.

THE CATALOG

The Library has completed the final step of our NEH grant-funded project for initial cataloging of the original collection thanks to the efforts of Susanne Nevin, our current cataloger. (Cataloging of the original collection was done by Chrisma Dittmann, Beverly Pierce, and Francesca Lane Rasmus.) A microfiche edition of the catalog of the Hong Kierkegaard Library is available for \$10. A list of still uncataloged new titles will also be sent with the microfiche. Anyone interested in acquiring the microfiche edition of the catalog should contact Cynthia Lund: Telephone: 507-646-3847. FAX: 507-646-3858. Email: lundc@stolaf.edu.

REQUESTED AGAIN

As mentioned in the last issue we welcome rereferences to periodical articles or better yet copies of articles which bear directly or remotely on Kierkegaard's thought. Citations and copies of book reviews are also welcome. We also welcome gifts of relevant books and bibliographic references to book titles which we still lack.

INTERNET INFORMATION

The Library sponsors a Kierkegaard listserv on the Internet. To subscribe, type "subscribe" to kierkegaard-request@stolaf.edu. For additional information on the list and its background, please see Charles Creegan's article in the last issue of the Newsletter. Also see information about the pre-print service available related to the Kierkegaard Internet list. Contact Cynthia Lund for further information: email lundc@stolaf.edu.

FUTURE PLANS

An international academic conference will be sponsored by the Hong Kierkegaard Library in June of 1997. Information will be forthcoming from Gordon Marino.

Cynthia Wales Lund

PLEASE NOTE

Dr. Paul L. Holmer was recently honored during the AAR/SBL Regional Conference at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, on April 12-13. A banquet on Friday evening was followed on Saturday morning by a featured plenary session "Paul Holmer and Theology," organized by William J. Cahoy at St. John's University. Panelists Stanley Hauerwas, George Lindbeck, and Don Saliers remarked on the place of Dr. Holmer's reflections in their scholarship, which was followed by a response by Dr. Holmer. Saturday afternoon Dr. Holmer was the respondent to panelists William Cahoy, Timothy Polk, Lee Barrett, Andrew Burgess and David Gouwens, in a disciplinary seminar entitled "Kierkegaard and Theology."

Formerly a professor at the University of Minnesota, and, until his retirement in 1988, Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale Divinity School, Dr. Holmer's twin concerns with philosophical issues in theology and the life of Christian faith provided many generations of clergy, laypeople, and scholars with a formidable reflective orientation. Special thanks for the organization and support of this event are due William Cahoy and St. John's University, Paul Sponheim and Luther Seminary, the Lutheran Brotherhood, and the colleagues and former students who gathered in honor of Professor Holmer's scholarship, stewardship and friendship.

John D. Poling

INTERNATIONAL KIERKEGAARD COMMENTARY NEWS

International Kierkegaard Commentary: Early Polemical Writings

While the editing of International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript continues, articles on Kierkegaard's Early Polemical Writings are still being sought. There will be some new authors in this volume. As with International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages, this volume will be the first collaborative effort to examine this material and will break new ground as well as challenge the "standard interpretation" of various parts of this collection.

Persons interested in submitting an article for this volume should contact the editor ASAP and request a current set of sigla. Since the closing date for articles is fluid, the editor must be able to write all prospective authors when the date is final. Be in touch. Julia Watkin, the translator of the primary texts for Princeton University Press, will serve as Volume Consultant.

International Kierkegaard Commentary:
Stages on Life's Way

Due date for submissions for this volume: 1 September 1996.

International Kierkegaard Commentary:
The Concept of Irony

Due date for submissions for this volume: 15 March 1997

Persons interested in submitting articles for these volumes should write the editor and request a current set of sigla and conventions. (Robert L. Perkins, Editor, International Kierkegaard Commentary, Stetson University, Philosophy Department, campus Box 8250, DeLand, FL 32720-3756; FAX: 904 822-8825; e-mail: Perkins@suvax1.stetson.edu)

KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS NEWS

The next two KW volumes, Christian Discourses and Without Authority, are scheduled for 1996.

