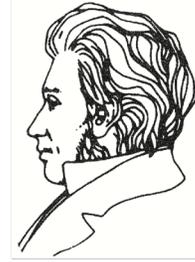


Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter

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Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS | 2 |
| ARTICLES | |
| The Unbearable Lightness – and Uplifting Gravity – of Being in Kierkegaard’s World and Ours Poul Houe | 2 |
| Play Kierkegaard! The Wisdom of Kierkegaard: What Existential Lessons Have I Learned from Him? András Nagy | 9 |
| Speaking as a Lily: A Reading of Kierkegaard’s 1849 Lily Discourses Dante Clementi | 17 |
| BOOK REVIEWS | |
| <i>Errant Affirmations: On the Philosophical Meaning of Kierkegaard’s Religious Discourses,</i> By David Kangas Reviewed by J. Aaron Simmons | 23 |

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ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS

Utech Lecture

This year, the Hong Kierkegaard Library (HKL) is pleased to welcome Professor Jacob Howland from the University of Tulsa to give the Utech Lecture on July 10th and 11th at 1:00 p.m. While Professor Howland is a Kierkegaard expert, he is also a renowned ancient philosopher as evidenced by his various books, including *Kierkegaard and Socrates* and *Glaucon's Fate: History, Myth, and Character in Plato's Republic*. Please join us or stream the lecture from St. Olaf's website in what is sure to be a riveting talk entitled "Kierkegaardian Reflections on the 'Sickness unto Death.'"

Julia Watkin Memorial Lecture Series

This spring, the HKL invited Carl S. Hughes '03 to deliver the Julia Watkin Lecture on May 9th. Hughes is a Kierkegaard Scholar, an Assistant Professor of Theology at Texas Lutheran University, and the author of multiple articles and book chapters along with his most recent publication entitled *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Rhetoric and Performance in a Theology of Eros*. The title of his talk, "What Makes Kierkegaard 'Biblical?'" engaged an audience of scholars, St. Olaf students and professors, and interested community members.

International Kierkegaard Conference

From June 13 to June 16, 2018, the Library welcomed over 150 scholars from 24 countries to the Eighth International Kierkegaard Conference. The theme of the Conference centered around the questions: "What life wisdom have you drawn from studying Kierkegaard? How has he impacted your life? How might Kierkegaard positively sculpt the lives of those who spend years scrutinizing his works?" Richard Purkhartofer was the first to give his interpretive answer to these questions in his thoughtful plenary lecture entitled "Taking a Good Punch – The Impact of Kierkegaard." Throughout the week, over 80 other Kierkegaard scholars provided their own understanding to these questions presenting daily lecture sessions.

For more information from the Hong Kierkegaard Library and other news, see the Hong Kierkegaard Library website at <http://wp.stolaf.edu/kierkegaard/>.

The Unbearable Lightness – and Uplifting Gravity – of Being in Kierkegaard's World and Ours¹

Poul Houe, University of Minnesota

Eighth International Kierkegaard Conference, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, June 14, 2018

I.

Much wisdom is reflected in Kierkegaard's (SK's) conceptual inventory, most of which was recently recorded in the six tomes of *Kierkegaard's Concepts*—Vol. 15 of KRSRR—which conclude each of their entries with cross-references to germane concepts. My discussion will involve some of these concepts, but instead of probing their cross-references, I'll focus on a different type of constellation, as suggested in the paradoxical, if not conflicted, wording of my title.

I want to unpack SK's interweaving of philosophical terminology and literary epistemology across disciplinary boundaries and many strata of signification—all of it marked by ambiguities and contradictions. As Gabriel Rossatti points out in his KRSRR "Novel" entry, SK's own "novels" match neither his theory of the novel nor his critical take on other novelists. "SK's treatment of the novel, both in its theoretical as well as practical aspects, is exceedingly problematic, as well as contradictory" (251). SK's thought-provoking double-talk implicates several

¹ I merely elaborate on the wording of Milan Kundera's 1984 novel; for further connections between Kierkegaard and Kundera, see Morsing.

KRSRR, Vol. 15, concepts, and how his talk synthesizes and falls apart speaks volumes about his discourse.

To drive the point home, I connect some of Rossatti's other observations with my own reading of passages *From the Papers of One Still Living* (1838), which I recently utilized to profile some SK-related Hans Christian Andersen (HCA) texts.² Next, I consult SK's other critical project, his *Two Ages* (1846), as I addressed it in a talk on repetition and memory ten years ago.³ Finally, I draw on claims I made five years ago in a paper on "SK's Imagined Community" to follow his inroads into social and political critique.⁴ The overall direction of these steps could be called the legacy of ambiguity in SK. Why, and how much, does it—still—matter?

II.

While many scholars are familiar with SK's charge against HCA that he lacked a *life-view*, rarely has this concept's deeper meaning and implications been probed. As SK describes it:

A life-view is more than a quintessence or a sum of propositions maintained in its abstract neutrality; it is more than experience, which as such is always fragmentary. It is, namely, the transubstantiation of experience; it is an unshakable certainty in oneself won from all experience, whether this has oriented itself only in all worldly relationships ... by which means it keeps itself from contact with a deeper experience—or whether in its heavenward direction (the religious) it has found therein the center as much for its heavenly as its earthly existence... (EPW 76).

While SK clearly finds "the transubstantiation of experience" conspicuous by its absence in HCAs case, he does ask, "is it, then, absolutely necessary for a novelist to have such a life-view, or is there not a certain poetic mood that as such, in union with an animated portrayal, can achieve the same?" (EPW 79). Yet the question is rhetorical, and SK's own answer categorical:

A life-view is really providence in the novel; it is its deeper unity, which makes the novel have the center of gravity in itself. A life-view frees it from being arbitrary and purposeless, since the purpose is present everywhere in the work of art. But when such a life-view is lacking, the novel either seeks to insinuate some theory ... at the expense of poetry or it makes a finite and incidental contact with the author's flesh and blood. ... In a novel there must be an immortal spirit that survives the whole (EPW 81-83).

Fast forward—or backward—to Rossatti, who notes that the novel SK has in mind is the *Bildungsroman*, a term rare in Danish parlance at the time, but a genre promising synergy of aesthetic and critical/theoretical forces ready to unite with the author's life-view in spiritual upbuilding. In HCA's case, a life-view was skirted as he "skipped over the epic [stage]" and failed to mature from a lyric stage of unreflective immediacy to the "higher principle of ultimately ethical-religious unity" (Rossatti 248). But did SK's own novel production fare any better? If he considered it:

The need of the novel to be a well-ordered microcosm of the main character's development of consciousness, a movement which had as its final goal some sort of harmonization with the world and which was supposed to serve as a guiding spirit to the reader's own existence, then his own novels seem to be governed by different rules. In other words, there seems to be a gap in SK's works between his *theory* of the novel ... and his own *practice* of it. ... Indeed, if the novel is the omnivorous literary genre *par excellence*, that is, a genre which is built upon self-reflexivity and eclecticism, then SK's novels are, for the most part, narratives in which the critical-theoretical

² Houe.

³ Seminar on "Memory and repetition in Kierkegaard and Dinesen" for the Department of German, Scandinavian and Dutch's The Graduate School Experience: An Intensive Summer Workshop for Undergraduates, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, August 19, 2008.

⁴ Guest lecture in the University of Minnesota course GSD 3512, Spring 2013, February 27.

element pretty much determines the very unwinding of the narrative (Rossatti 250).

I find this “fault line” in SK’s output discernible already in the quotes from his book on HCA that I gave earlier. But since his own “fiction” contributes to the “lining,” I want to show how his divisive theory of literary practice sets his own practice apart in “novels” such as *Repetition*, whose title concept has long divided the scholarly community.

III.

At the end of his “Novel” entry, Rossatti connects his comments on SK and the *Bildungsroman* with his points about SK’s dubious treatment of the novel:

As such, SK’s novels are fundamentally subversions of the *Bildungsroman*, for, apart from the *negativity* portrayed through the protagonists, there is no positive result in them, that is, there is no objective or final grasp of the character’s completion in self-consciousness. Thus SK’s “psychological experiments” can be described as his way of aesthetically waging war on the ideology of modernity (251).

In fact, this war is deconstructive in the sense the *Bildungsroman* is extolled while the “psychological experiments” in SK’s own pseudonymous novels reduce the genre’s norms to dead ends. Calling the result “open-endedness” (as Rossatti does [251]) only confirms the failure of SK’s claim that “the transubstantiation of experience” and a novelistic life-view center human experience and lend it providence. If arbitrariness and purposelessness do stay within limits, it’s not because of any center of gravity, nor of “an immortal spirit that survives the whole,” as SK wrote, but because of a theory no more respectable than the “finite and incidental contact with the author’s flesh and blood” that gave HCA’s fiction *its* illusion of uplifting spirituality. While SK theorizes *about* others’ novels, he *theorizes* his own by the norm of the *Bildungsroman*.

Aage Henriksen discusses “SK’s Reviews of Literature” in an article with this title from 1955. While the gap between the HCA review from 1838 and the Gyllembourg review from 1846 is not negligible, “what is surprising, is their similarity”: both authors, “one poetic in immediacy, the other sagacious in resignation,” represent “what is estimable in the current urge to begin anew” (“Kierkegaard’s Reviews” 75-76). By contrast, “the present age” is one that, in SK’s words, “has suspended the axiom of contradiction,” e.g., “the impassioned disjunction between being silent and speaking. Only he who can essentially keep silence can essentially speak; only he who can essentially keep silence can essentially act. Silence is intensity,” a “balance of opposites” SK counts for “ideality,” unlike present age gossip, which “is not balanced by its opposite” (“Kierkegaard’s Reviews” 79).

To SK, personality is defined by impassioned ideality and shows as the relation between protagonist and narrator in literary art created by such a human. “In this manner the record of the creation of the works is incorporated in the fiction itself” (Henriksen, “Kierkegaard’s Reviews” 82-83). Or in SK’s own formulation: “just as the entrance to a house is barred by the crossed bayonets of the guards, the approach to a man’s personality is barred by the dialectical cross of qualitative opposites in an ideal equilibrium” (qtd. in Henriksen, “Kierkegaard’s Reviews” 79-80). Pithy words, but does SK walk the talk in his own “novels?” Rossatti faulted his treatment of the novel as contradictory, but what if contradiction is the linchpin of a true novel, just as SK suggested? Might Rossatti have faulted SK for what the Dane himself deemed a virtue? Or might SK be contradicting himself by not living up to his own essential contradictions?

