

Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter

A Publication of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library
St. Olaf College · Northfield, Minnesota



NUMBER 58: November 2011

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ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS

The Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter will no longer include news and announcements in regular issues. For current information from the Hong Kierkegaard Library and other news from Kierkegaard scholars and related groups around the world, please see the website of the Hong Kierkegaard Library at <http://www.stolaf.edu/collections/kierkegaard/>.

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Jon Stewart's Relations to Kierkegaard Reconsidered

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It is perhaps apt that an issue of the newsletter exploring the work of Jon Stewart contain something in the way of a more personal reflection. My own work on Kierkegaard owes a large debt of gratitude to Stewart, without whom it would never have come into existence in quite the form it has assumed. Yet the significance of Stewart's work is not just a personal one. For regardless of what one thinks about the conclusions of his research, Stewart is one of the greatest Kierkegaard scholars of our generation (and, I would like to think, of more than just our time); a man who has perhaps done more than any of his Danish contemporaries to contribute to our understanding of the Golden Age of Danish culture, and make its figures and texts available to us. In what follows I want to reflect on Stewart's relations to Kierkegaard, the community of Kierkegaard scholarship, and the identity and nature of us as Kierkegaard scholars. I want to briefly try and account for why Stewart's work is so controversial, and outline how his research could change the course of Kierkegaard scholarship forever.

Stewart's contribution to Kierkegaard scholarship, as I understand it, starts with the adoption of a novel, yet common sense, methodology. This is an approach which begins, at least in part, with the figure of the historical Kierkegaard. A Kierkegaard situated in a particular cultural and intellectual context; and whose work and thought is to be approached, and understood, in terms of its relations to that of his immediate contemporaries. These contemporaries were figures with whom Kierkegaard shared certain assumptions, concerns, problems, and solutions. (This is not, of course, to deny that Kierkegaard was influenced by other figures such as Socrates, Plato, Christ etc., but it is simply to say that his own intellectual agenda was born in the context of the debates which in part characterised Golden Age Danish intellectual culture (such as the so called 'mediation', and 'rationalism/ supernaturalism' debates)).

One of the consequences of this methodology, as is widely known, is the drawing into question of the portrait of Kierkegaard as a figure who is to be understood as simply offering an intellectual position which is the negation of Hegel's (an interpretation which Stewart attributes to Niels Thulstrup).¹ According to Stewart, Kierkegaard's relations to Hegel, and Hegelianism, are to be understood in a much more subtle and complex fashion. The more general, and controversial, conclusion of Stewart's extensive research is that the historical Kierkegaard was radically, if not *absolutely*, different from the figure upon which much of contemporary scholarship is premised. I.e. that the Kierkegaard we have inherited in the history of Western Philosophy is a character with little, or indeed no, basis in historical reality. On this point Stewart calls for a re-evaluation of Kierkegaard's place and role in the Western intellectual tradition.²

The controversial nature of Stewart's work lies in the fact that it draws into question: the identity of Kierkegaard (how he has been characterised and understood in the Western tradition); the nature of Kierkegaard scholarship; as well what we take ourselves to be doing when we think and write about Kierkegaard. For Stewart's work admits into play the possibility that many contemporary methodological approaches to Kierkegaard's work and thought are founded upon a perennial myth. The perhaps fearful corollary, for many, is that their research will transpire to be premised on an inherited historical narrative that is little more than fiction.

The debate surrounding the interpretation of Stewart's work is likely to continue for many years to come. Those that seek to engage him on historical grounds face a monumental task, in dealing with the sheer volume of historical evidence that Stewart brings to bear. My own view is that approaching Kierkegaard in his immediate historical context provides us with a reading that is far more exegetically adequate, historically

sensitive, and conceptually coherent that any of the other offerings on the table. I think that there are many good arguments as to why the methodology employed by Stewart, or at least something very similar, is the best way of reading Kierkegaard that we are going to get, even if constraints of space prevent those arguments from being articulated here.

Interestingly, there are many analogies that can be drawn between the controversy surrounding Stewart's work and that which surrounds Kierkegaard's. For while Kierkegaard's work is concerned with the misrepresentation of Christ, and the consequences of that misrepresentation for our own nature, Stewart's work is concerned with the *misrepresentation of Kierkegaard* and the consequences of that for the discipline of Kierkegaard scholarship. In my view both stand as single individuals, attempting to point the way to a truth that they take to be in danger of being lost (or was, indeed, as good as forgotten). Both thinkers are confronted by communities that repress, or hide, the truth from themselves by means of: over-intellectualism, generality, abstraction, illusion, and a kind of aestheticism. The difference between the two is as follows. In Kierkegaard's case, speculation results from our abstracting from our theological natures: natures qualified by incarnation and sin. In Stewart's case our abstraction, dogmatism, or aestheticism results from our inattention to the individuality and particularity of the historical figure: Søren Kierkegaard.

While Kierkegaard attempts to show that our theological nature cannot be reduced to history, I take the virtue of Stewart's work to lie in demonstrating that we *cannot* take the religious, or theological, dimension of Kierkegaard's work seriously *unless* we understand his history. Only by understanding Kierkegaard's work in the context of the debate surrounding the interpretation of Hegel's logic, and its application to dogmatics and theology more generally, can we understand the religious, or theological, essence of Kierkegaard's work aright. What Stewart shows us, I think, is that only within the context of Kierkegaard's immediate history can we understand his use of concepts such as: subject, object, necessity, existence, double-reflection, etc. Without this context we lose the means to make these concepts intelligible to ourselves, and so are doomed to forms of misrepresentation, speculation, and aestheticism. The lesson I draw from Stewart's work is, ironically, that we can only account for the religious, Christian, dimension of Kierkegaard's thought through a historically mediated self-consciousness.