News from Copenhagen by M. G. Piety

There has been a great deal going on in Copenhagen in the past few months. Peter Thielst's introduction to Kierkegaard, Livet forstås baglæns, men må leves forlæns (Life is understood backwards, but must be lived forwards) was, despite a lukewarm reception by critics and scholars, such a tremendous popular success that he was encouraged to proceed with another Kierkegaard project he has had in mind for some time: a modernized version of excerpts from a selection of Kierkegaard's texts.

The Danish language has changed dramatically since the period in which Kierkegaard wrote, with the result that Danes have long complained that Kierkegaard is difficult to read. The spelling of many words has changed and many other words and expressions have either entirely dropped out of the language or become substantially altered in meaning. (An example of the latter is the expression 'vistnok,' which in Kierkegaard's day meant 'certainly,' but which in contemporary Danish means 'perhaps.')

The modernized version of Kierkegaard is entitled Lykkens dør går udad - Søren Kierkegaards tekster på nudansk (The door of happiness opens outwards: Søren

Kierkegaard's texts in contemporary Danish) and is intended for use by the general public. The idea behind the project is sound enough, but the reaction of the critics was swift and overwhelmingly negative. It seems Thielst and the two consultants on the volume took a few too many liberties in the eyes of the critics. They did not restrict themselves to updating the spelling, but inserted what is known in Danish as "grammatical punctuation." Apart from the fact that this does a disservice to Kierkegaard, who prided himself on his mastery of punctuation as a rhetorical device, it can occasionally even alter the meaning of a text.

No one has really had time to read the book yet, but many of Denmark's more talented journalists have already come forward with delightful diatribes against the very idea behind it. My favorite among these is Jørgen Stegelmann's brilliantly witty "Mig og heden" (Me and the Heath), which appeared in Berlingske Tidende, 8.11.95. Stegelmann argues that if Kierkegaard's language needs to be updated in order to make it accessible to contemporary readers, then so does the language of a host of other literary figures from the same period. Stegelmann then offers his suggestion for a modernized version of Steen Steensen Blicher's classic novel of the

Jutland heath Hosekræmmeren (The Hosier). What follows is an hilarious, tongue-in-cheek attempt to make the opening lines of Blicher's classic accessible to people who have never read anything more difficult than a MacDonald's menu.

Stegelmann's editorial is a priceless reminder that, appearances occasionally being to the contrary, Denmark is indeed the land of Kierkegaard and that spirit, of which he was such a shining example, will rise up like Holger Danske to protect Danish culture against the more brutal onslaughts of janteloven. (Unfortunately it did not rise up swiftly enough to prevent the adoption of "I'm not going" as the official slogan of "Copenhagen: Culture Capital of Europe 1996" [see The New York Review of Books, Sept. 21, 1995, p. 27].)

The evolution of the Danish language since the nineteenth century does, however, present a substantial problem for contemporary Kierkegaard scholars. This evolution was thus also an important theme of a translation seminar held at the new Søren Kierkegaard Research Center located on the fourth floor of the Theology Faculty of Copenhagen University (not to be confused with the Department of Søren Kierkegaard Research located on the third floor). This seminar was held from the 3rd to the 5th of November and included presentations by such noted Kierkegaard scholars and translators as Howard and Edna Hong, Alastair Hannay and Sophia Scopotéa.

Johnny Kondrup, the resident philologist at the Kierkegaard Center and consultant on the new "critical edition" of Kierkegaard's collected works (the raison d'être of the Center) gave a very informative presentation on the various Danish-Danish dictionaries crucial to contemporary Kierkegaard scholars. Chief among these of course were Christian Molbech's dictionaries from 1833 and 1859. Mention was also made, however, of Ludvig Meyer's dictionary of foreign words and the extraordinarily helpful, but prohibitively expensive Ordbog Over det Danske Sprog (Dictionary of the Danish Language).

