

Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter



A Publication of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library

St. Olaf College

Northfield, Minnesota

CONTENTS

	Page
NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS	2
ARTICLE	
<i>The Joy of Kierkegaard</i> By Hugh S. Pyper	10
REVIEWS	
<i>Ist Glauben wiederholbar? Derrida liest Kierkegaard</i> by Tilman Beyrich By Heiko Schulz	17
<i>Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology</i> by George Pattison Reviewed by David D. Possen	20

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David Possen
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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

DANISH COURSE, SUMMER 2004

The Kierkegaard Library will offer a month-long intensive Danish course this summer June 28 – July 23. Sinead Ladegaard Knox from Copenhagen will be the instructor. If you are interested, please email Gordon Marino immediately at marino@stolaf.edu. Class size is limited to the first scholars who apply.

SUMMER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM 2004

Summer fellowships for research in residence are offered to scholars for use of the collection between June 1 and November 15. The awards include campus housing and a \$250 per month stipend. Scholarships are available at other times of year also. Please contact Gordon Marino immediately if you are interested in the 2004 program.

5th International Kierkegaard Conference June 11-15, 2005

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Hong Kierkegaard Library will host its 5th International Conference June 11-15, 2005 at St. Olaf College. The theme of the conference will be “Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks.” Professor George Pattison of Oxford University will offer the keynote address.

Papers are to have a reading length, which will be strictly applied, of 20 minutes. We are also planning to hold a dissertation panel discussion in which scholars who are in the process of writing or who have just completed their dissertations will summarize their research.

To submit a paper or dissertation discussion proposal, please send two copies of either the complete paper or a detailed abstract by December 15, 2004. Complete papers must be submitted by March 15, 2005.

Anyone interested in acting as a commentator should contact Gordon Marino. Information about registration will appear in the July edition of the *Newsletter*.

KIERKEGAARD HOUSE FOUNDATION RESIDENCY FELLOWSHIP

The primary aim of the Foundation is to augment the Visiting Scholars Program of the Kierkegaard Library.

The Foundation is pleased to offer housing and financial assistance to long-term resident scholars. Graduate students, professors, writers, and other serious students of Kierkegaard’s writings are eligible.

Kierkegaard House Foundation Residency Fellowships provide living quarters and \$1,500 per month for periods of four to twelve months (with the possibility of extension). Applications for September 2005 are due April 17, 2005.

Please send a curriculum vitae, a plan of work at the Kierkegaard Library, and two letters of recommendation to:

Gordon Marino, Director
Kierkegaard Library
St. Olaf College
1510 St. Olaf Avenue
Northfield, MN 55057

NEWS

Remembering Roger Poole (1939-2003)

The Library recently received the very sad news that our friend Roger Poole has died. We will sorely miss him.

Obituary from *Independent* [London], Friday, November 28, 2003

Roger Poole: Polyglot Literary Theorist

Roger Poole: born Cambridge 22 February 1939; Lecturer, then Senior Lecturer in English Literature, Nottingham University 1969-89, Reader in Literary Theory 1989-96; married 1969 Bente Knudsen (three sons); died Nottingham 21 November 2003.

Roger Poole was as powerful an individualization of the great tradition of Anglo-European men of letters as one could find. In a world of intensifying specialisms, his world-wide reputation was of a man not only polyglot in his scholarship, but master in his gallant, generous, and sometimes touchy way of the vast muddy field of modern theory, structuralism, post-modernism and all the rest.

He was born in Cambridge in 1939, and educated at the Perse School, from which he won an exhibition to Trinity College in his home town, following his great fellow alumnus, F.R. Leavis, into the study of English literature.

Always faithful to his master's voice, learning by heart Leavis's exacting principles of high seriousness and ardent sincerity, Poole absolutely refused the dottiness and bigotry which overcame some devout Leavisites, and after his First and his appointment as Senior Scholar at Trinity, he took the best of Leavisian Englishness off to Paris as Lecteur in the Sorbonne during the thrilling years leading up to May 1968.

Poole was, one could say, the first Englishman to feel the force of that marvelous French coinage, "the human sciences," and nobody who heard him tell the story would ever forget the account of Jean Hippolite, mightiest of the Parisian Hegelians, reading aloud from the *Phenomenology* to a packed amphitheatre in the Sorbonne, and improvising its dazzling application to the tempestuous events outside the high windows.

Poole became the first mediator in English of the daunting *maîtres à penser* in Paris who have so dominated the human sciences these past 40-odd years. His 1969 introduction to the Penguin edition of Lévi-Strauss's *Totemism* is a classically lucid exposition of a classically opaque original, and Karl Miller, with his usual acumen, snapped up Poole as house tutor in the difficulties of structuralism for the early and best days of the *London Review of Books*.

Poole began his career-long association with Nottingham University as Lecturer in 1969, and long before the fatuous exigencies of the Research Assessment Exercise, began to publish the long line of his brilliant short essays, scattered so prodigally through so many hard-to-find periodicals. His first big statement, however, *Towards Deep Subjectivity*, came out in 1972 and remains one of the boldest and least refutable of the assaults upon the impossible idea of scientific objectivity as the guiding light of human inquiry.

In 1978, he followed this success with his extraordinary and controversial biography *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*. Perhaps the only person ever to have read all 2,000 pages of Sartre's biography of Flaubert, Poole copied Sartre in identifying the unhealing wound in the very depths of Woolf's psyche, simultaneous site of her anguish and her genius.

It was a recklessly brave book to write as the feminists and Virago books swept all women's writing out of reach of all men. Poole responded to some hard vilification with a kind of calm anger in a duologue for the Edinburgh fringe, happily entitled *All Women and Quite a Few Men are Right*.

In all his thought, however, in his long and passionate meditation upon body and soul (he was, with Charles Taylor, a first and splendid commentator on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body), upon reason and commitment, criticism and conviction, his true Penelope (as Ezra Pound put it) was always Soren Kierkegaard.

A formidable linguist, he learned Danish to court and marry Bente Knudsen, and then to initiate his strong, decisive and exhausting grapple with Kierkegaard. Everything that was best in Poole's vivid sense of being-in-the-world, of trying to keep French abstractions fully charged with the concrete of experience, and his own thought stripped of the ready-made and the illusory, rose up in recognition of Kierkegaard's similar venture. Something, indeed much of the Dane's desperation, the quickness of a sensibility too quick to miss a slight or ignore an affront, the urgency with which he wanted his beliefs validated, the truthfulness which prevented any such fulfilment, found not merely echo but identity in Poole. So his mighty work of 1993, *Kierkegaard: the indirect communication*, is a talisman of how to labour and find reward in the human sciences: subject and object, author and authority come together in the settled assurance of a great book.

Poole had been most cordially received as Visiting Fellow at York, Toronto, and twice at Yale; he there befriended the giants of deconstruction, while holding a nice balance between the light-headed delightfulness of Big Theory and the exasperating caution of Little Empiricism. (A loving parody of James Joyce, published in 1983 just after the Falklands skirmish as *Argentina / Barthes* represents a fine token of that cheerfulness which kept breaking into the Kierkegaardian angst.)

He took very hard, however, all that happened to universities as Thatcherism really bit home. Modularisation, publishing by numbers, recruitment and management were hateful to him. So it was a joyful relief that early retirement in 1996 brought more of the acclaim he so much merited, as Visiting Professor at Sussex, and as Fellow - doyen, rather - at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre at Copenhagen University in 2000. After such happy renewal, lymphatic cancer struck as he was appointed in 2001 to a Visiting Fellowship in the Department of Divinity at Cambridge, and he gave a final seminar on Kierkegaard in May of this year.

Fred Inglis

[Submitted by Simon Podmore, Secretary, Søren Kierkegaard Society of the United Kingdom]

Søren Kierkegaard Society, UK

Conference announcement and call for papers:

Søren Kierkegaard Society of the United Kingdom annual one day conference 8th May 2004, University of Manchester.

