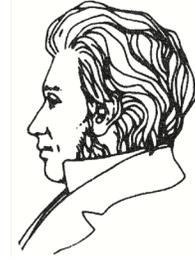


Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter

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ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS

In April, Poul Lübcke, professor of philosophy at University of Copenhagen and one of the most insightful astute readers of Kierkegaard in the world, died after a short illness. He was one of, if not the most Socratic individual I have ever met. Poul relished arguing about just about anything but always in the most-friendly spirit. He had a mischievous gleam in his eye, a spark that bespoke his boundless sense of humor. It is an understatement to say that Poul will be missed.

Kierkegaard taught that we should never promise we will remember someone forever but instead focus on remembering them for the next hour. For me at least, Poul might prove the exception to Kierkegaard's admonition. With the aim of keeping his infectious spirit alive, the Hong Kierkegaard Library established the Poul Lübcke Memorial Lecture series this summer that hosted a weekly virtual talk and discussion each Wednesday through June and July. Over 100 scholars, students, and alumni signed up to participate in the event each week.

Professor Clare Carlisle, at Kings College London, delivered the Utech Seminar on July 9th and 10th. Her lecture, "Kierkegaard: Writing a Life", discussed the intimate connection between life and writing; Kierkegaard's relationship to writing; and her own experience writing Kierkegaard's life. She is the author of four books on Kierkegaard specifically, the latest of which was published in 2019, *Philosopher of the Heart: The Restless Life of Søren Kierkegaard*. This annual seminar is made possible by the generosity of Ms. Krestie Utech.

Additionally in July, 24 students participated in our Young Scholars Program. We met four times per week, and despite the fact that our get-togethers were online, we had plenty of lively discussions. The program was given a boon thanks to a very generous gift from St. Olaf alum Mr. William Lindberg.

After two decades of devoted service, Mr. Jamie Lorentzen stepped down as President of the Friends of the Library. We are much obliged to Jamie for maintaining the Friends as a vibrant organization that offered invaluable support to the programs at the Library. Mark Stapp and Rune Engebretsen have been kind enough to step in to take the helm of the Friends. They have already established an active board of directors that is currently focused on developing an archivist position for the HKL.

Because of the pandemic, we are unable to welcome visitors from outside the college but will host online lectures this fall. More information on the upcoming speakers and the recorded talks from the summer can be found on our website: <https://wp.stolaf.edu/kierkegaard/> under Library News. As soon as COVID-19 restrictions lift, we hope many of you will come back to the Kierkegaard Collection on the Hill.

***Philosopher of the Heart: The Restless Life of Søren Kierkegaard* by Clare Carlisle**
Reviewed by Poul Houe, University of Minnesota

I

Yet another Kierkegaard biography...Oh, not again, you might say. Or you might not! For this one, composed by Clare Carlisle, a Reader in Philosophy and Theology at King's College, London, is original in several respects, some of which even dovetail into a semi-holistic, Kierkegaardian performance. Not only does Carlisle describe and interpret much of Kierkegaard's life and work with eloquence and academic acuity, but for all her intellectual controls, the way she reimagines her subject—a subject, indeed—is truly revitalizing. This is no imitation, but an empathetic reconfiguration balancing intimacy with social distance from its subject. If this sounds too good to be

true, it's because it isn't the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Like everything else, biographical designs come at a price, which must be calibrated. Bottom line, though: this one is worth the price!

More specifically, very few or none of the volume's factual parts should surprise any Kierkegaard scholar worth her salt; yet the storytelling, or enactment, involving these parts, is a novelty that sheds light on the way they have been assembled previously—altogether enabling a reception that overrides received wisdom. To capture this fabric of Carlisle's book, I first note how it ends on an autobiographical note that humbly takes off by recognizing George Pattison, Carlisle's mentor at Cambridge, who guided her through some fumbling times as a graduate student, and whose stage adaptation of *Repetition*, which she attended in a church, left her so teary-eyed that she finally saw her way and found a direction for her academic pursuits—in Kierkegaard: “To this day and this book, Kierkegaard remains endlessly interesting to me. This is because he spoke of, and to, a deep need for God within the human heart—a need for love, for wisdom, for peace—and he did so with a rare and passionate urgency” (261).

This self-reflection then turns explanatory as Carlisle continues musing about her teary-eyed *Repetition* experience: “it had something to do with casting a sideways glance at my life as a whole, and seeing meaning there” (261). Being in the church community on the occasion, the fledgling scholar was completely taken and personally “sensed a mysterious weight of human life, glimpsed in its entirety”—an experience she found utterly “elusive and intimate, fragile and astonishing” (262). But while it began to resonate with her in the church, the fullness of the sensation was noticeable well beyond her own life, namely, in Kierkegaard's “final months and his last days in Frederiks Hospital” (ibid.). In spiritual terms, and as her book “came close to the end” (ibid.), Carlisle came to detect her own pulse by way of Kierkegaard's and to realize how much her heart beats were in sync with that of the *Philosopher of the Heart*.

To my taste, some of the cited passages from this textual epilogue are overly general and slightly platitudinous. But I mention them anyway because they are part of the cost the text entails but also show why it's worth paying. What the book ends up doing is spilling the beans about its pivotal performance, which is turning a hesitant scholar into a single individual. In her own way—and that is important—the author becomes a real subject by narratively following her subject's lead. The rather trivial verbiage she employs to that end means less per se than how it's used and gesticulated, which the book's larger composition tellingly reveals last, not first. Or almost last—which is important too—in that its very last chapter (except for notes and other technical sections) is a “Prayer” from the beginning of *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* and essentially about “what it is to be a human being and what, from a godly standpoint, is the requirement for being a human being” (263).

In other words, Carlisle does not account for a simple takeaway or a lesson to be learned from Kierkegaard, but rather reenacts the coming into being of her own mindfulness, which was inspired by how mindfulness came to Kierkegaard in his life. With a design to enable this experience to also evoke the mindful attention of readers, Carlisle performs her own receptivity as synchronized with Kierkegaard's impulse and intimates the connection without imposing any one of its parts upon any other. It's like a deception into becoming a human that could have been molded on Kierkegaard's familiar performance of his deception into the truth.

Again, Carlisle's proximity to Kierkegaard's discourse is not a matter of cozying up to him. To the contrary, as she puts it in her “Preface,” she has “sometimes found [her]self disliking him,” a mixed and “painful feeling, similar to the pain of finding fault with a loved one,” which she attributes to a paradoxical strength of Kierkegaard's own weakness, as his “ability to invoke the goodness, purity and peace for which he longed was inseparable from the storms that raged and twisted in his soul.” Moreover, his “desire for rest, peace, stillness was a paradox—and a truth—that he lived daily” (xvi). Yet for all her “disapproving reactions to Kierkegaard's all too human thoughts and

feelings,” which have led her “to reflect also upon the fact that a biographer might be expected to evaluate her subject’s life. . .[a]s a Kierkegaardian biographer I want to resist the urge to impose or invite these judgments” (xvi-xvii).

To fully appreciate how subtly Carlisle throughout her book negotiates this intimate distance, as it were, between her scholarly subject and her own subjectivity, it’s worth noting how the upcoming balancing act is set afoot at the end of her “Preface.” Despite all her reservations about him, Kierkegaard remains her role model, for “though the judgments of others are as difficult to avoid as our own, Kierkegaard believed that none of these human judgments is absolute or final. It is always possible, he suggested, to occupy a different place,” such as inwardness, the God-relationship, “or simply silence” (xvii). When Carlisle toward the end of her text shows Kierkegaard in 1851 strongly contrasting the terms with (external!) reform (224), it underscores what she was looking for on her own—and her readers’—behalf: “His writing opens up this sphere, right at the heart of life, and beckons the reader into it” (ibid., emphasis added).