Henriksen, in his 1954 dissertation on SK’s novels, notes that *repetition* occurs in SK at the *moment* when reality and ideality, time and eternity, meet, and freedom arises from the Fall. Inwardly speaking, humans meet their ethical obligation by lifting their singularity out of the aesthetic and into the general. Failing to do so demonizes singularity and leaves the human stranded in a guilt that reveals the immediacy of sin beneath aesthetic immediacy. The young man’s *ethical* challenge either leads him to perdition in the demonic or to salvation in an absolute relation to God (*forgoing* the ethical either way). Eventually, he faces repetition as he gets back to who he was before he fell in love (with the girl who has now married someone else). It’s like awakening from a dream

with the feeling of having lost its reality yet sensing this reality return as image and sign. Certainly, this repetition is contradictory, and even more so, it seems, in SK's ideal sense than in the deplorable sense Rossatti suggested.

Several scholars more or less side with this reading of *repetition*, both the novel and the concept.⁵ But once the concept is viewed within the perimeter of its eponymous novel, the dilemmas it entails surface. Søren Baggesen reads the novel as a semi-religious novella—and the concept as hosting the old as the *fullness of time* while heading for the new in *the course of time*. This way repetition reaches Constantin—through the story he crafts in practice, while in theory he writes it off (Baggesen). The “contradiction” gets magnified through Erslev Andersen's lens, where recollection shows the self telling about itself—in a way that both reveals and clouds the self. Quoting Hillis Miller, Andersen claims that “the self exists only in the work and in the work's separation from real life” (38). Loss and gain of self reflect repetition's heterogeneity.⁶

While Rossatti attributed deplorable contradiction to SK's novel production, Flemming Harrits even declares *Repetition* a memorial novel, despite its title, and a leaping polemic against Hegelian mediation. Constantin's consciousness exceeds that of the book, whose mask of pseudonymity cracks as its repetitions progress into eternity. Repetition is two-faced—leading from despair to doubt, from immanence to transcendence and back as a movement of faith. To Harrits, SK is a creator against his will, whose fiction is material spirit—as opposed to immaterial Christian spirit—that shows reflection emanate and die away along with the silencing of language in its second immediacy. From the painful realization of the incessantness of language to the anticipation of reflection's end in death, SK's contradictions, by this account, are on the grand scale he himself attributed to the novel and novelistic life-view; yet they do not amount to the “dialectical cross of qualitative opposites in an ideal equilibrium”—or what I labeled the “Uplifting Gravity of Being” in my title—that he deemed integral to such narratives.

IV.

Now, if SK contradicts his own contradictions, but respectably so, what implications does his double-tongued disquisition have? While avoiding an “Unbearable Lightness,” its multilayered duplicity is not alien to this upshot, so it befits us to gauge the proximity—and to rate the fate of SK's single individual in his fiction. What's more, how does an imagined community of such individuals compare to the lightweight communities of “the present age,” be it his or ours?

The answer I suggested in my talk on the subject five years ago involved several steps before concluding with the “Clash of Ideologies and Remaking of World Order.” In SK's own shorthand, “In a noble sense to become nothing in this world is the condition for becoming something in the other world” (qtd. In Tudvad). This is his community, and far from denigrating him politically, its secular nothingness augurs a “Radical Existential Praxis” of relevance even to our age.⁷

SK's anathema is not politics per se, but its deification, which he finds wrong *and* self-defeating, as the repressed

⁵ Two cases in point: Jens Himmelstrup, in his standard dictionary entry (Himmelstrup), e.g., notes how Greek repetition is directed backward toward the past, while modern (Christian) repetition is forward oriented and renews the moment faith in salvation and grace enter the picture. Immediacy is conquered through faith, and so repetition is neither recollection nor hope. Much in the same vein Gregor Malantschuk, in *his* classical dictionary entry (Malantschuk), stresses that while repetition is not aesthetically, i.e., accidentally, possible, it is the deepest religious expression of atonement and thus the goal of SK's authorship. To the extent the ethical stage hosts repetition, it is thanks to its religious leanings. In its extremes, negative repetition is trite and philistine, whereas the highest form of repetition occurs when an individual human falls short, ethically speaking, and seeks atonement with Christ, at which moment a new life becomes possible.

⁶ Finn Frandsen in his comments on Constantin's experiment and fiction about the young man similarly considers this author inordinately split and imparting both his own aesthetic existence and that of the young man on a religious soundboard which he—Constantin—can barely imagine and certainly not comprehend. (Frandsen)

⁷ See Matustik.

eternal will return with a vengeance. Because the “present age” seeks false harmonies between finite and infinite, the worldly and the otherworldly, distinctions between religion and politics are sorely needed. For when false harmonies result in nothingness like Christianity in Christendom, this nothingness grows beyond false harmonies into imagined communities that chain two incompatible institutions to one another. Instead, a free and secular state should take its freedom gospel seriously and, by separating from the church, assure religious freedom too. That would mean individuation, not deification; not market driven selfish loners, herded into politics and “the public” as sheer numbers, but individuals of spirit existing before God as communities of neighbors loving one another.⁸

What complicates this picture (by Michele Nicoletti)—that politics and religion should be separate but not divorced—is that SK welcomes what he resents the most. He remains scornful of the absolute pretenses of modern politics as they are potentially self-destructive, yet allowing them to proceed may actually serve his cause against them. Modern politics, and its “illusion of a human, self-sufficient self-government” (Nicoletti 189), are, like modernity itself, ridden by inner contradictions that invite the kind of failures that SK relishes.

Being trapped in both of these worlds is the individual’s best hope. For the existential inadequacy of the worldly state and the worldly religion it has morphed into may trigger an inner form of government whose “single individual governs not through force or through worldly success but through suffering” (Nicoletti 191). Insofar as “the relevance of the world as the only place where a person has to live and can realize the truth” (Nicoletti 191), SK again does not critique society for insufficient religiosity, but quite the opposite, for its religious ambitions! Martyrdom purifies politics and society of their pretensions and restores secular society to its proper role. Nor does SK chastise society for its capitalism, but rather for discarding true subjectivity—and true community—in favor of the “mass society and the herd mentality” (Westphal 39) in which “the people’ are constrained by no law but are themselves the sovereign of history,” i.e., more like gods than real humans (Westphal 41).⁹

Over time, SK’s understanding of the age changes. From an era of objectivity at the expense of subjectivity it becomes one of reflection at the expense of passion— “to find a truth which is truth for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die,”—which assumes that “individuals never come too close to each other in the herd sense, simply because they are united on the basis of an ideal distance” (qtd. In Westphal 46-47). Both central and infinite, the idea unites and separates in one gesture and overcomes distance by keeping “the dialectical cross of qualitative opposites in an ideal equilibrium” that marked the individual personality. The circle is being squared again, now as an imagined community that ideally conjoins individuals without harming their individuality as single beings neighborly loving one another in God’s grace.

Meanwhile, in the present age and herd society masses fearful of boredom and hooked on entertainment busily hide their envy and self-interest behind a façade of mediation and “equality,” addictive universal means to deify contradiction out of existence. The age, by SK’s account, is a godless, demonic abstraction holding lost souls in bondage: a *compositional* individualism completely opposite of the *neighborly* individualism he advocates.¹⁰

And advocates not on behalf of Christian orthodoxy. To opponents of SK who call his ideology critique irrational, scholars like Merold Westphal respond that its religious framework has another logic than modern society’s and that this allows SK to detect such consequences of society’s logic to which society has blinded itself, most importantly how this logic has enabled society to deify its own secularization into a substitute for the vanished divinity. The nation is this new secular, liberal, rational, humanistic, culture-Christian societal God, and the

⁸ Still, as Nicoletti puts it: “Such a sharp distinction between politics and religion ... does not exhaust the relations between the two spheres for SK” (186).

⁹ Merold Westphal updates this scenario to an ideology that deifies societal interests in a (post-)industrial growth and production society.

¹⁰ This claim is evidenced in Westphal and backed by Martin Matustik, who stresses that neither compositional nor dialectical individualism met with SKs approval (see Matustik 241).

golden mean for the 19th century's imagination of community—whose falsehood SK pinpoints.¹¹

In showing the clash between this modern ideology of mediating existence and SK's "radical existential praxis," Martin Matustik clarifies the allusion to Hegel's philosophy (241). SK agrees with Hegel that the world is a whole, but not with Hegel's specific holism that is all about spirit *in* the world—like the deified nation-state SK detested. No, he thought—purify the world of deity so humans can relate to their selves to the point where these selves, without exception, will prove to be nothing. Then in facing a God that is not *of* this world but has come *into* this world *in* His son Jesus Christ, they may receive His grace and find all spirit to be theirs as neighborly love unfolds between all selves of faith. "SK's radical existential praxis" thus entails a *truly* egalitarian concern for the shared misery and nothingness of all single individuals and ordinary citizens belonging to his imagined community of sinners before God. This is why SK's ideology critique of the modern age can be—and has been—called "a cure against superficiality" (Jespersen).

V.

Religion's loss of "sovereignty," a dimension SK's "imagined community" shared with that of Benedict Anderson, gave rise to nationalism and made "imagined community" a powerful tool that offered the new national paradigm a fiction about the old community while steering imagination in a new direction (Anderson 5-7). The trick was to redact the old to make it familiarize the new. Incorporating the displaced religious Other made the secular project more palatable and aided the transfer of sovereignty to the nation as *the* imagined community. SK perceived this crafty ideological transformation as an unbearable lightness of being. What he didn't imagine was how much the lightness would weigh on his own art and compromise its uplifting gravity. Still, contradictions that fail so ambitiously are getting harder and harder to imagine in communities mired in likes and tweets. For that reason alone, SK's words merit *repetition*. Also, in a populist and nationalist era where most double-talk seeks to *avoid* the truth, any road *to* it is welcome.

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¹¹ See Westphal, chapters 3, 4, and 7. One of several instances where SK's (type of) insistence upon human finitude—and the finitude of human institutions, such as the nation state—takes center stage in current debates (often without mention of SK's name) is *Confrontation*, 29 and 54.

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Play Kierkegaard!¹ The Wisdom of Kierkegaard: What Existential Lessons Have I Learned from Him?

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I.

Children usually prefer playing to learning and they are absolutely right in their preference. Adults tend to forget that playing is just another form of learning, but a much more important, efficient and enjoyable form than you might associate with school.

As animal behavior bears witness, playing is also a crucial element in the process of growing up. Puppies and kittens indulge in important life preparing exercises when attacking our shoestrings or fighting with the tablecloths. Animals cannot be deprived of play, but humans can. This was probably the case of the young Kierkegaard, being born into the family of a devoted mother (about whom he very tellingly did not write a word) and a melancholic father who was anything but playful.

