

Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter



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NEWS

Fifth International Kierkegaard Conference, June 11-15, 2005

The Fifth International Kierkegaard Conference took place June 11-15. In accordance with the new Princeton translation effort, the theme of the conference was "Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks". There were 150 people in attendance at the opening dinner with 17 countries represented. Professors Sylvia Wals and Robert Perkins were honored at the banquet for their long and distinguished service to the community of Kierkegaard scholars.

On Saturday, June 11, George Pattison, the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford gave the plenary lecture entitled "The Year 1838". On the following day, a dissertation panel composed of 13 advanced and or recently finished doctoral students presented summaries of their research and fielded questions. On Sunday evening, we gathered for a service of remembrance for Dr. Julia Watkin, organized by Sylvia Walsh and Robert Perkins. David Cain was kind enough to share a remarkable video of two interviews that he had with Julia.

Over the next few days, more than 40 papers were presented. There was also a workshop on Kierkegaard and Buddhism led by Shin Fujieda, Kinya Masugata, and Joel Smith, and A reading by Caroline Coleman O'Neill from her recently published novel, *Loving Soren*. The conference ended with a luncheon attended by the founders of the Library, Howard and Edna Hong.

Report on Summer Program, 2005

The Kierkegaard Library welcomed scholars this summer from 14 countries. The summer (and fall) fellows included: Brian Barlow, Eric Berg, Maria Jose Binetti, Adam Buben, Manuel Caraza, Clare Carlisle, Alejandro Cavallazzi, James Champion, Eduardo Charpenel, Ingrid Constant, Daniel Greenspan, Toshi Hachiya, Christian Huebner, Peder Jøthen, David Kangas, Sharon Krishek, Erik Lindland, Laura Llevadot, Michael Lopez, Jakob Lund, Jason Mahn, Tamara Marks, Sean Nye, Anna Osokina, Azucena Palavicini, Simon Podmore, Sarolta Pusok, Shoni Rancher, James Rodwell, Gabriel Rossatti, Bartholomew Ryan, Narve Strand, Mark Tietjen, J. Michael Tilley, Christopher Truxler, Alejandro Vazquez, Massimo Vittorio, Sophie Wennerscheid, Joseph Westfall.

House Foundation Fellows

The first group of recipients of the new Kierkegaard House Foundation Residency Fellowships (2004-5) have completed their stays. This first group included John Lippitt, Oscar Parceró, Dolores Perarnau, and Patricia Dip.

The second group of recipients (2005-6) have already begun arriving. This second group includes Almut Furchert, Leo Stan, Toshi Hachiya, and Roy Sellars.

Applications for House Foundation fellowships are reviewed on a rolling basis for the following years. If you are interested in applying for 2006-7 or 2007-8, or subsequent years, please see the Announcements section description of application procedure. For more information, contact Gordon Marino at marino@stolaf.edu.

Donors to the Kierkegaard Library February 2004-August 2005

Special collections were received from Marcia Dewey (in memory of Bradley Dewey), from the Ditmanson family (in memory of Jean and Harold Ditmanson), from Inger and Junius Stenseth (in memory of Jonathan Stenseth), Ruth Hartshorne (from the library of H. Holmes Hartshorne), Mary Wood (from the library of Robert Wood), Walt and Betty Stromseth (in memory of Paul Holmer) and from the estate of Julia Watkin.

Gifts to the Library were received during the June 2005 conference from the following individuals: Eric Pons, Jolita Pons, Sylvia Walsh, Dolors Perarnau, Oscar Parcero, Alvaro Valls, Marcio Gimenes de Paula, Paul Muench, Richard Purkarthofer, Andras Nagy, Daphne Hampson, Per Lonning, Erik Lindland, John Lippitt, Amanda Bolland, Darya Loungina, Donald Fox, Leo Stan, Pia Soltoft, and Tonny Aagard Olesen, Richard Purkarthofer.

Other individual donors during this 2004-5 period are: Sergia Karen Hay, Daniel W. Conway, Julia Watkin, Hans Aaen, Karel Eisses, Todd Nichol, Sherman Johnsrud, Roman Kralik, Rafael Garcia Pavon, Eliseo Perez Alvarez, Monserrat Negre Rigol, Elisabete Sousa, Patricia Dip, Lone Koldtoft, Timothy Wilder, Timothy Slemmons, Ingrid Basso, Javier Teira Lafuente, Nicolae Irina, Tami Aylat-Yafuri, Louis Pojman, Jakob Lund, Sharon Krishek.

The Library is grateful to all who have contributed to the Library. We welcome gifts of books, articles, and financial assistance including the publications of scholars themselves.

SK Research Centre in Copenhagen

[will send on Monday]

KJN (Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks

[will send progress report on Monday]

SOBRESKI – Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos de Kierkegaard

{will send on Monday – may need to move to Announcements}

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 Muveszettudományi Intézet
Muzeum korut 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@axelero.hu.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Danish Course, Summer 2006

Dr. Sinead Ladegaard Knox will again offer her month-long intensive Danish course for Kierkegaard scholars beginning their study of Danish at the Library. This course focuses on learning how to read Kierkegaard. We will offer a certificate of successful completion of the course, but this course does not come with official academic credit. Cost for tuition and board will be \$1200. For further information, contact Gordon Marino at marino@stolaf.edu.

Summer Fellowship Program, 2006

Summer fellowships for research-in-residence are offered to scholars for use of the collection between June 1-July 31 and September 1-November 15 (closed in August this year). The awards include campus housing and a \$300 per month stipend (for scholars in residence longer than 30 days who are not supported by their home institutions.) A limited number of scholarships are available at other times of year. Please contact Gordon Marino if you are interested for 2006.

Kierkegaard House Foundation Residency Fellowship, 2006-7 and 2007-8

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. Advanced graduate students, professors, and other serious students of Kierkegaard are invited to apply.

Kierkegaard House Foundation Residency Fellowships provide living quarters and \$1500 per month for periods of four to twelve months (with the possibility of extension). Applications for September are due April 1st.

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

Soren Kierkegaard Society, USA

APA Kierkegaard Session

AAR Kierkegaard Sessions

[Will send this info on Monday from John Davenport etc]

Kierkegaard in Asia

[Announcement of Melbourne conference – will send on Monday]

Supported from the President's Office, Stetson University, DeLand, Florida

International Kierkegaard Commentary

Mailing address: 225 South Boundary Avenue, DeLand, FL 32720-5103
rperkins6@cfl.rr.com // 386-734-6457

1 August 2005—discard all previously dated copies.

CALL FOR PAPERS

International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Christian Discourses' and
'The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress'

Due date: 1 September 2006

Prospective authors should write the editor to discuss their intention to contribute to this volume.
Baring unforeseen events, this the fourth from the last call for papers.

VOLUMES IN PROCESS

International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits'

The page proofs for the text and the index are being read by the authors. The volume is expected to be in the
MUP stall at the AAR this fall.

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

International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions'

Volumes 9 and 10 will be combined in a single binding.

Authors have revised their articles. The editor is polishing the introduction.
The volume will be in the MUP spring catalogue, 2006.

MOST RECENTLY PUBLISHED VOLUME

International Kierkegaard Commentary: 'Practice in Christianity'

Subscription and authors' copies mailed in November, 2005

**Submissions that do not adhere to the conventions and sigla will returned unread.
All essays are submitted to the Advisory Board for evaluation; no papers are commissioned.**

For further information, write to Bob Perkins at rperkins6@cfl.rr.com.

A Tribute to Joan Estelrich i Artigues (1896-1958)

by Dolors Perarnau Vidal

While immersing myself in the secondary literature on Kierkegaard's reception in Spain, I recently came upon a rather important discovery: Alongside Miguel de Unamuno, whose interest in Kierkegaard is well-known throughout the world, Spain had another important early twentieth-century scholar who devoted himself to Kierkegaard, and whose studies were in fact more academic than Unamuno's. The scholar in question is the Majorcan Joan Estelrich i Artigues, one of the most significant intellectuals of the Catalan culture in the last century.¹

The purpose of this paper is to pay tribute to a man who, though popular for his political activities in Majorca and Catalonia, remains a complete stranger to Kierkegaard research, not only internationally but even, and more regrettably, within the Spanish-speaking world. Perhaps the Catalan language is the reason that he has been forgotten; after all, Catalan contributions are frequently eclipsed by the influence and power of Spanish. In this case, Estelrich has been completely eclipsed, and all the glory has gone to Miguel de Unamuno, rector of the University of Salamanca and the commonly acknowledged forerunner of Kierkegaard in Spain. It must be admitted that the latter description is to some degree accurate, inasmuch as Unamuno knew Kierkegaard first and in fact initiated Estelrich into the study of the Dane. But if Unamuno was the first to discover Kierkegaard, Estelrich was the first to study take a scholarly approach to his work. In contrast to Unamuno, whose appropriated Kierkegaard in an intensely personal way, Estelrich researched the secondary literature and became acquainted with the debates over the proper interpretation of Kierkegaard. While Estelrich was an ardent admirer of the Danish philosopher, his studies show that he was also able to look at Kierkegaard critically and his essays were rigorous enough to pave the way for an *academic* reception. However, as luck would have it, that reception never took place and Estelrich's studies have largely been ignored by the Kierkegaard world.