It’s the ability of the philosopher of the heart to reach beyond himself and touch the heart of Carlisle and her readers that qualifies him to be both her inspiration and her subject from the get-go. That her subtitle labels his life ‘restless’ only adds authenticity to this dual role as provider of insights into the human condition and compass for an academic discussion thereof. A whole symphony plays itself out in her book before it aptly ends with Kierkegaard’s prayer in the same key.

II

If “what it is to be a human being” (263) sounds a bit highfalutin, Carlisle does not mince words about what a mixed blessing it was to be human in Kierkegaard’s case—not least by his own account: “Being human is at once a blessing and a curse, Kierkegaard believes...and Jesus exemplifies this more than anyone” (85); even God himself blesses and curses “in the same breath” (49). On the obvious downside, seen from the outside, but from his inside as well, stood vanity and egotism, as when he anxiously glimpses how some “obsessive ruminations about his authorship are driven by egotism and conceit” (113), or when “his pride bristled at...anxieties over esteem, success, status to which he longed to be indifferent” (170). *The Corsair Affair* in particular caused these sentiments to boil over. Five years after it ended, he was “still deeply hurt” by Mynster’s endorsement of his opponent (225), and when Goldschmidt, the journal’s editor, reflected on the episode a decade later and shortly before Kierkegaard’s death, he deemed Kierkegaard “an unhappy thinker. Many of the outbursts issuing from him testify to sufferings that his pride will not confess” (244).

All the same, on his deathbed three weeks before he passed away, Kierkegaard asked his friend Emil Boesen to convey to the world that everything in his life “looked like pride and vanity, but it wasn’t. I am absolutely no better than other people” (248). The statement brings home the point that being suspended between life’s ups and downs was truly the mixed blessing of the human condition. Carlisle quotes from *Stages on Life’s Way* a passage to the same effect: “perhaps his whole life is an error!—and yet this error nevertheless expresses a truth” (186). As kindred ‘bi-polar’ pronouncements abound throughout her book and provide its central humanistic—or anti-humanistic—theme with its wealth of variations, a selected few of these nuggets, though ever so familiar to students of Kierkegaard, deserve to be weighed and measured more closely to orient more-general readers. Not least because they bring a good sense of the equally tortured and redeeming symphonic structure to which they belong in Kierkegaard’s life and oeuvre to bear on the composition and reasoning of Carlisle’s book.

Already in her opening chapter—on the basis of one of Kierkegaard’s journal entries—she links the makeup of this inspirational creativity to the equally duplicitous fabric of being human in itself, even referring back to the latter’s “blessing” and “curse”: “His creativity may be a blessing or a curse, but it feels inescapable, either way. The ideas flow through him, with a life of their own” (5; emphasis added). And as she reminds the reader, in subjecting himself to this flow, it let him flow into to truth. “Unlike Mynster’s propensity for moderation...he is drawn to a truth that lies at two opposite extremes at once—and the truth of human experience is often like this” (85; emphasis added). As is well known, all bi-polarities’ consequences can be dire, but this fundamental one goes to the heart of human existence, as both the philosopher of the heart and his interpreter acknowledge. In his words, transcribed by her: “What do I learn from experience? What is the universally human, and is there anything universally human? What is the self that remains behind when a person has lost the whole world and yet has not lost himself?” (153).

The most consequential opposition is likely the one between living forward but understanding backward, not only because it is Kierkegaard’s own roadmap to the riddles of all his other existential opposites, but because Carlisle, in tune with her general approach to his case, is following the same map, in fact has adopted its structure for her book. Yet what truly enables, if not compels, her to be on the same page as her author is paradoxically that his map—on that page—is the ultimate paradox. In his words from a famous journal entry: “It is quite true what philosophy says, that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other principle, that it must be lived forward. This principle, the more one thinks it through, ends exactly with temporal life never being able to be properly understood, precisely because I can at no moment find complete rest to adopt the position: backward” (15).

Understanding, no matter how irresistible its draw, inevitably falls short of expectations. Small wonder that Kierkegaard preferred life over knowledge, as when he already in his Gilleleje, August 1, 1835, diary entry claims to have resolved to “live a completely human life, and not merely one of knowledge,” to which Carlisle adds: “This was not just a personal aspiration, but a philosophical manifesto” (107). As she puts it later, “he is concerned not with a truth to be known, but with a truth to be lived” (155), which is why a philosophy like Hegel’s “didn’t help him to live in the world [but] was distracting [him] from the most urgent questions of existence” (137). In her own effort to make that paradoxical truth better understood and known, she readily embarks on Kierkegaard’s paradox as the lodestar for her composition!

III

“A Kierkegaardian biography of Kierkegaard” was how her editor characterized Carlisle’s initial vision of her book, and in its preface she admits that it later surprised her to come to realize how right he had been (xiii). Just a few lines earlier in the preface, she preempts his summary label by stating that her book “travels alongside Kierkegaard as he pursues the ‘question of existence’ that both animated and troubled him, held him back and propelled him forwards: how to be a human being in the world?” (ibid.). The man she was joining, almost matching his level of commitment, was a writer on his journey of life, who saw it as his Christian task to follow in Jesus’ footsteps, rather than admiringly—and statically—observe him, as the moderate bishop Mynster did (cf. 74, 80). And though Kierkegaard was “not an easy travelling companion” (xiv), Carlisle puts her money where her mouth is by arranging her after-travel account accordingly.

Part I of her book, “May 1843: Return Journey,” begins with Kierkegaard’s return to Copenhagen from his second visit to Berlin with manuscripts of a finished *Repetition* and an unfinished *Fear and Trembling* in his bag. Just three months earlier had seen the publication of his *Either-Or*, also largely penned in Berlin—two years earlier (cf. 3-4). By returning from Berlin now he hopes to repeat his success and cement “his fame as a writer” with a “hopeful—and rather beautiful—answer” to the question of human existence (xiii). Then, in her book’s Part II, “1848-1813: Life

Understood Backwards,” “we find him in 1848, five years later, looking back at his life and his authorship, and answering his question of existence differently” (ibid.). “Always hyper-conscious of his mortality,” in 1843 death was his “ultimate writing deadline,” but by 1848 it became “a deed that would fulfil his authorship” (xiii-xiv). Once a burden, now an opportunity. Which of the two will gain the upper hand is the subject of Carlisle’s Part III, “1849-1855: Life Lived Forwards,” as it shifts from the preceding chapter’s lengthy treatment of her subject’s attempts at understanding most of his years and work to a snapshot of his life itself in its final “battle with the world,” showing a man moving forward at all costs and with little time at his disposal.

A restless life indeed, and a restlessness that never seems to end. “The last battle” may be over, and our warrior physically taken out, but his legacy has not come to rest, as Carlisle briefly shows in her Part III’s final chapter about “Kierkegaard’s Afterlife,” of which she herself has become one still-living part. She even illustrates the extent to which he prepared for precisely this scenario by citing a talk in which Joakim Garff, a main precursor, addresses how their shared subject “presents posterity with his ‘Relationship to her’”—her being Regine, his authorship’s sine qua non (in the sense that “becoming an author was inseparable from leaving Regine” [169]). Garff’s approach was “to coax the narrative elements forth’ from the ‘monstrous material’ while allowing Kierkegaard to remain an ambiguous, open-ended figure” (260; emphasis added). That we seem to arrive at an equally dramatic equilibrium as *The Philosopher of the Heart* comes to a close animates at least this reader to dig a bit into its—Kierkegaardian—configuration of some of the open-endedness and ambiguousness between its covers.

