Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter

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

NUMBER 72: Summer 2022

Contents

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS 2

ARTICLES

Risk, Loss, and Finding Happiness after Despair: Lessons from Kierkegaard 3
Antony Aumann

Imagination, Empathy, and their Failures: Kierkegaard Scholarship as a Work of Love 9
Deidre Nicole Green

La melancolía de llegar a ser sí mismo: fuente de la patología del odio en las redes sociales digitales. Perspectivas Kierkegaardianas acerca del filme Hater, 2020, Jan Komasa dir 12
Rafael García Pavón

BOOK REVIEWS

***Kierkegaard and the Question Concerning Technology* by Christopher B. Barnett** 18
Reviewed by Thomas J. Millay

***Kierkegaard's Muse: The Mystery of Regine Olsen* By Joakim Garff** 21
Reviewed by Troy Wellington Smith

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS

Dear Readers,

The *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* began publication almost fifty years ago and for 27 years, I have been fortunate enough to be the editor of what we fondly refer to as "*SKN*." Over the decades, *SKN* has taken different forms, perhaps the most significant of which was going digital.

Almost every star in the constellation of Kierkegaard scholars has graced our pages. At last count, we had an audience of around 1600 readers -- which might qualify our journal in academic terms as a best seller -- save for the fact that the Newsletter has always been free.

It pains me to write it but I am retiring at the end of August and so this will be my final issue. As I have often preached, Kierkegaard insisted that procrastination is a moral danger. And when it came to the Newsletter, I frequently procrastinated about putting in the hard work involved in getting our journal into print. Truth be told, were it not for associate editors like Cynthia Lund, later Eileen Shimota, and latest Jill Fisher, our flagship publication might be years behind. Assistant editors and student workers also pitched in, keeping the editor-in-chief if not on track, then at least keeping him from running off the tracks and waiting until June to publish the September issue. I also owe a debt of gratitude to our Spanish speaking scholars and editors who were essential in our publishing articles in Español.

I am happy to say that the new curator, esteemed Kierkegaard scholar, Professor Anna Strelis Soderquist, will be, nay, is now the new editor-in-chief. I am confident that Professor Strelis Soderquist will preserve what is best in *SKN*, make improvements where needed, and the highly creative individual that she is, I am sure that Anna will also develop fresh initiatives. Welcome, Anna!

Finally, I am grateful to our many readers and contributors. Stay well and in contact both with the *SK NEWSLETTER* and the retiring editor.

Warmest regards,

Gordon

Risk, Loss, and Finding Happiness after Despair: Lessons from Kierkegaard[1]

Antony Aumann
Northern Michigan University

Anna the Prophetess

Risk is central to any meaningful life, says Kierkegaard (CUP 1:210/SKS 7:192; FT 42/SKS 4:137; JP 4:536–39/SKS 23:138, 24:25–26, 24:492, 24:519).[2] If we want our lives to have purpose and direction, we must commit to projects that might fail or to beliefs that might prove false. We must "venture" something, to use his term (JP 4:540/SKS 25:155; CUP 1:423–29/SKS 7:384–91; JFY 98–114/SKS 16:156–70). But what happens when our commitments do not work out? Projects sometimes go belly-up; things do not always go our way. What are we supposed to do then? When the source of meaning in our lives collapses, how do we go on?

Kierkegaard's writings often touch on this topic, and he offers us extended meditations on how to handle despair (SUD 5–132/SKS 11:117–242; UDVS 213–341/SKS 8:309–431; EUD 103–226/SKS 5:109–224). His quintessential answer comes in "Patience in Expectancy" (EUD 205–26/SKS 5:206–24), a neglected essay on Anna the Prophetess, a minor figure in the Christian Bible.[3] We meet her briefly in the Gospel of Luke as an aside in the account of Jesus' baptism. Yet, as Kierkegaard tells Anna's story, it captures the central human problem of loss and reveals why moving on can be so hard.