In 1947, Estelrich reported his discovery of Kierkegaard as follows: “[The reading of Unamuno] incited me to take a direct approach to the work of the great Danish writer. Despite the difficulties of the war, I obtained the German edition of Göttsched and Schrepf, plus the studies of Brandes, Høffding and some others; later I acquired the Danish edition of the collected works.”² Inspired by Unamuno's appropriation of the Dane, Estelrich wrote a “poetic”³ essay on Kierkegaard intended for publication as a book: “In the second semester of 1918, I wrote my essay on Kierkegaard, caught by the allure of his personality. My first piece of writing was quite long (more than 150 pages) and was published by *La Revista*.”⁴ Although the book never appeared, and Estelrich ended up publishing the written material in installments in *La Revista*, Estelrich's first essay on “The Tragic Sense of Søren Kierkegaard” was a pioneering study, for it not only portrayed the most characteristic elements of Kierkegaard's biography and dealt with the main topics of Kierkegaard's work, but also presented theses that would not be defended for many years, on such topics as Kierkegaard's broken engagement to Regine and the literary aspect of Kierkegaard's work. On the issue of the betrothal, Estelrich distances himself from popular theories about misogyny and sexual impotence, and suggests that the break was simply the result of spiritual incompatibility. As for the literary dimension of the authorship, Estelrich strongly emphasized the importance of Kierkegaard's role as a writer. Here he seized the opportunity to praise Kierkegaard's love and masterly use of the Danish language as a model fit for another minority language: Catalan.

Yet not everything in Kierkegaard was cause for his praise. Estelrich profoundly disagreed with Kierkegaard's claim that there was a contradiction between the Christian and human perspective. He also objected to Kierkegaard's dictum, “subjectivity is truth”. According to Estelrich, Kierkegaard's account of subjectivity was so radical that it undermined all forms of objectivity, including the one Kierkegaard most respected- revelation.

In a mood of disenchantment with that hitherto charming figure, Estelrich wrote another essay on Kierkegaard, this time with “perfect objectivity,” “just erudite and better documented.”⁵ “Kierkegaard in Nordic Thought” (*La Revista*, 1919) deals with the thinkers and writers who were Kierkegaard’s predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. With surprising precocity, Estelrich followed his treatment of some of Kierkegaard’s predecessors by introducing his reader to the literary, philosophical and theological context of the Danish Golden Age, which remains even now an overlooked matter in Spanish Kierkegaard scholarship.⁶ With regard to Kierkegaard’s heirs, Estelrich discussed Ibsen and other Nordic writers who either followed Kierkegaard in his fight against Christendom or preferred to accompany him in his defense of the single individual. Beyond Scandinavia, Estelrich dedicates his last chapter to “the only one who was really influenced by Kierkegaard, with the exception of the German Protestantism: the writer Miguel de Unamuno.”⁷ In Estelrich’s view, the Basque author’s lack of Latin roots was the reason for his familiarity with the northern spirit and his admiration for Kierkegaard, his suffering and melancholic “brother” from the North.⁸ Last but not least, Estelrich ends his second essay with an annotated bibliography that clearly proves his acquaintance with both primary and secondary literature.

Maybe today, after so many years of Kierkegaard research, Estelrich’s work does not seem so valuable. After all, Kierkegaard is now a famous thinker—even though he is so mainly under the heading of “father of existentialism”—and enjoys a great many articles and books that deal with his work. But in 1918—the year of publication of the first essay in *La Revista*—Kierkegaard was almost unknown outside Denmark, and especially in Spain, where the study of his work had not yet dawned, and only a cursory translation of excerpts from *Either-Or* had recently been published.⁹ Therefore, Estelrich’s two essays on Kierkegaard should be considered important contributions. They should not be underestimated, even today, by all those seeking an introduction to Kierkegaard. It is for precisely this reason that in Estelrich’s time, after the essays were reprinted and slightly amplified in *Entre la vida i els llibres*, they became the object of a very flattering request, which confirms, once again, the originality and merit of Estelrich’s work: Daniel-Rops and Jean Cassou asked Estelrich for permission to translate his essays into French.

In 1926 I reprinted it in the volume *Entre la vida i els llibres*. Here, the book did not have any influence and one must rather find its use in foreign works such as Daniel-Rops’ *Carte d’Europe*. Given that the book was the first extensive study on Kierkegaard in a non-Germanic language, Daniel-Rops and Jean Cassou asked for permission to translate it into French; I refused, because no one better than me knew the deficiencies of my work—without pressing my modesty so far as to ignore the happy discoveries and correct intuitions that later studies of more learned authors have confirmed and developed.¹⁰

Had Estelrich not pressed his modesty—or, better put, his pride—so far as to keep his work from international acclaim, Joan Estelrich i Artigues would now be regarded as one of the first and finest Kierkegaard scholars. Fate, however, wished him to remain in his small country, where he is known by few, if not forgotten by everybody. To begin to change this situation—to help make his studies of Kierkegaard known and acknowledged in the Kierkegaardian academic world—has been the task of this paper.

Estelrich’s Bibliography on Kierkegaard

“El sentiment tràgic de Søren Kierkegaard” [“The Tragic Sense of Søren Kierkegaard”] in *La Revista* vol. 4, no. 74-79, Barcelona 1918-19, pp. 4-7, 354-357, 376-378, 392-393, 406-409, 425-428.

“Søren Kierkegaard” [Fragment of Høffding’s lecture at the University of Copenhagen, May 5, 1913], tr. by Joan Estelrich in *Quaderns d’estudi* vol. 1, no. 1, Barcelona 1918-19, pp. 87-94.¹¹

“Kierkegaard dins del pensament nòrdic” [“Kierkegaard in Nordic Thought”] in *La revista* vol. 5, no. 81-83, Barcelona 1919, pp. 35-38, 48-50, 64-68.

“Kierkegaard i Unamuno” [“Kierkegaard and Unamuno”] in *La Revista* vol. 5, no. 84, Barcelona 1919, pp. 83-84.

“Bibliografia de S. Kierkegaard” [“S. Kierkegaard’s Bibliography”] in *La Revista* vol. 5, no. 85, Barcelona 1919, pp. 106-108.

“Søren Kierkegaard” in *Entre la vida i els llibres*, Llibreria Catalonia, Barcelona 1926, pp. 63-218.

“Experiència i elogi de la solitud. El retorn a Kierkegaard” [“Experience and Praise of Solitude. Return to Kierkegaard”] in *La nostra Terra*, Mallorca, 1936.

“Kierkegaard en España” [“Kierkegaard in Spain”] in *Destino*, Barcelona August 9, 1947, p. 9.¹²

¹ Politician, journalist, editor, translator, essayist ... Joan Estelrich was a greatly multifaceted writer. His interest in Kierkegaard was not an isolated literary preference, but was closely related to his political and social-cultural concerns, which focused, among other things, on the Scandinavian countries. Estelrich drew a parallel between the political situations of Scandinavia and Iberia (Cf. “Escandinàvia i Ibèria” in *La Revista* no. 112, Barcelona 1920, pp. 134-136).

² “Kierkegaard en España” in *Destino*, Barcelona August 9, 1947, p. 9. All translations in this paper are mine.

³ Estelrich refers to this first essay as “an imagined construction, purely poetic” (*Entre la vida i els llibres*, Llibreria Catalonia, Barcelona 1926, p. 66)

⁴ “The first of these essays about the fascinating figure of Søren Kierkegaard had to be—its elements being properly coordinated and amplified—a book for *La Revista*’s publication” (Ibid., p. 65).

⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

⁶ *Kierkegaard frente al hegelianismo* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid 1996), by Jaime Franco Barrio, would be the only exception.

⁷ “Kierkegaard dins del pensament nòrdic” in *La revista* vol. 5, no. 81-83, Barcelona 1919, p. 68.

⁸ It is a well-known fact that Unamuno refers to Kierkegaard as his brother. In the preface to the Danish translation of *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, Unamuno writes: “I discovered a brother in him, almost another I, and I decided to embrace his soul” (Miguel de Unamuno *Den tragiske Livsfølelse hos Mennesker og Folkeslag*, tr. by Franz Burghardt and Axel Thomsen, Haase, Copenhagen 1925, p. 5).

⁹ We refer to *Prosas de Søren Kierkegaard* [Excerpts from “In vino veritas,” “Diapsalmata,” “Den Ulykkeligste,” “Ægteskabets æsthetiske Gyldighed”], tr. by Álvaro Armando Vasseur, América, Madrid 1918.

¹⁰ “Kierkegaard en España”, art. cit., p. 9.

¹¹ As far as this translation is concerned, it must be said that it was likely not made from the Danish original. Although Estelrich seems to have mastered the Danish language—when one takes into account this translation and his constant references to the Danish titles and categories from Kierkegaard’s work—he himself talks about his rather poor knowledge of Danish when, in a letter from February 1920, writes: “My friend Kjersmeier also sent me a copy of his translation. I do not know anybody who could do a good and exactly literal translation either. The little knowledge I have of Danish, due to the resemblance to German, only helps me to be aware of the content, without being able to give a literal translation” (Letter to Joan Alcover, Joan Alcover i Maspons personal archives, Obra cultural Balear copyright, Regne de Mallorca Archives, Palma). Likewise, in a *curriculum vitae* written by Estelrich at the end of his life, Danish is not given as a language of his acquaintance (Joan Pons i Marquès personal archives, Palma de Mallorca).