The first temptation is to consider Carlisle as kind of a ghostwriter following Kierkegaard closely; at least she deftly applies literary devices that point in that direction. Most effective here is her discrete use of historical present to align her own presence with his. “He returned to live here four years ago, in 1844,” she writes about the family home on Nytorv (57; emphasis added). Not necessarily a historical presence, but close! And when, one page later, her description of the locale begins with “Last year, 1847, he sold...” (58; emphasis added), the dramatic presence can hardly be in doubt. Still, even though she often applies this stylistic/linguistic device in her toolbox, one must honor her cautious administration of it by not belaboring the effect.

Secondly, while perhaps a Kierkegaardian ghostwriter of sorts, Carlisle is no shadow; several of her references to shadows directly dispel that possibility. Shadows in her text can be the imprisoned philosopher in a Platonic cave that in itself could be “the human mind,” or “the social world,” as “an entire culture has evolved around...shadow play,” from whose illusions it is “the philosopher’s first task to wrest himself” to “see how the shadow play is produced” (9-10). In short, shadows may be a relevant challenge, but they are no good—at best they are in-betweens bordering on good and evil (20)—and that applies to all their specimens. She herself is clearly not among them. Instead, she is the inveterate narrator traveling in Kierkegaard’s footsteps, and an inventive one at that, whose notion of travel serves as metaphor for in-betweenness and its countless faces. Just consider its face at the end of Part I’s first chapter, the one about the second trip Kierkegaard took to Berlin. It sets the stage for many others to follow by putting his deep concerns and questions—“Where, in Christendom, is Christianity to be found?” (14) for one—within the proper context of his Danish home:

“The way of life his parents knew is coming to an end. Denmark’s economy has been in crisis; a political revolution is on its way. Everyone in the university is talking of history, progress, decline, theorizing about how the old way gives way to the new. Kierkegaard is not the only person in Copenhagen who has the sense of being caught between two ages” (14; emphasis added).

Traveling along and across this and other divides in his and his surroundings’ universe goes to the heart of the philosopher of the heart’s restless life, and what enables Carlisle to sense his heartbeats and persuasively convey the

results to her reader are gifts for flexible perception and execution that range from the small to the large, from the far distant to the very near.

IV

As mentioned already, the literal part of Kierkegaard's travel life unfolds in Part I of Carlisle's book. Each of its four chapters is framed as a stage on his way home to Copenhagen from Berlin: by train towards Stralsund in the first two chapters, and by stage-coach, no less, in chapter 3, which ends with him "stiff, sore and shattered" praying "only that the coach will soon reach Stralsund" (42), from which a Swedish steamship in chapter 4 will take him "overnight to Copenhagen. He is exhausted, but glad to be done with the stagecoach: now the horizons feel wider, his vision clear" (43). This is how chapter 4 begins, and "the steamship will arrive in Copenhagen's harbor tomorrow morning—and then he will get back to work" (53) is how it ends.

Meanwhile, within this framework of Kierkegaard's literal movement, other movements fan out on a different but no less important cultural scale. The title of the same last chapter of Part I, "Following Abraham Home," directly captures the spirit, long after the follower has drawn "great philosophical lessons from the journey to Moriah" (4). Soon we even learn that "one way or another, the world is always there, making its claims and offering its temptations, but right now it is palpably changing—and philosophy has to change too" (42). Meditating on Genesis 22, Kierkegaard in his journal responds that it is "important to draw God into the actuality of the world, where he surely is anyway" (44), a worldview he contrasts to the worldly philosophy of Hegel (18), the "biblical fundamentalism" of Luther (39), even to Abraham's, "single-minded faith" (45).

Yet while his "bitter rage" unsurprisingly sets Kierkegaard apart from patriarchal serenity, he remains attracted to aspects of Abraham's journey to Moriah that resonate with his "own uncertainty and ambivalence" (ibid.). Certainly, the knights of resignation are a case in point, but the Abrahamic movement he most unreservedly embraces is toward "something higher...a paradoxical peak that can be reached only by descending," later named "a paradoxical constellation: a faith that is lived in the world, yet defies worldly expectations" (46). While knights of resignation stand apart from the world, knights of faith are "immersed in everyday concerns" (ibid.). Kierkegaard's journey from Berlin and back to Denmark serves as Carlisle's sounding board for his spiritual journey into an Abrahamic paradox that—paradoxically—takes him through his own doubt and ambivalence. A finite being on a move during which "the divine inhabits the finite and finds its way in it" (19). So, "perhaps the soul does not lose itself in the world, but finds itself there" (21). Fundamentally a borderline traveler, Carlisle's Kierkegaard begins to envision his future: not married to Regine, but a writer, an outsider, out of place, still within the world and wedded to her absence instead. Perhaps "the Socrates of Christendom!" (22). The journey continues! Even if back in Copenhagen as the knight of faith, where to next?

Needless to say, the way stations along Kierkegaard's road are many. Suffice it to dwell on a few major hubs, among which is the one he most fervently seeks to put behind him. Not because it in itself is anathema to him, but because it has been hijacked by academics such as Schelling back in Berlin earlier, or Martensen awaiting him in Denmark. Their modern universities are trading ideas as merchants trade commodities—with traders like John the Seducer and currency like concepts and learning, though the human cannot be truthfully taught or conceptualized, or pulled into progress by Hegelian bandwagons, as *Fear and Trembling* warned. Add to this the colonial exploitation and slave trade on which the new bourgeoisie is capitalizing (cf. 68), and the sum total comes close to 'greed is good.' Carlisle endeavors to enumerate these troubling realities surrounding the young man who grew up as a mama's boy with a domineering father, whom he desperately sought to please, "because the unrest within me caused me to be always, always outside myself," as he wrote in his journal in 1849, which Carlisle cites twice (66, 117).

It's no small surprise that putting such a turbulent personal and cultural legacy to rest comes at a high price: how to find one's way to a self that is always outside itself? Only single individuals, their inwardness, spheres of existence, and Christian love are truthful movers and shakers to Kierkegaard's mind, and being truly shaken is what happens on the move into despair. Not that this hub of consciousness turning spiritual is depressing, far from: it's "elevating, inasmuch as it views every human being under the destiny of the highest claim upon him, to be spirit," as can be read in *The Sickness Unto Death* (Carlisle, 64). But the stakes are tremendously high, as true selfhood without despair is inconceivable (64). The two are as intertwined as blessing and curse. Despair itself is such a mix: "a blessing, for it is a sign of a human being's connection to God, his highest possibility. And yet it is also a curse, for the depth of the soul is measured by the intensity of its suffering" (62). It resembles what Kierkegaard came to realize years earlier: that "learning to love" meant "learning to be anxious" (72)—until, that is, by passing "through the anxiety of the possible...he will be 'educated to have no anxiety'" (175).

On and on the duplicities go—all the way into his writing process. Carlisle's book brims with examples, as when she mentions that from early on a "combination of extremes was already deep within him, always his 'possibility'" (219); or when she notes that "his childhood habit of self-concealment" (71) "is dogged by a contrary inclination to reveal himself, through writing" (70). Not to mention how private and public now come to split and (in)form his view of humanity overall: "Human existence is at once inescapably public and intensely private. And the deeper a person's inner life, the more profound this contradiction becomes" (50).

Considering that Kierkegaard's role as an author was likely more complicated than any of his other roles, it makes sense that Carlisle already in her "Preface" spells out a number of his writings' intricacies before she concedes: "One can grapple for decades—as I have done—with their literary and philosophical complexities, and still not get to the bottom of them" (xiv). One graphic illustration is Kierkegaard's placement of himself between his pseudonyms Climacus and Anti-Climacus (212), whose interrelationship the latter spells out "in one draft preface to 'The Sickness Unto Death.'"