Papers are invited on the topic: "Kierkegaardian Images of Christ"

For further details please contact Dr. David Law: David.Law@man.ac.uk

Or the Secretary, Simon Podmore: sd.podmore@virgin.net

Website: www.kierkegaard.org.uk

Søren Kierkegaard Society, USA

Vanessa Rumble, current President, reports the following changes in the officers of the Society:

Bruce Kirmmse, Vice-President/President Elect. Email: bhkir@conncoll.edu

John Davenport, APA representative. Email: DAVENPORT@FORDHAM.EDU

David Kangas, Secretary-Treasurer. Email: dkangas@mailier.fsu.edu

Søren Kierkegaard Society Meeting at the Eastern APA

Boston, MA, December 2004 (time/date to be announced)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Session Theme: Alterity in Kierkegaard and his 20th Century Respondents
(Marcel, Buber, Sartre, Levinas, Berdyaev, etc).

Reading time: 20-30 minutes max.

Any submission broadly related to this topic (including agape ethics) will be considered. Scholars, including graduate students, who have not spoken recently at the APA group meeting of the SK Society are especially encouraged to submit. Please submit papers in Word or Wordperfect electronic form (as an email attachment) to John Davenport@Fordham.edu, by April 2, 2004, or earlier if possible. (Submissions from anyone connected with Fordham will be evaluated by an outside referee.)

International Kierkegaard Commentary Editor

Sponsored by the President's Office, Stetson University, DeLand, FL

International Kierkegaard Commentary

Robert L. Perkins, Editor, 225 South Boundary Avenue, DeLand, FL 32720-5103
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NEWS

UNIQUE CALL FOR PAPERS

International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Prefaces' and 'Writing Sampler'

And

International Kierkegaard Commentary: Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions

will be combined in a single binding.

Due date: by the beginning of the fall semester or 1 September 2004,
whichever is first.

Prospective authors should write the editor to discuss their intention to contribute to this combined volume. The volume will be unique not only because of the combination of two IKC volumes in one binding but also because of the radical contrasts between the two volumes being commented upon: the first being a stinging satire on Golden Age aestheticism and the second plumbing depths of Kierkegaard's moral psychology.

VOLUMES IN PROCESS

International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits'

Submissions for this volume are being reviewed by the readers.

International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Practice in Christianity'

The typeset book has been mailed to the printer.

MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED VOLUME

International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses'
Contributors and subscribers received their copies in October, 2003.

Important policy emphases:

Submissions that do not adhere to the enclosed conventions and sigla will not be considered but returned unread.

Submissions should be in final form with regard to format and content when submitted. The editor cannot undertake to read papers prior to submission. The Advisory Board and Editor may recommend rewrites to the submitted paper.

All articles are submitted for evaluation by the Advisory Board; no papers are commissioned.

SOBRESKI: Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos de Kierkegaard.

IV Jornada, 02, 10 e 11 de Outubro, 2003, Pocinhos de Rio Verde- MG, Brasil

Donald Nelson, conference participant, submitted the following information regarding the recent gathering which took place:

- Introductory Remarks by **Marcio Gimenes de Paula**, Presidente de SOBRESKI
- The following scholars served as moderators:
Illana Viana de Amaral, **Alvaro Luis Montenegro Valls**, **Ricardo Quadros Gouvêa**, **Fransmar Costa Lima**, **Marcio Gimenes de Paula**.
- The following presentations were given:
Marcos Grillo: *Precariedade e fé: a existência humana segundo Kierkegaard e Unamuno.*
Henri Nicolai Levinspuhl: *Prólogo de A Doença Moral (O Desespero Humano).*
Jonas Ross: *Razão e Fé no pensamento de Sören Kierkegaard: O paradoxo e suas relações.*
Illana Viana do Amaral: *O Prosaico Esado do Mundo no mundo do Estado, do sentido da Ironia e do Humor em G.W. F. Hegel e S. A. Kierkegaard.*
João Emiliano Fourtaleza de Aquino: *A ambigüidade e o desvio: algumas questões em torno da letuura de Guy Debord des Mígalas Filosóficas de Sören Kierkegaard.*
Antonio Vieira de Silva Filho: *De ironia socrática em Hegel e des objeções Kierkegardianas..*
José Wilson da Silva: *O Livro I da República: o negativo a cominho da ivde a ou momento de eivrwnai, a absoluta?*
Edouardo Coutinho Lourenço de Lima: *A escolha no tempo.*
Maria José Binetti: *El Singular y el otro.*
Elisabete Sousa: *Criticas e Variações: Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt e Kierkegaard sobre Mozart.*
Ana Maria Lopes Calvo de Feijó: *Análise Psicológica do personagem Kierkegardiano Johannes no romance "Diário de um Sedutor".*
Elaine Lopes de Feijó: *Análise Psicológica de Adão am "Um conceito de Angústia".*
Maria Bernedete Medeiros Fernandes Lessa: *Johannes Climacus em "É preciso duvidar de tudo".*
Myriam Moreira Protasio: *Abraão em "Temor e Tremor".*
Marcio Gimenes de Paula: *O Livro sobre Adler e Sobre a diferença entre um gênio e um apóstolo. Algumas reflexões que se encontram.*
Fransmar Costa Lima: *Sobre a Fé: Uma reflexão sobre os dois discursos edificantes de 1843.*
Álvaro Luis Montenegro Valls: *O Crucificado encontra Dionisio- Discursos Cristãos Cristicidade e Nietzsche.*
Ricardo Quadros Gouvêa: *" A Repetição Reflexões sobre uma obra menor de Kierkegaard"*

For further information, consult the SOBRESKI website at www.kierkegaardbrasil.hpg.com.br.

Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Japan, School of Theology, Kwansai Gakuin University

The 2nd Japan Korean International Kierkegaard Conference took place November 14-15, 2003 at Korea University, Seoul, Korea.

Included on the program:

Opening Words: **Sang Hoon Lee** (The Academy of Korean Studies, President of the Søren Kierkegaard Society in Korea), **Hongbin Lim** (Korea University), **Jun Hashimoto**, (Kwansai Gakuin University, Japan; President of Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre in Japan).

Keynote Speeches: **Kinya Masugata** (Osaka Kyoiku University, Japan): "Kierkegaard and the Modern Age". **Mija Sa** (Presbyterian Church and Theological Seminary, Korea). "Indirect Communication as a Way of Communication".

Symposium Session: What Can we Learn from Kierkegaard?

Satoshi Nakazato (Tokyo University): "Religion and Ethics"

Hong Kyungsil (Korea University): "A comparison of the Concept of Subjectivity in Kierkegaard and Levinas: An Essay for the New Understanding of Humanity Today"

Makoto Mizuta (Fukuoka Dental College, Japan): "Religion and Language: The Problem of Communication".

Lee Minhoo (Korea University): "Kierkegaard's Diagnosis of Our Age"

Closing Words: **Pyo Chai Myung** (Korea University)

Kierkegaard Cabinet in Budapest

In March 2001, the Kierkegaard Cabinet opened at Budapest University Eötvös Loránd, hosted by the Institute of Aesthetics. This resource center functions as an independent foundation, with the mandate to support Kierkegaard scholarship in Hungary and the Central European region and to assist in the translation of Kierkegaard's works into Hungarian. The "heart" of the Cabinet is a special library and an electronic database which provides contacts with other resource and research centers in the world. The Cabinet welcomes scholars, students, and researchers from Central and Eastern Europe.

The founder of the Kierkegaard Cabinet Foundation is Péter Nadas. Members of the Board include Chairperson, András Nagy; Béla Bacso, head of the Institute of Aesthetics; and Thomas Berntsen, director of the Danish Cultural Institute in Hungary. Sponsors of the Cabinet include The Royal Danish Embassy, The Danish Cultural Institute, The Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre (Copenhagen) and the Hong Kierkegaard Library.

Address: Kierkegaard Cabinet
c/o ELTE Muvesztudományi Intézet
Múzeum körút 6-8. (-136)
Budapest 1088, Hungary

Phone: 36.1.266.9100/5855
Email: cabinet@emc.elte.hu
Website: <http://kierkegaard.elte.hu/>

Hours: Wednesday and Thursday during the academic year, 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM.
(Appointments possible for other times with advance notice.)

To request information about the Kierkegaard Cabinet or to offer books, articles, databases, etc. for scholars, students, and translators in the region, please contact András Nagy at andrasnagy@mail.matav.hu.