If Stewart is right, what does the future of Kierkegaard scholarship look like, and how does it differ from what we are familiar with today? Well... the current Anglo-American methodological agenda of attempting to integrate Kierkegaard's thought to the latest developments in analytic philosophy, and moral-religious, psychology, would be tempered. As would the practise of holding *any* mention of Kierkegaard's name by a living philosopher (e.g. MacIntyre, Frankfurt) to warrant detailed examination, and an occasion for re-examining Kierkegaard's contribution to philosophy. Indeed, gone would be the very idea that one could understand Kierkegaard by reading his work, along with some Hegel, from one's armchair and reflecting on: human nature, subjectivity, and existence.

This analytic and abstract approach would be replaced by one in which students would actually have to read some of the sources, and figures, of Golden Age Danish culture. Or, better still, get up out of the armchair, make one's way to the Royal Danish Library, and learn about the intellectual, cultural, theological, and indeed logical context of Kierkegaard's work and thought. This would be a future in which: attention would be paid to reinstating Kierkegaard as a genius of the Danish Golden Age, Kierkegaard scholarship is reintegrated with its forgotten or neglected history, and a new coherence and peace brought to the souls of Kierkegaard scholars.

What we witness in Stewart's work is, I think, the drawing into question of a research paradigm, or methodology, that has dominated for the last two hundred years (which is to say, forever!). Stewart's work admits the possibility of a future in which scholars will regard our own time as one subject to confusion (an analogous situation to the way in which modern chemists regard those that worked on phlogiston theory). In this

possible future our own time might well be regarded as one of pervasive illusion, abstraction, aestheticism, and a self-deception that we struggled to wake up from.

In the *Postscript* Kierkegaard ridicules the Hegelian idea that history might give one the basis to judge over divinity, and its relation to human nature. Stewart's work has revealed the power of history to enable us to understand Kierkegaard's own intellectual concerns and agendas and, moreover, to draw into question some of our most deeply cherished ideas about, and characterisations of, his thought. As we approach Kierkegaard's bicentenary it could just be that we are in the process of witnessing the death of a fantastical figure who has occupied us for the last two hundred years and the rebirth of a provincial genius who, but for one man, would still be all but forgotten.

¹ Jon Stewart, 2003, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 14.

² Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, p. 596.

REVIEWS

Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources

Edited by Jon Stewart
Ashgate, 2007-

Reviewed by Mads Sohl Jessen
University of Copenhagen

This multi-volume reference work is a contribution of the highest caliber to academic research on Kierkegaard. It is divided into three sections: sources, reception, and resources. Each volume is subdivided into one, two, three or more tomes. *Kierkegaard Research* is not yet completed (see www.sk.ku.dk.KRSRR), however it is possible to review the first part, 'Sources', in which seven volumes have been published.

The titles of the seven volumes are 1) *Kierkegaard and the Bible* 2) *Kierkegaard and the Greek World* 3) *Kierkegaard and the Roman World* 4) *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions* 5) *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions* 6) *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries* 7) *Kierkegaard and His Danish Contemporaries*.

Kierkegaard was a writer of the here and now and as such his authorship is deeply intertwined with other writers of his own time. The articles in these volumes testify to the fact that international scholars have never before been so aware of the contemporary context of Kierkegaard's writings. This is one of the most powerful aspects of Stewart's contribution.

The greatest achievement of the section on 'Sources' is the fact that you can now acquire deep insight into Kierkegaard's profound knowledge of the central Western texts in the ancient and modern traditions of philosophy, theology, and literature.

Kierkegaard's genius as a modern writer is shaped by his original interpretation of ancient Greek thought. The figure of Socrates as handed down to us by Plato's writings stands at the very center of his attention. Volume 2 offers an exhaustive survey of Kierkegaard's interpretation of each of the central Platonic

works. The same choice has been made for Kierkegaard and Aristotle. The complexities of these relationships are thus made accessible and transparent. The volume also includes highly interesting articles on Kierkegaard's view of the ancient Greek poets, tragedians, and historians.

Another impressive accomplishment of the first section of *Kierkegaard Research* is the way it describes Kierkegaard's appreciation of writers from epochs that have generally been neglected by former research. This is especially true of volume 3, 4, and 5, which covers the time span from the Roman world to European romanticism. Kierkegaard received a very thorough education in Latin and many of the classical Roman writers were part of his own library. As volume 4 attests, Kierkegaard was in "critical dialogue" with the church fathers. Likewise the articles in volume 5 on Kierkegaard's relations to authors from the Renaissance to the beginning of the 19th century brim with insights. It is not an exaggeration to say that volumes 3 to 5 are a breakthrough in Kierkegaard research. These volumes will become, I think, the necessary foundation for further investigations into the Danish writer's perspective analyses of the central figures from these periods of time.

The most important international context for Kierkegaard was the flourishing of German intellectual and artistic life from the 1770s to 1840s. Kierkegaard made extensive studies of German idealism, Hegel, Goethe, German romantics, and a multitude of German theologians. Many readers are fascinated by Kierkegaard's knack for fusing theological, philosophical, and literary matter into his own unique pseudonymous blend. This fusion would not have been possible without Kierkegaard's deep immersion in German writing of this period. In that sense volume 6 is essential reading for anyone hoping to develop a nuanced and historical understanding of the sources behind the complicated intertextuality of the pseudonymous writings.