From all this, and keeping in mind, on one hand, that an early French translation of Høffding’s speech had already been published (*Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* vol. 21, no. 6, Paris 1913, pp. 713-732)—as Estelrich himself remarks in his “Bibliography on S. Kierkegaard”—and, on the other hand, that the Danish titles and categories could also have been taken from other studies on Kierkegaard, we could almost conclude that “Søren Kierkegaard” is a Catalan translation made from the French version of Høffding’s speech. I would like to express my gratitude to Isabel Graña for letting me have access to those Estelrich’s documents.

¹² Since most of Estelrich’s work has not been reprinted, and is scattered in many different countries, it is not possible to state that the bibliographical material listed is complete. Only detailed research into Estelrich’s publications and personal papers could make such a statement feasible.

Special thanks to David Possen for his idiomatic suggestions and corrections.

Kierkegaard on Socrates in the *Journals and Papers*

Jacob Howland
McFarlin Professor of Philosophy
University of Tulsa

Kierkegaard mentions the name of Socrates in the Hong edition of his journals and papers well over two hundred times.¹ Some of his remarks revolve around themes familiar from the pseudonymous works, such as Socrates' existential "proof" for the immortality of the soul, the significance of his example for the Christian dialectician, his exemplary use of indirect communication, his attention to the single individual, his negativity, and his emphasis on doing as the proper criterion of knowing.² On other occasions, Kierkegaard reflects on the Socratic nature of his own task. "I wonder if it did not go with Socrates in his age as with me," he muses in a typical entry. "He came to be regarded as representing evil, for in those days ignorance was looked upon as evil—and yet Socrates was in truth the physician."³ Yet another significant set of entries explores Socrates' anticipation of Christian existence—a theme that is especially prominent in Kierkegaard's later years. "This Socratic thesis is of utmost importance for Christianity," he writes in 1850:

Virtue cannot be taught; that is, it is not a doctrine, it is a being-able, an exercising, an existing [*Existeren*], an existential [*existentiel*] transformation, and therefore it is so slow to learn, not at all as simple and easy as the rote-learning of one more language or one more system. No, in respect to virtue there is always particular emphasis on the internal, the inward, "the single individual."⁴

And in 1854, Kierkegaard observes that "just as Socrates is said to have talked continually only about pack asses and leather tanners etc. . . . so Christianity uses the same words and expressions we human beings use and yet says something entirely different from what we say."⁵

Socrates' efforts to reach the single individual inevitably suggest a comparison to Christian reformers, and ultimately to Christ himself. In comparison to Socrates, Kierkegaard writes in 1850, Luther "took the matter too lightly." "He ought to have made it obvious that the freedom he was fighting for . . . leads to making life . . . infinitely more strenuous than it was before." Instead, Luther "swung off too hastily":

Jubilantly . . . the contemporary age embraced his cause, joined the party—Luther wants to topple the Pope—bravo! Well, all I can say is that this is pure political bargaining. . . . I have the deepest respect for Luther—but was he a Socrates? No, no, far from that. When I talk purely and simply about man I say: Of all men old Socrates is the greatest—Socrates, the hero and martyr of intellectuality. Only you understood what it is to be a reformer, understood what it meant for you yourself to be that, and were that.⁶

In another entry from the same year, Kierkegaard writes: "Outside of Christianity Socrates stands alone—you noble, simple wise man—you were actually a reformer."⁷ And in 1849, he asserts that Socrates "is the only one, is 'the martyr' in the eminent sense, the greatest man." Christ, on the other hand, cannot be called a martyr because he "was not a witness to truth but was 'the truth.'"⁸

This is not all. In an entry from 1853, Kierkegaard muses on the situation of philosophy after Socrates and Christianity after Christ. "They say," he writes, that whereas "in Socrates philosophy was as yet merely a life," it subsequently becomes doctrine and then scientific scholarship, from whose heights we now "look back at Socrates as inferior." So, too, "in Christ, in the apostles, in the first Christians Christianity was as yet . . . merely a life. . . . and now we stand at the pinnacle of scientific scholarship and look back on the first Christians, for in them Christianity was as yet merely a life."⁹ How, then, can we recover the Socratic or the Christian life? This question leads directly into Kierkegaard's most provocative reflections on Socrates.

In a journal entry from 1849, Kierkegaard explains that Christ provides not only the prototype or archetype of the Christian life, but also a ladder, so to speak, to help one climb up to the archetype:

When we humble ourselves, then Christ is pure compassion. And in our striving to approach the prototype [*Forbilledet*], the prototype itself is again our very help. It alternates; when we are striving, then he is the prototype; and when we stumble, lose courage, etc., then he is the love which helps us up, and then he is the prototype again.¹⁰

Christ is thus not only the truth but the way to the truth, in that his example furnishes us with the condition for understanding and appropriating the very truth that he exemplifies.

The Socratic case is fundamentally different: the condition for understanding the truth is one that all human beings are already supposed to possess. This condition turns out to be not simply reason, but the desire to learn the truth—the passion of philosophical eros of which Johannes Climacus makes much in *Philosophical Fragments*. Eros makes possible more than understanding, for it is also the condition for existing in the light of this understanding. It is the way to the truth that answers to the example of Christ in Christianity. Yet in his journals and papers, Kierkegaard makes it clear that Socrates' philosophical passion is extraordinary. He indicates that Socrates is unique in being able, without following Christ's example, to live up to his understanding of the truth and thus to actualize the ideal. Others simply lack the depth of passion—in other words, the condition of genuinely philosophical eros—that makes this possible. Nor can Socrates give this condition to anyone else, for in order to do so he would have to be a god. For Kierkegaard, the problem with Socratic philosophizing is thus not that it is too low in comparison with faith, but that it is too high for ordinary human beings. Because ordinary human beings lack the means to appropriate the truth on their own, Christ gives them a ladder with which to climb up to his example. Socrates, however, can furnish no such aid.

Kierkegaard spells out the foregoing understanding of Socrates in a long entry from 1854.¹¹ The general theme of this entry is the difference between poetry and actuality, a theme Kierkegaard introduces by observing that the extraordinary wittiness of Socrates' speeches in the *Apology* can make us “read him as if he were an author” and thereby forget that “the stakes are life and death.” Socrates seems to combine poetry and actuality in his own person in a way that is altogether unique:

Socrates is the only one of his kind! Such a cultivated intellect, so very subtly educated and sharpened that presumably such a man would need all the coddling and all the remoteness from actuality that a poet, an artist, needs—and then to be the toughest character in Greece, one who does not produce in a study but in the most crucial actuality, with everything at stake and face to face with death, infuses this subtle intellect so subtly into every line, so magnificently into even the most unimportant turn.

What my pseudonyms frequently say could be said of Socrates: His life is not a drama for men but for the gods; spectators such as he required are found almost as rarely as a Socrates.

In this passage, Kierkegaard suggests that Socrates' speeches and deeds, even in the midst of exigent circumstances, reflect the sort of poetic perfection one normally associates with a carefully composed text. But this point alone does not explain why most human beings are not fit spectators of his life's drama. What does Kierkegaard mean to say here?

Kierkegaard makes himself more clear in the immediate sequel, in which he reflects on “the Socratic principle” that “to understand, truly to understand, is to be.”

For us more ordinary men this divides and becomes twofold: it is one thing to understand and another to be. Socrates is so elevated that he does away with this distinction—and therefore we are unable to understand him, understand him in the most profound, the Socratic, sense.

Socrates' life is graced by an extraordinary integrity of understanding and existing. In him, speech and deed are one; his actions are fully in harmony with his grasp of the truth. But if understanding and being are one and the same—and this is what is expressed in the Socratic principle that virtue is knowledge—then one who falls short in the domain of being will also fall short in the domain of understanding, and vice versa. If, for example, my deeds fail to reflect my understanding of justice, it would follow that I do not truly understand justice. By the same token, those “more ordinary men” whose existence reflects a division between understanding and being cannot truly understand Socrates. In Kierkegaard's imagination, Socrates' life is properly a spectacle for the gods because they, too, do what they know and know what they do, for which reason only they can fully appreciate his godlike integrity.

The upshot of these reflections is something quite surprising. Whereas the philosophical hypothesis that Johannes Climacus develops in *Philosophical Fragments* implies that Socrates lacked “the consciousness of sin,” which “only the god could teach,”¹² Kierkegaard suggests another reason why Socrates might have lacked this consciousness: he was one of the only human beings ever to have been *without* sin.

Outside of Christianity Socrates is the only man of whom it may be said: he explodes existence, which is seen quite simply in his elimination of the separation between poetry and actuality. Our lives are such that a poet portrays ideality—but actuality is a devil of a lot different. Socrates is an ideality higher than any poet is able to poetize it, and he actually is this, it is his actuality. This is why it is all wrong for Oehlenschläger to want to poetize Socrates.¹³ In relation to Socrates “the poet” is a completely superfluous person who can only become an object of ridicule, a laughing-stock, when he does not keep the proper distance but even wants to poetize him. What does it mean to poetize? It means to contribute ideality. The poet takes an actuality which lacks something of ideality and adds to it, and this is the poem. But, good God, Your Lordship, there is no need at all to add anything here; Socrates' ideality is higher, and it is that precisely by being actuality.