List of Kierkegaard Library Donors (February 2003 – January 2004)

Hans Aaen, Maria José Binetti, Jacob Bøggild, Manuel Caraza Salmeron, Catalina Elena Dobre, Donald Fox, Shin Fujieda, Marcio Gimenes de Paula, Sergia Hay, Howard Hong, Nicolae Irina, Mikael Kristensen, John Lippitt, Luis Mendez Francisco, Gordon Marino, András Nagy, Elisabete de Sousa, Sherman Johnsrud, Onur Ozdemir, Margaret Smith (posthumously), Inger and Junius Stenseth (from the library of Jonathan Stenseth), Massimo Vittorio, Julia Watkin.

The Hong Kierkegaard Library strongly encourages the donation of books and articles on Kierkegaard and related thinkers to add to its collection and to share with other libraries and scholars. Gift books are indicated with a special donor bookplate. During the past year, approximately 400 titles were added through donation and purchase.

Research Summaries from Summer Scholars, 2003

Maria José Binetti

(PhD candidate, Philosophy, Universidad de Navarra, Spain/Profesora de Filosofia, Universidad Católica Argentina Santa María de los Buenos Aires)

My dissertation research pursued at the Library concerned the Kierkegaardian concept of freedom in terms of power; dialectical, intensive, and relational. Freedom as a power emerges from its own possibility in order to become an absolute with real and self-conscious energy determining the self as a spiritual subject. The possibility of freedom is its own necessity as well as being a continuous possibility to the finite and contingent being always aspiring to personal unity and identity. The reality of the self is reached through an itinerary, threatened always by nothingness, achieved transcendentally in the absolute instant of the loving God which coincides with the total gift of oneself.

Marcio Gimenes de Paula

(PhD candidate, Philosophy, UNICAMP – State University at Campinas, Brazil)

This dissertation aims to provide a detailed examination of Kierkegaard's critique of Christendom. It will include both a discussion of the historical context of Kierkegaard's critique and an assessment of the prospects for a Kierkegaardian ecclesiology. In the careful reading of both *The Book on Adler* and *The Moment*, I will analyze Kierkegaard's understanding of authority, revelation, and the imitation of Christ. I will also explore the parallel between Socrates, the gadfly of Athens, and Kierkegaard, the gadfly of golden age Denmark.

Catalina Elena Dobre

(PhD candidate, Philosophy, University "Dunarea de Jos," Galati, Romania)

My work at the Library during the summer of 2003 involved research for my dissertation which is entitled "The Hermeneutic of Repetition in Søren Kierkegaard's Philosophy." I was able to complete my project because of the resources I found in the collection. Of particular interest were works by John Caputo, George Stack, Mark C. Taylor, Julia Watkin, and David Goicoechea. My summer work will be presented in a forthcoming publication in Romania.

Shin Fujieda

(PhD candidate, Philosophy, Otani University, Kyoto, Japan)

On my reading, Kierkegaard holds that neither science nor history can verify religious beliefs. That being the case, how could religious belief ever be grounds for action in the public sphere? For example, Abraham in Genesis 22 plans to kill his son Isaac because he believes God has commanded him to do this. And yet because of the unverifiable nature of religious belief Abraham is without any neutral or public grounds for his actions. Wittgensteinian fidelists consider religious discourse to be one kind of language game. While I recognize the value of understanding religion in this way, it seems to me that this move still leaves us with the problem of how to reconcile the language games of different religions, and so my dissertation is also concerned with the challenge of inter-faith dialogue.

Dr. John Lippitt

(University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom)

My current work investigates Kierkegaard's relevance to the 'narrative turn' in contemporary ethics. Though my overall project also addresses the work of Cavell and Nussbaum, the part of the project which I was working on at the Library last summer concentrates upon John Davenport and Anthony Rudd's collection *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*. In particular, I am interested in whether attaching too great an importance to notions such as 'narrative coherence' and 'narrative unity' runs the risk of serious psychological oversimplification, which in turn impacts upon current debates about self-deception and human vulnerability.

Submitted by Cynthia Wales Lund, Special Collections Librarian, Hong Kierkegaard Library. To submit news contact at lundc@stolaf.edu . Tel. 507-646-3846, Fax 507-646-3858.

The Joy of Kierkegaard

Hugh S. Pyper
Head of School of Humanities/
Head of Theology and Religious Studies
School of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Leeds
United Kingdom

The title of this paper, 'The Joy of Kierkegaard', is the same as that of a module that I am currently teaching at Leeds. When I presented the paperwork to the Faculty committee, the philosophers present fell off their chairs laughing: 'That'll be the shortest module ever taught,' they chortled. 'Well', I replied, 'if that's what you think, that's all the more reason why I should teach it. Why don't you all enrol and you might learn something?' At one level, of course, their reaction was quite understandable. The melancholy Dane, the father of existentialism, inventor of angst, favourite philosopher of anguished teenagers, the writer of the Concept of Dread, the Sickness unto Death and the Gospels of Suffering – these stereotypes hardly convey a bundle of fun. To be fair, a casual reading of the journals with their constant allusions to suffering and misunderstanding and isolation tends to bear this out.

Yet my strong conviction is that joy is at the heart of what Kierkegaard was about. When I am asked what description best sums up Kierkegaard – philosopher, theologian, religious thinker, a kind of poet, novelist, preacher? – these days I have an answer – he is an evangelist, in its root meaning as a bearer of good news. What he burns to communicate is good news, while knowing that the majority of his hearers can't tell good news from bad and have a tendency to mistake the disease for the cure and the cure for the disease.

I suspect that most of us are here because we have a sense of the joy of Kierkegaard, and that can itself mean different things. There is the sheer joy of reading Kierkegaard's writings, an experience that is well summed up in a paragraph introducing another book and another writer not always thought of as a bundle of laughs, Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*:

The Brothers Karamazov is a joyful book. Readers who know what it is 'about' may find this an intolerably whimsical statement. It does have its moments of joy, but they are only moments. The rest is greed, squalor, lust, unredeemed suffering, and a sometimes terrifying darkness. But the book is joyful in another sense, in its energy and curiosity, in its formal inventiveness, in the mastery of its writing. And therefore, finally, in its vision. [Richard Pevear 'Introduction' *The Brothers Karamazov* (London, Vintage, 1990) p xi]

There is in even the darkest passage of Kierkegaard the sheer joy of the writing, the dazzling verbal display, but also so often the teasing tone that leads you up the garden path only to pull the rug out from under you, to mix a jolly metaphor. Kierkegaard is one of the few philosophers who makes me laugh. He is a great comic writer, in the sense that Dostoevsky, Proust and Joyce are great comic writers. They give us the joy of recognition, putting in front of us figures and arguments and voices caught with the deftest of sketch-lines, but irresistibly alive and recognisable.

One passage that always has this effect is the remarkable disquisition on boredom in the section of *Either /Or* entitled 'Rotation of Crops':

The gods were bored; therefore they created human beings. Adam was bored because he was alone; therefore Eve was created. Since that moment, boredom entered the world and grew in quantity in exact proportion to the growth of population. Adam was bored alone; then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*. After that the population of the world increased and the nations were bored *en masse*. To amuse themselves, they hit upon the notion of building a tower so high that it would reach the sky. This notion is just as boring as the tower was high and is a terrible demonstration of how boredom had gained the upper hand. [E/O 286]¹

We smile at the astonishing *aperçus*, and then are brought up with a shock, which has its own pleasure, rather like a cold wave breaking over us, of recognising ourselves. I might interject here my own experience of Kierkegaard as providing

this variation on the old practice of finding your fortune in a random verse of the bible or Virgil in the *sortes virgiliensis*. It was, I promise you, on my fortieth birthday, that I was thumbing through *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and came across this remarkable passage:

Often enough one encounters men who are full grown, confirmed, and men of heart who in spite of being older in years do everything or leave undone like a child and who even in their fortieth year would undeniably be regarded as promising children if it were the custom for every man to become two hundred and fifty years. [CUP 490]²

That was me told, as we Scots say. One of these days I must do something about it. Yet such a passage can also serve as a warning. There is rather a gulf between being amused by Kierkegaard and getting to grips with the joy of Kierkegaard, and we need to watch ourselves around here. After all, it is boredom, E/O reminds us, that underlies the search for amusement and in the name of amusement all sorts of ridiculous things are done which in the end turn out to be more boring than ever.