Conspicuously absent, however, was any reference to a Danish-English dictionary which might be of use to Kierkegaard scholars. Most English-speaking Kierkegaard scholars use contemporary Danish to English dictionaries which they then supplement with one of the two Molbech dictionaries. The difficulty with this practice, however, is that, as was noted above, many expressions used in Kierkegaard's time have not actually

dropped out of the language, but have become instead somewhat altered in meaning in contemporary Danish. Many scholars do not resort to Molbech unless they cannot find the word in question in a contemporary Danish to English dictionary. This means, of course, that they may be unwittingly led astray concerning the meaning of particular words in Kierkegaard's texts.

Unfortunately, Danish to English dictionaries from the first half of the nineteenth century (or even the second half for that matter) are virtually impossible to obtain and the few that do occasionally turn up are often of dubious quality. An exception, however, is J. S. Ferrall and Thorleifur Gudmundsson Repp's excellent A Danish-English Dictionary from 1845. Ferrall and Repp explain in their preface that they have adopted the vocabulary, arrangement and orthography of Molbech. They have also taken Molbech as their authority for the identification of foreign words as such and culled the most essential of these words from Meyer's dictionary and "subjoined them as a supplement."

According to an article in Magasin, one of the many publications of the Royal Library,¹ Ferrall and Repp's dictionary was tremendously important for Danish lexicography. "It represents a break," continues the author,

with the previous tradition, influenced by the eighteenth century, and the introduction of a more modern type of dictionary. It was the first [Danish-English] dictionary that had a solid foundation on which to build, both from the Danish side, in the form of Molbech's dictionary from 1833, and from the English side, as Ferrall was English and Repp was very knowledgeable about English.

"There is an unbroken connection," the passage concludes, "between this dictionary and Gyldendal's contemporary red Danish-English dictionary."

Alastair Hannay informed me that he has a copy of Ferrall and Repp's dictionary and that he has found it very useful. An inexpensive photographic reproduction of this dictionary would be invaluable to scholars whose knowledge of Danish is not so developed as Hannay's. The Royal Library published a reproduction of the auction catalogue made of Kierkegaard's books shortly after he died. I have not yet contacted anyone at the library, but it is my hope that I may be able to interest them in producing a reproduction of Ferrall and Repp's dictionary. I will, of course, keep the Newsletter posted on any developments in this area.

1. This article was graciously sent to me by Johnny Kondrup.

REVIEWS

Søren Kierkegaard, *Prières et Fragments sur la Prière (Extraits du Journal)*. Traduit du danois par P[aul] H[enri] Tisseau. Chez le Traducteur, Bazoges-en-Pareds (Vendée) [France] 1937.

The Prayers of Kierkegaard, Edited with a New Interpretation of his Life and Thought by Perry D. LeFevre, The University of Chicago Press, 1956; Fifth printing of the paperback ed. 1996.

Søren Kierkegaard: The Mystique of Prayer and Prayerer. Prayers of Kierkegaard never before translated in English with special permission of Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen, Denmark. Translated by Lois S. Bowers. Edited by George K. Bowers. CSS Publishing Co. Inc. Lima, Ohio 1994.

Reviewed by Donald Fox

One of the ways to get a handle on the immensity of Kierkegaard's writings is to find a common denominator with his exceptional life. For P.H. Tisseau, Perry LeFevre, and George and Lois Bowers this common denominator has been Kierkegaard's prayers. Prayer is an expression of religious faith that belongs to all believers, be they pastors, professors or lay people. I am then especially grateful to Prof. Marino for inviting me, a pastor, to review the above books. I also owe a word of gratitude to my friend in Paris, Claudine Liéber, who sent me a copy of Tisseau's book which is not easily found in America.

I.

Paul-Henri Tisseau was the foremost French translator of Kierkegaard of his time. He translated over half of Kierkegaard's works. He also did the French translation of Johannes Hohlenberg's 1940 biography. Many of his translations were labors of love which he published himself and sold out of his village home in Bazoges-en-Pareds through a post office box in nearby Nantes.