Hegel seems to have had a more colorful childhood and was probably allowed to play. Thus, he was able to spend the remainder of his life obtaining wisdom by learning and delving deeper and deeper into the areas he was dedicated to investigating.

Kierkegaard, however, spent his entire childhood without playing, the only toy he ever possessed was a spindle and contemporaries recalled that he was not welcomed in children's companies when they engaged in group games. Playing is an unconditional psychological drive and being deprived of the ludic element of life in his early age may have impelled Kierkegaard to indulge in play for the rest of his days. His ways of playing, however, had an epistemological character and were interconnected with his thinking, his writing and ultimately with his entire life. Kierkegaard's approach to play had existential relevance and created a unique oeuvre by taking playing as seriously as only children can.

Adults are seriously restricted in their opportunities to play; thus, the few options offered to them are the more significant. One adult excuse to play is sport, however, Kierkegaard was hardly an athlete, even if he referred to horserace and to hippodrome when describing another kind of adult "game" - politics. The other chance for grown-ups to play is gambling, that was not his field either (yet it may also have existential significance, as Dostoevsky proved, being influenced by Kierkegaard). And yet, once a year playfulness is "institutionalized," at the carnival in which adults don masks and pretend to be someone else. The carnival was very important for Kierkegaard but not something to partake of in daily life. However, the only way remaining for Kierkegaard to play was the play: the very substance of performances and of theater in general.

Can wisdom be obtained in the theater? Not necessarily, but was Kierkegaard interested in wisdom? Or was he interested in remaining ignorant in the Socratic sense as in the more we know the more we realize how ignorant we are?

Besides being the subject of his dissertation, the ironic genius, the Greek master of dialogical argumentation was a model for Kierkegaard. Socrates' conversations possessed dramaturgy and involved not only the intellect but also all the senses. There were many reasons that these dialogues served as inspiration for playwrights as Nietzsche had proven in his masterful essay, even while Socrates became a character in Aristophanes' comedy, *The Clouds*. Socrates was an exemplar for Kierkegaard throughout his authorship, when he was trying on masks to hide his individuality and experimenting with different characters: the ironist, the outcast, and alas-- the martyr.

¹ See: Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Play Strindberg!* Dürrenmatt wanted to write his thesis at the Zürich University on the concept of tragedy in Kierkegaard.

The Socratic dialogues were written by Plato and sometimes had several characters. For example, there were seven in the *Symposium*. Recreating the dramatic aspect, Kierkegaard also required more than one character in his works. In Kierkegaard's writings, dialogues were often composed as an exchange of letters or reconstructed conversations. The complexity of his thinking process also demanded the division of the writer into author(s), editor, and publisher defined by names that included his own. When all these appeared in print and created significant resonance, Kierkegaard sometimes attempted to contradict the whole book in another work, rife with the same complexity of angles, and yet remaining in the imaginary world of characters, roles, and expressed by his pseudonyms. The play then had an unexpected turn.

Compared to Hegel's monologues this was a different mode of expression - an altered way of thinking. The voices and aspects of pseudonyms determined a significant part of Kierkegaard's oeuvre including masterpieces like *Either-Or*, *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling*. In Copenhagen almost everyone knew who was behind the literary masks. They also knew something about the relationship between his personal life and his writings. While these works were shaped by different characters, these characters also shaped their author. It was a learning process - wisdom was obtained through experiments and reflections, rather than through syllogisms.

The names defined the types of voices Kierkegaard used and, as it was the habit in comedies and in vaudevilles of the time, these names referred to the features of the relevant character, like Vigilius Haufniensis, Hilarius Bogbinder, Constantin Constantius, Johannes de silentio. The whole "cast" was engaged in dialogues on the imaginary stage of the "textual theater," where the drama and/or comedy of the thinking process was performed. Sometimes these names provided a context for what was expressed by the author, like in the work of the triumphant hermit (Victor Eremita); in other cases it referred to a subtext, recalling model figures from the past, such as Climacus an ancient church father. However, the meaning of names like Climacus were not known by many besides Kierkegaard; his playfulness included teasing his public with references his readers were unaware of. Sometimes this strategy included the use of silence, like narrating a story by John of silence or leaving the revelation of secrets to the taciturn frater who had a lot to be silent about.

Dramatizing dilemmas and eventually restaging them in different contexts is definitely less "serious" than a calculated and masterfully composed narrative. Still, in their puckishness the texts of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms help the reader not just to "learn" but to stimulate his/her intellect and spirit to participation in the process. This approach also created a "horizontal" structure for those involved in the game in stark contrast to the authoritative and "vertical" structure of the traditional learning model.

II.

The Copenhagen adults' playhouse, the Royal Theater, seems to contradict this logic. The audience did not participate in the performance and the behavior of the theatergoers was restrained. However, the audience's enforced passivity, as Peter Szondi in his *Theory of Modern Drama* described it, turns into a "virtual activity"² by identification with the staged characters. This provides a much larger moving space than any linear narrative. Watching the performance, we are criminals and victims and heroes and villains often simultaneously. This may have been the reason Kierkegaard writings are so rife with used literary references. Indeed, the fictional figures that take the stage in his works outnumber his references to philosophers and theologians.

Besides the identification with the characters, the audience's different types of activity were also described by Kierkegaard, focusing on the collective creative process as it is executed in theater. The performance in Berlin's Königstädter Theater attended by Constantin Constantius, the author of *Repetition* reveals the interactivity between the audience and the actors. During the production the audience becomes the instrument of the actors, at the same time, the reactions of the public mold the actors' performance. This may serve also as a model of mutual inspiration and creation, important for Kierkegaard.

² Peter Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: 1987. p. 8.

In a different way, theater was also crucial for Kierkegaard's intellectual "upbringing" in that he soon became a professional interpreter of performances, i.e., a theater critic³ at a time when theater was the central cultural institution of Copenhagen. Kierkegaard's initial closeness to the leading intellectual cadre of Copenhagen, headed by Johan Ludvig Heiberg, inspired him also to understand the logic and magic of the stage, crucial for the Heibergs. In early nineteenth-century Copenhagen, theater meant much more than "only" art, education was mixed with entertainment. There was a mediation of Danish literature and language with patterns of behavior to follow as well as a fashion show with salon life.⁴ With its multifunctional character, theater served as the most important secular place of assembly, in Denmark "monothe(atr)ism" prevailed, the Royal Theater being **the** theater in Copenhagen and possibly in all Scandinavia.⁵ The monopoly of the absolute monarchy was over in 1848 when the theater's status had changed⁶ but not its importance, due to its high artistic level. Theater also had a therapeutic function, offering "cultural reverberations of the nation's traumatic defeats."⁷

Communication in drama is *per definitionem* indirect: the dramatist communicates through characters and the process of the drama is created by their verbal (and verbally described physical) actions. The complexity of points of view and voices does not mean the destabilization of the narrator's authority; on the contrary, it is precisely the function of a playwright to integrate all the relevant features into a dynamic entity.⁸ Opposing views are expressed in dialogues and may result in verbal and physical conflicts in the denouement of the drama. Obviously, the author is in the totality of voices thus Shakespeare was neither Shylock nor Hamlet. To apply this logic to Kierkegaard's oeuvre, SK was neither Climacus nor Anti-Climacus, nor was he purely Kierkegaard either - the author of the signed works and this may have been also part of his existential wisdom.

Shakespeare well knew this characteristic when Puck apologizes for their special form of existence in his farewell words,⁹ *Midsummer Night's Dream*, calling themselves shadows. Kierkegaard's use of shadow may also illustrate this process, as he already in his *Silhouettes*¹⁰ wrote shadow-portraits (as visual artists also produced those that time, using ink and scissors) of the deceived women as reflected by the radiating light of the seducer. In *Repetition* the protagonist "young man" was watching the play as if "splitting up himself into visual variations."¹¹ Shadows have also significant philosophical and psychological meaning. The visual image philosophically recalls the Platonic perception of our reality with major epistemological consequences, while the psychological features are masterfully described in Peter Schlemihl's fate, in Chamisso's extremely popular story of that time.¹²

When Kierkegaard wrote his own play, shadows were in lead roles. His parody drama *Battle between the Old and*

³ G. Pattison, "Søren Kierkegaard A Theater Critique of the Heiberg School", in: *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries. Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2003.

⁴ Henning Fenger, "Kierkegaard: A Literary Approach." In: *Kierkegaard and his Contemporaries*, op. cit. p. 304.

⁵ "To every civilized Dane the center of Copenhagen and of the world was the Royal Theater" Henning Fenger, "Kierkegaard: A Literary Approach." In: *Kierkegaard and his Contemporaries*, op. cit. p. 304.

⁶ J. Risum, "Towards Transparency: Søren Kierkegaard on Danish Actresses", In: *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries, Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, op. cit., p.331.

⁷ Lasse Horne Kjaeldgaard, "An Artist Among the Rebels? Johan Ludvig heiberg and the Political Turn of the Public Sphere", in *The Heibergs and the Theater. Between Vaudeville, Romantic Comedy and National Drama*. ed. by: Jon Stewart and Klaus Müller-Ville, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, Søren Kierkegaard research Centre, University of Copenhagen, 2012. p. 52.

⁸ Szondi, op. cit., p. 10.

⁹ „If we shadows have offended / Think but this and all is mended, / That you have but slumber'd here / While these visions did appear." Act 5, scene 1.

¹⁰ See the chapter in Kierkegaard: *Either / Or*.

¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, translated and edited by H. and E. Hong, Princeton: University Press, 1983. p. 220.

¹² Adalbert von Chamisso: *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*. The missing shadow was crucial in other literary works as well, for example in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. The psychoanalytic interpretation of the "shadowless" person and also that of the double is in Otto Rank, *Der Doppelgänger. Ein Psychoanalytische Studie*, Leipzig, Vienna, Zurich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1925.

*the New Soap Cellars*¹³ was probably never intended to be published or even communicated to anyone, as he never completed it and nearly forgot about it. His sardonic interpretation of Faust¹⁴ (the archetype of doubt for Kierkegaard) is just as crucial as his lampooning his professors with nicknames and characteristic dialogues, experimenting with ideas to criticize and to elaborate further. The protagonist Willibald - himself a reference to a Romantic story¹⁵ - defines his origins as “I am one of Chamisso’s fantasies... a shadow myself, therefore [I] cannot cast any shadow.”¹⁶ In the young thinker’s mind it concludes in the paradoxical act: “If I am going to be a shadow myself, I will at least compose a new one, I will create one... (with great feeling) Let there be a person,” he adds, and “at that very moment the cloud assumes the form of Echo,” who is otherwise “my other self.”¹⁷ This process of visual and acoustic multiplication (an echo may be considered a voice-shadow) is in many respects an exclusively theatrical move, creating new identities from earlier ones, toying with the levels of existence.