We are not twins, we are opposites. Between us there is a deep, fundamental relationship, but despite the most desperate efforts on both sides we never get any further, any closer than a repelling contact. There is a point and a moment at which we touch, but at the same moment we fly from each other at infinite speed. (213) Carlisle later proceeds to extend what she said earlier about the private and public sides of Kierkegaard's search for the meaning of being human:

"Writing is inseparable," she states, from the "effort of self-understanding: it is through words as well as through silence that he brings coherence to the motions of his soul. Yet for him this is always a paradoxical exercise, revealing and concealing at the same time—like telling someone you have a secret that can't be told" (ibid.)—with the religious in particular being spelled out as such a secret.

A predictable fallout is that he ends up as nearly everyone's opponent (142), not only of individual populists like Grundtvig (141), but of the delusional crowds, who personify the "banality" of public taste more broadly (93). In terms of his target as he defines it polemically around 1848, that pivotal year in both his life and in Carlisle's book, her description sticks to the usual fare: "to provoke [the church] into truthfulness from within" (90). Far more creative—and Shakespearean—is her rendition of his urge to write about the larger human condition: "And this question, to publish or not to publish, is inseparable from the question of who he is, which path he must follow through the world: to be or not to be an author?" (92). To which must be added the glue that holds the Siamese twin questions together, which, of course, is God, into whose sphere Kierkegaard was "propelled by the engagement

crisis. It was not theology, nor philosophy, nor art, but the break with Regine that had opened up his relationship to God, and allowed him to grow into it” (127).

That said, his travel abroad was equally instrumental. “His authorship began during that first visit to Berlin—and he started to become, as he now puts it, ‘the person I am’” (127)—and (thanks to Regine) it was religious from the outset (128). It’s even hard not to connect this birth of his selfhood with his work on *Repetition*, for, as Carlisle puts it, “true repetition is an inward spiritual movement, wherein a human being received himself anew” (162), a link that further reinforces Kierkegaard’s rejection, along with the ancient Greeks’, of knowing as mere recollection in favor of modern philosophy’s teaching “that all life is a repetition”; this insight he further connects to modern travel as he has Constantin Constantius’ “investigative journey” become “an experiment in ‘the possibility and meaning of repetition’” (157). It stands to reason that only writing would bring this unhappy man rich enjoyment (206).

V

The ultimate question, though, is: who is the writer really? Is he Kierkegaard, or did God write through him, or even write him?—another perplexing challenge for his biographer to address. She does it like this: “His sense that divine governance directed his authorship was difficult to distinguish from his need to assuage his deep anxiety” (206). Or is the copyright even harder to nail down, she asks on his behalf: “If our inner lives always reflect the world, how can we know ourselves apart from the world? ‘Yes, even now as I write this observation,’ Kierkegaard reflected, ‘—this, too, perhaps, is a fruit of the experience of the age’” (107). Situated between pseudonyms of his own making (perhaps!), the alleged author may be equally (or unequally?) suspended between his Maker and the rest of the made world writ large by way of his—Søren Kierkegaard’s—pen!

Moreover, because he also was torn between splendid isolation in some respects and visible publicity in others, his various surroundings and other contexts figure as prominently in Carlisle’s book as they did in the life of her subject. She lines up the usual suspects—mostly Danish and German poets, philosophers, and theologians—who influenced his thinking and creation (assuming, again, it was his!) in a thoughtful presentation and discussion of his major existential themes and leitmotifs, enlivened by images of his everyday intake of spiritual impulses and offenses, sometimes even spiced with entertaining trivia—about his coffee consumption, occasional horseback riding, and the like (169). Ever so discretely, she revisits this remarkable journey of life and work as a time traveler with the committed general reader aboard her scholarly vehicle. Getting Kierkegaard under the skin of this reader—without emasculating the gadfly or overwhelming the recipient of his sting—seems her main goal.

And a goal within reach it should be. Readers will experience few unwarranted bumps on the road, so let me mention just one of them, which reads: “The ethical sphere—still ringing with the judgments that had shamed and wounded him after his broken engagement—expanded, became more populous, and its attentions intensified” (145). The first part—the insertion—is clear enough, but what about the other? Are we supposed to envision a connection between the two—with a hurt person taking his grievances out on the world around him, the whole present age, perhaps? Or has his own misfortune rather opened his eyes for comparable woes elsewhere? Or is the ethical sphere simply expanding in the second part—beyond the reach of any private bias? If so, what do the intensified attentions signal?

Not only could a formulation like this have been more helpful, but its shortcoming feels extra lamentable because its composition at first glance seems as promising as the book’s as a whole. To bring an existing human being’s stock in life (in this case his plight) into close proximity with one of the spheres through which such a traveling individual might approach an enriched life at the end of the road is a promise too good to squander. Walking the talk, precisely the kind of mental journey that captures Kierkegaard’s way of coming into being, should not be verbally blurred.

Even further, images of the same kind that do make it, as most of Carlisle's do, deserve to travel beyond the bounds of her book to face time with voices of different kinds of restless lives and with other philosophical organs than the heart. Carlisle's research is well grounded in primary sources (available in translation) and a fair number of secondary sources (mostly in English), but while she is a keen observer of Kierkegaard's exchanges with 'others' from his past and present, she omits arranging any intertextual encounters between the story she has been telling and more topical stories that both share and contest his premises. Such an expansion of its intellectual horizon would be in the spirit of her book's design, so let me, instead of lamenting what's missing, conclude with two suggestions about the enrichment I have in mind. Carlisle has offered up a sensitive sounding board for Kierkegaard's voice(s), but all scholarly pursuits run the risk of ending up in echo chambers—unless practitioners put wrecking balls next to their walls.

Edward O. Wilson would seem to be the last person to fit the bill of a wrecking ball. The doyen of American naturalists, this polymath and stellar writer has especially in recent years patrolled the border between the humanities and sciences and here come close to areas of deep concern to Kierkegaard. Already the title of Wilson's 2014 book *The Meaning of Human Existence* is an indicator, and in it he talks directly about "an insoluble problem, which the great, conflicted nineteenth century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard called the Absolute Paradox." Wilson the natural scientist may also have an affinity with the Kierkegaard who suggested that "from the lily and the bird... a human being can learn silence, obedience and joy" (Carlisle, 207), and another contact point could be the 'equivalence' between existential irony and scientific doubt, which Carlisle brings forth thus: "Just as scientists maintain that there is no true science without doubt [Kierkegaard] asserted, so it may be maintained that no genuinely human life is possible without irony" (122). Wilson further enlists the Dane to illuminate the paradoxical/absurd nature of the creation myth and its earthly consequences—God in Jesus Christ. Yet the ulterior Wilsonian perspective is the chasm between a scientific and humanistic future, as scientific insight grows exponentially until the curve flattens and similar outcomes ensue everywhere, while humanistic insight increases gradually, as in a cultural evolution, but then leads to an endless diversity, which will assure us all a better future.

Now, whether Carlisle's Kierkegaard is a humanist or an anti-humanist—her claim that "he contrasted a humanistic life-view... with a 'religious' life view drawn from 'deeper experience'" (119) suggests the latter—he clearly speaks to the issues Wilson raises, but not in the same 'dialect,' if even the same language. Were he to enter Wilson's conversation, any sign of an echo chamber around it would be blasted. But especially Wilson's book *The Origins of Creativity* (2017) would be a valuable sparring partner for *The Philosopher of the Heart* with its screening of a deeply Christian writer's creativity. Wilson maps a creativity that has no Creator but comes into being in the course of human and pre-human history. Hence, two seminal authors have the same central focus but quite contradictory pathways leading toward it.