As a Danish PhD scholar working on a study of Kierkegaard's hidden satire on his Danish contemporary Johan Ludvig Heiberg, I am equally impressed by volume 7 on Kierkegaard and his Danish contemporaries. Here, readers are offered a fresh perspective on Kierkegaard's relations to people in his everyday life in Copenhagen. Those intrigued by the Golden Age of Danish culture will find a number of rich offerings in volume 7.

In my opinion, Kierkegaard as a writer is comparable to writers like Nietzsche and Emerson. Each of them wrote in a mode that took the task of appropriation very seriously. Some scholars stress the metaphor of Kierkegaard "being influenced" too much, I think, when he was rather looking for material he could use for his own ends, but this is a minor matter compared to the wealth of interpretations offered here. With Stewart's impressive series, researchers will be able to compare his or her own views on Kierkegaard's writings with that of the specific article in *Kierkegaard Research*. As such it is the perfect tool for academic readers wishing to delve further into Kierkegaard's rich use of both ancient and modern sources.

The editing is of the highest academic standards. The bibliographies are also an important contribution to Kierkegaard research in their own right. It is a very helpful feature that they include page references to the works in Kierkegaard's own library that discuss the writer at hand. For instance, if you want to know what other views on Shakespeare Kierkegaard would have known about through his own book collection, you can find the references here. The bibliographies also include excellent references to secondary literature. The general editor Jon Stewart together with his co-editors must be thanked for orchestrating such a vast undertaking. Their work is nothing less than a largesse to the future of Kierkegaard scholarship.

Kierkegaard and the Bible: Tome I: The Old Testament
(Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Volume I)

Edited by Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart
Ashgate, 2010, 273 pp.
ISBN 978-1-4094-0285-5

Reviewed by David Lawrence Coe
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Martin Luther said, “*Oratio, meditatio, tentatio facit theologum,*” that is, the proper way to grasp Holy Scripture is through prayer upon the text, meditation upon the text, and agonizingly realizing the text in one’s own life. Kierkegaard’s approach to Holy Scripture especially mirrors the latter, as revealed in *Kierkegaard and the Bible: Tome I: The Old Testament*, edited by Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart, vol. 1 of *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, edited by Jon Stewart, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010. This excellent compendium from scholars around the world shows that while Kierkegaard was fully aware of the increasingly academic and critical approaches to the Bible, his own hermeneutic remained devotional and agonizingly subjective.

The tome’s articles helpfully sets Kierkegaard’s academic setting in nineteenth-century European biblical studies. Each notes the rise of various styles of historical and literary criticism of the Bible. Summarizing the whole, speculative isagogics was replacing devotional exegesis. The historical-critical positions of well-known authors, texts by whom Kierkegaard owned and read, such as Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), and Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–84), are manifested. The reader will especially notice the lesser-known, but most recurring throughout the tome, positions of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780–1849), whose *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die Bibel Alten und Neuen Testamentes* Kierkegaard was very familiar and also owned. While nine of the eleven articles analyze Kierkegaard’s relationship to and employment of individual texts and figures from the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes, each firstly and helpfully outlines the scholarly positions with which Kierkegaard would have been surrounded. For example, with regard to Ecclesiastes, Will Williams shows how Herder and de Wette each dated the book much later than the Solomonic tradition, somewhere in the Babylonian or Persian era, since, these scholars held, Ecclesiastes reflects a pessimism triggered by decline in Israelite fortunes (180).

While each article insightfully spends a great deal of space outlining the historical-critical issues of Kierkegaard’s day, it is almost comical to repeatedly read the refrain that Kierkegaard showed no interest in such isagogics. Read, for example, a sampling of the authors’ synonymous expressions of Kierkegaard’s disinterest. “Kierkegaard owned the relevant works by Herder and de Wette, whose exegetical books he often consulted. . . . However, he shows no interest in the issue of the date of the work or the possible influences upon it (180).” “Kierkegaard’s writing shows awareness of these issues. . . . However, he generally refrained from engaging in the scholarly conversation, and often ignored it (x).” “Kierkegaard shows no interest in source-critical problems or in the historical facticity of Adam’s transgression (39).” “Kierkegaard would have been familiar with many of these academic conversations from his theological training, and he owned the relevant texts. . . . However, worries about the authenticity and authorship of individual psalms are largely absent from Kierkegaard’s pages (144).” “Kierkegaard was probably familiar with this interpretation of the historical setting and rhetorical purpose of Daniel, but he makes little use of such an historical approach (197).” “Kierkegaard

made no claim to being an academic exegete in his day as being too impersonal and thus unhelpful. His reading strategies ostensibly seem unusual compared to the scholarly methods of biblical interpretation and theological inquiry that were becoming common in northern European universities (231).” Why is Kierkegaard so little concerned with the academic concerns of his day?

Iben Damgaard points us to the first discourse of *For Self-Examination*, which Kierkegaard scholars know well. Damgaard summarizes, “Kierkegaard argues against what he takes to be a characteristic of his own scientific age, namely, that one look only *at* the mirror, i.e., observes the mirror by asking only objective, scholarly, historical questions that can never lead to anything more than approximations of certainty about factual matters. Kierkegaard’s concern here is not to argue against a historically-critical scholarly reading of the Bible, but to argue against never getting beyond such a reading to an existentially and ethically oriented reading (217–18).” Hence, the common theme throughout the tome is that while Kierkegaard was familiar with his era’s historical-critical setting, he shows little interest because such concerns can distract the reader from a subjective reading where the reader reminds himself while reading the text, “It is I to whom it is speaking, it is I about whom it is speaking (218).”