III.

Comedy and tragedy have different origins as their mythic history reveals: Thalia was the Muse of comedy, later however she became the symbol of theater in general, while Melpomene was the female symbol of tragedy, fading away in the history of theater. The sisters’ genealogy is particularly important where Kierkegaard and theater are concerned, as *Repetition* starts with reference to ancient Greece. The Muses were daughters of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. Her identity and mythic function includes remembering, recollecting and reminiscence - basic anthropological features.¹⁸ Kierkegaard was very much at home in ancient Greece¹⁹ and liked to play with references and hidden reflections, creating a “subtext” not necessarily clear to all his readers. In *Fear and Trembling*, the twin-book of *Repetition*, the Greek goddess Artemis²⁰ was indirectly, yet determinatively present providing an oblique network of notions. Iphigeneia was originally the human sacrifice for Artemis; however, after she was saved by the goddess, she later became her priestess. Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic thinker referred to by Johannes de silentio, deposited his works in Artemis’ temple. Even the reference to Eratostratos, the burner of her sanctuary recalls Artemis. She was the twin sister of Apollo the relationship to poetry (drama being not only part of it but the highest form of poetry) is thus organic. Even the seemingly erotic references to the bare breasts of the sacrificial Iphigeneia demonstrate the authentic clothing of the priestesses of the virgin goddess, while Johannes de silentio starts his work “from the breast” as the “Preliminary Expectoration”²¹ suggests.

Examining the phenomenon of repetition, the author contends that repetition is a “crucial expression for what recollection was to the Greeks.”²² It is the same movement “but in opposite directions.” Thus, “what recollection has been is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward.”²³ The reader is served with a personified memory: Mnemosyne, who was the daughter of Gaia and Uranus; thus, recollection was conceived

¹³ Kierkegaard: “Battle between the Old and the New Soap Cellars.” In: *Early Polemical Writings*. Translated and edited by Julia Watkin. Princeton University Press, Princeton: New Jersey, 1990.

¹⁴ It is particularly interesting to read Kierkegaard’s play in the context of other Faust-interpretations (Goethe, Lenau, Chamisso) and of commentaries on Faust (Heiberg, Martensen). In the play not only the influence of Goethe is present, but also the atmosphere of *Clouds* of Aristophanes, as the Greek author was of great importance for Kierkegaard (including his theatrical criticism of Socrates).

¹⁵ The probable source is Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff’s, *Viel Lärmen um Nichts*, see David R. Law, “The Literary Sources of Kierkegaard’s *The Battle Between the Old and New Soap-Cellars*” in: *International Kierkegaard Commentary* ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Volume 6. Mercer: University Press, 1993. Volume 1. Mercer: University Press, 1999. p. 178.

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, “Battle between the Old and the New Soap Cellars” op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Hesiod’s *Theogony*.

¹⁹ See Volume 2 Tome II of Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources. *Kierkegaard and the Greek World. Aristotle and other Greek Authors*. Edited by Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun. Burlington: Ashgate, 2010.

²⁰ See Andras Nagy: “The Mount and the Abyss (The Literary Reading of *Fear and Trembling*)” in: *Kierkegaard Studies. Yearbook 2002*. Ed. by: N.J. Cappelørn, H. Deuser J. Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002.

²¹ “Ex pectore” literally from the chest, yet metonymically refers also to the heart.

²² *Repetition*, op. cit. p. 131.

²³ Ibid.

out of the earth by the sky and her existence was that of a female Titan. She was the little sister of Chronos, who was the master of time and father of Zeus. The ambitious nephew slept with his aunt for nine consecutive nights to beget the nine Muses, one after the other.²⁴ Divine incest created the nine goddesses of arts who were also Muses of sciences, as the two fields were not yet distinct. Art forms and scientific disciplines developed separately by their own rules, while the oral tradition withdrew to the safety of the theater, where recollection and repetition remained dominant from ancient times on.

Kierkegaard's Constantius knew well that the home of repetition is theater. The entire art of theater is based on repetition, as rehearsals constitute the process of creation, that in some languages also connote repetition. Once created, performances are going to be repeated from evening to evening, sometimes from season to season. Memory plays a crucial role throughout the process, while the passage of time constantly changes the work of art – *re-presentation* of the “same” situation, in the “same” atmosphere, with the “same” actions, based on the “same” text, etc. and yet with the passage of time can never be the same. This was also a basic wisdom for theater artists and theorists when defining the very object of their work as unfathomable and evaporating in the moment.²⁵

Kierkegaard's familiarity with the stage had also somewhat paradoxical origins: once he became a character in an ironic play who was ridiculed as a Hegelian hairdresser.²⁶ In another parody-play by Jens Christian Hostrup, *The Neighbor Across the Way*, the figure of the theologian Søren Torp was more than similar to Kierkegaard.²⁷ The responses to the performances possibly contributed to the later ridicule of Kierkegaard orchestrated by the cartoons of *Corsair* and by the visualization of his unattractive characteristics. The power of the stage, coupled with the public's immediate responses, taught Kierkegaard an important lesson when using the “stage” of the streets and squares of Copenhagen for his purposes.

IV.

Theoretic revelations were based by Kierkegaard on concrete analysis, like the one he gave on acting. In “The Crisis and the Crisis in a Life of an Actress,”²⁸ repetition was in the focus again with the “duplication” of times. “That little article,”²⁹ as Kierkegaard referred to the text, was inspired by two performances of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the first version ran from 1828-30 with Johanne Louise Pätges (later Fru Heiberg) in the title role, the “replica” was performed in 1845-46, starring a student of Fru Heiberg, Emma Meier.³⁰ Emma was young and talented but not suitable for the part, so the next year Johanne Louise, already in her mid-thirties took over the role of Ms. Capulet, the vibrant, fatally enamored teenager. She performed it first at the age of fifteen, then at the age of thirty-five; the initial hurricane of hormones could be played by an intoxicated teenager, but the unfolding of the drama needs much more, it demands “all the nuances of a lover, the entire scale right from the first immediate surrender to the heights of demonic passion.”³¹ This is obviously unknown at the age of fifteen; the devoted, forceful and energetic woman who “carries out her will”³² comes to life later. This is thoroughly baked into Shakespeare dramaturgy, as after the explosion of passions all the essential steps for

²⁴ There are several narratives about the genesis of the Muses, I follow the version of Hesiod in *Theogony*. See also Károly Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks*. Thames and Hudson: London, 1980.

²⁵ The Hungarian drama theorist Tamás Bécsy focused on the ontological status of drama and theater. See *A dráma lételméletéről, [About the Ontology of drama]* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984. *A színjáték lételméletéről, [About the Ontology of the Play]* Budapest – Pécs: Dialóg – Campus, 1977. The relationship between stage and memory is in the focus of Marvin Carlson's book, *The Haunted Stage. Theater as Memory Machine*, University of Michigan Press, 2003.

²⁶ H.C. Andersen: *A Comedy at the Open Air*. It was partly Andersen's aesthetic revenge for criticizing him, partly a success making fun of popular trends in the intelligentsia.

²⁷ Eric Ziolkowski, *The Literary Kierkegaard*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2011. p. 84.

²⁸ Kierkegaard "The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress", in: *Christian Discourses*. Translated and edited by H. and E. Hong. Princeton: University Press, 1997. p. 412. It is important to note that the term *crisis* was highly charged in Kierkegaard's vocabulary. The text appeared under the pseudonym "Inter et Inter."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

³⁰ See Risum, *op. cit.* p. 339.

³¹ Kierkegaard, "The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress", *op. cit.*, p. 412.

³² *Ibid.*

realizing the promised happiness are taken in by the pragmatic Juliet. Romeo, on the contrary, is the raving, mesmerized, love-drunk, passive one, whereas maturity becomes a major force in the young girl, absorbing time at an enormous speed.

This existential wisdom contradicts the gallery of the theater that “wants to see Miss Juliet a devilishly lovely and damnably pert wench”, as the author understands, but “to represent Juliet an actress must essentially have a distance in age from Juliet.”³³ The “temporary quality” of youthfulness can well fall prey to the years passed; however, time steals something from the “immediate, the simple, the actual youthfulness,” in return the actress’s genius becomes “more essentially manifest,”³⁴ and the performance is irradiated with “pure, calmed and rejuvenating recollection.”³⁵ In the idealizing light of the past “Inter et Inter” prefers the mature Ms. Capulet to the adolescent. This wisdom is hard to obtain anywhere but in theater.

The other important theoretic reference concerned the sacral character of theater particularly when compared with the secularization of the institutionalized faith. In ancient times “[T]heater was a religious service not only in Greece, but also in Persia”³⁶ wrote the young Kierkegaard in his notebook. He later used the historical background for comparison: “in paganism theater was worship, but in Christendom the churches have generally become theater.” It is really “enjoyable” to commune with the Most High once a week, he added, “by way of imagination.”³⁷ The foundation of Kierkegaard’s disdain was deep, as he put it in a journal entry, to want “to spectate [...] is essentially sinful” as it is also sinful, to be exalted by the highest. To be a spectator instead of entering into the tension of true actuality is fatal, and the same holds for observing suffering, instead of taking part in it. This existential “lasciviousness” transforms the church into a theater, “for the difference between the theater and the church is the relationship to actuality.”³⁸ The watershed was that “the theater honorably and honestly acknowledges being what it is”, while the church dishonestly conceals it. Kierkegaard suggested that it should be written “over the church door or be printed under the list of preachers on Sundays” that “money will not be returned.”³⁹

The sacral is not created by the space or authorized persons. As Kierkegaard understood, it can be born from the opposite. The presentation of such acts as incest, murder, idiocy, suicide, and sex may result in a “religious drama,” as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* was understood by Frater Taciturnus.⁴⁰ To grasp the Danish prince by other categories seemed to him futile, as an “aesthetic hero [Hamlet] becomes nothing at all,” yet once he is conceived in religious terms his scruples have “essential importance.”⁴¹ The drama of a profoundly melancholic Dane who

³³ Ibid., p. 340. The actress recalled Johann Ludwig Tieck’s notion that only a woman above the age forty can play Juliet. See also Katalin Nun, *Women of the Danish Golden Age*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen, 2013. pp. 70-72.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 322.

³⁵ Ibid., p.322. The temporary versus the eternal in the play is discussed by the Married Man in *Stages of Life’s Way* by Hilarious Bookbinder, referring to Romeo and Juliet’s kiss (Act 3, Scene 5). The husband focuses on its “eternal element, essential reflection” when no one thinks there will be a next moment. See Ziolkowski, op. cit., p. 192.