If Socrates did not acknowledge the perversity of the will that drives a wedge between what we do and what we understand,¹⁴ it is, Kierkegaard suggests, simply because he had no experience of this perversity. It is true that he was not a Christian, but he did not need Christianity. He was able to hold truth together with existence, the ideal together with the actual, because his will was completely in accord with his understanding of the good. This unity of willing and understanding, rooted as it is in Socrates' extraordinary philosophical eros, puts him both existentially and intellectually beyond the reach of ordinary human beings.¹⁵ By the same token, however, it puts the rest of us beyond *his* reach. As the only man outside of Christianity to explode existence, Socrates would seem to combine ideality and actuality in a manner reminiscent of Christ. Not being a god, however, he was limited by his experience and so could not know what Christ knew—and what we know—about sin. Without this knowledge, it could not occur to him that others might lack the condition for understanding the truth—much less that this condition cannot be supplied in the absence of a concrete example that would not only give them something to imitate, but also teach them how to imitate it.¹⁶

We would be remiss to conclude without noting that the foregoing account of the Athenian philosopher contains a deep ambiguity. Kierkegaard insists that Socrates' actuality cannot be poetized, for his “is an ideality higher than any poet is able to poetize it, and he actually is this, it is his actuality.” Yet his Socrates is the Socrates of Plato's dialogues, and Plato himself warns us in his *Second Letter* that “there are no writings of Plato nor will there ever be, but those now said to be his are of a Socrates grown beautiful and young” (314c). If in the dialogues Socrates has grown beautiful and young, has he not been poetized? And if neither Oehlenschläger nor anyone else can poetize Plato's Socrates, might this not be because Plato has *already* poetized Socrates to the utmost extent? To add to these doubts, we may wonder whether Kierkegaard's attempts to grasp Socrates' actuality do not in themselves involve poetizing him. In an entry from 1848, Kierkegaard notes that whereas Christ is “eternally present,” Socrates “is present only historically.” For this reason, “it certainly does not help me to pray to Socrates: what I am to know about him I must learn from history or shape it out of my own head.”¹⁷ One's suspicion that Kierkegaard's understanding of Socrates might in part be “shaped out of his own head” is strengthened by another entry from 1848, in which he observes that “no one can really learn anything from

the past . . . because it is the past and consequently can only be comprehended by the imagination. But imagination and the medium of imagination is a medium of ideality.” He goes on to advert to Socrates in the course of noting that “ideality is the very contradiction of being in actuality; only in the medium of ideality can a man be so ideal that he is ideal at every moment—in actuality this is impossible.”¹⁸

One of Kierkegaard’s last journal entries on Socrates is a wistful expression of the mystery of his human accomplishment, a mystery that moves away from us and toward eternity, and thus in the opposite direction of revelation.

Socrates is the only person who solved the problem: he took everything, everything, with him to the grave. Marvelous Socrates, you performed a feat which remains eternally just as difficult, if anyone should want to repeat it; you left nothing, nothing, nothing, not even the thinnest thread of a result which a professor could grab onto; no, you took everything along to the grave. This way you kept the highest enthusiasm closed up airtight in the most eminent reflection and sagacity, kept it for eternity—you took everything along.¹⁹

¹ Citations are from *Søren Kierkegaard's Journal and Papers*, six vols., ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-1978). Henceforth JP, cited by entry number, volume and page number in the Hong edition, and arrangement and notation in the Heiberg-Kuhr-Torsting edition of the *Papirer*.

² On the soul’s immortality see JP 73, 1.27 (X.2 A 406), JP 255, 1.108 (IX A 32), and JP 4280, 4.214 (X.3 A 315); on Socrates’ dialectical example JP 373, 1.153 (VIII.1 A 547) and JP 390, 1.161 (X.2 A 453); on his use of indirect communication JP 649, 1.273 (VIII.2 B 81); on his attention to the single individual JP 2030, 2.413 (X.3 A 476) and JP 4295, 4.219 (X.5 A 133); on his negativity JP 754, 1.350-351 (III A 7); on knowing as doing JP 895, 1.400 (IV C 86) and JP 4765, 4.457-458 (X.4 A 138).

³ JP 4555, 4.355 (X.2 A 401); cf. JP 6532, 6.251 (X.2 A 195), JP 6839, 6.472-475 (X.5 A 104), and JP 6901, 6.524-526 (XI.1 A 439).

⁴ JP 1060, 1.463 (X.2 A 606).

⁵ JP 3532, 3.615-616 (XI.1 A 19); cf. JP 4264, 4.209 (VII.1 A 65) and JP 4290, 4.218 (X.4 A 497).

⁶ JP 2514, 3.80 (X.2 A 559).

⁷ JP 6871, 6.508 (XI.1 A 133).

⁸ JP 2651, 3.160 (X.1 A 119).

⁹ JP 3317, 3.522 (X.5 A 113).

¹⁰ 334, 1.140.

¹¹ JP 4301, 4.221-223.

¹² *Philosophical Fragments*, In *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 47.

¹³ Adam Oehlenschläger was the author of a book called *Sokrates* (Copenhagen: 1836). On poetizing Socrates, Kierkegaard adds the following in the same journal entry: “What a wonderful Socratic difficulty! In order to poetize a man it is surely necessary first to understand him. But Socrates himself says: ‘To understand is to be.’ O dear poet, if you were able to understand this it would never enter your head to poetize it. Consequently it can be poetized only if it is not understood, or to poetize Socrates is *eo ipso* a misunderstanding, and to praise a poet for having poetized Socrates in a masterpiece makes a fool of him.”

¹⁴ Cf. the following from an 1849 entry: “Socrates says it is impossible for a person really to have understood, grasped, perceived the good and then do the evil—for the proof that one has actually comprehended the good is precisely this, that understanding exercises such power over a person that he does it; otherwise the fact that a person does not do the good demonstrates that he has not understood it. This is pure intellectuality, from which Socrates does not emerge; he does not make room for the will, or room within which the will can stir and move.” JP 3194, 3.466 (X.1 A 392).

¹⁵ Kierkegaard disagrees with Johannes de Silentio on this point. “If there were no final lines from Socrates,” Silentio writes, “I could have imagined myself in his place and created some, and if I had been unable to do so, a poet would have managed it, but no poet can find his way to Abraham.” *Fear and Trembling*, in *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 118.

¹⁶ In a journal entry from 1848, Kierkegaard had observed that Socrates and Christ had few imitators (JP 963, 1.420 [IX A 372]). In the case of Socrates, this seems to have been an understatement.

¹⁷ JP 318, 1.133 (VIII.1 A 565).

¹⁸ JP 1054 1.458-459 (IX A 382)

¹⁹ JP 4303, 4.224.

The Health Matter Briefly Revisited

Epilepsy, “Hunchback,” and that tiny word (tubercl?)

Joseph Brown III, MD

Testimonies to Kierkegaard’s physically and psychically tortured existence abound in the literature surrounding his life and works. Bruce Kirmmse’s landmark annotated compendium “Encounters with Kierkegaard” offers the most recent and most compact English resource to find observations by his contemporaries.¹ Joakim Garff, using his unparalleled access to primary source material, explores many of these physical and mental health issues in his monumental biography, recently released in an English edition, translated by Kirmmse.² In addition, over many years there has been a small but steady flow of books and articles that address Kierkegaard’s health issues, most are accompanied by conjecture over what effect a particular illness could have had on his literary work. Robert Widenmann and Henning Fenger discuss many of these speculative theories in their separate reviews.³

Epilepsy, pathological kyphosis (“hunchback”) and tuberculosis are addressed in all of the above commentaries. Importantly, these three singly or together could account for every physical and most psychological observations reported. Avoiding medical jargon and with the Kierkegaard scholar in mind, I will present pertinent medical insights into these three disorders. My hope is that the scholar will be better able to assess any conjecture when he or she encounters it.

Cup your hands over your ears (fingers pointing backward) and you have fairly well outlined the left and right temporal lobes of your brain. Specific regions in these two amazing interconnected structures organize and control many higher functions unique to our human species: language recognition and formation, sentence structure, long term memory, our emotions--ranging from psychotic ideations to flight-fright responses. Epileptic symptoms originating in these lobes range from a mere blank stare, to head twisting, blinking and tongue thrusting, with or without loss of consciousness. They can include frightening psychic phenomena such as shrinking and tilting of visual images, depersonalization and derealization--to the point of autoscopy, the sense of seeing ones own body from the outside. As Garff points out, patients sometimes regard these episodes as “a feeling of sublime bliss.” Individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy may or may not remember the seizure episode, and indeed may be able to carry out some conscious activity in the midst of the seizure.

In 1975 S. G. Waxman and Norman Geschwind noted an *inter-ictal (between seizure)* symptom complex of approximately fifteen behaviors, “a personality profile” in some of their patients suffering from temporal lobe epilepsy.⁴ The behavior complex has become known as the Geschwind syndrome, in honor of the late Harvard neurologist. Among the fifteen are such notable behaviors as “hypergraphia” (in some a 10 fold increase in words used to answer standard short essay questions when compared to normals), hyper-religiosity and altered sexuality, often accompanied by mood disorders, including overt depression. As one reads this litany, one could conclude it could be called the “Kierkegaard” syndrome or “Adler” syndrome: it also could be called the Dostoevsky or Van Gogh syndrome, or be named after any one of hundreds of geniuses or schizoid personalities whose lives have been compared to the profile since the symptom association was first noted.