Edward W. Said's reputation in his field of study matches Edward O. Wilson's in his. One of the late twentieth century's preeminent humanist scholars and public intellectuals, Said was a multicultural, Palestinian-born migrant to the US, whose personal biography and background differ greatly from both Wilson's and Kierkegaard's. Yet a series of overlapping concerns and experiences immediately comes to mind once again. As he reveals in his 1999 memoir, Said too had read Kierkegaard; but it's his volume's title, *Out of Place*, that strikes a basic common chord, and had the book had a subtitle, it might well have been "The Restless Life of Edward Said." Just to intimate how pertinent to Carlisle's Kierkegaard its discourse appears to be, let me quote *Out of Place*'s conclusion:

"I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents, like the themes of one's life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are "off"

and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I'd like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place.”

If my review of Carlisle's book has accomplished anything, it will leave no one in doubt about how close to, yet far from, her Kierkegaard the Said of *Out of Place* is. My bet is that reading the two together, or Said's memoir and selected texts by Kierkegaard himself, would prove an irresistible exercise for fans of either one. If I'm right, Carlisle has delivered a book and a subject for the present age. The market-town genius on whose ticket she time traveled might well agree.

***The Dialectical Self: Kierkegaard, Marx, and the Making of the Modern Subject* by Jamie Aroosi
Reviewed by Mark Stapp**

“Ours is a fractured age,” announces Jamie Aroosi in the first line of his prescient text, *The Dialectical Self*. Yes, indeed. Aroosi published the book a year before our global pandemic that has also featured economic turmoil and worldwide social protests. His plea that we turn our attention to Marx while “all that is solid melts into air” is perfectly timed. Aroosi's book opens a fascinating new vein of scholarship for both Kierkegaard and Marx studies, and does so with *au courant* references including Occupy Wall Street and Frederick Douglass. Will knowledge workers around the world unite in celebration for Aroosi's Marxist telos? Probably not, but everyone is going to close the book's covers with a new perspective on Marx and Kierkegaard—and a reminder of how they speak as bluntly to us as they did to their own age of turmoil and revolution.

It is surprising how few scholars have put Marx and Kierkegaard into extended conversation. Aroosi mentions that Karl Löwith and James Marsh have previously connected these two mid-19th century cultural observers and critics of Hegel, with Sartre also offering a few implied connections.¹ It seems clear that Aroosi deserves the prize for demonstrating why more scholars need to read Marx and Kierkegaard in tandem. Aroosi is persuasive in the way he dovetails their projects together, arguing that Marx requires Kierkegaard's investigations of authentic selfhood to undergird his social theories, and that Kierkegaard's psychological and religious introspections need Marx to outline their social and political ramifications.

With a succinct and jargon-free writing style, Aroosi guides the reader on an interpretation of Marxian-Kierkegaardian authentic selfhood and offers a vision of what a social community and political structure supportive of such individuals might look like. *The Dialectical Self* is divided into four parts: Bondage, Emancipation, Freedom, and Praxis. Aroosi ascends through these four sections like Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, leading us from alienation and despair to self-determination and class-consciousness.

He begins by unpacking the similarities between despair for Kierkegaard and alienation for Marx. Both are freely chosen self-deceptions that blind us to richer personal and social possibilities. Aroosi is effective in how he weaves together Kierkegaard's diagnoses of psychological and religious roots of despair with Marx's interpretations of eco-

¹ See Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Marsh, “Marx and Kierkegaard on Alienation,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984).

conomic and social causes. He combines the two perspectives into a compelling representation of modern personal and social anxiety.

In the middle sections of his text, Aroosi highlights Kierkegaard's notions of faith and love and presents them as critical for leading us out of our despair and alienation. In his reading of *Fear and Trembling*, Aroosi sees faith as that which allows us to recognize and accept our own individual subjectivity apart from social determination. Faith facilitates our overcoming of anxiety and self-deception stretch toward becoming self-determined individuals. Critically, faith also permits us to recognize the freedom and potential of other individuals. It is thus the first step toward a non-coercive community of self-determining individuals.

Faith opens the door to love, which Aroosi understands to be at the heart of both the Marxist and Kierkegaardian projects. Aroosi emphasizes Kierkegaard's notion of love as upbuilding: a person who is loved gains in confidence, imagination, and ambition. Having a sense of the potential in themselves and other individuals, love gives us the strength to embrace and nurture this potential in others and ourselves. Faith and love are stepping stones to Marx's "true democracy" composed of radically free individuals, a fact that Aroosi underlines with his repeated use of Kierkegaard's statement that "Love is a revolution."²

Aroosi's final chapters focus on Marx's social and political aspirations and what these might look like with a citizenry of Kierkegaardian Single Individuals. Aroosi's personal passion for his intellectual labors comes through clearly here: he wants to change the world, not just interpret it. In an effort to find historical instances of his Marxist vision for a just society, Aroosi reaches for examples ranging from the 1871 Paris Commune to Martin Luther King, Jr. to Occupy Wall Street. Aroosi is not shy about promoting what he sees as Marx's core insights: the primacy of the economic sphere, and the importance of the means of production to creating a better, more just society. Aroosi sees Kierkegaard's insights as indispensable for creating the kind of individuals who could transition Marx's social vision from possibility into actuality. (And, he notes in a brief but important aside, in correcting the excesses of modern identity politics.)

The conversation Aroosi stages between Marx and Kierkegaard is engaging throughout. Unsurprisingly to anyone who has tried to extrapolate Kierkegaard's ethics and politics, the delicacy of Aroosi's balancing act between the two thinkers becomes trickier as his argument moves from discussions of personal despair/alienation and closer to the social and political realms. Orthodox Kierkegaardians will spot this quickly in Aroosi's treatments of faith and love. Aroosi's Marxist approach and secular political interests are incentives for him to downplay the role that Kierkegaard assigns to God, with distorting effects.

In a more standard reading of *Works of Love*, for example, Kierkegaard puts forward love as the ontological basis for our individuality, a kind of serial number on each person cementing that individual's personal relationship to the Creator. Furthermore, Kierkegaard suggests that any true love relationship requires divine mediation: my love of another person is first and foremost a love of God, who provides the possibility for love of another person. Aroosi references these ideas in *Works of Love* but he repeatedly returns to a more mundane understanding of love as a beneficial way of relating to others. Aroosi goes so far as to offer that a shoemaker freely providing shoes in a Marxist true democracy is exhibiting a Kierkegaardian work of love. Aroosi's interpretation of love is a fascinating thought experiment and valid on its own terms, but it is a stretch to say that it is Kierkegaard's.

² Works of Love, pp. 265.

Writing as someone who is capitalist, conformist, and self-deceiving, I want Aroosi to challenge me further. Here are three inquiries that Aroosi does not address in this book, but which would deepen his argument and that I hope he will address in future work:

The Dialectical Self offers Marx as our only guide out of our current capitalist/democratic structure. Other thinkers also offer options for economic and social change, so why should we focus exclusively on Marx?

Marx and Kierkegaard have similar and fascinating relationships to money and employment, pursuing the first—at times, somewhat cravenly—and mostly avoiding the second as much as possible. As thinkers assisted greatly by the wealth of others, why do both of them denigrate money and financial speculation? More information about their personal economic histories and financial psychologies would inform our understanding of their social and economic perspectives.