In 1937 he translated and published a unique collection of Kierkegaard's writings centered around the theme of prayer which he called "Søren Kierkegaard, Prayers and Passages about Prayer (Quoted from his Journal)." This title, however, does not fully describe its contents. The first chapter contains sixty-three prayers painstakingly culled from a thorough reading of the *Papirer*. They are arranged chronologically, starting with the personally revealing devotions which Kierkegaard wrote (and dated) at the time of his "awakening" in 1838-1839.

In the second chapter, Tisseau translated seventy-eight

journal entries in which Kierkegaard reflects personally and theologically on the nature and meaning of prayer. Up to this point, Tisseau's book is like an expanded version of the subject heading "Prayer, Prayers" in the Hongs' translation of *Journals and Papers* (Vol. 3, pages 547-579). The majority of the prayers which Tisseau assembled are included in this section; all but one of them can be found interspersed among the various other subject headings of the first four volumes and in the autobiographical entries of the last two volumes of the Hong edition.

The third chapter of Tisseau's book is what makes it unique for its time. It is a translation of the last of Kierkegaard's *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* which, I think, has the longest title of any: "One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and is Victorious--in that God is Victorious." At that time Tisseau's work was one of the first that included journal entries together with Kierkegaard's published works.

Tisseau's book concludes with an appendix which can also easily be compared to the scholarly collaboration present in the Hongs' edition of the *Papirer*. He adds four pages from Jean Wahl's about-to-be published *Études Kierkegaardiennes* which shed light on the theme of prayer. In miniature this is like the commentaries of Gregor Malantschuk which illuminate all of the subject headings of the English translation of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*.

Two sentences from the Preface to his 1937 translation delineate the boundaries and the purpose of his work: "I am providing here my first collection of passages from

Kierkegaard's *Journals*. I believe that I have thus given a relatively precise portrait of Kierkegaard's devotion life (*piété*) over the last twenty years of his life (1835-1855)" (*Prières*, page v.).

II.

In 1956, Perry D. LeFevre, a professor at Chicago Theological Seminary, published his own collection of *The Prayers of Kierkegaard*. This well-known work has been in print for forty years. In April of this year it will appear in its fifth paperback impression.

The first half of this work contains ninety-nine prayers taken from both the *Papirer* and from Kierkegaard's published works. They are divided into the Trinitarian categories of "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," and the liturgical categories of "The New Year" and "At the Lord's Table."

The second half of the book is LeFevre's short study of Kierkegaard, with constant reference to him as a "man of prayer." LeFevre could say of himself, borrowing words from Tisseau, "I believe I have given a relatively precise portrait of Kierkegaard's devotional life."

There is a direct relation between Tisseau's *Prières* and LeFevre's *Prayers*. In the Preface to his book, LeFevre writes, "I owe a further debt of gratitude to the work of P.H. Tisseau, whose book helped me locate many of the prayers and much of the material on prayer within the Danish *Papirer*" (page vi.).

LeFevre took the translations of Kierkegaard's prayers where he could from the already published sources of Dru's 1938 *Journal* selections and of the Swenson, Lowrie and Steere translations. For forty-eight prayers from the *Papirer* which were not translated by Dru, LeFevre had the assistance of Jens and Harry Thomson, two Danes who were studying at Chicago Theological Seminary in the mid 1950s. Together, they translated these prayers into English for the first time.

In a "Note to the Reader," LeFevre concludes his expectations for his collection with these words: "My earnest hope is that the reader may find in these pages not only an approach to a sensitive and sympathetic understanding of Kierkegaard and his thought but also a rich resource for his own religious life" (page 2).

III.

This past year, George K. Bowers, a Lutheran pastor and his wife, Lois S. Bowers, published through CSS (originally known as "Children's Sermon Services") Publishing Co., a collection of the prayers of Kierkegaard

which they state have "never been translated into English." In fact, there is only one prayer that does not appear in the English edition of Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers* and LeFevre's work contains most of these prayers.