In 1988, Heidi and Lief Bork Hansen first compared the features of the Geschwind syndrome with Kierkegaard’s well-documented behavior characteristics.⁵ Lief Bork’s subsequent 1994-literary/medical review (with extensive Danish and English bibliography) explores his thesis that epilepsy lay at the center of Kierkegaard’s tortured life.⁶ Hansen further postulates that his fascination with Adler may well be because of Adler’s “temporal lobe” characteristic hypergraphia and, most telling, the out of body ecstatic dissociative events (autoscopy) which both experienced. (Adler December 1842, Kierkegaard Easter 1848). “Through Adler Kierkegaard is confronted with himself.” Hansen also builds his case that the cause for Kierkegaard’s forgoing of marriage and ministry was in the name of secular and canon law. King Christian V’s 1683 law linked “falling sickness” as equivalent to leprosy and syphilis; if undisclosed prior to marriage they were grounds for

annulment. Furthermore, epilepsy was viewed as a familial moral failing. Hansen links Kierkegaard's intense study of Canon law to this concern. If not the entire thorn, Hansen believes that epilepsy certainly was the point.

Except for modest metabolic-anatomical insights provided by MRI and PET technologies, as of this writing there are no new medically transformational insights into the Geschwind syndrome—if it exists—since Hansen's review of 1994. Finally, the very pertinent present day discoveries in psychopharmacology are beyond the scope of this essay.

I confess to being put off when the “diagnosis”--“hunchback”--is listed among Kierkegaard's major maladies. For me “hunchback” somehow conflates into Hugo's Quasimodo, an image that carries with it conscious and unconscious revulsion and/or pity over his horrid deformity. I believe this psychological content helps fuel biases—e.g., a hidden explanation for the actions of this “isolated, asocial” individual. Although we have only one idealized portrait and several caricatures to go by, I am confident that Kierkegaard was no Quasimodo. The medical term for forward bending of the spine is called kyphosis; present normally to a mild degree in all of us in our upper back. Certain disease processes will accentuate this bend, causing a “hump.” Linguistically sterile the word kyphosis may be, but blessed by absence of the psychological or sociological content Hugo gave it. Clearly Kierkegaard exhibited a significant, *probably* abnormal kyphosis. Several disorders could well have been its cause.

X-ray films of pathological kyphosis will show collapse of the front side of one or more vertebral bodies, the 24 mobile hockey-puck shaped bones which make up the weight bearing anatomy of the spine. The affected body will be wedged shaped, the apex to the front, producing a forward thrust of the column above it and the noticeable “hump” over the site on the individual's back. Sometimes, in order to bring one's weight back over his or her hips, an individual will develop an increase of the normal low back (sway-back) lordosis below the affected area, an observation seemingly caught by Klaestrup.

Kyphosis can be associated with rare severe inherited metabolic disorders resulting in structural weakness in the building blocks of skin, bone, cartilage, tendons, and related tissues. Invariably these illnesses exhibit striking features, such as those captured by Hugo (and Chaney). Most often these individuals also have a lateral twisting of the spine called scoliosis, the combination called kypho-scoliosis, a finding not apparent in our images of Kierkegaard.

More commonly, one or two vertebrae, particularly those in the thoracic region can collapse in a wedge seemingly spontaneously—an occurrence in an otherwise normal person. The condition occurs frequently enough to bear the name Scheuermann's disease. Believed to be a disorder of the growth process, Scheuermann's often will first appear at the onset of puberty. If not corrected, the condition is permanent. Most often it remains stable, the individual affected only by the appearance of the hump. However it can be severe enough to compress the nerves that comprise the spinal cord and cause varying symptoms of neuronal damage below the defect, ranging from abdominal pain, to sphincter problems to lower leg paralysis. When one considers that no mention ever was made of the hump until Kierkegaard's adulthood, Scheuermann's could well explain the notorious hump and its consequences.

Trauma and infection also can cause a sudden or gradual collapse of a vertebral body, (remember that memorable fall from a tree). One notorious infection, Pott's disease, tuberculosis of the spine, seems so clearly relevant to Kierkegaard's case that its discussion occupies the remainder of this essay. The medical history leading to the mid 19th century highly sophisticated understanding of tuberculosis I believe will be instructive to non-physician readers. The story also centers on the prominent role French physicians played in this understanding and their influence on Kierkegaard's doctors.

Fueled by the atrocious working and living environments that accompanied the industrial revolution, massive migration into cities, incessant wars and a high density of susceptible individuals, tuberculosis, the “White

Plague” was devouring all major cities of Europe and the United States during the 18th and 19th century. According to Rene and Jean Dubos, during these centuries, “*all* dwellers in large cities of Europe became infected at an early age.”⁷ Even after its infectious nature was understood (early 1880’s) and social and medical efforts had reduced the death rate in half (early 1900) “tuberculosis remained the greatest killer of the human race.”⁸ Ironically, as opposed to dramatic lightning quick outbreaks of smallpox and cholera which caused public panic and demanded official attention, tuberculosis was so ubiquitous and indolent that scant attention was paid to its occurrence; death due to “phthisis” a matter of course, the will of God.

Although only an emerging “market town” of around 120,000 citizens, social and environmental conditions in 19th century Copenhagen met all the requirements needed for explosive epidemics. I doubt it was spared its more populous neighbors’ tuberculous fate. Most likely *everyone* residing in Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen was infected. (Accurate data gathering was not fully implemented until after the infectious nature of the disease was understood late in the 19th century. Citing various sources the Dubos extrapolate early 20th century data to 1875, estimating that the annual tuberculosis death rate in Denmark was an astounding 300/100,000.⁹ Remember that much less than 1% of those infected die from the disease). Speculative statistics aside, given the pervasive presence of the disease throughout Europe, it seems unlikely Kierkegaard was spared infection.

In spite of glaring examples to the contrary (Ole Bang’s folksy manual), Kierkegaard’s physicians were no back-woods practitioners of “voodoo” medicine. In addition to the peripatetic raconteur poet, medical manual publishing, Kierkegaard family physician, Oluf (Ole) Lundt Bang, other prominent contemporary Copenhagen physicians included S.M. Trier, C. E. Fenger, C.J.H. Kayser, A. Ahrensen, and A.H. Salmenson. Along with Bang, all were intimately associated with Fredericks and Almindeligt hospitals. Younger physicians active in practice at Royal Frederick’s included Kierkegaard’s nephews, Henrik (Sigvard) Lund and Michael (Frederick Christian) Lund, and the now, newly famous (thanks to Garff), naïve record keeping, recent medical graduate Harald Krabbe (Widenmann citing Dr. K. Norregaard gives credit to Emun Silfverberg for this medically dubious but historically important record).¹⁰

The older physicians were stalwarts in the royally chartered “Medical Society of Copenhagen,” an always social, sometimes scientific, highly elitist organization. Because of its Royal charter, its committee’s often wrote policies and participated in carrying out government health regulations. In addition to Bang’s 1823 plea for collection of “exact information about certain diseases by list of symptoms” (surely “consumption”), minutes of The Society substantiate sophisticated cutting edge scientific interests.¹¹ Smallpox vaccination of soldiers and control of outbreaks by vaccination occupied a number of meetings in the 1830’s and 40’s: S.M. Trier spoke of efforts to control the Soro epidemic of 1836. Considerable attention was paid to cholera epidemics of 1830, 1831, and 1847 and to the sudden and fulminate epidemic of 1853 that claimed several society members. At one undated meeting, Ole Bang discussed the need for a separate “special services” department for the treatment of syphilis at Almindeligt hospital.

In their student days, Bang and Trier had made the traditional medical grand tour to Paris, (the “studierejse,” part of the curriculum of any promising student from hospitals around the globe).¹² Apparently both attended lectures by the famous Rene Laennec, the inventor of the stethoscope and father of the lexicon of chest sounds in health and disease. However, of even greater importance, under the tutelage of his teacher Gaspard Bayle, Laennec was the first to describe the pathologic anatomy of tuberculosis. The young Danes surely also attended lectures by other contemporary French medical titans (including Claude Bernard and Pierre Louis). It was these latter physicians who developed and refined “bedside” teaching and the idea of “differential diagnosis,” the method of calculating the most probable diagnoses based on history, symptoms and findings of the patient. Trier carried the Laennec scientific traditions into Danish Medicine, lecturing in Copenhagen and writing about the use of the stethoscope. In addition to Paris, Kayser and Fenger together also visited and studied at the Prussian Medical capitals of Berlin, Heidelberg, and Halle as well as at the important scientific medical centers located in Vienna and finally to Zurich where they studied with the famous Professor J. L. Schoenlein.

In 1803 Laennec announced that “tubercles” (small round nodules) could be found in all organs of the body, (muscle and bone included), in patients dieing of “phthisis” (consumptive tuberculosis). Laennec traced pulmonary phthisis through all its manifestations, from the tiniest tubercle sitting like a gray pearl in the infected lung, which grew to the masses of cheesy material (caseous tuberculosis) to the cavities formed when this material was coughed out. As meticulously described by Laennec, tuberculosis will invade any organ of the body; most notoriously the lymph glands, (scrofula), bones (including spine) (*Pott’s disease*), brain (tuberculoma) and kidneys. In 1839 Professor Schoenlein suggested that the word “tuberculosis” be used as a generic name for all the manifestations of phthisis, “since the tubercle was the fundamental anatomical basis of the disease.”¹³

Although the infectious nature of tuberculosis was long suspected, it was not until 1882 that Robert Koch identified the tiny tubercle bacillus under the microscope, and proved that it was the causative agent of the disease. Usually the route of infection is through the air, the bacillus settling first in the lungs. Most people (95%) contain the infection there, dieing never knowing they were infected. In others less fortunate, for a variety of reasons (exhaustion, other diseases, pollution, poor nutrition, civil unrest, constitutional predisposition, etc.), the disease will progress in the lungs, sometimes rapidly, sometimes slowly, often times waxing and waning over years. In some individuals, the tubercle bacilli escape into the blood, seed themselves in other organs and take up residence there. The disease in these extra-pulmonary locations also can wax and wane over months or years, suddenly to explode into fulminating activity, causing rapid decline into death of the patient.