It also reminds us that the joy of Kierkegaard is not simply a matter of appreciating the humour of Kierkegaard and the key place of humour in his thought, though this too is a vital counter to the lazy characterisation of him as melancholic. Humour marks the necessary transition from the ethical to the religious for Kierkegaard, although I am not a great believer in too formulaic an application of the notion of stages in his work. Nothing is more important in his thought than the comic - except the religious. This is well explained in a passage from CUP:

On the whole the comic is present everywhere, and every existence can at once be defined and assigned to its particular sphere by knowing how it relates to the comic. The religious person is one who has discovered the comic on the greatest scale and yet he does not consider the comic as the highest, because the religious is the purest pathos. But if he looks upon the comic as the highest, then his comic is *eo ipso* lower, because the comic is always based on a contradiction, and if the comic itself is the highest, it lacks that contradiction in which the comic exists and in which it makes a showing. That is why it holds true without exception that the more competently a person exists, the more he will discover the comic. [CUP 462].³

Discovering the comic is something that comes with a deepening awareness of the contradictions of the world and its incongruities, but to rest in the comic, to see it as the highest, argues that we have some way of rising above the world and fails to acknowledge the pathos of our own comic contradiction in being aware of the comedy of our own existence. Humour, the comic and joy are not unrelated, but they are not by any means identical for Kierkegaard.

What I want to suggest about joy in Kierkegaard is that it comes in a different category, and I think that W.H. Auden captures this particularly well in one of his poems. Auden, as you may know, was profoundly influenced by Kierkegaard. He himself describes his first encounter as bowling him over as did his first encounter with Simone Weil, Pascal or Nietzsche, and though he later came to see Kierkegaard as a partial thinker, one who heretically homed in on the crucifixion, failing to balance it with the incarnation and the resurrection (an opinion we might wish to examine further), he never lost an admiration for him. This stanza from Auden's poem 'In sickness and in health' is as fine a summary of how I would understand Kierkegaard's thought on joy as I have found.

Beloved, we are always in the wrong,
Handling so clumsily our stupid lives,
Suffering too little or too long,
Too careful even in our selfless loves:
The decorative manias we obey
Die in grimaces round us every day,
Yet through their tohu-bohu comes a voice
Which utters an absurd command – Rejoice.
[Auden *Selected Poems* London, Faber &
Faber, p 113]

This stanza bears re-reading. Note how it starts with the word 'beloved', even though what it goes on to chronicle is imperfection and stupidity and clumsiness. For all our faults – because of all our faults? – the addressee is, the poet proclaims, beloved. It then develops into a thought which directly echoes one of Kierkegaard's phrases – the joy of it:

that before God we are always in the wrong. How can that be a cause of joy? The answer is because it saves us from the error of focusing on our errors, and reminds us that what we are and how we are judged are not our prerogatives to choose.

Auden lists our errors, some of which may seem strange. How can we be blamed for suffering too little, and equally be blamed if we suffer too long? But these are Kierkegaardian categories, to be found in that remarkable work *The Gospel of Sufferings*, where all but one of the seven chapter headings contains the word 'joy,' or in the series of aphorisms and paradoxes which form the headings of the second part of the Christian discourses, itself entitled 'States of Mind in the Strife of Suffering':

The joy of it, that one suffers only once but is victorious eternally
The joy of it, that hardship does not take away but procures hope
The joy of it, that the poorer you become the richer you are able to make others
The joy of it, that the weaker you become, the stronger God becomes in you
The joy of it, that what you lose temporally you gain eternally
The joy of it that when I 'gain everything' I lose nothing at all
The joy of it, that adversity is prosperity

A similar structure of paradox is to be found in *the Sickness unto Death*. There it is our inability, or unwillingness to embrace suffering, and ultimately to undergo death that is the cause of our true suffering and despair. The sickness unto death itself is the inability to die, precisely, suffering too long, refusing to end our despair because we fear what will actually cure us, the death to self.

The paradigm example that helps to explain the error of the one who suffers too long is the sick man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5. He has lain there for thirty-eight years, never making it to the pool at the healing moment when the water is troubled. Jesus asks him a key question 'Do you want to be made well?' The man's reply is not a yes or a no but a recital of his grievances. I was very struck when teaching this story many years ago to a rather motley class of children in a very rough inner London comprehensive. One forthright young lady said, 'He was a right idiot!' When I asked her why, and didn't she have any sympathy for the sick man's plight, she said, and I apologise for the language in this august assembly, 'Well, even if he could only shuffle on his bum an inch a day, in thirty eight years he could have got to the edge of the pool, and then when the water bubbled, he could just have rolled himself over and got in first. But he didn't have the bottle!'

I reckon that is a good account of what might be meant by 'suffering too long!' It is also a corrective to a possible misapprehension that Kierkegaard himself is at pains to get right. If suffering is the necessary pathway to joy, and the inevitable experience of the Christian in the world, might we not be tempted to embrace suffering itself as a good? This, however, is something that Kierkegaard warns against, and which his journal entries strongly deny. It is a kind of frivolity to entertain that thought, he says, one which could only occur to someone who has not truly experienced suffering. Paul was not enjoined to see the suffering of his thorn in the flesh - a phrase Kierkegaard uses for his own case - as in itself a good, and certainly not expected to seek out thorns to impale himself upon. Suffering in itself is not a good, anymore than despair is. It is given to us to be striven against, not embraced.

Auden also chides us for our carefulness even in our selfless loves - how reminiscent of the Kierkegaard who in *Works of Love* tells us that love can never be deceived, and that we should carry on loving even the one who attempts to deceive us. The false lover may deceive us, but not love, because love remains undeceived by his attempts to evade it. It is a bold kind of selfless lover who can open himself to such deceit. Auden also takes on the aesthetic and its self deception as our 'decorative manias' die around us. Yet the final line is the one that arrests me in this context. Auden sees this confusion, this *tohu bohu*, overcome by an absurd *command*: 'Rejoice'. Joy, then, is both absurd, and a command, and here I do think that Auden catches the essence of what Kierkegaard has to say about joy. I want to look at this in two stages. Firstly, I want to understand what is absurd about joy and, secondly, I want to look more closely at the absurdity of a command to rejoice, or what we might call a 'duty of joy'.

Firstly, the absurdity of joy. The absurd, the paradox, is of course something that is entirely characteristic of Kierkegaard's thought, and I would argue, of biblical thought. I teach the Hebrew bible, when I am permitted to, and have to do an outline course in 20 lectures. I always begin by explaining to the students that this is a mugs game, and that

given my head I have been known to spend four weeks lecturing on the first verse of Ecclesiastes. Having got that off my chest, I then go on to make them a promise, that when it comes down to it I will perform the even more impossible feat of summing up the Hebrew bible in one word. They have to sit through eleven weeks of lectures to hear it, but tonight, I will let you into the secret with rather less suspense, though I might give you a minute to think of it - the one word that sums up the entire Hebrew bible. The word is – nevertheless. I suspect my fondness for it may be part of my Edinburgh upbringing, either nurture or nature, I am not sure which.

Certainly the word is wonderfully explored by my fellow Edinburgh native, the inimitable Muriel Spark. She writes

It would need a scientific study to ascertain whether the word was truly employed more frequently in Edinburgh than anywhere else. It is my own instinct to associate the word, as the core of a thought-pattern, with Edinburgh particularly. I see the lip of tough elderly women in musquash coats taking tea at MacVittie's, enunciating this word of final justification, I can see the exact gesture of head and chin and gleam of the eye that accompanied it. The sound was roughly 'niverthelace' and the emphasis was a heartfelt one. I believe myself to be fairly indoctrinated by the habit of thought which calls for this word. In fact I approve of the ceremonious accumulation of weather forecasts and barometer reading that pronounce for a fine day, before letting rip on the statement: 'Nevertheless, it's raining.' I find that much of my literary composition is based on the nevertheless idea. I act upon it. It was on the nevertheless principle that I turned Catholic. [in Douglas Dunn *Scotland an Anthology* 119]

The biblical roots of this attitude are epitomized by the prophet Habakkuk:

Though the fig tree does not blossom
And though no fruit is on the vines
Through the produce of the olive fails
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock is cut off from the fold
And there is no herd in the stalls,
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will exult in the God of my salvation. Hab 3:17-19

Yet I will rejoice – Habakkuk's 'nevertheless' to God, and one that is equated to rejoicing. Habakkuk does not rejoice *because of* what he sees or experiences, but *in spite of* it. Time and again in the psalms, and in the stories of Israel, it is the 'nevertheless' that break through after the depths of lamentation have been plumbed. Yet there is another side to this: God's recurrent nevertheless to the people of Israel, whose disobedience by rights should have led to their casting off and utter destruction. In the interplay of these neverthelesses we find the possibility of forgiveness and of love.