The Bowers' book is not a translation of Kierkegaard's original Danish but of two chapters of Tisseau's 1937 French edition. George Bowers does not hide this linguistic shortcut in his introduction where, in an oblique way of identifying his source, he writes "Chapters 1-10 of this text are the translation from the French Tisseau of *Prières et Fragments Sur la Prière*" (page 24). He then expresses his gratitude "to my wife for her patient and painstaking labors in translating this work." In his Introduction, Bowers seems to consider Tisseau's *Prières* to be an "original" work or "treatise" by Kierkegaard himself (page 24). In the concluding words of his introduction, he absolves his wife of any unfaithfulness to Kierkegaard's own words by writing, "how more grateful I am for how graciously she has tolerated the editor as he prayerfully fashioned the final text!"(page 24).

But the "final text" of the sixty-three prayers that Lois Bowers has translated from the French and that Rev. Bowers "fashioned," while full of enthusiasm, conveys a theology and a style which are not Kierkegaard's. The Bowers should be commended for their effort to place Kierkegaard before a group of readers who may be unfamiliar with Kierkegaard, but I wish they could have been more honest in their presentation. The book is not even a faithful translation of Tisseau's French: the hard parts are omitted, the dialectical parts are either completely missed or superficially paraphrased, and, in almost every single prayer, the editor has thought fit to add phrases and Biblical allusions of his own that have no justification in the original.

I have compared their translations with their sources in Tisseau's book. And I have further compared Tisseau's work with the Hongs' translations of Kierkegaard's prayers. Tisseau was an accurate and sensitive translator. But the Bowers do not always understand his French.

The way the Bowers have treated Kierkegaard is, however, an example of what we clergy have often freely done with the sacred scriptures of our religion. We've often ignored the hard parts of the Bible, glossing over what we do not understand and happily paraphrasing the rest. We too are almost always using a translation, for we are seldom able to refer directly to the original languages of the texts that are sacred to us!

I want to give one example of the Bowers' "translation." This is their version of the first prayer found in Kierkegaard's *Journals* (li A 231, dated July 8, 1838). Here they totally miss the poignant allusion to Kierkegaard's own father. This translation is not the most egregious in terms of padding, but it stands out as an example of how the Bowers put words and thoughts into the mouth of Kierkegaard that were never there.

"As I return thanks to You, O Heavenly Father, for having guarded me here in this life when I needed an earthly father, my further hope and prayer is that You will have more joy in being my Father for the second time than you had this first time around!" (page 29).

Here is the Hongs' translation:

How I thank you, Father in Heaven, for having kept my earthly father present for a time here on earth, where I so greatly needed him; with your help I hope he will have greater joy in being my father the second time than he had the first time. (Hong #5328)

The Bowers do not provide any of the references to Kierkegaard's *Papirer* even though they are all found in Tisseau's translation. If they had, they might have avoided "translating" one of Kierkegaard's prayers in two different versions one after the other. This is from VIII¹ A 380 and is found on pages 47-48 of their book.

There are countless other blunders in the Bowers' book. One of the strangest mistakes occurs when the Bowers translate a footnote of Tisseau as part of Kierkegaard's prayer in X⁴ A 488 (Hong #6794 on pages 57-58 of their book). The footnote is added without a paragraph break, and the whole passage gets convoluted as Tisseau stops speaking in his own voice and quotes Kierkegaard's journal entry that immediately follows the prayer. This journal entry, moreover, contains two marginal notes by Kierkegaard himself! By this time, the Bowers are so mixed up that they leave one proper name reference in the original French.

The second half of the Bowers' book contains forty-two prayers written by Rev. George Bowers himself. They are entitled "Prayers in the Existential Mode." Each of these prayers is introduced with a paragraph that explains the particular thought of Kierkegaard that inspired what follows. Two of these introductions contain the curious affirmation that Kierkegaard was "ordained" (pages 108 and 119).

When he is speaking in his own voice, Rev. Bowers' enthusiasm for Kierkegaard shines through in every prayer. My main complaint with his own prayers is that they show how a pastor can "use" Kierkegaard without ever really letting Kierkegaard get under his skin as a stimulating Socratic gadfly--for like the Athenians, we clergy are "inclined to be lazy."