Anna is someone who follows Kierkegaard's advice. She has a great passion: her relationship with her husband. Her love for him is the source of her life's meaning. But seven years into the marriage, Anna's husband dies. And because her love ran so deep, she cannot move on. She cannot start over with someone new. Anna copes with her grief by turning to God. According to the Biblical account, she spends her remaining days praying and fasting in the temple.

It is no surprise Kierkegaard's hero finds solace in religion. He often casts faith as salve for pain or cure for despair (CD 3–92/SKS 10:11–98; SUD 39–40/SKS 11:155).[4] Moreover, this is hardly going out on a limb. "Turn to God in troubled times" is folk wisdom. Still, Anna's appropriation of it may give us pause. Retreating

---

[1] An early version of this paper appeared on the Blog of the APA (https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/08/31/kierkegaard-on-being-happy-again-after-youve-lost-everything/).

[2] For discussion of this theme, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Kierkegaard on the Internet: Anonymity vs. Commitment in the Present Age," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1999*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1999), 96–109; Hubert L. Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, "You Can't Get Something for Nothing: Kierkegaard and Heidegger on How Not to Overcome Nihilism," *Inquiry* 30, no. 1–2 (1987): 33–75; Hubert L. Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, "Kierkegaard, Division II, and Later Heidegger," in *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 283–340; Hubert Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, "Kierkegaard on the Nihilism of the Present Age: The Case of Commitment as Addiction," *Synthese* 98, no. 1 (1994): 3–19.

[3] For an excellent recent discussion of this essay, see Michael Au-Mullaney, "Kierkegaard's Widow: Can Love for the Dead Motivate Authentic Faith" (Chicago, IL, 2020).

[4] See, for example, Sharon Krishek and Rick Anthony Furtak, "A Cure for Worry? Kierkegaardian Faith and the Insecurity of Human Existence," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 72, no. 3 (2012): 157–75.

to the temple for the rest of her days does not sound like much of a solution. As Michael Au-Mullaney worries, it comes across as escapism.[5] So, why does Kierkegaard recommend it to us?

There is something else that is odd. Why not tell Anna to pick up the pieces and move on? Why not encourage her to find a new love to help her forget the pain? It could be a new husband or something else: a hobby, a project, a friend. Kierkegaard could add that this is just how life goes. When you take risks, sometimes you lose. But when that happens, you do not give up; you get up and try again. I suspect many of us would offer Anna such counsel. It is also what we would do ourselves if we were in her shoes. We would go through a grieving period, perhaps comforted by our relationship with God, and then start over. It would not be easy. But we would find a way.

The Costs and Benefits of Deep Cares

Kierkegaard says this path is not open to Anna. Why not? Allegedly, she would not be "true to herself" if she moved on (EUD 208–9, 218/SKS 5:210, 217). Behind this pithy remark lies a robust theory of identity. Kierkegaard holds that our cares define us.[6] We are what we love. So, we cannot change our loves without changing ourselves. Moving on means abandoning who we were and becoming someone new.

Fair enough, we might respond. But so what? Suppose moving on means Anna will become a different person. What is so bad about that?

The answer has to do with the nature of care. A care, Frankfurt tells us, is not a casual preference, which might be fleeting.[7] Think here of liking or disliking this season's popular sneakers. Nor is a care an intense desire, which we might regard negatively. Witness the recovering addict who craves a drug but disapproves of this craving. No, a care is a desire we reflectively endorse. It is a preference we want to endure and so work to sustain. Thus, to care about something is to commit to it and invest in it, as Anna does her relationship with her husband.

Cares have inertia.[8] What we invest in, we cannot readily shake. A law of proportion applies here. The more we throw ourselves behind something, the longer it sticks with us. Our most fervent cares become so deeply embedded in our psyches that they reside there indefinitely. This is what happens to Anna. She puts everything she has into her relationship with her husband. So, even after he is gone, she cannot stop loving him.

It follows that deep cares come with a great risk. We may end up with a desire we cannot shake for something we can no longer have. Does this make deep cares foolish? The question does not admit of a single answer. Later, I will consider a Kierkegaard-inspired objection. For now, I will offer a Kierkegaardian defense.