³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks*, ed. by: N.J. Cappelørn, B. Kirmmse, J. Stewart. G. Pattison et al. Princeton: University Press, 2007. p. 96.

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*. Translated and Edited by H. and E. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970. Vol. 6.p.p. 6.

³⁸ Ibid., vol. 1. p. 457.

³⁹ See Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*. Translated and edited by H. and E. Hong, Princeton: University Press, 1998. p. 221.

⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life’s Way*, Translated and edited by Howard and Edna Hong, Princeton: University press, 1988. p. 410.

⁴¹ Ibid. Taciturnus refers to Ludwig Börne’s (born as Löb Baruch) interpretation of the drama, considering it a mistake by Shakespeare that Hamlet does not have religious doubts. “If he does not have them it is sheer nonsense and indecision if he does not settle the matter straight away.” Ziolkowki, op. cit. p. 203. Hamlet’s misgivings are “extremely interesting, because they give assurances that he is a religious hero” as the author continues (ibid., p. 206.) referring also to a Journal entry from 1854 with some resonances to the Ophelia – Regine parallel. Idib., p. 210.

felt out of place in his hometown, with his studies abroad interrupted and a tragic relationship with women, offered Kierkegaard a chance for identification. The paralyzing power of doubts, the ambiguous references to the existence of the transcendent, the beloved and lost father's appearance from the underworld went beyond the territory of aesthetics or psychology and opened up the domain of faith. It seems logical that when Kierkegaard offered a key to the understanding of his authorship, Hamlet served as a model revealing at once the dramaturgical nature of his oeuvre.⁴²

Kierkegaard not only enlivened characters and distributed roles to an imaginary cast as in theater;⁴³ he executed different actions, first by means of the pseudonyms and then by means of his personality and reflections aimed at a growing Copenhagen audience. Beyond the "textual theater," Kierkegaard also produced the "staging of the self," a controversial and yet extremely significant achievement in his time.

His endless role-playing however seemed mocking and shocking to his audience. His brother, Peter Christian Kierkegaard, interpreted Søren's role playing, observing that "even when Kierkegaard wrote in his own name, it was in effect just another pseudonym."⁴⁴ To anyone unfamiliar with the dramatic tradition, with theatrical specifics blended into a coherent oeuvre this mischievous attitude might seem to fatally undermine real identity. This is the real drama of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (partly inspired by Kierkegaard), yet this complexity provides no less than the drama of thinking, believing and loving. Unfit for the roles of academic, pastor or husband, Kierkegaard not only rejected but also ridiculed these functions, as he was concerned with the existential consequence of dilemmas that he not only described but mainly "acted out." He was not the playwright but the "master dramaturge"⁴⁵ behind the composition of the authorship, as he was not creating one or two voices and scenes but instead he was distributing the complexity of several unfolding existential dramas.

This may not be a lesson to learn, but a process to be observed, and recreated by artists, many of whom continued to "stage" Kierkegaard's ideas, like Ibsen, Sartre, Dürrenmatt, Beckett, Camus – the list is as long as the ways there are to learn from him.

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⁴² In Kierkegaard's *The Point of View of My Work as an Author* the explanatory references explain the authorship via Hamlet, see Ziolkowski, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴³ See the logic and strategy as revealed by Kierkegaard in *The Point of view...* David Cain argues that it is possible "To see the whole aesthetic authorship as being itself a kind of theater of the spiritual life". David Cain, "Notes on a Coach Horn: 'Going Further,' 'Revocation' and 'Repetition'", in: *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, Volume 6., op. cit., p. 371. It is somewhat different yet important hypothesis that Martin Thust suggests in his *Das Marionettentheater Søren Kierkegaards*, Zeitwende, I. 1925. 18-38.

⁴⁴ Quoted by B. Kirmmse, "I am not a Christian" – A 'Sublime Lie' Or: 'Without Authority'? Playing Desdemona to Christendom's Othello", in: *Anthropology and Authority*, Amsterdam – Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000. p. 130. See also Pyper's question, "S.K. as another pseudonym?" Pyper, op. cit., p. 316.

⁴⁵ The term is inspired by the "master thief," so important for Kierkegaard. In his authorship not only writing, but publishing was also crucial (curing and editing the text), while the Danish word *udgive* 'to publish' also means 'to pretend' and 'to act.' See Hugh S. Pyper argued in "The Stage and Stages in Christian Authorship", in: *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, Volume 17. Op. cit., pp. 309-19.

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Speaking as a Lily: A Reading of Kierkegaard's 1849 Lily Discourses¹

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I. Introduction

A major theme of Kierkegaard's 1849 upbuilding discourses, entitled *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, is learning to become silent before God. The secondary literature has had two main focuses: first, characterizing how exactly Kierkegaard considers one does so – that is, become silent – and furthermore how Kierkegaard considers it an art; and second, highlighting the irony of writing several discourses urging the reader to practice becoming silent and parsing Kierkegaard's authorial conception of language given that irony. This focus, however, has neglected to address - or otherwise been only briefly addressed in service of other aims – another

¹ I borrow this term for the discourses from Frances Maughan-Brown's doctoral dissertation, "The Authority of the Lily and the Bird in Kierkegaard's Lily Discourses," 2015.

thematic concern of the discourses: the relation between speech and spiritual upbuilding. Moreover, the conception of speech in these discourses is usually read as entirely negative, which neglects the abundant comments made by Kierkegaard regarding different modes of speech in both the 1847 and 1849 discourses.² To rectify this narrow reading of speech as conceived in the discourses, I will offer a reading of the 1849 discourses (and, when necessary, draw on the 1847 discourses for textual support) that tries to make sense of certain passages that seem inconsonant with Kierkegaard's derision of speech. The claim of such a reading is that there is a conception of speech present in the discourses that is not incompatible with one forming a relationship with God.

II. Speech, Silence, and One's God-Relationship

Given that Kierkegaard is quite explicit in the opening pages of the 1849 discourses that the human being's ability to speak corrupts the God-relation (WA 11),³ how is it at all plausible that Kierkegaard may be drawing the contours of a mode of speech that does not do so? Indeed, this is why Kierkegaard emphasizes the spiritual edification of silence. For, as Kierkegaard explicitly says, in silence one is aware of being before God, whereas this "is entirely forgotten in speaking and conversing with other human beings" (WA 17). Moreover, the abundance of derisive comments about language and speech throughout the text itself, as well as in several journal entries⁴ further evidences the implausibility of such a reading.⁵

Thus, it would seem not rash to conclude that, for Kierkegaard, there is no prospect for speech to *not* undermine spiritual upbuilding, for it (speech) not to prevent forming a relationship with God.⁶ To read these discourses with a view to how Kierkegaard might have a positive conception of speech that does not disrupt a relationship with God seems, when considering the abundant textual support to the contrary in both discourses (1847 and 1849) and various journal entries, rather fruitless.

If speech and silence are in opposition - the former as a barrier to one's God-relationship and the latter being a necessary condition for such a relationship - then how are we to understand a passage such as the following in the 1849 discourses:

In the evening, when silence rests over the land and you hear the distant bellowing from the meadow, or from the farmer's house in the distance you hear the familiar voice of the dog, you cannot say that this bellowing voice disturbs the silence. No this belongs to the silence, is in a mysterious and thus in turn silent harmony with silence; this increases it (WA 13).

And consider another such passage also from the 1849 discourses, where the noisiness of nature is understood as a silence, that nature's cacophony is paradoxically silent:

² For instance, in the 1847 discourses: "he [worried person] learns to speak just as tersely just as solemnly, and just as inspiringly about a human being as the Gospel speaks tersely about the lilies" (UDVS 170) "...eternal language of earnestness..." (UDVS 171) "Beautiful native language of that man of wonder" (UDVS 191) "...that man of wonder knew how to speak gloriously about the human being's glorious clothing" (UDVS, 191) "...divinely speaking..." (UDVS 194) "Oh, in the desperate, glittering, or miserable wretchedness of worldly comparisons, whereas little is known about what honor is about perfection, there people cravenly or traitorously speak in another way." (UDVS 200, italics mine.) "...speaks rigorously..." (UDVS 204). Indeed, in the 1849 discourses, the poet highlights the qualitative difference between the language of the poet - that is, human language - and the language of the Gospel. (WA 8)

³ See also JP 4:3987, where Kierkegaard says "talking about one's God-relationship as an emptying that weakens."

⁴ See JP 3:2324; 2331; 2334, and 2336.

⁵ Indeed, consider Kierkegaard's most vitriolic dismissal of language: "Animal life is so simple, so easy to understand, because the animal has the advantage over man of not being able to talk...Language, the gift of speech, engulfs the human race in such a cloud of drivel and twaddle that it becomes its ruination." (JP 3:2337)

⁶ To think that speech may promote a relationship with God at all seems contrary to Kierkegaard's theology: for God and man are infinitely qualitatively different, a difference that not even language can bridge, since, for Kierkegaard, "all human language about the spiritual is essentially metaphorical in character." (Walsh (2013) 295. / WL 209)

The sighing of the wind, the echoing of the forest, the murmuring of the brook...*every sound you hear is all compliance, unconditional obedience.* Thus, you can hear God in it just as you hear him in the harmony that is the movement of the celestial bodies in obedience (WA 25, emphasis mine).

Of course, one may object – and reasonably so – that the din of nature is categorically different than human speech, and thus the description of the above two passages may not extend to speech. But consider in the 1847 discourses Kierkegaard's comment that not only does one learn silence from the lily, but one also learns from the lily to speak – to speak “just as tersely, just as solemnly, and just as inspiringly about a human being as the Gospel speaks tersely about the lilies” (UDVS 170). The implication here is that some modes of speech, to the exclusion of others, do not pose a barrier to forming a relationship with God.⁷ Put differently, some modes of speech may not weaken or corrupt one's God-relationship as other modes of speech do.

From the above passages, the tentative conclusion to draw is that the role of silence and speech with respect to one's God-relationship is more complicated than merely “muzzling” (WA 12) one's capacity to speak,⁸ thus allowing for such a relationship. To read Kierkegaard's conception of speech as solely an obstacle to one forming a relationship with God is, I submit, to consider only one dimension of how speech is portrayed in these discourses (including those both from 1847 and 1849.)

The question that arises then is how might speech be conceived in such a way that doing so – that is, speaking – is not incompatible with forming a relationship with God. Alternatively put, how might the mode of speech one learns from the lily be characterized? The following two sections provide a reading that sketches an answer to this question, and reconstructs how speaking like a lily would, again, not be an impediment to one's God-relationship.