The Bowers' book can be seen as an unintentional work of self-criticism on the part of us clergy. I have written this review out of the conviction that the relation of us pastors to Kierkegaard and contemporary Kierkegaardian scholarship is deeply inadequate. As clergy, he has so much to teach us; he has so many ways to correct and amend us for the better. But we excuse ourselves from listening carefully to him for we've forgotten that he was speaking principally to us. Or what is perhaps worse than not reading Kierkegaard at all, clergy are prone to "fashion" Kierkegaard so that he fits easily into our own religious sensibilities, like the later "editors" of Shakespeare who "improved" his plays in the Romantic and the Victorian periods. As pastors we will not be healed of our comfortable ignorance until we allow ourselves to be "wounded from behind" by Kierkegaard's own words. And these words need to be truly translated, as they have been by Edna and Howard Hong and others.

Clarifying Kierkegaard's status as a theologian is a knotty but worthy problem. Few thinkers--with the exception, perhaps, of certain negative theologians--have exercised such variegated theological influence. David Law's book, *Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian*, engages the fascinating problematic of Kierkegaard's theological status by arguing for Kierkegaard's inclusion "in the first rank of negative theologians."^[217] The strategy throughout is to expose "those elements of Kierkegaard's thought which emphasize the inadequacy and incapacity of human thought, knowledge and language to grasp the reality of God; the hiddenness and incomprehensibility of god; and the mystery of the Incarnation;"^[1] and then to compare these to negative or 'apophatic' elements in the theological writings of 'classical' negative theologians like Dionysius and Meister Eckhart. Law's aim is thus the modest one of drawing *comparative analogies and disanalogies* between Kierkegaard and negative theologians rather than establishing any deep correlations or dependencies. Indeed, after an interesting and detailed review of Kierkegaard's knowledge of classical negative theologians, Law concludes that only an indirect influence can be established between Kierkegaard and the tradition of negative theology.

In order to establish a comparative baseline for his analysis, Law distills negative theology, not unproblematically, down to "three fundamental apophatic principles": 1) The transcendence of God, 2) The inadequacy of human language and reason, and 3) Union with the divine.^[22-23] Law finds no evidence of any idea of union with the divine in Kierkegaard, which will lead him to conclude that Kierkegaard is "*more apophatic* than the negative theologians." The burden of the book, then, comes down to providing an exhaustive catalogue of the sites of negativity in Kierkegaard's authorship, primarily in the works of Johannes Climacus, which evidence the first two principles.

Law pursues this task with vigor. The reader is soon inundated with negativity and the 'apophatic element' of Kierkegaard's thought. A division is made, however, between those apophatic elements which have an 'anthropological basis,' i.e., a basis in the epistemic and ontological elements of human existence and which "preclude the human being from establishing a direct and immediate relationship with God";^[2] and those which have a 'theological basis,' i.e., those which are based in

the nature of God or the Incarnation.

Dealing with the anthropological basis of Kierkegaard's negativity, Law moves through intricate discussions on dialectics, epistemology, truth, and the 'stages of existence'. In the chapter on dialectic (ch.3) Law emphasizes (a) the negativity of qualitative dialectic, which disavows an identity of thought and being; and (b) the use of pseudonyms and doubly reflected or 'indirect' modes of communication, which disavows an identity of the inward and the outward along with the epistemic criterion of 'results'. The chapters on Kierkegaard's epistemology and conception of truth (chs. 4,5) exploit the negativities--which in this case means simply forms of scepticism--inhabiting the *Postscript's* notion that 'subjectivity is the truth'. With regard to the stages of existence, Law points to two apophatic elements: 1) Kierkegaard's purported severance of faith and knowledge, and 2) Kierkegaard's insistence that the object of faith is paradoxical and thus inaccessible to the understanding. The theological sites of negativity which Law exposes are rooted both in the transcendence of God's being with respect to human being--the famous 'infinite qualitative difference'--and in the dynamics of revelation in relation to that transcendence, i.e., that God "remains hidden before and after his revelation of himself in the Incarnation"^[2].