Thus, Kierkegaard is more concerned with the characters of the Old Testament as existential exemplars by which the reader critiques the authenticity of his own life. Adam’s transgression represents “a fundamental decision that confronts every single individual (24).” The fear and trembling of Abraham exemplifies the time and patience demanded of every believer (214). David and Solomon are exemplars of certain types of virtues and vices, namely, models of repentance and evasion of guilt (102). Job is an exemplar in praising God in the midst of *tentatio* rather than securing an ideological theodicy (119). The Psalms are a source of images and contrasts for the cultivation of Christian pathos (144). Nebuchadnezzar “represents the ideal image of an idolatrous and prideful king who nevertheless repents and reforms (195).” Lori Unger Brandt summarizes in her excellent overview of Kierkegaard’s use of the Old Testament that Kierkegaard immersed himself in the Bible’s stories with characters and plotlines in order to “wonder what one might feel and do in the same situation (239).” The Old Testament’s ultimate purpose is not to be the object of the archaeologist’s brush, but to brush away the sedentary sediment in one’s heart.

While much space is given to the historical-critical setting and Kierkegaard’s knowledge yet disdain of such methods, only Brandt’s article briefly alludes to the historical reason for Kierkegaard’s devotional proclivity, namely the Pietist movement in his religious formation. Brandt unveils that Pietist favorites of Kierkegaard, namely Johann Arndt (1555–1621), Gerhard Teerstegen (1697–1769), and Hermann Olshausen (1796–1839), regularly viewed the religious struggles of the characters of the Old Testament as prototypes of the tensions between sin and faith in the Christian life (241). This insight is a gem and deserves further exploration.

In the midst of the rise of the historical-critical method in Kierkegaard’s academic setting, Kierkegaard responds not with Fundamentalist retort, but with the existential concern of the Pietists and Luther before an exacting God. This excellent tome on Kierkegaard’s approach to the Old Testament resounds with Luther’s hermeneutic rule: “*tentatio facit theologum.*”

Kierkegaard and the Bible, Tome II: The New Testament
(Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Volume I)

Edited by Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart
Ashgate, 2010 338 pp.
ISBN 9781409404439

Reviewed by Brian C. Barlow
Anderson University

Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart have provided for the international community of Kierkegaard scholars a much needed work on Søren Kierkegaard and the Bible, Vol. I of Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Research which is under the editorship of Stewart. The work is actually divided into two tomes, one on the Old Testament and one on the New Testament. This review focuses on Tome II: The New Testament. The contributors to this volume come from a wide geographical range of countries and various kinds of institutions.

The tome is divided into two parts. "Part I" is devoted to particular texts and figures in Kierkegaard's authorship. "Part II" includes more general articles that address Kierkegaard's relationship to the New Testament. The reader can profitably proceed by reading either the specific articles first or the "overview articles" in "Part II". In any case there is no need or decision to attempt to harmonize the contributions by the various authors, a welcome approach to the particularities of Kierkegaard's authorship and author. Yet, the editorial vision is well organized and brings a highly nuanced understanding of a certain coherence to and in the authorship.

This rich and thoughtful approach is carried out by attending to specific biblical characters of the New Testament: Simeon and Anna, Peter, the Pharisee, the tax collector, the woman in sin, Lazarus, Paul, and James. Alongside the incisive portraits of these characters are other thematic approaches to the miracles of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, the crucifixion and resurrection, and Kierkegaard's work entitled "The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air."

By reviewing a selective number of these we gain a sense of Kierkegaard's creative theological readings of Scripture. Barrett concentrates on Kierkegaard's use of the story of Simeon and Anna. He helpfully notes the exegetical context of Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Bible. Specifically, he describes the way in which Kierkegaard uses the story to depict the importance of Christian virtues such as patience and hope. "Patient expectancy...is a virtuous habit, an enduring disposition to act, think and feel in particular ways in the face of life's challenges.... By cultivating patient expectancy through the practice of prayer, Anna already enjoyed intimate fellowship with God, which was the very thing for which she hoped (13-14)."

Timothy H. Polk describes the tax collector as a "model of inwardness." Kierkegaard draws on a parable from Luke 18:9-14 to create one of the sermons from his communion discourses on Fridays. Polk emphasizes Kierkegaard's "theological-literary context." This context belongs to the "theocentric" and "christomorphic" aspects of Lutheran theology, a form of theological writing that Polk informs us is "blunt." Masterfully he shows how Kierkegaard uses this text and context to communicate a form of inwardness intratextually and indirectly to the reader. The crucial role of the imagination is necessary for Kierkegaard and the reader to strive to fulfill the purpose of the sermon, the purpose of becoming a Christian.

Paul Martens incisively discusses Kierkegaard's late female prototype: "the woman in sin." Martens helpfully discusses the biblical context of Luke 7:36-50 and the context of Kierkegaard's authorship in which his late discourse is published. By placing "the woman in sin" as an internal corrective to the ideal prototype of Christ as pattern depicted in Practice in Christianity, Martens elucidates the dialectic of "stringency" and "grace" that Kierkegaard shows is at the heart of the Christian life.