---

[5] Au-Mullaney, "Kierkegaard's Widow: Can Love for the Dead Motivate Authentic Faith."

[6] This position has been developed by several commentators, including John J. Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[7] Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 10–21; see also Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality*.

[8] Carlos Alós-Ferrer, Sabine Hügelschäfer, and Jiahui Li, "Inertia and Decision Making," *Frontiers in Psychology* 0 (2016); Peter Koval et al., "Getting Stuck in Depression: The Roles of Rumination and Emotional Inertia," *Cognition and Emotion* 26, no. 8 (December 1, 2012): 1412–27; Peter Koval, Stefan Sütterlin, and Peter Kuppens, "Emotional Inertia Is Associated with Lower Well-Being When Controlling for Differences in Emotional Context," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (2016); Bart Zantvoort, "On Inertia: Resistance to Change in Individuals, Institutions and the Development of Knowledge," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (August 18, 2015): 342–61.

Despite their risk, deep cares have a benefit. Their inertia stabilizes us.[9] It keeps us on track when we are jostled by life. It moves us along in the same direction when we would otherwise turn away. In sum, the inertia of deep cares guards our identities against dissolution and fragmentation, and few things matter more, according to Kierkegaard, than a stable identity.[10] To cite just two examples, knowing who we will be tomorrow and the next day helps us make decisions and interpret our lives.

Authenticity

Of course, scholars debate the value of stability, and some downplay its importance.[11] So, let us set this point aside. There is another that merits mention. Kierkegaard holds that each of us has a "true self"—an inner essence that defines who we are. Anna's has to do with her late husband. It involves being in an intimate relationship with him. Thus, for Anna, moving on would not just be a matter of exchanging an old self for a new self. It would be a matter of betraying her true self. It would involve becoming inauthentic.

We might wonder, though, whether we really have true selves. Sartre thought we did not.[12] But supposing we did, where do they come from? Who determines what they are? Kierkegaard appeals to God (SUD 14/SKS 11:155; CI 280–81/SKS 1:316–17; CUP 1:258/SKS 7:234; UDVS 93/SKS 8:198).[13] He says the creator of all things defines our individual essences at the moment of our birth. This is a predictable answer for a pietistic Lutheran. But Kierkegaard is also supposed to be the father of existentialism. Indeed, he councils us to stand alone and tells us to go our own way (JP 1:45/SKS 24:410–11; JP 1:100/SKS 24:211; JP 1:280/SKS 27:397; JP 2:270–72/SKS 24:109–11; JP 3:325/SKS 24:311–12; CUP 1:263–64, 277/SKS 7:239–40, 251). He extols subjectivity and places a high value on personal choice (CUP 1:203/SKS 7:191; PV 118/SKS 16:98; PC 118, 223/SKS 12:125, 218).[14] It is hard to square this side of Kierkegaard with the idea that we are all just supposed to follow some predetermined path in the end.

There is an epistemic problem too. How do we know what our true self is? Maybe it has to do with our old love, as Anna held. But maybe it has to do with some unknown new love. Or maybe it is an amalgam of both! We could consult God to settle the issue. But God's voice can be hard to hear. And Kierkegaard says the usual signs—aptitudes and opened doors—are not telling (UDVS 60–64, 139–40/SKS 8:169–72, 237–38; CUP 1:137, 149/SKS 7:128, 138–39). God may want us to do what seems fruitless to us.

Love Is Jealous

But never mind all that. Suppose Anna insists on remaining true to her old self. Suppose she is committed to holding on to her love for her late husband. We cannot fault her for it. Many people do the same. But a question lurks: does Anna's choice really entail that she cannot move on? Is continuing to love her late husband inconsistent with coming to love someone new?

---

[9] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 23; Zantvoort, "On Inertia."

[10] For discussion, see Antony Aumann, *Art and Selfhood: A Kierkegaardian Account* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 27–34, 51–56.