It is not a matter of 'because' and in that sense joy itself is not only absurd but can be an integral aspect of the most acute form of suffering. When Johannes Climacus confesses his admiration but incomprehension in face of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*, he sets out in the four exordia, midrashic retellings of the sacrifice of Isaac, four more comprehensible Abrahams. The second of these is the Abraham who loses his joy. 'From that day henceforth, Abraham was old; he could not forget that God had ordered him to do this. Isaac flourished as before, but Abraham's eyes were darkened, and he saw joy no more.' It is one thing to be required to undergo suffering; it is another to be expected to rejoice while we undergo it.

This is Climacus' way of pointing out the incomprehensibility that the biblical Abraham did not only perform this duty but retained his joy. That seems to compound the absurdity, and the suffering. The Abraham who obeys in despair we can understand more easily. Indeed, despair is something that we can empathize with more readily than joy. That is not surprising, as according to *Sickness unto Death*, despair is a universal condition, and Kierkegaard brilliantly dissects and displays the varieties of despair that we fall into. But we misread the book entirely if we just see it as an anatomy of our condition, a description of the human hearts which offers us the consolation of a bleak solidarity of despair, which is how it has been taken up in some quarters. Kierkegaard, or Anti-Climacus, explicitly warns against this in the preface: 'Just one more comment, no doubt unnecessary, but nevertheless I will make it: once and for all may I point out that in the whole book, as the title indeed declares, despair is interpreted as a sickness not as a cure.'

Kierkegaard's tongue is in his cheek here; he knows full well that this 'unnecessary' warning is all too necessary. But Climacus does go on to say that, strange as it may seem, despair is itself 'good news':

Is despair an excellence or a defect? Purely dialectically, it is both. If only the abstract idea of despair is considered, without any thought of someone in despair, it must be regarded as a surpassing excellence. The possibility of this sickness is man's superiority over the animal, and this superiority distinguishes him in quite another way than does his erect walk, for it indicates infinite erectness or sublimity, that he is spirit. The possibility of this sickness is man's superiority over the animal, to be aware of this sickness is the Christian's superiority over the natural man; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness. [SUD 14-15]⁴

The possibility of blessedness is only available to us because we are constituted to despair. That may seem a strange sort of good news, but it falls in the same explicitly medical category as receiving the diagnosis that one has a life-threatening but curable disease, even though one feels healthy enough except for some indefinable pang, but that the cure itself may be slow and painful. To be told of the disease is a terrible shock which may lead some to spin off into denial, and others to despair. And yet there can be a sense of relief at having at least a diagnosis, and to have the sense that this enemy, though formidable, is not above defeat. Kierkegaard often uses this forensic sort of metaphor, and much of his work could be understood as the attempt to persuade his hearers that they are sick so that they will seek a cure for the disease that is killing them spiritually unawares. It is only in the encounter with Christ's offer of a cure that we realise how ill we have been and the true nature of sin can be realised.

But the cure and the disease can be reversed. The one who points out the falseness of our sense of security can be quickly recast as the champion, if not indeed the cause, of the sickness, and the escape into denial or defiance, which itself constitutes despair, can be seen as the cure. Here is the offence which can be healing, but which can result in the Godman, or his apostle, falling victim to the fear that he instills. It is an absurd claim, beyond a point, but it is the only way to joy. Kierkegaard sets this out in *SLW* and makes the bridge between this absurdity of joy, and joy as a duty, answering the accusation that this obsession with despair and sin is merely a perverse desire to torment oneself:

It is now obvious what must be understood religiously by self-torment. It is a matter of discovering *by oneself* the full possibility of danger, and *by oneself* at every moment its actuality (this the esthete would call self-torment and the esthetic lecture would prevent one from it by imitation religious gilding), but it is simultaneously a matter of being joyous. Where then, is the self-torment? It is at the halfway point. It is not at the beginning, for then I am speaking esthetically, but it is due to one's being unable to work one's way through to joy. And this, declares the religious person, is not comic; neither does it lend itself to evoking esthetic tears, for that is reprehensible and one *shall* work one's way through. [*SLW* 470-471]⁵

One *shall* work one's way through. It is a task and a duty, and something which takes courage. As SK puts it in a journal entry, 'It takes moral courage to grieve; it takes religious courage to rejoice.' [*JP* 2179].⁶ Joy is not an optional extra, or a subjective sense of satisfaction, but an orientation, and a command, as Auden intimates.

It is as absurd, and as important as that other problematic order, the command to love. As we know, the idea that one can love on command has been challenged as itself absurd by philosophers. No less absurd is a command to be joyful, surely. Kierkegaard's defence of this seeming absurdity is worked out at length in *Works of Love*, where rather than being an impossible burden, the command to love is demonstrated to be a source of power and freedom for the human subject. 'You shall love. There is nothing difficult in one sense in the syntax of this sentence, but nevertheless it is a source of offence. It seems to rob love of its spontaneity, its romance, its arbitrariness. All this Kierkegaard acknowledges, but then we read, in emphatic bold script: "You shall love" **Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured against every change, eternally made free in blessed independence, eternally and happily secured against despair.**' [WL 29]⁷

It is the very obligation that frees us, as SK explains: 'Alas, we very often think that freedom exists and that it is law that binds freedom. Yet it is just the opposite; without law, freedom does not exist at all, and it is law that gives freedom.' [WL 38-39].⁸ It also is the counter to despair. '... there is only one security against despair: to undergo the change of eternity through duty's *shall*.' In *Works of Love*, SK explains despair as a misrelation to eternity. Only eternity can be the object of our infinite passion and so, when that passion is directed anywhere else despair results. Joy, I would contend, is

the manifestation of this passionate relation to eternity, and while the misrelation persists, there can be no joy. The command brings joy as it brings love. A journal entry reads 'If this is properly interpreted, every man who truly wants to relate himself to God and be intimate with him really only has one task - to rejoice always.' [JP 2186 VIII 1 A 12 [1847]]⁹

Rejoicing brings the relation, the relation causes joy, all through the dutiful performance of the task. Another take on this, one which gives quite another colour to the same ideas, is to be found in *Judge for Yourself*, in the story of little Ludvig. It is part of a discussion of Kierkegaard's beloved lily and the bird, one where, in contrast to the rather forbidding prose of sickness unto death, he offers a delightfully lyrical hymn to the joy of those who trust absolutely in God. Little Ludvig makes his appearance precisely to deal with the paradox that joy is our task, and yet we can only undertake the task because of the relationship with God that underpins it:

Every day little Ludvig is taken for a ride in his stroller, a delight that usually lasts an hour, and little Ludvig understands very well that it is a delight. Yet the mother has hit upon something new that will definitely delight little Ludvig even more; would he like to try to push the stroller himself? And he can! What! He can? Yes, look, Auntie, little Ludvig can push the stroller himself! Now, let us be down to earth but not upset the child, since we know very well that little Ludvig cannot do it, that it is really his mother who is actually pushing the stroller, and that it is really only to delight him that she plays the game that little Ludvig can do it himself. And he, he huffs and puffs. And he is sweating, isn't he? On my word, he is! The sweat stand on his brow, in the sweat of his brow he is pushing the stroller – but his face is shining with happiness; one could say he is drunk with happiness, and, if possible, he becomes even more so every time Auntie says: Just look at that! Little Ludvig can do it himself. [JFY 185]¹⁰

This is a remarkable bit of writing where Kierkegaard barely skirts sentimentality to make the point that the individual's joy of the task and the fact that God accomplishes it for him are not incompatible. Characteristically, just as we are beginning to think that Kierkegaard is turning into a sentimental poet like Patience Strong, over the page we find little Ludvig again, only now he is grown up. He knows now that his mother was pushing the stroller, but this gives him a new joy, a joy of the recollection of her love which could think of providing such joy to her child, but also a nature awareness of the fact that the task, and the joy, are not his, but God's.