Another figure discussed in the text is the Apostle Paul. Lori Unger Brandt describes Paul as a "herald of grace and paradigm of Christian living." As is the case with the other articles in the book she gives the background and context of Kierkegaard's depiction of Paul. Showing the pietist corrective to Kierkegaard's authorship she focuses on the "attitudes and inner characteristics" that are shaped by faith and lead to action. Although Kierkegaard is writing from within the Lutheran tradition he corrects the misuse of grace in Christendom by emphasizing how grace is at the heart of works of love.

"Part II" of the book is devoted to "overview articles" of Kierkegaard and the New Testament. As is the case with "Part I" there are several fine articles comprising this portion of the book. I will discuss briefly two contrasting points of view in the limited space of this review.

Timothy Polk continues to develop his ground-breaking work published previously as The Biblical Kierkegaard. Here his attention is devoted to Kierkegaard's use of the New Testament. The themes that capture this use are intratextuality, indirect communication, and appropriation. Although Polk does not describe his hermeneutic approach as necessarily normative he passionately argues for its normative status when reading Scripture theologically. Intratextuality is helpful as an approach to reading the Bible because it both critiques the one-sidedness of historical-critical method and provides a "cohesive theological construal of human life (240)." The New Testament is a form of indirect communication itself and Kierkegaard's use of it is indirect as well. Because the task and hope of each is to communicate the Paradox (the Incarnation) indirect communication is the best means (the how) to make sense of faith and Christian existence (the what). Since there is no neutral approach to appropriating the meaning of the text the person should seek to place his or her life into the context of the text. Such use of the New Testament is practically necessary for following Christ in joy and suffering.

Another significant approach to Kierkegaard's biblical hermeneutic is given by Joel D. S. Rasmussen. The editors have nicely related Polk's and Rasmussen's articles in a kind of juxtaposition of themes of imitation and imagination. Rasmussen's task is "to analyze some of the hermeneutical assumptions and practices Kierkegaard brings to his reading of the Bible (251)." He helpfully discusses the hermeneutic context of Kierkegaard as well as Kierkegaard's critique of historical-critical scholarship by exploring an imaginative freedom, perhaps encountering God's Word in the process. However, it is in the theme of "paradoxical fixation" that Rasmussen makes his most provocative point in the article. Whereas the reader might use imaginative freedom to construct narrative meaning of the text in post-liberal approaches he emphasizes Kierkegaard's "fixed attention" on "the Absolute Paradox" as the existential *imitation* of Christ (273)." Polemics aside, it can be said that Rasmussen is as keen as are all the authors in this book to acknowledge God's gift of Word and love in faith.

Lee Barrett and Jon Stewart have given to the international community of Kierkegaard scholars an excellent collection of articles on Kierkegaard and the New Testament. While this review has not discussed all of the articles in the volume (there are seventeen chapters in all) it has sought to show the range and depth of Kierkegaard's uses of the New Testament. Each author in the volume has written with keenness of mind and heart about Kierkegaard and his approach to the Bible. The book makes a very significant contribution to Kierkegaard and biblical scholarship. May it receive the kind of attention in the scholarly community it so richly deserves.

Kierkegaard and the Greek World: Tome I: Socrates and Plato
(Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Volume 2)

Edited by Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun
Ashgate, 2010, 321 pp.
ISBN 9780754669814

Reviewed by Glenn Kirkconnell
Santa Fe College

This exciting collection of essays examines Kierkegaard's engagement with, and debt to Greek philosophy. As Paul Muench puts it in his essay on the *Apology* in this book, "(Kierkegaard's) first true act as a writer and thinker was to stake his claim as the best interpreter of Socrates; in the end of his life he maintains that if we want to become interpreters of him who avoid the superficial readings he attributes to his contemporaries, then we should take his suggestion and examine his writings in the light of Socrates." And yet even a cursory summary of the secondary literature reveals that this area has received comparatively little attention: a quick search on Amazon.com reveals one-fifth as many books on "Kierkegaard and Socrates" as on "Kierkegaard and Hegel," for example. Kierkegaard was shaped by Socrates from the beginning, and continually looked to Socrates (primarily as portrayed by Plato) as a role model and an inspiration, as well as for specific concepts, themes and ideas; Kierkegaard without Socrates is simply inconceivable, and yet it seems as if this relationship is practically ignored. These essays begin to redress this imbalance in Kierkegaard scholarship, by examining Kierkegaard's relationship with Socrates, the sources he used to develop his view of Socrates, and what he did with his Socrates once he had him.

The collection is divided into three parts. The first and largest examines Kierkegaard's use of Plato. Seven essays by five different authors discuss Kierkegaard's use of a particular dialog (or in some cases, two dialogues) to explore some particular theme in Socratic philosophy. As the preface makes clear, the essays in the first section of this book are not intended simply as treatments of Kierkegaard's discussion of those works; rather, they examine Kierkegaard's treatment of various themes most particularly treated in those works. The general approach is to pick a central Platonic text, examine SK's treatment of it and of some core concept or theme of that text, but then also to look beyond to SK's discussion of other Platonic texts where they also speak to that theme. Kierkegaard's references to a particular dialogue were generally scattered among his writings, and his understanding of a particular concept was generally drawn from multiple dialogues. So, for example, while the discussion of eternity, time and the moment may center on the *Phaedo* and *Parmenides*, it does not confine itself to these dialogues but treats the other dialogues Kierkegaard used in developing his views on temporality and eternity through his various writings. The other essays in this section explore Socratic self-knowledge, recollection, irony, maieutics and Platonic eros, as Kierkegaard developed his understanding of each and applied each concept in his own philosophical and theological arguments. The result is a fuller understanding of Kierkegaard's view of Plato and Plato's Socrates, but it is more than that. Even a reader with little specific interest in Plato can learn more about how Kierkegaard approached his task as a writer and philosopher. Our understanding of Kierkegaard's writing strategy is enriched by those essays exploring his use of Socrates as a role model, as well as his views of Socratic irony and maieutics. We see that Kierkegaard was highly selective in his use of Plato, drawing on a "canon within the canon" to give him the "authentic Socrates," while other dialogues were dismissed as too speculative and Platonic. This selective reading of Plato and his relative lack of historical concern, as well as his tendency to discuss dialogues in short bursts scattered through his many books, reflects his nature as a thinker: unsystematic of course, not usually interested in producing "scholarly" works but in using Plato and Socrates to develop his own understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology, reason and faith. The essays at times draw attention to what could be called