The final chapter revisits the negative theologians of the first chapter in order to make an explicit comparative analysis. Law concludes:

...it seems clear that there is a strong affinity between Kierkegaard and the negative theologians in their conception of God, treatment of the knowledge of God, Christology, and employment of indirect communication. On this basis, it would seem that, despite differing ontological presuppositions, it is possible to regard Kierkegaard as a negative theologian.^[210]

It is in their differing ontological presuppositions that notes of disanalogy are sounded. Law points out that, from the standpoint of the Neo-platonic ontology forming the context of most negative theologians, Hegel may be closer to negative theology than Kierkegaard. Negative theologians, Law argues, assume a fundamental continuity between God and creation which then grounds mystical union and ultimately a mystical form of gnosis. Kierkegaard interrupts this continuity by his notion of sin and displaced mystical knowledge of faith. In these

ways, Kierkegaard is said to be 'more apophatic than the negative theologians themselves'.[217]

Along the way to these conclusions Law makes some controversial statements. For example: "Kierkegaard not only adopts...a negative position towards the knowledge of God but also attacks the viability of knowledge as a whole." [210] Or further: "...for Kierkegaard, knowledge is the enemy of faith." [214] These bald statements are not meant to imply any criticism of Kierkegaard; they are made straight-faced. Even if such statements can be challenged exegetically and perhaps qualified, they raise questions about the overall thesis of the book: how is the appellation 'negative theologian' supposed to qualify or amend the negativity of Kierkegaard which is so much in evidence? Is Kierkegaard's negativity or apophaticism anything different than simple theological agnosticism? Though Law provides the reader with much evidence of the apophatic motifs in Kierkegaard's thought, his comparative strategy gives the reader no way to interpret this evidence--it remains raw data.

What the reader craves in the final chapter, then, is interpretation rather than comparison. Above all it seems important to mark a clear distinction between agnosticism and apophaticism. Unfortunately, Law often conflates them. Agnosticism is an *epistemological posture* which asserts simply that we can't know much of anything due to the limitations on our capacity to know; but with greater noetic capacities, we *could* know. Apophaticism, however, is an *ontological posture*, not based passively in a noetic defect but actively in the very nature of the person's accomplished relation to the truth.

Apophaticism has reference to paradox; agnosticism to error. Kierkegaard makes the distinction implicitly in a reflection upon paradox as a category: "The Paradox is not a *concession* but a category, an ontological qualification which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and the eternal truth." [JP III, 3089; italics mine] Thus, apophaticism is not a *concession* to limited cognitive powers; it is not making the best of a bad situation. Rather, as the word indicates, it is an active 'saying away' of ontological predicates. It is a form of speech, not a theory of knowledge (or non-knowledge).

What is important about apophaticism are not the negative 'results' which Law relies upon for comparative purposes, but precisely the *movements* of 'saying away.' Apophaticism is a consummated movement of thought or speech. In *Fear and Trembling* Abraham is at his most apophatic--that is, his most paradoxical--precisely when he *speaks* to Isaac: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Abraham cannot reply to Isaac's question *agnostically* by saying "I know nothing"; this would have been an untruth.[FT, 119] The response is apophatic, which means that 'first and foremost, [Abraham] does not say anything, and in that form he says what he has to say.' [FT, 118; italics mine] In other words, Abraham's apophatic speech has the form of irony. Apophatic speech is akin to ironic speech. Yet Law's comparative method--comparing the 'results' of negative theology to the sites of negativity in Kierkegaard--prevents him from raising crucial questions about the relation between apophaticism and the *form* of Kierkegaard's writing, i.e., irony (and humor).

In spite of these difficulties, Law's book remains a highly interesting one. He does succeed, I think, with his main intention: drawing Kierkegaard into the *general orbit* of negative theology. And in doing so he admirably adds another wrinkle to a fascinating problem.

1 . Oxford University Press, 1993.