Joy, then is both duty, and gift, both task and reward. What we have been saying here is echoed in some remarkable words often attributed to Nelson Mandela in his 1994 inaugural speech, but in fact by the Jewish author Marian Williamson:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We as ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous.' Actually, who are you not to be? you are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. [Marion Williamson]

The pity is that we think of joy in terms of a philosophy of scarcity. We regard it as a precious thing which we need to keep hold of for ourselves if we are granted any. More selflessly, we become self-conscious about our joy. We may ask ourselves what right we have to rejoice when other people are in pain and suffering or in poverty. The mistake is that we think that joy is *our* joy, and that what we have, other people are deprived of, or that we are deprived by their joy as if there were not enough to go around. The command to rejoice relieves us of that fear, and the realisation that joy is not defined as something we feel, but as part of our duty before God, takes our focus away from ourselves. If joy is God's joy, then it is not limited except by our failure to make it manifest, or our failure to live up to that duty. Joy is a gift, not our gift to others, or a gift to us, but a gift such as is spoken of in that verse of James which Kierkegaard so often refers to and called his favourite. 'every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, which who is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' Joy is a gift, and joy is a duty. It is most importantly the gift of being enabled to perform the duty.

If this is so, one final question occurs; does Kierkegaard himself live up to this vision? That is probably an impertinent question, and one that strays into a realm of spiritual judgment that is not ours to make. There are passages in the journal which do speak of an unutterable joy like the following

Therefore my voice will shout for joy at the top of my lungs, louder than the voice of a woman who has given birth, louder than the angels' glad shout over a sinner who is converted, more joyful than the morning song of the birds, for what I have sought I have found, and if men robbed me of everything, if they cast me out of their society, I would still retain this joy. If everything were taken from me, I would still continue to have the best - the blessed wonder over God's infinite love, over the wisdom of his decisions. [JP 2184 III A 232 [1842]]¹¹

Yet, as we have seen, Kierkegaard's reputation in some quarters has been as a pedlar of gloom, and angst, and as we read through some of his journals and the account of the attack on Christendom we can understand those who feel a sense of sympathetic disappointment that this brilliant and difficult man in the end of a tortured life succumbed to bitterness and loneliness. Nevertheless, and I use that word quite consciously, as so often we have choices to make about how we weigh the evidence.

I read the accounts of Kierkegaard's last days with more than the usual sense of unwarranted intrusion that such accounts may induce. There in cold print we can now read the doctor's notes, and can only imagine the chagrin with which an intensely private and physically reserved man would feel to know that this is so, as the body with which he had so uncomfortable a relationship asserted its feeble but ungainsayable demands.

And yet among these pages is the remarkable account by SK's nephew Troels of his last parting from his uncle, an account where Troels is at pains to underscore his own awareness that what he says could be taken as the romanticism of an impressionable young man, but which he stands by:

When I extended my hand to him, the others had already turned toward the door, so it was as though we were alone. He took my hand in both of his own – how small, thin and transparently white they were – and said only “Thank you for coming to see me, Troels! And now, live well!” But these ordinary words were accompanied by a look of which I have never since seen the equal. It radiated with an elevated, transfigured, blessed brilliance, so that it seemed to me to illuminate the entire room. Everything was concentrated in the flood of light from these eyes: profound love, beatifically dissolved sadness, an all-penetrating clarity, and a playful smile. For me it was like a heavenly revelation, an emanation from one soul to another, a blessing, which infused me with new courage, strength and responsibility. [Kirmmse *Encounters with Kierkegaard* 190]

Joy as gift and duty seems to me epitomised in this encounter. That his nephew would write this, whatever the cold eye of the camera would have made of that moment, is to me earnest enough that Kierkegaard, in whatever measure, was what I think he would agree that we are all called to be, a prophet of joy, a joy that is not Kierkegaard's possession, but which may invite us to the joy that Kierkegaard knew, the joy of Kierkegaard.

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: Part I. (Kierkegaard's Writings, III)*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). p. 286.

² Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments: Volume I: Text. (Kierkegaard's Writings, XII: I)*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). p. 490.

³ *Ibid.* p. 462.

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening. (Kierkegaard's Writings, XIX)*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). p. 490.

⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way: Studies by Various Persons. (Kierkegaard's Writings, XI)*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988). pp. 470-1.

⁶ *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers: Volume 2, F-K*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995). p. 493.

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love. (Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI)*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995). p. 29.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 38-9.

⁹ *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers: Volume 2, F-K*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Assisted by Gregor Malantschuk. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 495.

¹⁰ Søren Kierkegaard. *For Self Examination/Judge for Yourself. (Kierkegaard's Writings, XXI)*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990). p. 185.

¹¹ *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers: Volume 2, F-K*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Assisted by Gregor Malantschuk. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970). pp. 494-5.

Reviews

Ist Glauben wiederholbar? Derrida liest Kierkegaard

By Tilman Beyrich

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1.1 The present study, with which the author earned his doctorate (University of Greifswald) offers the reader a comprehensive, well written, and engaging academic inquiry which, in more ways than one, is long overdue. It has been established for some time now that it would be fruitful to compare Kierkegaard's religious works with the writings of authors loosely defined as "post-modern." However, in comparison to the indirect tradition of influence the treatment of Kierkegaard's direct reception by the idols of (here: deconstructionist) postmodernism – in the present case: Jacques Derrida – still remains in its infancy; this holds true, in particular, for the theological study of Kierkegaard.

Beyrich's (henceforth: B) study is motivated by more ambitious goals than the mere retracing of direct lines of reception. Based on the assertion that not only superficial, but rather "more profound connections" (p. 5) between Derrida's and Kierkegaard's thought are recognisable, the author intends both a "re-reading of Kierkegaard from Derrida's perspective," (ibid.) and a "reading of Derrida from Kierkegaard's point of view" (ibid.). A quick glance both at B's fundamental methodological preferences and the content of the inquiry as a whole, reveals that his statement of intention promises too much, whereas the book's subtitle ("Derrida Reads Kierkegaard") promises too little. With the demonstration of 'profound connections' between the two thinkers certainly more than a merely *direct*, but still less than a *reciprocal* reception study (which, under the given circumstances, would only be hypothetically re-constructible) is offered. Furthermore, it is not without a certain irony that B's book has found its place in the rather prestigious monograph series of the *Kierkegaard Studies*, although its author frankly admits that one can hardly call his study a genuine "contribution to Kierkegaard research" (p. 18). Does this somewhat confusing break between communicative form and content immediately expose the reader to a deliberate, deconstructive 'disturbance of expectation' (cf. p. 363)? I am not sure but there is one thing that is certain: as a proponent of post-modern principles of writing and reading, the author is free to assert such a claim without believing it.

1.2 After a detailed *Introduction* (pp. 1-20) describing Kierkegaard as the 'Socrates of postmodernism' and placing him in relation to Derrida's challenge to contemporary theology, B begins an extensive investigation (in all 369 pp. plus bibliography and index) and spells out in great detail the connections between both thinkers. B insists that neither Kierkegaard nor Derrida take any pains to formulate a new doctrine. Nevertheless, in chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 21 – 127) attempts to show that Derrida's focus on the conditions of both the possibility and the boundaries of *writing* finds its Kierkegaardian counterpart in the Dane's reflections about the meaning, function, and importance of *literary style* in matters of communication. In this context, B bases the discussion on a thesis which seems to me to be the most interesting theological claim in the book. That is, B maintains "that the question of style in Kierkegaard ... is [not only]

fitted to his theological intention and literary gift, but also *generates* essential decisions in his theology,” (pp. 9f; cf. pp. 20f, 52, 75). This central thesis will be discussed again later. The extensive and topically structured Part II consists of chapters 3-5 (pp. 129 – 319) and offers a detailed interpretation of *Donner la mort* (1992), i.e. the book, in which Derrida explicitly and extensively refers to Kierkegaard, in particular to *Fear and Trembling*. In chapter 6 (“Kierkegaard’s Repetition”) B scrutinises Derrida’s concept of ‘religion without religion’ and his principal challenge to Christian theology (as does Part III, pp. 321 - 365). B’s brief *Afterword* (pp. 367 – 369) invokes Kierkegaard’s repeated warning against the ‘urge to go further’. This invocation is intended to thwart the objection that the book stops “at the foreword” instead of pushing on to theological “things themselves” (p. 368; cf. pp. 18 & 363). B makes this parrying move by pointing to the inevitably “preliminary character of anything like theology” (p. 369).