Kierkegaard's failures as a scholar, or at least his failure to adhere to strict scholarly standards; but they also often point out the insight and essential validity of much of his interpretation of Plato in the light of today's Plato scholarship.

The second part of this book consists of two essays on each of Kierkegaard's other major ancient sources for his understanding of Socrates: Xenophon and Aristophanes. In "Aristophanes: Kierkegaard's Understanding of the Socrates of the *Clouds*," Eric Ziolkowski examines the various influences on Kierkegaard's interpretation of Aristophanes (such as Hegel, Schleiermacher and the Romantics), and Kierkegaard's provocative claim (from *The Concept of Irony*) that Aristophanes' interpretation of Socrates was "not far from the truth." Kierkegaard continued to sustain this positive assessment of Aristophanes through most of his authorship, in tension with his admiration for Socrates. At times Aristophanes serves Kierkegaard as the archetypal social critic, and thus almost as much a role model as was Socrates. At other times Kierkegaard or his pseudonyms seem almost ready to call Aristophanes out for unfairly and destructively mocking Socrates. This is in marked contrast to his treatment of Xenophon, as William MacDonald's essay in this book makes clear. Again following contemporary scholarship, Kierkegaard largely disparages Xenophon, partly because (MacDonald argues) Kierkegaard relies excessively on Hegel's condemnation of Xenophon, and partly because the Socrates of the *Memorabilia* does not fit his own vision of Socrates as pure negativity and irony.

The last major division of this book contains two essays on Kierkegaard's contemporary sources for his understanding of Socrates: one essay devoted to his use of Danish sources, and the other examining his use of German-language sources. Both essays focus primarily on *The Concept of Irony*, as this is the only major work of formal scholarship by the notoriously unsystematic Kierkegaard. His dissertation was supposed to show his scholarly ability to teach at the university, so he had to engage specifically with the historical and philological scholarship of his day as well as the more philosophical writings that were his primary interest. These essays discuss how he treated his contemporary sources, what he learned from them, and how his choices of which to accept, reject or ignore reflect his own philosophical agenda. In his use of contemporary sources, his philosophical concerns dictated his philological agenda, at times leading him to ignore significant works of historical scholarship because they did not fit his image of Socrates the ironist. His Socrates was based more on the philosophical scholarship, including Hegel, Schleiermacher and the Romantics; his philological research aimed more to support his prior philosophical judgments than to meaningfully challenge them. Both essays give us insight into how Kierkegaard's mind worked in developing his conception of Socrates and his significance, and that of philosophy itself for Christian faith.

In addition to the essays, the book contains cumulative bibliographies of the relevant writings owned by Kierkegaard, as well as modern secondary literature referenced by the essayists themselves. This book is certain to be useful to anyone doing research on Kierkegaard and Socrates; but more importantly, the essays explore concepts that Kierkegaard took from Plato and Socrates and made his own, so anyone wishing to understand Kierkegaard better will profit from this book regardless of prior background in the Greeks.

Idealism and Existentialism: Hegel and Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century European Philosophy

By Jon Stewart
Continuum, 2010, 282 pp.
ISBN 978-14411-3399-1

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Jon Stewart's *Idealism and Existentialism: Hegel and Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century European Philosophy* sets out a worthwhile goal: "to reveal in one way or another the long shadow cast by Kant and Hegel over the subsequent history of European philosophy."¹ Although Kant is not mentioned in the title, it is assumed and at times also elaborated the ways in which Kant's version of idealism defined Hegel's philosophy and that of Hegel's successors. This can be seen clearly when Stewart employs Kant's definition of 'systematic' in order to show the systematicity for which Stewart argues in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This links to another aim, which in fact comprises the major *telos* of the text: to reconstruct systematicity in and among some of the major works and themes of several nineteenth- and twentieth-century European thinkers. This includes Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Camus, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre.

In his previous book, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, Stewart wrote an extensive and astute critique of the reified interpretations of Kierkegaard as that defender of the solitary individual that pits itself opposite the monstrously abstract 'system' of Hegelian idealism.² Stewart's *modus operandi* is to bring traditions closer together by way of eliciting resemblances between them in the form of systematization and appropriation. His approach constructively frustrates Western philosophy's stereotypical readings of the major figures in the late modern European tradition by going to the core of the most significant dialogues: for example, the debates between idealism and existentialism, and atheism and religious belief. While I am greatly appreciative of his scholarly achievements in reawakening the nuances of the individual philosophers whose works he has taken up and in challenging a predictable rendering of their words (and the ways in which they received each other's words), I sometimes question his commitment to systematicity in his efforts to evince these nuances. I wonder if even more nuances would come to fruition if the stringency with which each figure must be fitted to a systematic reading were eased. To my mind further explanation is needed on the significance of systematicity as Stewart understands it so as to better grasp his project as a whole and his commitment to this method. For this reason I focus on the notion of 'systematic' in my review.