Would a society of Kierkegaardian Single Individuals really be a pleasant place to live? Can we assume—and does Kierkegaard ever suggest—that all of these freely self-determining people will choose to live like 21st-century progressive liberals? Explaining the basis for Marx’s optimism would be helpful.

The Dialectical Self is an exceptional first book for Aroosi. It is idiosyncratic, daring, and thought provoking, even to a reviewer who is not, so to speak, a fellow traveler. If we are going to start mending our fractured age, we need additional ambitious intellectual efforts like this one.

The Point of View of Mister Rogers’ Work as an Author
Paul Kidder, Seattle University

It began many years ago as a pedagogical expedient, one of those analogies that an instructor employs to make complicated interpretive problems somewhat comprehensible in an introductory class. I was trying to put across the intentions behind Kierkegaard’s authorship, but students were having trouble figuring out in what sense his fictional authors could or could not be identified with Kierkegaard himself. In particular, there was a puzzle as to how one could think of Kierkegaard, a devoted Christian, as present in voices that were secular and/or dubious about the merits of Christian faith.

Admitting to some embarrassment at invoking a simplistic analogy, I asked students if they were familiar with the program, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. Oh yes, even recent generations have known what I was referring to. In that program, I recalled, Mr. Rogers looks at the camera and says, “I like you just the way you are.” In that moment, I suggested, he is expressing unqualified Christian charity. But then he sends us off to the Land of Make Believe, where we encounter a collection of eccentric puppets manifesting emotional difficulties of which there was no hint in the Rogers who sang to us at the beginning of the show as he donned a zippered sweater. Daniel Striped Tiger is anxious and phobic, King Friday is conceited and commandeering, Lady Elaine Fairchild is narcissistic and naughty, and so on. Yet these puppets are also Rogers. They are invented by him, scripted by him, and voiced by him. He gives them distinct points of view, but also puts himself into them, identifying with their weaknesses even as the storyline promotes the overcoming of those weaknesses. The puppets are not the Rogers of the show’s opening, but they are recognizably dimensions of Rogers’ own character, born of the complexities of his own inner life. So too with Kierkegaard: he writes in his own name as a Christian, and while his fictional authors have differing and in-

compatible personalities and points of view, Kierkegaard is discernable in them in complex respects. To the students this made sense enough and we were able to move on.

Since the year 2003, with the attention given to Fred Rogers through the mourning of his passing, the release of the 2018 documentary film, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*³ and now Marielle Heller's fictionalized feature film, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*,⁴ I have found myself taking my analogy more seriously, for the focus in these recent examinations of his work has centered on the unique combination of sincerity and complexity that grants it more depth than one might expect from a production for children. Indeed, as I have watched the films, listened and watched interviews with Rogers, and read Tom Junod's *Esquire* article on which the feature film was based,⁵ I have found myself considering my analogy from the other end, imagining a kind of Kierkegaardian reading of Mister Rogers and his neighborhood.

Such a reading might begin with the central symbolism of the "neighbor," which, in Rogers' usage, is clearly infused with Christian meaning, and specifically the commandment that one should love one's neighbor as oneself. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard articulates a paradox of Christian love: To be sure, "neighbor" in itself is a multiplicity, since "the neighbor" means "all people," and yet in another sense one person is enough in order for you to be able to practice the Law.⁶ The Samaritan of Jesus' parable, who manifests in his care for one beaten man a universal love that sets no criteria for worthiness of that love, experiences the bounty of divine *agape* through the dutiful act of sharing that love with others. From the parable, Kierkegaard concludes, "by acknowledging your duty you easily discover who your neighbor is."⁷

Early in his career, Fred Rogers came to see television as a unique medium for communicating this kind of unconditional care. Through the medium one enters the intimacy of the home and connects, there, with an audience that may consist of a single soul. Indeed, Rogers often said that when he was before the camera, he would imagine himself speaking to one person. As he does this, he invites that single individual to participate in the bounty of transcendent love that he has experienced, and he asks, "Won't you be my neighbor?" There were certainly many people who responded actively to the invitation, people who would contact him, people he would pray for, people whose letters he would spend part of each day answering, but the love of neighbor was already in the invitation, so that one could equally well accept it in the privacy of one's heart. The invitation is really an acknowledgement that one already is a neighbor; to accept the invitation is to recognize what was always the case.

A critic who dismisses Rogers as simplistic most likely overlooks the forms of indirection that is at work in his mode of communication. That indirection is guided first and foremost by ideas about child development. In contrast to all the television programming that presents a childish world to children, Rogers sought to imagine how the real world must be interpreted through the lens of the developing child. Development is an inherent force, realized best when allowed to take its own dialectical path, yet encouraged by those experiences—factual or recreated in fiction—where the developing self has broken through obstacles and has flourished. The obstacles take the form of fear, anger, trauma and other overwhelming emotions and events, which must be addressed by finding something meaningful

³ *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, directed by Morgan Neville (Tremolo Productions, 2018).

⁴ *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, written by M. Fitzerman-Blue and N. Harpster, directed by Marielle Heller (TriStar/Tencent/Big Beach, 2019).

⁵ Tom Junod, "Can You Say...Hero? Fred Rogers Has been Doing the Same Small Good Thing for a Very Long Time..." Originally published in *Esquire*, November 1998. Available: <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a27134/can-you-say-hero-esq1198/>

⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love, Kierkegaard's Writings*, XVI, ed. and trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), p.21.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 22.

and empowering in every kind of experience. This is the reason not only for Rogers' constant reassurances to children, his constant assuaging of common fears, but also for his persistent affirmations of inwardness. In an anecdote told in Junod's story and reimagined in Heller's film, Rogers mollifies a child who will not stop waving his large toy sword around by saying, "Do you know that you're strong on the inside, too?" The invitation to turn inward, to the real project of individuation as a self, was a strategy Rogers employed in countless variations to help put children in touch with the finality at work within them.

One can call it cooperative grace, this developmental dynamism within us that comes from beyond us, and in the right forums Rogers did not hesitate to do so. Junod tells us that Rogers believed that television could be used "for the broadcasting of grace throughout the land." Rogers was indeed a man whom one can imagine meditating constantly on our utter dependence upon God's Word: "If we choose to allow it to grow, we'll be given help. If we choose otherwise we won't be forced."⁸ But he would not want that kind of language to be voiced on his program—not only because the rules of public television prohibited sectarian proselytizing, but also because (as he told Terry Gross in a 1985 interview) he wouldn't want to do anything on the show that would exclude anyone, that would posit a doctrine that one must accept before being admitted into the neighborhood.⁹ Better to form friendships in a spirit mindful of grace while yet experiencing that grace most definitively through the gift of the friendship itself.

In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard insists that if you proselytize at all to one who is of a very different mind, they will simply dismiss you.¹⁰ The esthetic writings were efforts to find people where they are, to recognize how deeply one's horizon shapes one's psyche, to recreate the frustratingly intractable quality of various types of unhappiness. His characters frequently write from stubbornly settled forms of habit—complacent, despairing, and sometimes a little of both. The same may be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the characters in the Land of Make Believe. Often enough, the emotional development that is demanded of them seems to them to pose a threat to their very identity. That is why, paradoxically, if one is to encourage their development as selves, one must emphatically like them just the way they are.