III. Speech, Worry and “Existential Insecurity”

In these discourses, Kierkegaard urges us to stop worrying over the circumstances of our existence (WA 19 20). This concept of worry is, for Kierkegaard, connected with, following Krishek and Furtak (2012), our “existential insecurity” as finite beings. For Krishek and Furtak, this concept involves all of the following: our concern for those things that we value and find “meaningful” (160), the unknowable future and our inability to extricate ourselves from concern for the “next day” (CD 70-71), and the impermanence of those things we value given their own temporal existences (160). These aspects of our finitude enumerated above merit – and understandably so – our worried concern, so why then does Kierkegaard ardently admonish us against worrying over our finitude? Should we not worry over the insecurity of our existence?

Kierkegaard, of course, does not advise us against having concerns, for to do so would be to “deny” the essential insecurity of our existence (Krishek and Furtak 160).⁹ Instead, the aim here is to admonish us against worry as our response to these concerns. But why then does Kierkegaard so ardently disavow worry as a response to our worldly concerns, if, as Krishek and Furtak rightly note, worrying “reflects essential aspects of our human condition?” (160). Kierkegaard's concept of worry in these discourses is more than just an excessive or fervent concern with aspects of our material existence. Rather, he conceives of worry as “a person's unwillingness to be contented with being a human being,” that is a result of “worried craving for distinction by way of comparison”

⁷ To this point, see Kierkegaard's journal entry 3:2828: “Trees carry on the most pleasant, the most refreshing conversation, and although all the leaves talk away at the same time...it is not at all disturbing; instead it lulls the external senses and awakens the inner ones.” See also another paradoxical passage in the second of the three discourses from 1849: WA 13.

⁸ Indeed, to further evidence that Kierkegaard does not have an entirely negative conception of speech, consider the following from *Two Ages*, where he contrasts “chatter” with the speech of “the person who can remain essentially silent,” and thus who “can speak essentially, can act essentially.” (97)

⁹ The logic here is that if we were “existentially secure,” then, naturally, we would have no need to be concerned with anything in our lives. It follows then that since our finite existence is in fact essentially transient, to deny that we have concerns would be to deny that very transience.

(UDVS 171). The worried person's "craving for distinction" is an attempt to combat the sense of one's existential insecurity - an attempt to feel secure in one's irrevocably finite existence (Krishek and Furtak 165) by an assertion of one's self as more distinguished than another, by being "rich[er], independently wealth[ier], [more] prosperous, [more] fairly secure" than another (UDVS 179). This craving to compare oneself with another, to compare oneself so that one may find (illusionary) security in one's finitude, is, for Kierkegaard, a refusal to be contented with being a human being, with the finitude that is inherently constitutive of human *being*.

But why is one's refusal to be content with what one is spiritually disastrous? Such discontentedness is, Kierkegaard tells us, implicitly to compare oneself with God.¹⁰ In being "not contented with being a human being," one "wants to compare himself to God, wants to have a security by himself, which no human being dares to have" (UDVS 178). For the worried person - one who is unwilling to be contented with being a human being and craves distinction by comparing himself - he seeks "to be himself his own providence for all his life... he wants to entrench himself, so to speak, in a little or large area, where he will not be the object of God's providence and the supporting care of the heavenly Father" (UDVS 178). Such self-assertion draws the bounds of one's sovereignty in the world, and in doing so manages to wrest some - albeit illusionary - control over the insecurity of one's finite existence. To do so is, as Krishek and Furtak helpfully note, to consider oneself able to do what God can, to assert oneself as "self-sufficient" and self-governing just as God essentially is (162).

Where does speech figure in the preceding paragraphs? In these discourses, both from 1847 and 1849, the opposition between silence and speech is often characterized in terms of self-assertion. For instance, in the 1847 discourses, Kierkegaard explicitly conceives of speech as implicitly drawing a comparative relation between the speaker and the thing spoken about¹¹ - as he tells us that, "when the happy person says to one who is worried: be glad, the remark also implies: as I am glad; and when the strong person says: Be strong, it is tacitly understood: as I am strong" (UDVS 160-161).¹² To further evidence this point, consider a passage from the 1849 discourses where Kierkegaard exhorts us "to simply fold up all [one's] plans into less space than a period and with less noise than the most negligible trifle - in silence." (WA 17) And, no more than a page later, a further exhortation to learn silence so as "to forget [oneself, one's] plans, the great, all-encompassing plans or limited plans for [one's] life and its future..." (WA 19)

The point here is that, for Kierkegaard, speech is linked with one being their "own providence" (UDVS 178) as opposed to submitting to the providence of God. Indeed, this link is confirmed by Kierkegaard's comments on the poet, where he describes the poet's use of language as a means of asserting himself over the world, of exercising his independent will, through speech. Moreover, to further evidence this link, consider Kierkegaard's

¹⁰ Krishek and Furtak (2012) read Kierkegaard as having several different kinds of comparison: namely, (1) comparison of oneself with another and (2) temporal comparison - that is, between the present and the future. Kierkegaard certainly does draw these distinctions but for the sake of not overly complicating the argument in this paper, I will just make the assumption - as Krishek and Furtak admit is probable - that the worried person's comparison of themselves with God "underlies" the other two kinds of comparison. See Krishek and Furtak 162.

¹¹ See UDVS 161, where Kierkegaard says: "All misapprehension, after all, stems from speech, more specifically from a comparison that is implicit in talking, especially in conversation."

¹² In these discourses (especially those from 1849), Kierkegaard draws several distinctions between different categories of speech: namely, divine and human speech, the latter of which is divided between poetic and "ordinary" speech. A consideration of Kierkegaard's comments on poetic speech, and its relation to silence, in the context of this paper, would derail the line of argumentation I seek to develop and involve unnecessary digressions. Moreover, including poetic language would muddle the boundary with "ordinary" human language, thus obscuring the fact that the claim I wish to make in the paper applies only to "ordinary" human language (though it may apply to the poetic as well.) For instance, in speaking, the poet "transforms and [beatifies] the whole world," projecting onto, and asserting mastery over, the world through language by "lending the lily and the bird words and speech" (WA 18). "Ordinary" human language, by contrast, does not linguistically construct the world, but serves to secure, and to ensure sovereignty over, one's existence. The distinction here is fine, and the instinct is in some sense the same in both the poet and the ordinary-language user, but there is a substantively different use of speech that should be emphasized, a difference that unfortunately cannot be adequately explored within the confines of this paper.

comments on praying “aright,” where doing so is not “to listen to oneself speak” but rather “to become silent and to remain silent, to wait until the one praying hears God” (WA 11-12). That is, to pray correctly is to remain silent and become a listener. Genuine praying, Kierkegaard tells us, is not to fervently address God by asserting oneself and one’s demands, but rather to silence oneself such that one may listen. In these two passages, speech is understood as a means of self-assertion, of asserting oneself, one’s agenda and plans, and of one’s own governance over oneself. Such self-assertion, as Kierkegaard makes clear in his comments on prayer, leaves no space for the providence of God in one’s life.

In sum, speech is the means – or, at least, one of the means – by which this ultimately illusionary existential security is established. In speech, the speaker asserts themselves, asserts who and what they are, in an attempt to wrest security from, and thus exercise control over, the transient circumstances of their finite existence. The mode of speech that is spiritually ruinous is one in which the speaker aspires to existential security – a security in which who one is and one’s place in the world resists the transience of one’s finitude – by asserting oneself and, by doing so, securing who and what one is. Doing so is, for Kierkegaard, of course an affront to God’s will, an act of disobedience, insofar as doing so is to implicitly compare oneself to God. But this mode of speech obstructs one’s God-relationship not because one compares oneself to God, but rather that one closes oneself to God’s providence in favor of one’s own.

IV. Speaking as Contentment with One’s Being

Speech, then, as a vehicle for one to assert and define oneself, as a means of independently exercising one’s own will, is a closing of oneself to, or a turning away of oneself from, God. That is, speech, so conceived, is constitutive of one acting disobediently, of rejecting God. At this point, the following group of questions suggests itself: How might the human being speak while remaining obedient to God? Or, put differently: How might speech be conceived such that it is not an impediment to one’s God-relationship?

As intimated in the previous section, Kierkegaard explicitly links disobedience with the exercise of one’s own independent will. During one imaginative point in the 1849 discourses, Kierkegaard contrasts the reactions of the human being and the lily when both are, unfortunately, “assigned” a place not conducive to their respective flourishing. Kierkegaard imagines that the human being would bemoan his unfortunate circumstances, supposing that the assignment of his place in the world was not only some malign intention of God to destroy “the impression of [his, the human being’s] loveliness,” but, if it were the intention of God, it would be outright “self-contradiction” (WA 27) for a supposedly benevolent creator. The lily, in contrast, realizes that its assigned place, and the conditions thereof, are not remotely its “affair,” but rather is the will of God (WA 27) and thus the lily does not question its place, as does the human being. For Kierkegaard, then, to be obedient to God is to abnegate one’s independent will and conform to the will of God.¹³ Undergoing such self-abnegation – “to forget [oneself], [one’s] plans, the great, all-encompassing plans, or the limited plans for [one’s] life and its future...[to forget one’s] will, [one’s] self-will,” (WA 18-19) – involves learning to be silent, and thus to be obedient and respect God’s will.¹⁴

Such self-emptying allows one to be open to God’s providence, to be “actively receptive” and disposed to trust God.¹⁵ In being so disposed, in trusting God and thus being obedient to His will, one is freed of worldly worry. It should be emphasized, though, that the conception of being worry-free does not only involve trusting in God’s providence. Rather, being free in such a way is linked with, for Kierkegaard, a thing being “fully and completely

¹³ For more examples of this point, see WA 10, and especially 25-26 (“if there were a star in the sky that wanted to have its own will...they are wiped out at the same moment and with equal ease. In nature everything is nothing...it is nothing but God’s unconditional will.” See also JP 4:5038: “Two wills in the world cannot be tolerated. God is the one and only.”

¹⁴ Indeed Kierkegaard explicitly connects silence and respect for God in the 1849 discourses – see WA 13. Especially consider WA 16: “But what does this silence express? It expresses respect for God, that it is he who rules and he alone to whom wisdom and understanding are due.”

¹⁵ For more on this idea of being open and receptive in the Lily discourses, see Beabout (2007) and his reading of the discourses as extolling the virtue of, in his words, “active receptivity.”

itself" (WA 27). In the case of the human being, the constant disobedient questioning of God's will, and the resultant worrying over one's place in the world, does not allow one "to unfold [one's] full potentiality" (WA 28). That is, in ceasing to worry over worldly concerns – such as the material conditions of one's existence – and thus allowing oneself to be open to God's providence, one may manifest to the fullest degree what one is as created by God. In contrast to the human being, by remaining unconditionally obedient to God and, in doing so, remaining free of concern with the conditions of its place in the world, the lily is itself: by submitting to God's will, the lily manifests itself as God has created it and, despite its place in the world and other material conditions, blossoms – that is, literally unfolds its full potentiality as a lily.