Another reviewer's response to Stewart's recent work was to seek out *even more* systematicity that Stewart himself provides. In *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* Andrew LaZella offered numerous suggestions for additional connections and further consolidation of contacts internal to Stewart's own work, in an attempt to bring together the individual articles and lectures published under one title in *Idealism and Existentialism*.³ My approach is different. Rather than continue the movement of systematicity I would like to take a step back and ask what 'systematic' means in Stewart's specific use of the term and how it genuinely benefits a reinvigorated grasp of the philosophers under his microscope.

Some framework on this issue is provided in Chapter 2, "Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a Systematic Fragment," where Stewart contrasts "the notion of 'systematic' in the everyday sense of 'orderly' or 'well-organized' " with "the technical sense in which it is used in German idealism."⁴ He then elaborates on this contrast because he is troubled by what he considers to be false interpretations of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (for example, those of John Dewey, Robert Solomon, Walter Kaufman, and Alexander Kojève), which to Stewart

make evident a lack of awareness of the technical use of 'systematic' as well as Hegel's appropriation of it. The named interpreters are wrong according to Stewart because they either lump together the inconsistencies and 'breaks' internal to the structure of the *Phenomenology* into a category that labels the text 'poetic', or they pick and choose those sections they deem most worthy and utilize them for their own idiosyncratic reading (as in Kojève's). Stewart continues with the following claim: "With respect to the question of systematic philosophy, Hegel is a typical representative of the entire German idealist tradition, which aimed at offering a systematic and exhaustive account of the cognitive faculties."⁵ From this one can take that the technical use of systematic meant by Stewart provides an "exhaustive account of the cognitive faculties." But it is still not clear why, and such a conception of systematic cannot be applied to Kierkegaard and those who followed him in the existentialist spirit. Furthermore, Stewart employs the term 'systematic' in his definition of 'systematic', producing a kind of vagueness, and he uses Kant as an exemplar:

Kant, for instance, says of his own philosophy, "it is nothing but the *inventory* of all our possessions through *pure* reason, systematically arranged." Kant's transcendental philosophy can thus be seen as a catalogue of the various functions of the intellect by means of which we come to know and understand. This inventory, he claims, is ordered in a necessary, systematic fashion. "As a systematic unity is what first raises ordinary knowledge to the rank of science, that is, makes a system out of a mere aggregate of knowledge," he explains, "architectonic is the doctrine of the scientific in our knowledge and therefore necessarily forms part of the doctrine of method." For Kant, it is the ensemble or organic unity of knowledge that makes it a true science, and what does not belong to this systematic unity is a "mere aggregate" or collection of facts. One might be able to make specific observations about the operation of the intellect, but to adequately account for it one must consider all of the cognitive faculties and their interconnections, for otherwise the observations would remain incomplete.⁶

Stewart draws on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as the arbiter of 'system' in idealism, but this definition is limited and becomes superimposed onto the works that come after Kant's first *Critique*. Stewart claims that "Kant's successors accepted, without serious qualification, his insistence on system as an organic unity"⁷ and that "Hegel can hardly be regarded as a maverick on this point."⁸ Although Hegel certainly had the intention to create a systematic work in the *Phenomenology*, something that could be used to teach philosophy at the *Gymnasium* level in Germany, that doesn't necessarily preclude the possibility that such a project failed, even in Hegel's assessment.⁹ The fact that this *propaedeutic* did not quite accomplish what Hegel set out for it does not negate the intent, but the intent that it be systematic likewise does not offer a necessary and sufficient condition that it ended as a systematic work. While this is a problem for Stewart, I see the failure of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a systematic structure as a benefit, for it opens up alternative ways to look at Hegel's philosophy as a whole, including the *Phenomenology*. Philosophic interpretations need not fall into the binary of: either systematicity or poetry. For Aristotle, for example, poetry was one of the most organized and organizing creations based on the notion of organic unity in which all parts of the whole related to each other in their respective and appropriate measure to create an even and harmonious whole.¹⁰ The situation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* could be something closer to such an understanding of an organic whole, or could be seen in the context of what Frederic Jameson has recently described as 'variations'.¹¹ This seems congruous with what the idealists had in mind in terms of a general kinship with organic unity in the way that Stewart himself describes it.

In the context of the latter connotation of systematic as an organic whole, Stewart provides a convincing account of the ways in which the different parts of the *Phenomenology* can be brought together internal to a consistent structure that repetitively follows the same dialectical pattern. This takes place in Chapter 3, "The Architectonic of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*." Herein Stewart sketches his model for a proper reading of the *Phenomenology*. This essay links to his previous accomplishments from Chapter 2, and taken together one gets a fuller-bodied grasp of what systematic really means for Stewart, integral as it is for him in Hegel's philosophy. In connecting Hegel's notion of truth as systematic form to Anglophone conceptions such as 'a

network theory of truth', 'a scientific paradigm', and 'holism', Stewart defines Hegel's speculative philosophy as follows: "individual parts of the system have their meaning only in their necessary relation to the other parts, and thus as parts of the larger whole."¹² This is a somewhat more flexible context of systematic than the one provided earlier in the text, and it yields an interesting contrast to the approach of superimposing Kant's concept of systematic onto subsequent philosophers in the idealist and existentialist traditions. Stewart helpfully brings in the organic analogy from the *Phenomenology* and writes: "Just as the different stages of its development change the plant's appearance so radically that it appears to become another 'contradictory' species, so also contradictory concepts can contribute to the development of a single philosophical system."¹³

But Stewart's insistence on calling Hegel's *Phenomenology* 'system' in the strict sense of the term and linking it to 'reason' counterposed to 'irrationality' requires further analysis and consideration. Stewart seeks to show how the traditions of idealism and existentialism are closer than the ways in which they have been superficially presented, according to Stewart's estimation. This is a crucial dimension of his work and his writing is illuminating in the individual analyses of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. For this reason I lack understanding of Stewart's emphasis on the systematicity as defined by Kant, most especially as it implicitly impacts Hegel.