1.3. B’s inquiry is convincing wherever he succeeds in bringing certain (sit venia verbo) ‘central ideas’ of Derrida’s ideas into a common perspective with Kierkegaard’s thoughts such that the re-reading of the Danish thinker inspired by deconstructionism actually shows substantial parallels between his work and that of Derrida. This attempt sometimes fails because of a number of methodological shortcomings. The overall architecture of the book remains in certain parts opaque, and the lines of B’s argument are muddled by repeated digressions. B’s conclusion (pp. 352 – 365), in which the fruits of his re-reading are concisely summarised, does much to make up for this obscurity. I cite the four most important results, the first of which concerns the book’s central question (‘Is faith repeatable?’). With this formulation, albeit at first somewhat strange, B alludes to *Fear and Trembling*, specifically to Kierkegaard’s question, whether a “[re-]appropriation of ... Christian faith under the circumstances of his time” (p. 353) is possible or not. As a matter of fact, this question remains unanswered in Kierkegaard; however, according to B the theological point lies precisely therein. That it “remains uncertain, ... whether that faith be repeatable, creates “precisely that freedom for *repetition* with which Kierkegaard is chiefly concerned” (ibid.); as such it does not call for the mere remembrance of a purportedly original and normatively established ‘essence of Christianity’, but rather for a “self-responsible reinvention of faith by each individual ... in his or her own existence,” (ibid.). In the author’s opinion, this conclusion resonates in important ways with Derrida’s central deconstructionist concerns. Generally speaking, a grammatology grown out of a critique of Western logo- or phonocentrism no longer roots the semantics of language signs in any transcendental significance, but rather in the process of endless ‘supplements’ – a process, within which meaning can never be fixed once and for all, but only preliminarily, in a never-ending deferment (*différance*: cf. 74). This applies also and paradigmatically to the concept of religion. Insofar as it can be determined in its individual character as dependent on the tradition of sacred texts, it necessarily entails the “willingness for new interpretation and description of tradition ” (p. 354); for only then does religious faith have the chance “to remain *faith*: namely risk, decision and responsibility before God, the entirely other” (p. 355).

This formulation leads to the *second* central aspect, which B. summarises under the heading ‘God and mystery’: In and with that form of religious faith for which the Kierkegaardian Abraham (especially in “Problema III” of *Fear and Trembling*) is a model, God only comes into play where the individual can “keep a ... secret between himself and God” (ibid.); and yet, precisely by willing to abjure from mediation of an ecclesiastical and/ or social sort, the individual deserves to be called an “individual” in the full sense. Derrida reinforces and surpasses this by drawing on an interpretation of faith which explains it as a relation to God which “leaves open *who* this god is” (p. 356). From the perspective of religious faith, God appears only as a name or place holder for the “totally other” and as such escapes all generalising representations; faith, however, stands for the “experience of unappropriable otherness in general” (p. 357).

The *third* point of comparison is concerned with Kierkegaard’s critique of ethico-religious teleology. The idea of the leap of faith represents the transgression of all salvation-historical speculations. The believer “does not make an *exchange* in any respect, but ... gives without any *in order to*,” (p. 358). Derrida surpasses this ‘transeconomic’ structure of faith by means of what is called a “thinking of the gift” (ibid.). On the one hand the logic of the gift entails an absolute asymmetry in the (duty-)relation of man to God; on the other hand, it functions as the basis for a far-reaching claim about the problem of death in the history of western philosophy. According to Derrida, western thought from Socrates to Heidegger can be read as a misdirected attempt to ‘give death’ (*donner la mort*) to oneself, i.e.: to endow death with a meaning (more exactly: an ‘economically’ distorted meaning). This attempt ignores the basic fact that death can only be conceived of as an absolute gift, as a “spending with no return, ... without being calculable in any way” (358f).

The *fourth* point of comparison integrates this diagnosis into the context of what can be labelled the ‘ethics of the gift’. The fundamental idea of such an ethics can only be accentuated paradoxically, namely in terms of a certain ‘moral of morals’: Whereas, according to *Fear and Trembling*, the ethical qua universal is teleologically suspended only in exceptional cases and by virtue of a genuinely religious movement, Derrida holds that the ethical as such already – and paradoxically enough - *begins* “beyond the ‘universal’: wherever we deal with the demand of ‘the other’, we are always involved in Abraham’s paradox” (p. 360). It is the ethical perspective as such which confronts the individual with the

disquieting possibility that 'every other is the *entirely* other' (tout autre est tout autre) – that is the other, to whom as such we are absolutely obliged against all exchange economy. Thus ethics is to be plagued by that very dilemma which Kierkegaard had reserved for ethico-religious border conflicts alone: There is "no righteousness without that unconditional, incalculable, universally unjustifiable opening vis-à-vis the *entirely* other" (p. 361; italics H.S.). The moral imperative, and a fortiori its fulfillment always begins beyond and necessarily remains in irreconcilable tension with any rationally universalisable duty.

2.1 B's study is, in many respects, of considerable merit. First it tackles a theologically promising and hitherto insufficiently researched topic. Second, it documents an impressive familiarity with the sources and the secondary literature as well as with the results of the pertinent interdisciplinary research. Third, the author not only shows an extraordinary feel for the stylistic nuances and idiosyncrasies of his sources, but he also succeeds in integrating his observations into the overarching argumentative structure of his book (cf. e.g. pp. 43-50, 108ff.). Fourth, he does not restrict the textual basis of his Kierkegaard interpretation to Kierkegaard's treatment of the Gen. 22 episode in *Fear and Trembling*, but also takes further relevant sources (e.g. the later journals) as well as other thematically pertinent aspects into consideration: for instance, Kierkegaard's relation to Judaism on the one hand, and on the other, Jewish readings of Kierkegaard (cf. pp. 271-308). Finally, over and above a number of apt individual observations (e.g. pp. 153, 159, 165f. 175, 241, 248, 265, 284, 288, 363f.), B's central thesis is thesis both stimulating and theologically far-reaching.

2.2 It is, however, upon this very thesis that the critical reader must rack his brains, for, to the best of my recognition, it is based on a doubly foreshortened picture of Kierkegaard. The assertion that his communicative forms 'generate' fundamental decisions in his theology (cf. p. 10) means with reference to the title- and core question of the book two things: first, that the answer to this question has intentionally been left open, indeed, that its openness is to be seen as a result and element of an indirect communicative strategy. It also implies that this strategy proves meaningful if and only if we are entitled to attribute the opinion to Kierkegaard that that openness is in itself a constituent element of a theological 'message,' according to which each individual must generate anew, perhaps even "reinvent" Christian faith for himself (cf. pp. 353 & 365). However, this interpretation, which according to B, is fully consistent with Kierkegaard's own intentions, ascribes to Kierkegaard's writings that very moment of 'doctrine', which the author had earlier claimed Kierkegaard had intentionally and successfully avoided. A further complication lies in the fact that the implications of that message do not really seem to do justice to Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity. For in my opinion Kierkegaard unswervingly holds fast to the transcendental (or more exactly: eschatological) significance of the expression "Christian faith." If this were not so I would see myself unable to account for his insistence (in the *Book on Adler*) that Christianity, owing to the paradoxical connotation of its object of faith, has 'no history', so that each individual always and inevitably starts 'from the beginning, at that paradox'.

2.3 A final point. Although I shall not presume to pass judgement on the hermeneutic reliability of B's reading of Derrida – if upon the foundation of deconstructionist principles of interpretation such a judgment can or ought to be attempted at all - I can hardly conceal my astonishment about the uninhibitedness with which B joins forces with those authors who, notwithstanding their appeals to Derrida's logic of unending supplement, repeatedly claim to be able to deliver precise information about that with which Kierkegaard and Derrida are 'truly concerned' (cf. e.g. pp. 6, 8, 35, 39, 41, 45, 48, 50, 81, 110, 114, 125, 163). Thanks to its unintended comical effect, this pragmatic inconsistency comes close to that wonderful anticlimax (although, in this regard, B is innocent), with which valiant deconstructionists are wont to amaze their readers by publishing a thesis about the death of the author under their own name – i.e.: that of the person of the author. Doubtlessly, this has little to do with Kierkegaard, save for the fact that Kierkegaard would have certainly been greatly amused by this the lack of reduplication in the attitude of those unfortunate authors.