To be worry-free, then, for Kierkegaard, is to manifest what one is - one's nature as determined by God - by being contented with what one is. By ceasing to worry, by ceasing to think that one may be secure in one's existence through one's own governance, one is content with what one is – in this case, a human being – and thus obedient to God's will. In being so contented, one manifests what one is as created by God.

Extending this line of argument to speech, to speak obediently – to speak in a way that would not undermine one's God-relation - is to manifest one's nature as determined by God. Put differently: To speak obediently would be to speak humanly, that is, as a human being. What might speaking humanly amount to? Speaking obediently – that is, *humanly* - would involve a realization, and acceptance, of one's finitude and the concomitant ephemerality of one's speech. It would be to speak without pretense that one is God: that one's speech does not, and by necessity cannot, articulate the essential nature of the world, that one's speech is inextricable from one's nature as a finite being. Such speech, in other words, involves the realization that the world does not conform itself to one's will, but rather to that of God.¹⁶

What does Kierkegaard mean when he says in the 1849 discourses that we learn not only silence from the lily, but also how to speak – a mode of speech? As I have argued, Kierkegaard means here that to speak as the lily is to speak as being contented with one's being, with what one is. To speak in such a way involves not being more than what one is – in other words, in the case of the human being, not aspiring to substitute God's providence for one's own in a (ultimately) futile attempt to secure the inherent impermanence of one's finite existence. In being so contented, one manifests what one is as determined by God. In the case of speech, in doing so – speaking in a way that manifests what one is as created by God – one is obedient to God and as such does not obstruct the God-relation.

V. Conclusion

As made clear in other works, Kierkegaard's conception of the relationship between silence and speech is much more complicated than merely that the two are in opposition. Speech and silence appear in myriad forms, both spiritually edifying and ruinous respectively. Indeed, this complexity appears in the 1847/1849 Lily discourses as well, most prominently in those two previously cited passages wherein the cacophony of nature is in harmony with silence, is paradoxically itself a silence. Returning to these two paradoxical passages, I submit that, should Kierkegaard possibly have a conception of a mode of speech in the way just argued in the previous sections of this paper, such a conception makes sense of those two cited passages.

Recall that, in the first of the two cited passages, Kierkegaard comments that the bellowing of the dog does not disturb the silence, but rather, paradoxically, increases that silence for the dog's bellowing is in "harmony" with it. How exactly does the dog's bellow paradoxically harmonize with silence? Such harmony is just to manifest one's God-determined nature: the dog can only manifest itself – that is, in barking – as has been determined by God. In manifesting according to God's will, one is – whether human being, or dog – obedient to Him, not deviating from His willed plan for creation. Indeed, this connection between harmony and obedience is explicitly

¹⁶ Both in the 1849 text itself (see, again, WA 25-26), and in several journal entries, Kierkegaard emphasizes that the world conforms to God's will – that "not even a sparrow falls to earth without his [God's] will." (JP 3:2853). See also JP 3:2851: "...I do not feel at all alien in this enormous world – for, truly, it is my Father's...for I am always under my Father's eye."

brought out in the second of the two passages cited previously. This harmony between the dog's bellow and silence emerges insofar as the former – that is, the dog's bellow – is an expression of obedience to God, which, ultimately, amounts to a manifestation of one's God-determined nature, a manifestation that allows God also to be manifest as He is in silence.

Addendum: Kierkegaard's Ontology of the Human

A major objection has loomed in the background for the entirety of my argument, which, unfortunately, I will not be able to fully address given the confines of this paper. One might object that not much actually rests on the distinction in speech that I have drawn, for even if one were to speak disobediently, as it were, doing so would be a manifestation of a God-sanctioned nature anyways insofar as one of Kierkegaard's theological commitments includes human beings as possessing both a free will and the consciousness to exercise choices freely made. This objection, however, oversimplifies Kierkegaard's ontology of the human being. For, as Kierkegaard elucidates in several pages (UDVS 192-93) of the 1847 discourses, the human being is the only creature with an "an upright gait," allowing prostration during worship. Thus, for Kierkegaard, to worship, to submit to God's will, is a part of the human being's essential nature. This being so, however, in no way negates – or, rather, it is not inconsistent with – the human being as a free entity. For, as Kierkegaard notes often throughout the 1847 discourses, in being contented with being what one is, and thus being obedient to God, one implicitly realizes the immense ontological difference between oneself, as a human being, and God, along with the nature of one's freedom of will that such an ontological difference implies. Of course, much more could (and should) be said on this point, but for now this disappointingly brief comment will have to suffice.

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Reviewed by J. Aaron Simmons, Furman University

Even So, Today: A Few More Words to Delay the Inevitable

I am not sure that I have done much of value in my career, but one thing does stand out as having been significant. When David Wood and I were editing the book *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*

(2008), one of things I wanted to make sure was included in the volume was a collaborative essay by two of my own former professors, mentors, and friends, at Florida State University: David Kangas and Martin Kavka. The essay that they wrote for that volume is titled “Hearing, Patiently: Time and Salvation in Kierkegaard and Levinas.” It is a remarkable text, but one of the things that stands out in it is the way in which David and Martin model what it looks like for friends to think together. Their voices remain distinct, but they are always intertwined. The speaking of one occasions the speech of the other. They do not agree on everything, but the sites of disagreement push them both further than they could have gone individually. That essay performs the idea that thinking truly is a collaborative exercise. Socrates may have found his best interlocutor waiting for him at home, but for most of us, it is all too easy to think that responding to ourselves is sufficient. The more difficult task is to leave the comfortable confines of our own isolated ideas and find someone with whom shared thinking propels us both not merely toward figuring out what books are worth writing, but ever deeper into becoming invested in the task of living more fully.

In that conversation, David writes a line that is easy to overlook and yet, in light of his untimely passing, now resounds with a kind of existentially prophetic significance. As context, Martin notes that it is important to “forget all that can be forgotten” in order to “begin again,” but he then appeals to David: “*Ne me quitte pas.*” David responds, “*Ne me quitte pas.* And yet departure is inevitable. Kierkegaard and Levinas must go their separate ways. Before the inevitable transpires, however, will you allow me a few words that perhaps risk unintelligibility? A few more words to delay the inevitable?” (Kangas and Kavka 147). This call, “don’t leave me,” announced by one friend to another is met with the maximal limit of all friendship: “Departure is inevitable.” We find ourselves today on the other side of David’s departure. And yet, we are not without him. His new book, *Errant Affirmations: On the Philosophical Meaning of Kierkegaard’s Religious Discourses* (Kangas 2018), provides us with “a few more words to delay the inevitable.” What is so remarkable about reading this book is that, since it was published posthumously, it carries a weight that is temporally pressing in ways that can often be missed in the speed of normal human social life. How many of us have written essays simply because we hit on something that *can be said*? Oh, may we instead find those words that invite others *truly to listen*. For those of us who knew him personally, reading David’s new book, his last book, his lasting book, is as much a memorializing sacrament as it is an exercise in philosophy.

And yet, it is easy to overstate the significance of the act of reading here—to make of the book a monument, rather than an invitation to the moment. Notice that in his comment to Martin, David does not say that we can *avoid* the inevitable, but perhaps merely *delay* it. Additionally, don’t miss the power of the question that is asked: “Will you allow me a few words?” In the grand scheme of things, maybe this is all any of us get: a few words to delay the inevitable. And yet, what better gift could we receive from others, *especially from our friends*, than to be heard such that unintelligibility (and shared understanding) might be risked? What is so compelling in *Errant Affirmations*, though, is the way that David does not engage in the rhetorical tropes of offering a “last lecture.” Instead, this book is presented as a rigorous attempt to do again what has always been worth doing: reading well in order to live a bit more intentionally. Like the call from one friend to another, “*ne me quitte pas,*” David’s “few more words” offer a profound invitation to the reader not to miss out on life in the process of trying to write about it. Often, we existentialists are better at lecturing about anxiety than we are in overcoming it in our own relationships. We are more effective at analyzing the texts of thinkers long dead, than we are at fostering relationships with those that matter in our own lives. We tend to find solace in the complexity of decision and, in so doing, fail to be good at making decisions without regret and self-loathing. David’s words, thus, call to us: don’t leave me by trying to remain present; don’t miss the point by trying to be sophisticated in your analysis; don’t confuse the inevitability of departure with the irrelevance of meaning.

For my own part, I learned Kierkegaard from David, but while reading *Errant Affirmations*, I felt like I was learning Kangas from Søren. Perhaps we all meet ourselves most deeply when we don’t merely read books, but rather allow books to read us, as it were. When Kierkegaard talks about “resting transparently,” his terminology indicates that we are unable to hide in ourselves, but instead become maximally open to those who would see through us. With that said, I am very grateful to Gordon Marino for inviting me to offer a few of my own words about David’s new book here in a *Newsletter* devoted to the (not so) few words that Kierkegaard left to all of us.

Yet, perhaps Heidegger was right to suggest that all the good words have been “used up.” What more can be said about what has been said? Indeed, isn’t learning to be silent part of the lesson taught by the birds of the air and the lilies of the field? Well, risks abound, and yet some are worth taking. I admit that this task is daunting and while putting together these words, I have frequently felt inadequate. In fear and trembling, then, let me suggest three lessons that I think we all should learn from reading Kangas reading Kierkegaard:

- *First, humility is the key to confidence, and self-denial is the hallmark of selfhood.*
- *Second, life is not about managing limitation but about finding joy in excess.*
- *Third, affirmation does not require justification but rather investment.*

I will consider each in turn and, in the process, I will simply highlight “a few more words” from David’s book that speak to me—maybe they will speak to you as well.

I. Humility is the key to confidence, and self-denial is the hallmark of selfhood.

For David, the “philosophical meaning” of Kierkegaard’s *Discourses* lies in the way that they overturn the philosophical account of selfhood as defined by the determinate capacity to be, to do, and to think. Such self-sufficiency is entirely challenged by Kierkegaard. In particular, this happens in light of the radical revision Kierkegaard gives to the notion of temporality. Rather than understanding the present as the time in which we live toward the projects to be achieved in the future, Kierkegaard offers a notion of the future as “absolute” such that it is disconnected from any relation to where we currently find ourselves. As David explains, “This relation to the future announces what will be a fundamental motif of the edifying discourses: the absolute *incapacity for the human being to achieve a self-overcoming*. Vis-à-vis itself the human being is exposed to an essential powerlessness: a powerlessness to get a grip on itself, to posit itself, to will itself. This incapacity is identical to its temporality” (Kangas, *EA* 21). When understood in this way, temporality gets reframed as *gift*—the present is provided by the absolute future, rather than the future being a progression from where we are to where we are going. Thus, Kierkegaard doesn’t simply rethink time, but rethinks selfhood according to a logic of gratuity: “according to the gift, therefore, all forms of capability have their source, not in the inner resources of self-consciousness, but in an original incapability” (Kangas, *EA* 38).