This requirement is a demanding one, for one may wait with long-suffering patience for changes that will never come. Yet thankfully, Kierkegaard assures us, the dutiful love that is required is not dependent upon time; it takes up its residence, rather, in eternity. This is true for the ethical love that grounds the fullest kind of marriage, as articulated by the fictional author, Judge William, as well as for the Christian *agape* that Kierkegaard extols in his own name. In the Judge's resounding words, "marital love...has its enemy in time, its victory in time, its eternity in time."¹¹ He makes the analogy to a piece of music, which exists in a permanent form in the written score but only becomes fully what it is through its indefinitely repeated performances.¹² In Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* the theme of love's eternity becomes itself a kind of theme repeated with variations, as the transformation of love that occurs when it becomes duty renders it sterling, abiding, unchanging, free from the burden of habit—for no matter how much it is expressed over and over, the repetition does not dull, but rather recalls and reinforces, the eternal grounding of the love.

⁸ Tom Junod, "My Friend Mister Rogers," *The Atlantic*, December 2019.

⁹ Terry Gross interview with Fred Rogers for the program, *Fresh Air*. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1178498>

¹⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, XXII, ed. and trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), p. 45.

¹¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Volume II, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, IV, ed. and trans. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), p. 139.

¹² Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, II, p. 137.

One finds something similar to these ideas in Tom Junod's reflections on Fred Rogers' penchant for repetition. When stepping before the camera as Mister Rogers:

"He wanted to do things right and whatever he did right; he wanted to repeat. And so, once upon a time, Fred Rogers took off his jacket and put on a sweater his mother had made him, a cardigan with a zipper. Then he took off his shoes and put on a pair of navy-blue canvas boating sneakers. He did the same thing the next day, and then the next...until he had done the same thing, those things, 865 times, at the beginning of 865 television programs, over a span of thirty-one years."¹³

These simple rituals came to be deeply felt by his audience, became symbols of the permanence of his care, its freedom from change. For Rogers, rituals—including his own daily rituals of exercise, prayer, and correspondence—were equally ways of enhancing one's awareness of the divine at work in all the interstices of life. Junod experiences Rogers' patient, meticulous process of taping a show as a day in "a life unfolding within a clasp of unfathomable governance."¹⁴

Interpreters of Kierkegaard have learned how to respect the basic narrative of *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and related writings—that his books were authored by a reasonably confident Christian addressing a failed Christendom through a creative form of indirect communication¹⁵—and yet we also learn from his accounts of his efforts the restless, unsettled feelings Kierkegaard had toward his authors and his authorship. We see him at times, reflecting on how he arranged the mask, adjusted the puppet on his hand. He lets us in on the hints in the names—for example, with reference to *Either/Or*, Vol. II: "Personally, I was far from tranquilly wanting to summon existence back to marriage, I who religiously was already in the monastery—an idea concealed in the pseudonym *Victor—Eremita* [the Hermit]."¹⁶

Readers are right to see a genuine dialectical struggle in Kierkegaard's attempts to flesh out his authors and breathe life into them. If he had not drawn on his own experiences and personality, in this struggle, the characterizations would certainly not have the power that they do. The whole project of the authorship would be more neatly didactic and less profoundly philosophical. It is this kind of interpretation of Kierkegaard's authorship that is expressed in my analogy to *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. What is so interesting in the journalistic and fictionalized revisits to the Neighborhood is that they take interest not only in what Rogers did and why he did it, but in the confounding difficulty of what he was trying to do: to reach the inner depths of the human soul through its formative roots in childhood. For that he needed an audacious confidence, but also a willingness to be a searcher within himself.

A Point of Contact Between the Thought of Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard¹⁷ **Jacob Hendrickson**

Ludwig Wittgenstein's admiration for Søren Kierkegaard is well noted, having called the Dane a "saint" and the "greatest philosopher of the 19th century". Here I would like to present a link between these two exorcists of pretense, coupled by Kierkegaard's enigmatic notion *inderlighed*, and Wittgenstein's enigmatic concept of ethics in his *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (hereafter *TLP*).

¹³ Junod, "Can You Say...Hero?"

¹⁴ Junod, "Can You Say...Hero?"

¹⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, pp. 30-1.

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *Point of View*, p. 35.

¹⁷ A very special thanks to Anthony Rudd for his very helpful comments on this piece. And to Gordon Marino, for his encouragement and tutelage over the years, without which this short paper would not exist.

The *TLP* is an odd book. One of the founding documents of the purportedly more sober thinking analytic branch of philosophy, this text is still debated over as to what it means, if anything. Wittgenstein claimed the sense of the book could be summed up: “what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence” (*TLP* Preface). He wanted to show the limits of thought, or rather, of the expression of thought, for since one cannot think unthinkable thoughts, the limit must be drawn in language.

To find the limit, Wittgenstein concocted the ‘picture theory of language’. This theory proposes that facts, propositions, and thoughts, all share the same logical form, like a song, the grooves of the record, and the score. The world is the “totality of facts” (it also divides into facts). The facts that make up the world break down into other facts until we reach the atomic facts, the ground level.

Atomic facts are reflected in elementary propositions, which are the building blocks that are combined into all the possible ‘sensible’ propositions. If a proposition represents a fact in the world, it is true. But it could still be false and have sense. It could represent a possible fact. Sensible propositions are contingent binary (true or false) propositions. Basically, the possible propositions of science.

‘Our’ world and ‘the’ world are the same, but our world is a fragment of the whole. Language mirrors the world, and “*The limits of my language means the limits of my world*” (*TLP* 5.6). The more we expand our understanding of the sciences (or language(s)), the greater our understanding of the world. The more we examine the facts of our own experience, and most importantly, our relation to these facts, the more we understand ourselves.

There is some debate as to what the elementary propositions consist of. Some commentators claim they are spots in our visual field, others that they are basic objects within the world. Wittgenstein was silent about their makeup, and I believe this to be intentional. For the silence allows for the reader to examine the facts of their own lives (or the world) in a way that clarifies earnestly.

The issue of the ‘limits of language’ offers a rendezvous with Kierkegaard and is also necessary to understand Wittgenstein’s ‘conception’ of ethics. In a lecture on ethics, Wittgenstein states,

“I see now that these nonsensical expressions [ethical or religious expressions] were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just *to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless....But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it” (*Philosophical Occasions* 44).

In a transcribed conversation, Wittgenstein proclaims,

“Nevertheless, we thrust against the limits of language. Kierkegaard, too, recognized this thrust and even described it in much the same way (as a thrust against paradox). . .But the tendency, the thrusting, *indicates something*.”¹⁸

In a letter to a publisher, Wittgenstein explains the *point* of the *TLP* by stating that there were two parts to the *TLP*, that which was written and that which was not, and that the second part was the most important. “For the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book; and I am convinced that, *strictly* speaking, it can ONLY be delimited in this way. . .All of that which *many* are *babbling* today, I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it” (“Letter to Ficker”).

¹⁸ From a conversation held on 30 December 1929, translated by Genia Schonbaumsfeld in her book *A Confusion of Spheres*.

Despite this, he does make certain, though perhaps peripheral, claims about the ethical. In a lecture on ethics he distinguishes between ethical and relative values. Ethical values are absolute and therefore cannot be represented by sensible propositions, which are, as mentioned above, contingent. Yet he offers examples of absolute value, like: wondering at the existence of the world, feeling absolutely safe, and feeling guilty. However, he claims that to speak of these is to speak nonsense. In this way ethics is transcendent.

In another sense, ethics is transcendental, a condition of the world. The ethical will does not change the facts of the world, only the limits, and “The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the sad man” (*TLP* 6.43). The true subject, the transcendental subject, is a limit of the world. It is here where ethics resides. There is ‘the world’ constructed of facts, but then there is the sense of this world. The ethical is found in a relation *to* the world, not in relations *of* the world.