And so it is with Pott’s disease of the spine. The infection can be indolently active, off and on compressing spinal nerves (causing abdominal pain, constipation, possibly impotence, leg pain and in-coordination), suddenly to explode into lower body paralysis. If the infected vertebra is high enough on the back, there can be complete loss of sphincter control. In the meantime, yet another colony is busy destroying the kidneys causing bloody urine.

As is evident from the above, and in agreement with Garff, I believe it safe to say that Kierkegaard’s physicians knew their tuberculosis very well. However, unlike Garff, when the word “tubercul?” appears in his chart, I do not take it as a sign of befuddlement. To this day question marks in a record do not necessarily imply ignorance, but rather a “possible” diagnosis among several others, the question mark removed at the time of laboratory confirmation, or in Kierkegaard’s time, after autopsy. This was the French method. Although certainly they would have been much more precise and meticulous than our woe-be-gone house officer Krabbe, Louis’ and Bernard’s hands are seen in Kierkegaard’s care.

The above medical intuitions, coupled with the astute opinion of Kierkegaard contemporary Hansine Andrae, “paralysis of the legs as a consequence of tuberculosis of the spine marrow,”¹⁴ and the report of his non-physician nephew Carl Lund in a letter to Peter “his chest is also under attack by consumption, which is at work in his lungs, spine, and other places,”¹⁵ I along with other writers believe the case for tuberculosis is compelling.¹⁶

Scheuermann’s, Geschwind or Potts disease complicating pulmonary tuberculosis? We shall never know. However, had I answered any differently than the above to questions raised by my Professor of Internal Medicine on rounds at Atlanta’s Grady Hospital back in 1960, there is a fair chance I might have been available to pursue a career in philosophy rather than medicine. Until, of course, some Professor of Philosophy might have asked me to define Kierkegaard’s understanding of dialectic as expressed in the “Concept of Irony.”

¹ *Encounters with Kierkegaard: A Life as Seen by His Contemporaries*, ed., comp. and annotated Bruce H. Kirmmse, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse and Virginia R. Laursen. (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996). Another excellent English compendium which

includes a number of observations different from Kirmmse's is T.H. Croxall, *Glimpses and Impressions of Kierkegaard* (Hertfordshire: James Nesbit, 1959).

² Joakim Garff, *Soren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 458

³ Robert J. Widenmann and Carl Jorgensen, "His Death," in "Kierkegaard as a Person," Skat Arildsen, et.al., *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Edenda Curaverun*, v 12, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulova Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels, 1983) and Henning Fenger, "Kierkegaard in the Doctor's Office," in *Kierkegaard: The myths and Their Origins*, trans. George C. Schoolfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 62-80

⁴ S.G. Waxman and N. Geschwind, 1975. The interictal behavior syndromes of temporal lobe epilepsy " *Archives of General Psychiatry* 32, s., 1580-1586.

⁵ Heidi Hansen and Leif Bork Hansen, 1988. "The temporal lobe epilepsy syndrome elucidated through Soren Kierkegaard's authorship and life," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 77: s., 352-358.

⁶ Leif Bork Hansen, *Soren Kierkegaard's Hemmelighed og eksistensdialektik*, (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1994.

⁷ Rene Dubos and Jean Dubos, *The White Plague: Tuberculosis, Man and Society*, (Boston Little Brown, 1952), 96

⁸ *Ibid.*, p186

⁹ *Ibid.*, Appendix B, Chart 5

¹⁰ Widenmann, "His Death," 179

¹¹ J. Jenner, 1972 "The Medical Society of Copenhagen, 1772-1972, *Acta historic scientiarum naturalium et medicinalium* 27

¹² Dansk Biografisk Lexikon, Vols. 1, 5, 17, ed. C.F. Bricka, (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske 1891-1905). (My special thanks to Oscar Parcerro and Dolores Perarnau for their translations from Danish to English of the biographies of Bang, Fenger and Trier).

¹³ Dubos and Dubos, *The White Plague*, 84

¹⁴ Kirmmse, *Encounters*, 118

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120

¹⁶ F.L. Holder, 1979, "Soren Kierkegaard's Final Illness and Death" *Anglican Theological Review* 61:4 508-514, Widenmann and Jorgensen, "His Death," 180, and Fenger, *Kierkegaard in the Doctor's Office*, 66

REVIEWS

Reflections on Anti-Climacus and his Offensive, Radical Cure: A Review of International Kierkegaard Commentary Volume 20: Practice in Christianity

Edited by Robert L. Perkins

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Bob Perkins, with his consultants and contributors, continues to produce invaluable commentaries that correspond to individual volumes of Princeton's SK translations. Scholars will be especially grateful for the latest International Kierkegaard Commentary installment—Volume 20: *Practice in Christianity* (hereafter: IKC 20)—seeing as almost 20 years passed between the publication of the Hong translation and this corresponding commentary. Those of us who, like Merold Westphal, have a "special affection" (10) for *Practice in Christianity* (PC), have noticed that there has been less scholarly attention to SK's "Radical Cure" than to the diagnoses and prognoses of *The Sickness Unto Death* (SD). Perhaps this is for the same reason that people are more fascinated with Dante's *Inferno* than with his *Paradiso* (or why The Joker is more fun to watch than Batman): purity of heart can appear boring beside the sin-sick-soul, especially when the latter rages with demonic despair. Happily, the "practice" that Anti-Climacus commends is anything but conventional or banal; indeed, it is so radical and counterintuitive that it can appear "infinitely worse than the sickness" (PC, 110). Happily too, the eleven essays comprising IKC 20 witness to the peculiarity of this cure, while critically

questioning the meaning and use of “offense,” “rigor,” “kenosis,” and “suffering” by Anti-Climacus, as well as his relation to Mynster, politics, female liberation, and even Moravian music.

In his Introduction, Perkins divides the essays into three parts. The first seven are “somewhat or sometimes almost completely expository while at the same time critical and reconstructive” (9-10). The next three focus on the various cultural and social settings behind PC, settings that might go unread without the historical exegesis that we have here. Perkins puts the final essay, Wanda Warren Berry’s “Practicing Liberation: Feminist and Womanist Dialogues with Kierkegaard’s *Practice in Christianity*,” in a category of its own. Presumably, it gets Anti-Climacus to “talk” with the differing concerns of womanist and feminist theologians, while the other essays recount more anticipated conversations between Anti-Climacus, his contemporaries, and the other pseudonyms.

In what follows, I highlight four topics around which many of the IKC 20 essays turn: the nature of divine transcendence, the persona of Anti-Climacus, the relationship between sickness and cure, and the importance of the possibility of offense. I find these topics central to PC and the discussions of them in this volume invaluable.

DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND HUMAN AGENCY

Westphal begins his essay, “Kenosis and Offense: A Kierkegaardian Look at Divine Transcendence,” with this unassuming claim: “Kierkegaard is in many respects simply a good Lutheran” (19). He thinks particularly of the Luther in Heidelberg who commends the “theologian of the cross.” As Westphal knows, Luther writes of a *theologian* of the cross, not a *theology* of the cross, despite frequent use of the latter term. To recognize God in suffering requires not right doctrine but right attention and right practice, each of which are interested and embodied. Westphal reads Anti-Climacus as “attuned” to this Luther. Accordingly, PC contends that knowledge of God is mediated through Christ’s lowliness, and that, because “epistemology is rooted in ethos” (35), Christians are called to be imitators of Christ in his abasement and suffering (21).

Westphal centrally claims that the kenotic Christology of PC—as attuned to Luther and pointing to Philippians 2—helps us better think of God’s transcendence. Admitting that the topic of God’s transcendence usually belongs to philosophical debates over theism, Westphal nonetheless probes: “But [what] if we think of transcendence more existentially (How else to say it?) as the alterity that evokes self-transcendence by decentering the human self [?]” (23). He reads transcendence in PC as the epistemic and ethical alterity of Christ that decenters others, creating space for self-transcendence. Discussions of God’s otherness need not bracket Christ, and discussions of Christ’s otherness can say more than that Christ was divine.

In the second essay, “Relational Transcendence in Divine Agency,” Paul Sponheim returns to themes he began pursuing 35 years ago in *Kierkegaard on Christ and Christian Coherence* (Harper & Row, 1968). Sponheim, like Westphal, understands PC to conceive of divine transcendence apart from classical theism, and he too spots the kenotic Christology of Philippians 2 as the subtext for PC (52-53). Sponheim attempts to reverse habits of thought whereby transcendence is pitted against relationship. God’s omnipotence, according to Anti-Climacus, is manifest in his willingness to commit to humanity without reserve: “by his will, his free decision” God “has in a certain sense bound himself once and for all” (53; PC 131). Or, as the “god poem” of *Fragments* has it, God has “become captive, so to speak, in his resolution and is now obliged to continue (to go on talking loosely)” (53; PF 55). For many, the fact that this is “loose talk,” and true only “in a certain sense,” indicates that God is really free to break the self-binding, if God so chooses. Sponheim suggests a more radical interpretation: The equivocations indicate the difficulty of imagining a relationship as so “omnipotently maintained” that there is no difference between God’s “not willing” and God’s “not being able” to break it. For Sponheim, “transcendence is characterized by unparalleled commitment to relationship” (53).