George Pattison, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology*
(Routledge Studies in Nineteenth Century Philosophy)
(London: Routledge, 2002), 240 pp.

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"If I have ever been on good terms with the public," Kierkegaard observed in *The Point of View*, it was "in the second or third month after the publication of *Either/Or*" under a pseudonym (PV 37). Shortly thereafter, Kierkegaard released *Two Upbuilding Discourses* under his own name—and promptly lost his public following. He never regained it. By the numbers, at least, Kierkegaard was a one-hit wonder: *Either/Or*, the third of his thirty-odd books, remained his sole commercial success.

Kierkegaard later portrayed his fall from public favor as a decisive clash with the world. "With my left hand I passed out *Either/Or* into the world, with my right hand *Two Upbuilding Discourses*; but they all or almost all took the left hand with their right" (PV 36). This miscommunication, as it were a colossal missed handshake, soon recurred at regular intervals, as Kierkegaard released a succession of pairs of pseudonymous and "upbuilding" works. If we believe *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard's aim throughout was to winnow his readership, sifting for the upbuilding discourses' true reader, "that single individual" who would accept "with the right hand ... what is offered with the right hand" (PV 36n, EUD 179).

In his fresh, masterly study, *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, theology, literature*, George Pattison seeks not so much to grasp Kierkegaard's right hand with his own as to reveal the continuity of Kierkegaard's work, left hand and right, as only the upbuilding works show it. "These texts provide a standpoint from which best to see the unity that holds together the whole, including, necessarily and pre-eminently, the extraordinary achievement of the pseudonymous works" (9). This thesis, Pattison knows, needs vigorous defense on a number of fronts. On the one hand, he must reconcile his talk of "unity" with the distinction between "right" and "left" hands: Kierkegaard's insistence that the upbuilding writings differ radically from the pseudonymous works. On the other hand, and more urgently, Pattison must rescue the discourses from charges dating to the 1840s: that they are boring, dogmatic, and detract from Kierkegaard's interest to philosophy, theology, and literature. Pattison devotes his difficult first chapter to the former task; his remaining chapters attempt—and superbly accomplish—the latter.

Chapter 1 combats three Kierkegaardian claims about the signed upbuilding writings: (1) that they represent "direct communication," as opposed to the pseudonymous works' "indirect communication"; (2) that they are *merely* upbuilding, and do not reflect Kierkegaard's sense of true Christianity; and finally, a specification of (2) due to Johannes Climacus,¹² (3) that the upbuilding discourses reflect only the standpoint of "Religiousness A," not that of Christianity.

Claim (1) occurs prominently in both *The Point of View* and the unpublished lectures on communication. Pattison has long argued that "even the direct is indirect" in the upbuilding discourses, that Kierkegaard's "best works and most fruitful insights transcend this duality."¹³ He here presents an elaborate proof of this view, applying the motto *de omnibus dubitandum* to Kierkegaard's own pronouncements (14, 16). According to the unpublished lectures, Pattison notes, all ethical communication is "indirect" (18); however, he argues ingeniously, "the concept of ethical communication set out in the lectures is exemplified in the discourses" (19), which "would seem to mark them out as indirect communication after all" (21). At the very least, Pattison concludes, this reveals a tension between the lectures and *The Point of View*, and gives us reason to doubt that either is Kierkegaard's "last word" on the subject (22). Such strong claims may not be necessary: I am not certain that Pattison needs to challenge Claim (1) all—let alone attack the unpublished lectures and *The Point of View*—to bolster his thesis.¹⁴

Claims (2) and (3), on the other hand, plainly warrant Pattison's protests: both dismiss the discourses as works of an inferior religious character. Against Claim (2), Pattison maintains that no "qualitative distinction" can reliably be drawn between upbuilding and Christian works: "Even the most radical Christian works," Pattison maintains, "are readable in light of the category of the upbuilding" (12). In particular, Pattison flatly denies Johannes Climacus's Claim (3). "The apparently rigid schematization of 'Religiousness A' and 'Religiousness B' ... conceals a far more dynamic picture.

His last chapter fulfills this promise with creativity, grace, and thoroughness: it is the book's great triumph. Pattison begins by taking October 16, 1843—the date Kierkegaard published both *Fear and Trembling* and *Three Upbuilding Discourses*—as an occasion to read the former in terms of the latter, so that the upbuilding discourses' commentaries on love illuminate Johannes *de silentio*'s¹⁶ confusions about the faith and trials of Abraham. Pattison next examines Kierkegaard's upbuilding portrayal of "The Woman Who Was a Sinner" as a model of *imitatio Christi* befitting the rigorous standards of Anti-Climacus.¹⁷

It is only at this point, having shown the upbuilding's continuity with writings of both "lower" and "higher" pseudonyms, that Pattison plays his final card: the figure of Socrates, wending his way through works of all three categories. Socrates' movements reflect the continuity Pattison champions between the upbuilding and the pseudonymous, between what we might otherwise call Kierkegaard's philosophical and theological texts. "The reappearance of Socrates" hints, writes Pattison, "that the transition to a more overtly Christological understanding of religiousness [is] conceived within a framework erected on the ground of common human experience and understanding" (215). For Kierkegaard, in other words, Socrates signifies precisely what the upbuilding discloses: the juncture of Kierkegaard's right and left hands, the "point of similarity between irony and radical discipleship," that is, the "limit" of *both* philosophical and religious communication (219).

This complex, formidable argument is a marvelous contribution to English-language Kierkegaard scholarship: a book-length interpretation of the upbuilding discourses as the hermeneutic key to Kierkegaard's corpus. For all its ambition, Pattison's book is nonetheless careful and reasoned, cleanly written and clearly documented. It testifies eloquently to the richness of the discourses it treats. I am honored to recommend it to the *Newsletter*'s readers.

¹² Pseudonymous author of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. "Religiousness A" is the topic of some two hundred pages of CUP (1:387-586); on the upbuilding discourses, see 1:256-7n.

¹³ See, for example, George Pattison, "'Who' is the Discourse? A Study in Kierkegaard's Religious Literature," in *Kierkegaardiana* 16, ed. Joakim Garff, Arne Grøn, Eberhard Harbsmeier, and Julia Watkin (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels, 1993), 28-45, p. 43.

¹⁴ I find Pattison's sense that the discourses transcend the duality of "direct" and "indirect" appealing. I am just not certain that his view requires *rejection*, as opposed to reinterpretation, of Kierkegaard's claims in the unpublished lectures and in *The Point of View*. The unpublished lectures insist that "ethical-religious communication," as opposed to merely "ethical communication," is always "direct-indirect" (VIII² B 89). Meanwhile, *The Point of View* declares that, to portray religiousness properly, one "must begin in one swoop with simultaneously being an aesthetic and a religious author," i.e., one must mix "direct" and "indirect" communication strategies (PV 49). In both the unpublished lectures and *On My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard announces that he wrote the upbuilding discourses precisely to ensure such a "concurrence" (VIII² B 88; PV 8). To fuse these claims together: on the level of prefaces and bylines – that is, comparing signed and pseudonymous works – the upbuilding discourses may indeed be "direct-indirect" communication about Christianity. These statements, it seems to me, are not necessarily incompatible with Pattison's thesis that, on the level of ethical-religious content, the upbuilding discourses are *themselves* indirect in important ways. Kierkegaard may well have believed that, furnished with the right sort of preface, disclaimer, or revocation, a text containing indirection could nonetheless count as "direct."

¹⁵ For further discussion, see the introduction to Chapter 7's original: George Pattison, "A dialogical Approach to Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses*," in *Zeitschrift für neue Theologiegeschichte*, 3:185-202, p. 186.

¹⁶ "Lower" pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*.

¹⁷ "Higher" pseudonymous author of *The Sickness unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*, two works sometimes taken to represent "Religiousness B" (as opposed to the "Religiousness A" of the upbuilding discourses; see "Claim (3)" above).