Interestingly, Kierkegaard proclaims that “Silence is the essence of inwardness. . .” (*The Present Age* 69). Yet this does not paint the whole picture. *Inderlighed*’s translation as ‘inwardness’ is lacking on several fronts. For one, it is not internally directed, but an “inner warmth, sincerity, seriousness and wholeheartedness in one’s concern for what matters, a ‘heartfeltness’ not applied to something but which comes *from* within” (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* xxxix). Native speakers wince at the translation of ‘inwardness’. *Inderlighed* is a term used only on the most special occasions. If one says, “Jeg elsker deg inderlig.” it means to proclaim one’s love with an absolute certainty and passion, knowing full well the difficulties and sadness of what could be. But one cannot just bandy the term about like a fast-food slogan. The meaning of the term relies upon its use.

I believe *inderlighed* is the central concept to Kierkegaard’s corpus. This is evidenced by the fact that in his magnum opus, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, within a chapter entitled “The Subjective Truth, Inwardness,” lies an appendix in which the author, Johannes Climacus, reviews the books of Kierkegaard’s previous pseudonyms, drawing upon each author’s concern with *inderlighed*. This concept can be directly related to so many of the other peculiar terms in Kierkegaard’s toolbox (e.g. subjectivity, indirect communication, existence, anxiety, faith, passion, suffering, the moment, etc.). In his doctoral thesis, Kierkegaard compares the term to Socrates’ *daimon*. This gives *inderlighed* an aspect of “conscience”, of “being alone before God.” Vigilius Haufniensis hesitantly defines *inderlighed* as earnestness (and the eternal). Earnestness might be thought of as distinguishing between what one understands and what one does not understand (cf *Concept of Anxiety* 3). The eternal is the actual eternal in one’s life. Here we find a family resemblance with Anti-Climacus’ conception of the self as a relation between the temporal and the eternal. *Inderlighed* is found in this relation, this truth of subjectivity, the truth that edifies, that idea for which one can live and die, the purity of heart that wills one thing, an infinite passion, a transparency of thought in existence, silence. Kierkegaard defines, and alludes to, *inderlighed* in so many ways, it can be dizzying. But all the definitions can be traced back to the ‘ordinary’ usage of “Jeg elsker deg inderlig.”

So how does *inderlighed* link with Wittgenstein’s ethics? If we take the aspect of conscience, Wittgenstein, in his notebooks, exclaims the Augustinian notion, “Certainly conscience is the voice of God” (*Notebooks*). At a later date, he writes “What is good is also divine. Strange as it sounds, that sums up my ethics” (*Culture and Value* 3e). Here, we see the notion of the eternal. As far as earnestness goes, Wittgenstein’s entire project of clarity of language and language’s relation to the world, requires earnestness. That *inderlighed* is the ‘truth of subjectivity’, and that Wittgenstein’s ethics resides in the subject, might show the point where Wittgenstein’s ethics and *inderlighed* make contact.

Furthermore, both seem to be on the same sides of Schopenhauer and Hegel. Wittgenstein was a young admirer of Schopenhauer, and his opening proposition of the *TLP* is a clear reference to Schopenhauer's major work. Kierkegaard's relation to the world, and specifically suffering, is the opposite of Schopenhauer's Buddhist elimination of desire, and this is reflected. I believe in the transcendental aspect of Wittgenstein's ethics. Also, Kierkegaard thought that *inderlighed* did not fit in Hegel's system, and that Hegel's system lacked an ethics. Wittgenstein's removal of the ethical from 'the world of facts' and the systems of scientific language, only helps to clarify Kierkegaard's critique.¹⁹

However, we should not forget Kierkegaard's debt to Hegel. Kierkegaard, too, considered himself a dialectician, and much of Hegel's dialectics can be sensed in Kierkegaard's scribbles. Yet, Kierkegaard thought it ridiculous that Hegel claimed his own system to also be true, instead of merely a thought experiment. The truth has to show itself.²⁰ Wittgenstein's thought flashes glimpses of similarity with Hegel's.²¹ Yet Wittgenstein's system allows for Kierkegaard's 'individual' in a way that Hegel's does not.

Both our heroes aided individuality, but each specialized in an aspect of the self, Wittgenstein on clarity of thought, and Kierkegaard on purity of heart. Both of which are essential to *inderlighed*.

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Faith Sees Best in the Dark
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Vice President Joe Biden has frequently acknowledged that only his faith has enabled him to endure the untimely death of his son, Beau. In a talk show in September, Biden revealed that his wife Jill had taped an expression from philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) to his mirror: "Faith sees best in the dark." At the recent

¹⁹ Perhaps the most poignant appearance of *inderlighed* in Kierkegaard's writings is found in a letter to his disabled nephew. Kierkegaard pulls no punches in addressing his nephew's lot in life, but then advises, "as if your life, if lived in inwardness, did not have just as much meaning and worth as that of any other human being in the loving eyes of an all-wise Governance." Here we see the crucial point in both *inderlighed* and Wittgenstein's ethics, it is: how one relates to one's existence.

²⁰ Here one is reminded of Wittgenstein's critique of Frege's 'judgement strokes' basically claiming that they only show that Frege holds a certain sentence to be true. Certainly, for Wittgenstein, truth shows itself.

²¹ The truth as the whole, the logical structure of the world, private language criticism, concerns with conceptuality, etc, are shared themes.

White House Easter prayer breakfast, Biden echoed that same half sentence. But what do those simple six words from the Danish firebrand mean?

The expression that has provided such sustenance to Mr. Biden can be found in Kierkegaard's 1847 book, *Uplifting Discourses in Various Spirits*, in a section of text entitled "The Gospel of Suffering." The paragraph from which Biden cites reads:

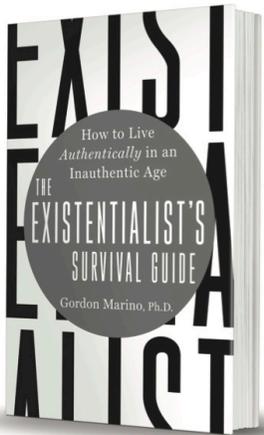
"The believer humanly comprehends how heavy the suffering is, but in faith's wonder that it is beneficial to him, he devoutly says: It is light. Humanly he says: It is impossible, but he says it again in faith's wonder that what he humanly cannot understand is beneficial to him. In other words, when sagacity is able to perceive the beneficialness, then faith cannot see God; but when in the dark night of suffering sagacity cannot see a handbreadth ahead of it, then faith can see God, since faith sees best in the dark."

There are many ways to interpret this tissue of thought, but a few pages before this paragraph, Kierkegaard observes "...faith always pertains to what is not seen, be it the invisible or the improbable." The benefits are easily intelligible when the love of your life accepts your marriage proposal and you have just landed the job of your dreams. In such sunny times, it does not require faith to discern the blessings of life.

Human understanding, however, cannot find anything good in the death of a son. In that obsidian night, sagacity is blind to goodness.

Though his entire life was a meditation on the Christian faith, Kierkegaard was no dew-eyed believer. He reminds his reader "it is not true that the Christian is exempted from human sufferings," and when those sufferings are at your threshold, when the earthquakes of life rumble and there are no worldly advantages to point to, then neither the senses nor the mind can discern anything beneficial. In that darkness, faith sees best. And what does faith see? Faith sees what human understanding can only shake its head at, namely, "that the heavy suffering is beneficial."

**Søren Kierkegaard. Uplifting Discourses in Various Spirits. H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong, eds. and transl. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1993).*



THE EXISTENTIALIST'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Gordon Marino, Ph.D.

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OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Books: Ethics: The Essential Writings, The Quotable Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard in the Present Age.

Select publications for a general audience: New York Times Magazine, New York Times, APA Blogs, Atlantic Monthly.

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