Far from the Cartesian idea that epistemic doubt is the key to certain knowledge, David understands Kierkegaard as saying that “Self-doubt . . . does not indicate a psychological state, but clarity about the impossibility of self-foundation” (Kangas, *EA* 42). Rather than living furiously into the future while trying to ground oneself in one’s knowledge of the world and one’s hopes for achievement, selfhood is maximally present when founded in patience: “Precisely by way of its relation to eternity, *not being able not to be*, an essential rift is created between the soul and itself, a rift from which to think ordinary time as the time of patience. The rift between the soul and itself signifies that the soul is not present at its own origin, that it does not inaugurate itself” (Kangas, *EA* 52). Accordingly, “in patience the soul gains itself only by being un-done, de-constituted, stripped of what it only apparently possesses. The sense of finitude, breaking into the realm of attachments, is the acid that strips the soul of its founding illusion—namely, its illusion of possessing itself” (Kangas, *EA* 59). Instead of the foundationalist absolutism of the Cogito, or the Fichtean absolute ego, David explains that, “at issue is human power or capability. . . . Kierkegaard pursues a certain counter-thought: The highest perfection of a human being, the point at which the human is most capable, is located in its fundamental *need*, that is, in its lack of capability” (*EA* 68-69). Importantly, though, Kierkegaard’s *Discourses* are “religious,” and as such, “encountering one’s own incapability is itself encountering God; it is not a prelude to such an encounter, it is the encounter” (Kangas, *EA* 77). Through patience in relation to the gift of the present in light of the absolute future, we find ourselves by finding God. Here we hit on the hallmark of human being itself: “Only the human being is the being who is capable of grasping his own nothingness, of entering into and assuming that nothingness. Becoming nothing is the way of human becoming” (Kangas, *EA* 128).

II. Life is not about managing limitation but about finding joy in excess.

It might seem that Kierkegaard’s existential leanings would highlight a general approach to anxiety, death, finitude, and embodiment as a kind of limitation against which we must struggle. This is certainly the case for

some later existentialists working in light of Kierkegaard's thought. And yet, David contends that Kierkegaard is not interested in finding a way to work through our mortality in order better to understand ourselves, but instead reconceives faith as a kind of transformed existence that, from the outset, is about self-denial: "In faith nothing is determinate or concretely representable is expected; faith is a relation to the future as the absolute future" (Kangas, *EA* 17). In this way, the future is not named by limitation but by excess.

Our projects, our possibilities, our hopes, and our fears are not frames in which to paint the picture of our life, but instead temptations to be avoided such that they can often invite us to think that our existence is a matter of our own capabilities: "Existentially, the difference between the determinate future of representation and the absolute future is legible in the circumstance that the tomorrow we anticipate is never the tomorrow that arrives. There is always a surplus, a surprise or sudden factor, that is the very insignia of the future's wholeness (its open character). The struggle with this surplus defines the most intractable struggle of the human being and defines the context of faith as expectancy" (Kangas, *EA* 19). When faith is an expectancy of victory, as such, and not about obtaining this or that expected thing, then we find ourselves not faced with death as the end of our projects, but as a meaningless trauma that invites us to see natality as the locus of meaningfulness: "To think oneself together with death is to relate to death without any mediation or distance. It is to forego all interpretation of death, to withdraw death from any context of meaning. Death *means* nothing. ... For Kierkegaard, death cannot be integrated into life; and yet, at the same time, the evasion of the reality of death is the evasion of existence par excellence. Death must be confronted in its reality without making it the touchstone of truth. If life gains meaning it can only be through life itself" (Kangas, *EA* 98). Far from overcoming death through some sort of authenticity, death remains the reminder that "*there is something that cannot be made meaningful. This in itself reshapes life*" (Kangas, *EA* 100).

In one of the most profound passages in the text, David speaks with an existential authority that we are tempted to read as tragic in light of his own terminal diagnosis, and yet he refuses to leave such an interpretation open to us: "And, in fact, anxiety before death is characteristic only of those who are not actually facing death; it is the healthy who are anxious before death and who have the luxury of thinking of death as their own most eminent possibility. ... When death is made proximate time appears, for the first time, as a precious resource not to be wasted. Death's proximity does not make one anxious but makes one 'wide awake'" (Kangas, *EA* 109). *This passage wrecks me.* Rather than being overwhelmed with the loss of future possibilities, David insists with Kierkegaard that, "in response life utters its own logos: 'Even so, today' (*Endu i Dag*)" (Kangas, *EA* p. 111). David goes on to explain that, "the Danish expression *Endu i Dag* is complex and resists translation. Its basic sense is to indicate that the day is nevertheless still there—even after, and despite, its end" (Kangas, *EA* p. 111). Whereas realizing one's own incapacity requires patience, this new logos requires obedience, as characterized by worship: "Becoming unconditionally obedient signifies becoming *finite without restriction*" (Kangas, *EA* p. 157). Notice that instead of turning to the infinite as a release from the sorrows of human finitude, David finds in Kierkegaard the encouragement to become even more finite—even more wedded to what he terms our "emplacement." Accordingly, when we stand with the confidence that only humility can foster, "together with death," we do not allow death to give meaning to life, but instead realize that "Joy... is not founded upon anything; it is rather founding, in the sense that it establishes the condition, prior to the present, within which the present is lived or 'used.' In being-joy, without condition, each moment is lived as joy" (Kangas, *EA* 161).

IV. Affirmation does not require justification but rather investment.

As we have seen, joy is not about overcoming death, or being-toward it, but about allowing life to happen at each moment. This is the upshot of a reconceived Kierkegaardian faith: "faith does not affirm victory as some definite event. Rather, it carries victory—its affirmation of time as such—*into* each present" (Kangas, *EA* 23). Returning, then, to the notion that temporality is a gift, we are no longer awash in the anxiety of how to get "there" from "here," but instead abandon ourselves to God as we realize that "immediacy is perfect adherence to the moment, outside of any temporary projection. It is a condition of plenary presence or pure givenness. In immediacy there is no gift precisely because *all is gift*" (Kangas, *EA* 29). Here we see that the tasks of patience, obedience, and worship are not things that we need *to accomplish*—as if they were on our "to do" list after stopping by the grocery store—but instead name what it means to live without having to be self-grounding: "Patience acquires its

meaning solely for its power to bring about patience; one is patient in order to be patient” (Kangas, *EA* 45). Turning to the birds and lilies, we begin to learn that “the soul becomes patient—and thereby becomes itself—in simply allowing it to blossom. This is not a doing, but a ceasing to do, a becoming ‘still and stiller.’ In patience the soul gains itself through allowing itself to sink deeper into the sense of finitude: that letting-happen is the work of patience” (Kangas, *EA* 61).

I admit that, oftentimes, existentialist philosophy just makes me tired. The task of being authentic, living up to my own freedom, figuring out how to will myself and others, etc., all can just be more than I think I am up to on most days. It is here that we should tarry with David’s idea that we have misunderstood Kierkegaard if we think he is calling us to work harder: “Thus Kierkegaard links confession to a movement of becoming still: to confess truth will not mean to bring the truth to light in language, in a speech act, but to become still” (Kangas, *EA* 82). When we admit the end of projects, then we no longer define ourselves in terms of concern. Similarly, instead of working to figure out what is true, we receive ourselves as instances of truth: “Rather than seeking the truth—which in any event is impossible inasmuch as the truth is already given—the seeker is to become the very site where truth can occur. The seeker is to become the site where the truth can be true, where it can be” (Kangas, *EA* 89). As such, “one can only *be* truth, one can never know it” (Kangas, *EA* 91). When we really get this point, then we see how “The birds of the air and lilies of the field show us a dimension of ‘whylessnes’ or, if one likes, ‘anarchy’—namely, a dimension refractory to projects, reasons, principles, goals” (Kangas, *EA* 116).

“To be specific,” David explains, “Kierkegaard’s discourses must finally be understood in terms of a problematic inaugurated by Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart, according to which only that which lives ‘without a why’ truly lives” (Kangas, *EA* 133; see also Kangas, *Dangerous Joy*). Echoing the notion that regardless of what comes, “even so, today,” David here notes that living without why amounts to living in the instant: “In silence and obedience blooming is simply blooming, nothing more and nothing less. Only today is” (2018, p. 165). What amazing freedom from the concerns of temporal striving! Rather than chasing our tails as we find ourselves bound to the economic logic of lack, we now take ourselves up according to the eternal gift of plenitude. This does not remove us from our mortal condition, but instead allows that condition to be meaningful, of itself, without a deeper ground. Life does not matter because eventually things will be ok, as if a theodicy were all that were needed, but instead matters because life is here and we are alive now. As such, reading David’s book is not about avoiding the inevitable, but reminding ourselves that “even so, today” here we are. So, let’s be here on purpose as we “become finite without restriction.” “Why?” we might ask. Here we might hear Walt Whitman’s fecund phrase: “That you are here—that life exists, and identity” (231). Or, as David says in a glorious rejection of all theodical attempts to evade the stakes of temporality: “Casting all one’s sorrows ‘upon god,’ letting the infinite be infinite, does not eliminate this sorrow, but relativizes it with respect to the joy of the instant itself: that, despite all, time and place are ceded, that inhabitation of space and time *remain* as fundamental possibilities to be made use of” (Kangas, *EA* 168).

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By hearing David’s words today, we should not think that we can read this book so that somehow David remains here with us. That would be to reduce his words to a kind of “why” for our own philosophical and existential efforts. Instead, by appreciating the pure gratuity of his text, we should read this book so that we remain here with ourselves and with each other. “*Ne me quitte pas*,” while always remembering that “departure is inevitable.” David’s final words in the book thus resound as inaugural words for living without why, but with passion: “In these terms the edifying discourse may be less about making reassurances than about finding a way to affirm, each time again, reality in its excess to norms. Such affirmation—if and when it occurs—can never, in principle, be authorized; it must remain an *errant* affirmation” (Kangas, *EA* 171).

I miss David. I am sure that we all do. But, rather than giving in to the economic despair of the lack of his presence with us, let us live lives of gratitude that, when faced with his own death, he did not allow it to become *finally* meaningful, but instead patiently embraced the possibilities of speaking while he could. That he “left us a few more words to delay the inevitable” is something for which I am grateful.

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