Stewart is fighting against the nice dramatic story told to undergraduates in which "the history of philosophy in the first half of the nineteenth century has been...a grand confrontation between the ambitious but sadly naive rationalistic system of Hegel and the devastating criticisms of it by Kierkegaard's philosophy, with its emphasis on actuality and existence."¹⁴ He writes:

While Kierkegaard champions the individual and human freedom, Hegel, by contrast, emphasizes the universal and rational necessity. While Kierkegaard insists on the absolute irreducibility of the individual, Hegel presents his view in the form of a grotesque, impersonal, abstract monstrosity called "the system," which mercilessly destroys everything in its path, including the individual.¹⁵

Stewart makes some interesting moves in order to counter this dichotomy as it has been portrayed by several readings in the history of Kierkegaard reception. For example, Stewart argues against a strict division between the rationalist (allegedly Hegelian) tradition and the irrationalist (purportedly Kierkegaardian and later existentialist) one. Stewart turns to Hegel's account of the struggle of Enlightenment with religion from the *Phenomenology* in order to demonstrate Hegel's own disgruntlement with 'reason'. In Stewart's narrative, taking from his project as a whole, Hegel is more irrational and Kierkegaard more rational than previously construed. This is the approximative locus of the more correct history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy that has been heretofore elucidated, according to Stewart.

One example of the way in which Stewart carries this out can be found in Chapter 1, "Hegel and the Myth of Reason." Stewart writes:

What I ultimately wish to suggest is that Hegel is very aware of the pernicious aspects of reason and thus is best seen not as the last *Aufklärer* but rather as a forerunner of the so-called "irrationalist tradition." Thus, the tradition that is inaugurated after Hegel is most accurately understood not as a new beginning or a radical break with the past, but rather as something continuous with what preceded it.¹⁶

Stewart has clarified one way in which Hegel was aware of certain negative manifestations of reason--what can be called nonreflective rationality, or what was dubbed by first generation Frankfurt School philosophers 'administrative rationality'. This is enough for Stewart "to demonstrate that the myth of Hegel as an arch-rationalist is in need of, at the very least, some serious qualification if it is not to be dismissed altogether..."¹⁷ Stewart then concedes that a question is looming: namely, the one "concerning the degree to which Hegel ascribes to reason and what precisely the conception of reason is that he subscribes to."¹⁸ I find this the most

important question of the entire book. For if the two traditions of idealism and existentialism really are more tangential and less exclusive to each other than previous histories have led us to believe, the burning question is what reason comprises at this significant connecting point in the history. Instead of answering this question (in Chapter 1) Stewart highlights counter-evidence to the myth of Hegel as über-rationalist, which according to Stewart facilitates a connection between Hegel and "that of the so-called 'anti-rationalistic' thinkers..."¹⁹ Stewart countenances multiple concepts of reason throughout his narrative of counter-evidence. In this way he productively problematizes a flat-lined delivery of Hegel's conception of reason. Implicit in Stewart's outlay of passages and interpretations is an alternative concept of reason in Hegel, one which fights against scientism and any reactionary justification of 'tradition'. Stewart's methodology then can be summarized with the motto that 'system' itself can be 'edifying' in the way that Kierkegaard meant it, according to Stewart's version of an upbuilding process in Kierkegaard's corpus.

While I disagree with Stewart's landing place for Kierkegaard via Hegel, Stewart rigorously opens up discussion about the historical reception of these figures--integral as they are to his grander thesis at large--and provokes many significant questions about their respective definitions of 'reason' and 'truth' as well as the edification process that results from raising these questions. *Idealism and Existentialism* should be read by anyone interested in the history of the reception of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Because Stewart persists throughout his writings at a counter-intuitive level for those trained in this history, his work deserves much credit for the means it employs to challenge our preconceptions. The reader is forced to think about 'reason' in many of its iterations throughout the rich history of late modern European philosophy. Since Stewart does not give a unitary solution to the problem of what reason is, the reader is left to build a new definition in an attempt to grasp this previous philosophical epoch, all the while thinking about how this ever expanding, multivalent notion of reason could fit into a 'system'. It is in this way that Stewart's reading of Hegel has truly succeeded.

¹ Jon Stewart, *Idealism and Existentialism: Hegel and Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century European Philosophy* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 2.

² See Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Although I disagree with Stewart's conclusion, I learned immensely from his work.

³ Andrew LaZella, "Review of Jon Stewart, *Idealism and Existentialism: Hegel and Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century European Philosophy*" in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, February 18, 2011.

⁴ Stewart, *Idealism and Existentialism.*, pp. 25-26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹ See, for example, Frederic Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2010), p. 3.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics* in *The Collected Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

¹¹ Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit*, *ibid.*

¹² Stewart, *Idealism and Existentialism*, p. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*