Reading the similar projects of Westphal and Sponheim together makes their differences emerge more starkly. Westphal emphasizes the otherness of Christ and the way it decenters humans, fissuring their sinful ways of

knowing and acting. Sponheim points to a more happy encounter between human reason *qua* created and the paradox (55; PF 49-54). The differences reflect a tension embedded in PC, even structurally. Does “The Halt” that interrupts the “The Invitation” comprise a *permanent* suspension of sinful human expectations and knowledge? Or is the suspension *teleological*—one that interrupts and calls into question sinful hopes only in order to complete the aim first given in creation? With his attention to epistemic corruption, Westphal suggests that humans so attempt to secure themselves that only a radical de-centering can cure them. With his attention to the continuing gifts of creation, Sponheim insists that “even in the reality of radical change there is an element of continuity supporting some hope that the human connectedness that is reason may yet function” (55).

Wanda Warren Berry’s essay bears on this issue as well. Berry too reads Anti-Climacus as thinking about transcendence “existentially.” Like Sponheim in particular, Berry emphasizes that it is the continuity between PC’s Christology and soteriology that makes that Christology meaningful. In so doing, she counters the claim by David Gouwens (in *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, Cambridge U.P., 1996, pp. 142-152) that for Kierkegaard Christology precedes soteriology. At times the terms of this debate are less than clear. Whereas for Berry, soteriology stands for the subjective appropriation of Christ in his abasement, and Christology signals an objective or even speculative standpoint, Gouwens only argues against those functional Christologies that reduce the significance of Christ to the benefits he brings about. This Physician is certainly more than a practitioner; the Physician *is* the practice; the benefit *is* relationship with Christ. I take it that Westphal would join Gouwens in emphasizing the irreducibility of Christology to soteriology, but would emphasize no less than Berry that Christ’s transcendence is existentially efficacious. Christians are receiving a health—a relationship with Christ—that disrupts and exceeds their expectations.

Murray Rae’s essay, “The Forgetfulness of Historical-Talkative Remembrance in Kierkegaard’s PC,” refines this issue further. Contra the assumptions of Troeltsch and the Jesus Seminar of our day, Christ transcends the sinful, human knowledge—including the knowledge of history—that seeks to circumscribe him. And yet Rae makes clear that “knowledge” might mean more than which can be measured or circumscribed (88). The experience of the immeasurable, uncircumscribable love of Christ might “radically change a person’s perspective” (91). Christ both escapes human knowledge and transforms it into a knowledge called love.

THE PERSONA OF ANTI-CLIMACUS

Perkins begins his introduction by noting the lack of scholarly attention to the identity of Anti-Climacus. He challenges the now common characterizations of Anti-Climacus as “higher” than Climacus, and of SK as situated between. Those characterizations draw wholly on one famous journal entry (JP 6:6433) and on Hong’s introduction to SD. Perkins, by contrast, attends to SK’s invention of Anti-Climacus as a “recklessly ironical and humorous” persona (3; JP 6:6142). He suggests that the earlier association of “Anti-” with “against” continues to characterize the relationship between Climacus and Anti-Climacus. Perkins summarizes:

Kierkegaard initially intended “Anti-Climacus” to be *against* Climacus, back toward the aesthetic. When the new pseudonym was finally used in *The Sickness unto Death* and later in *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus is still against Climacus, but in the opposite direction: he represents the decidedly Christian (PC, Supplement, 279). Finally, “Anti” continues to mean against. Relation of rank requires difference. (5)

Perkins here creates space to rediscover how the second authorship differs—sometimes strikingly—from the first. He cites the turn from Climacus’s emphasis on hidden inwardness to Anti-Climacus’s call for manifest discipleship and external suffering. Both respond to the perils of Christendom, but the second becomes increasingly aware of Christendom’s tenacious ability to mask spiritual bankruptcy under the guise of silent devotion (8-9).

Perkins develops these suggestions in his essay, “Kierkegaard’s Anti-Climacus in His Social and Political Environment.” There he notes that Anti-Climacus repeatedly resists the “taming of [the] contradiction” between Christianity and the world that is accomplished by the institutional and cultural power of the Constantinian age (283-4). (Climacus, by contrast, attends more closely to Christianity’s imprisonment within modern philosophy.) In “Standing at the Crossroads: The Invitation of Christ to a Life of Suffering,” Sylvia Walsh traces a similar authorial development through SK’s changing depictions of Christian suffering. She describes the “enormous self-contradiction” (159) posed for those who accept voluntary, external suffering for Christ’s sake, as distinguishable from the inward suffering of the more abstractly religious. Her essay helps fill-out Perkins’s suggestion that the author of PC is still “recklessly ironical and humorous.” For if, as Walsh suggests, the “inverted dialectic” of Christian faith “run[s] counter to our natural or merely human desires, understanding, and values” (145), and if, as Perkins suggests, the “merely human” becomes sinful under the aegis of Christendom, then Anti-Climacus can help make possible true confession and discipleship only through the expulsion of false pretense.

Such expulsion may not be “reckless,” but it will involve a complex and changing (or even ironic?) relationship between Kierkegaard’s objectives and the use he makes of Anti-Climacus. Such is the focus of David Possen’s extremely helpful contribution, “The Voice of Rigor.” Possen traces the way Anti-Climacus in PC depicts Christianity’s *strengthed* (rigor) in relation to *mildhed* (leniency). Discerning this relationship requires that the reader attend not only to the ways rigor and leniency are represented within PC, but also to the way in which Anti-Climacus presents this relationship rigorously and/or leniently, and then to the way Kierkegaard, as “reader” and critic of PC, understands his own perspective to be more or less rigorous than that of Anti-Climacus. While the details of Possen’s essay surpass this summary, one notes that the complex use that Kierkegaard makes of Anti-Climacus does problematize the conventional Climacus / Kierkegaard / Anti-Climacus continuum.

I might add that the meaning of “Climacus” deserves as much attention as the meaning of “Anti.” If Johannes Climacus (John the Climber) is said to think conceptually and deductively, beginning with a single thought and then “climb[ing] step by step to a higher one, because to him coherent thinking [is] a *scala paradisi* [ladder of paradise]” (*Johannes Climacus* 118-119), then Anti-Climacus (John the Descender?) would climb by going *down*, ironically imagining God’s perfection through the suffering of God’s son and of those who follow him. The “reckless irony” employed by Anti-Climacus thus reflects the reckless kenosis of God’s unbounded love. I will make one further suggestion about the irony of Anti-Climacus in the next section.

SICKNESS AND CURE

The character of Anti-Climacus bears on how one understands the relationship between his works. Among the IKC 20 essays, that of Berry and a second by Possen most carefully relate the diagnoses and prognoses of SD with the “comfort, cure, and healing” (PC 114) that PC intends. Sickness and cure seem correlative enough, but connecting Anti-Climacus’s works becomes difficult, primarily because the Christian cure can be more painful and unwelcomed than is spiritual sickness. Anti-Climacus writes:

The physician has perhaps announced that he can help me with regard to the illness from which I suffer, and perhaps he can really do that—but there is an “*aber*” [but] that I had not thought of at all. The fact that I get involved with this physician, attach myself to him—that is what makes me an object of persecution; here is the possibility of offense.

(PC 115, original emphasis)

As it turns out, the typical self-diagnoses of humanity (especially in Christendom) are so off the mark, and the actual “practice” of the Physician is so counterintuitive, that the distinction between “sickness” and “cure” continually shifts and sometimes fades.

In SD, for example, Anti-Climacus periodically indicates the value of manifest despair, especially when compared to the feigned “health” of spiritlessness. He writes of a “despair that is a thoroughfare to faith” (SD 67) and asserts that “it is the worst misfortune never to have had that sickness: it is truly a godsend to get it, even if it is the most dangerous of illnesses, if one does not want to be cured of it” (SD 26). However deadly sin may be, there is some sort of “effective” or “radical” despair, without which the spirit cannot “break through from the ground upward” (SD 59). Despair is thus the disease—but might also be a homeopathy, despite the author’s precautions (see SD 6). In PC as well, the Christian cure not only increases suffering, but also occasions the highest form of sin—the possibility of taking offense at Christ and Christian practice. Rather than speaking of *non posse peccare* (the impossibility of sin), PC characterizes ideal Christian existence as *posse peccare potentissime*—the possibility of sin potentiated by Christ to the highest power. PC recapitulates SD at a higher, more dangerous level.

For her part, Berry is concerned to keep SD propped open while reading from PC. Without doing so, she suggests, the “twofold direction of despair/sin” toward the sin of defiance and the sin of weakness becomes lost on the reader of PC: “Since [PC] is addressed to the established power of Christendom, it tends to articulate Christological soteriology in imagery and language appropriate for raising consciousness of the sin of defiance more than the sin of weakness” (310). Berry’s reminder prompts a conversation between Kierkegaardians and feminist/womanist theologians. But there are other ways to get them to talk. One recalls that Anti-Climacus, while demarcating weak and strong forms of despair, also suggests that either can stand for the whole. Every kind of despair can be “traced back” and “resolved in” the sin of pride (SD 14), just as the sin of hiding is “the formula for all despair” (SD 20). Thus “the contradiction is the same” (SD 20) for both. One weakly does not will to be one’s true self (the self *coram Deo*) when one defiantly wills to be oneself. One wills defiantly to be a false self when one, in weakness, is not willing to be oneself. Whereas Berry helps the reader recall SD’s “feminine despair” when reading PC, an alternative approach would be to trace the qualitative difference between Christian kenosis and the numerous forms of despair that are quantitatively distinct at best.

In “The Works by Anti-Climacus,” Possen responds to those who question the usefulness of the Anti-Climacus pseudonym. He objects to the claim that SD and PC “seem to mimic other works—structurally, thematically, and stylistically—far more closely than they resemble one another” (189). In countering, Possen reads the works “as a pair, a poem, a diptych, and either/or: as the works of Anti-Climacus” (209). He makes an interesting move to distinguish his reading from Gregor Malantschuk, whom he otherwise closely resembles. Malantschuk coordinates the failure to synthesize one’s infinitude and finitude, temporality and eternity, etc, with the challenge of faith to synthesize the factors of God and human in the God-man. By contrast, Possen argues that Anti-Climacus’s works correspond via triads rather than syntheses. Spiritual sickness—unlike a psychic disorder—infests the activity of relating to one’s synthesis. Faith too is not a “simple relation” but a “relation in a relation.” I suggest that this means, among other things, that Christ’s cure does not mend the self but “decenters” it yet again (Westphal), making possible the most intensive forms of sin (offense) along with the possibility of self-transcendence.

Possen admits that his correlation cure is “a sketch, an opening, a single line amid a plane of interpretive possibilities” (209). Let me sketch another interpretive possibility that compliments his and returns us to the persona of Anti-Climacus. To my knowledge, the tripartite division of despair in SD (unconscious despair, despair of weakness, despair of strength) has not been explicitly connected to the tripartite division of offense in PC No. II (inessential offense, offense at Christ’s loftiness, offense at Christ’s lowliness). While the connection is not exact, it does serve to highlight how unconscious despair, or “spiritlessness,” and inessential offense, or the offense endemic to “Christendom,” are each an additional “negativity” (SD 44) removed from spiritual health. Just as the spiritless need to recognize their sickness before they can become healed, so too the “established order” must confess its propensity to level all difference and deify the crowd. Most importantly, this confrontation with one’s despair or with the Galilean who claims to be God may simultaneously occasion more intensive forms of sin. Perhaps the irony that Perkins finds in Anti-Climacus might also be found in this: that in both SD and PC the vast majority of “Christians” can only secure the aptitude for faith by becoming increasingly capable of sin.

Andrew Burgess, in “Kierkegaard, Brorson, and Moravian Music,” also implicitly coordinates sickness and cure when hearing Moravian music in the keys and refrains of PC. In No. III, Anti-Climacus intertwines two seemingly conflicting emotions: sorrow over sin and joy over salvation. Burgess notes that the resulting melody would not be unfamiliar to those who (like SK) sang Brorson’s hymns in the Moravian song service (*Syngetime*). “Like Brorson, Kierkegaard finds faith’s gladness and suffering to be part of the same song” (236). Christian Fink Tolstrup closes his essay on Kierkegaard’s relationship and polemic with Mynster with a similar description of PC. He claims that for Anti-Climacus, “rest and yoke are mutually determined in such a way that one cannot find rest without the yoke” (270). One suggests again that connecting the works of Anti-Climacus is difficult not because they are disparate or incommensurable, but because sickness and cure overlap in the life of the believer. The works of Anti-Climacus displace our desires for a programmatic *ordo salutis*. They describe instead the way one mysterious encounter with Christ induces suffering over sinfulness—and the possibility of more intensive sin—together with the joy of being forgiven.

ON NOT BEING OFFENDED

PC No. II is at the literal and figural center of Anti-Climacus’s work. The title labels the discourse a “biblical exposition” of Matthew 11:6, as well as a “Christian Definition” (*Christelig Begrebsbestemmelse*: literally, “Christian determination of concepts”). It suggests that Anti-Climacus will not only exhibit the “blessedness of not being offended”; he will also determine or shape the concept of offense according to a decidedly Christian standpoint. The second purpose should not be overlooked. In fulfilling it, Anti-Climacus continues a project that he began in SD, where he distinguished the common (*vulgaire*) understanding of “not being in despair” from an understanding that has been given Christian determination:

If not being in despair signifies neither more nor less than not being in despair, then it means precisely to be in despair. Not to be in despair must signify the destroyed possibility of being able to be in despair; if a person is truly not to be in despair, he must at every moment destroy the possibility. (SD 15)

Anti-Climacus here differentiates the happy self-security of those who have avoided the possibility of despair from the blessed faithfulness of those who actively and “at every moment” *destroy* this possibility. Interestingly enough, it is confrontation with the impinging possibility of sin, or the realization of one’s “ownmost” capacity to sin, and one’s ensuing self-struggle, which distinguishes Christian faith from its various simulacra. Christendom “is so far being what it calls itself that the lives of most men, Christianly understood, are far too spiritless to be called sin in the strictly Christian sense” (SD 104).

In PC, Anti-Climacus again definitively distinguished the passive and pusillanimous state of “not being offended” from the courageous and embattled fight to “be not offended,” having faced the repulsiveness of Christ’s unbounded love. As Anti-Climacus sees it, Christ’s warning to his disciples against taking offense presupposes that that possibility is intrinsic to his life in general and to his Passion in particular. Christendom subtly and almost entirely circumvents this possibility of offense (PC 112-120), and, with it, possibilities for becoming authentically Christian. In this situation, the first task of Anti-Climacus is to reinstate (or “reactivate”) the possibility of offense so that the Christian might resist being offended.

In “The Movements of Offense toward, away from, and within Faith: ‘Blessed is he who is not offended at me,’” Niels Jørgen Cappelørn helpfully groups the SK’s various expositions on offense into three “movements”: the *Postscript*’s movement of offense toward faith (97-103), SD’s movement of offense away from faith (103-110), and PC’s movements of offense toward and within faith (110-124). While the typology is not airtight (when treating SD, Cappelørn writes as much on offense as a “means to recovery” as he does on offense as the means to spiritual death), I find the characterization of offense as a movement suggestive. Too often the possibility of offense, together with despair and sin, is understood as a “position” that lies *opposite* of the possibility of faith but which does not actively *oppose* it and help *shape* it by way of resistance. Anti-

Climacus is responsible for some of this confusion. Near the beginning of No. II, he offers this “crossroads” imagery:

Just as the concept of “faith” is an altogether distinctively Christian term, so in turn is “offense” an altogether distinctively Christian term related to faith. The possibility of offense is the crossroad, or it is like standing at the crossroad. From the possibility of offense, one turns either to offense or to faith, but no one comes to faith except through the possibility of offense. (PC 81)

The crossroads analogy misleads insofar as it implies that the would-be offended or faithful one stands impassively at a crossroads, able to quietly choose which way she will go. Elsewhere at least Anti-Climacus writes of the possibility of offense as “the repulsion [*Frastød*] in which faith can come into existence—if one does not choose to be offended” (121). The possibility of offense comprises not a formal option but a determinate temptation or trial, something into which the Christian will slide unless he or she remains vigilant and aggressive. Cappelørn implicitly highlights this determinate, impinging character of offense’s possibility. He writes of “overcome[ing]” or “surmount[ing]” this possibility (101, 109), of the “terrible resistance” supplied by it (102), and of “faith’s battle” against it (109).

There are, however, places where Cappelørn’s essay threatens to mislead. For example, Cappelørn, motivated to indicate the opposing “movements” of offense, suggest that “offense can . . . be considered ‘something good,’ a remedy,” or at least the “means to bring about a cure” (109). He reasons that, just as Haufniensis commends being “shaped unto faith by anxiety” (109; CA 155), “by offense the individual is *shaped* unto faith within Christian religiousness” (109). Cappelørn’s suggestion that faith is shaped over-and-against something “negative” is compelling and accurate to PC, though overlooked by many. But his equation of “the possibility of offense” with “offense” itself is unjustified (cf. 107, 110, and 116). Haufniensis only claims that anxiety, and with it, the possibility of sin, might help shape religious faith. So too, Anti-Climacus continuously extols the possibility of offense, not offense itself.

I find the distinction between the sin of taking offense and the gift of this possibility not simply theologically important (as a way of distinguishing fallibility from fault, for example), though it is that as well. The distinction also invites creative rethinking about the nature of sin’s possibility. Anti-Climacus suggests that the activated possibility—or even the “disposition”—to take offense intensifies and specifies the ordeal of “choosing” faith. Such choice more resembles the sustained “destruction” of one’s preponderance to sin than a simple and instantaneous “selection” of faith. Possibilities to do otherwise do not merely characterize one’s freedom to follow Christ. They bear on and shape that freedom as well. One should note that Cappelørn at his best writes of this intensification of the situation of choice (119) and of how Christ himself “posits the repulsing possibility of offense, [and] does so in the deepest sense in order to direct the attention of people to the decisive choice: to become Christian” (123).

It is only by struggling against pregnant possibilities to take offense that the hero of faith can be distinguished from Christendom’s “cultured believer.” In our “post-Christendom” but still culturally-Christianized age, there are perhaps many who are “not offended” because they have bypassed its possibility. Regardless of the numbers, Anti-Climacus provides for us a “practice” in facing and subduing our predilection to reduce or reject the scandal of God’s unbounded love. The contributors of IKC 20 help initiate us into this training.

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