[11] John Lippitt, "Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and Some Problems with Narrative," *Inquiry* 50, no. 1 (2007): 34–69.

[12] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Penguin, 1975), 345–69; for discussion, see Aumann, *Art and Selfhood*, 39–58.

[13] For discussion, see Aumann, *Art and Selfhood*, 59–77.

[14] For discussion, see Aumann, 86–90.

Answering "yes" presupposes that love is a zero-sum game. It is as if there is only so much room in our hearts, and we can give real estate to a new person only by taking it away from the old one. Admittedly, love often feels this way. But the idea seems specious to me. At least it does if we think about love in terms of care and affection, which are not zero-sum. We can have increased affection for one person without having decreased affection for someone else. This is obvious when it comes to children. Having a new child does not mean caring less about your old ones. Yes, you have to divide your time, energy, and resources in more ways. But few parents would accept this as a measure of their love.

Someone might retort that love is jealous. It is not OK with being one of many. When we are small, we scowl at having to share our mother's love with a new sibling. When we are grown, we bristle at having to compete with someone or something else for our partner's affection. We want to be their "one and only." That is why we resist dating someone who has not gotten over their ex or who is married to their job. We will not be getting all their heart. And that is what love wants. Everything.

It is hard to take this literally, though. Suppose your spouse gets all your love. How can there be any left over for your children? Or your friends? Or your vocation? Your spouse would have gotten all you had. And what about God? If Anna's late husband is her everything, how can she have room in her heart for her Lord and maker? Someone might protest that these are different kinds of love—romantic, filial, religious, etc.—and they do not compete with each other. Fair point. But, interestingly, it resembles the talk of people who have moved on from their deceased spouses. Their new love does not compete with their old love. It is just different.

No One Can Serve Two Masters

Yet, conflicts do arise, even across different kinds of love. All cares require cultivation, Frankfurt says, and cultivation requires time and energy.[15] We may dislike measuring love in such terms, but they do matter and they are zero sum. An hour spent with one love often means an hour not spent with another. Hence, when our best friend gets married, we worry that we will grow apart. And when our spouse takes a job that requires working long hours, we fret over the toll it will take on the home front.

We want to win these conflicts. We want to come first in our lovers' hearts. And there can be only one number one. "No one can serve two masters," Kierkegaard writes, echoing the Biblical theme (CD 81–91/SKS 10:89–98). This may be Anna's logic (EUD 208–9/SKS 5:209–10). She cannot acquire a new love without dethroning her old one; she cannot acquire a second husband without downgrading the first. And she does not want to do those things, so there is no moving on for her.

It is worth pausing to consider what it means to come first. It does not mean winning any and every conflict. Or, at least, it does not have to. All else being equal, I might choose my friend over my job. But all else is rarely equal. Optional requests bump up against inflexible requirements. Casual invitations compete with genuine emergencies. I have a 5 p.m. deadline for an article and my friend asks me to join them in the park. I say, "Let us go tomorrow." I have not thereby relegated my friend to the basement of my heart.

Of course, we cannot always avoid Sophie's choices. Sometimes we are forced to decide between great loves. Someone gives us an ultimatum: "it is me or the job." The situation is tortuous, and not just because we cannot have everything we want. We might not actually prefer one love to the other. The two may be tied or

[15] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 16.

incommensurable. Imposing a hierarchy might do violence to how we think and feel. Indeed, I suspect this is our common lot. Our lives are filled with deep cares we cannot or do not want to rank first, second, third, etc.

This makes Anna unusual. She has one great love and does not want another. Kierkegaard paints this as a virtue (EUD 210, 218/SKS 5:210–11, 217). Anna has integrity; the rest of us are mere triflers (see FTH 71/SKS 4:136). She is pure of heart; we have fragmented souls (FTH 72/SKS 4:137; EUD 211/SKS 5:211). But it is not necessary to be so moralistic about it. On my reading, Anna is not taking some grand philosophical stand. She does not think everyone ought to do what she does. She is just acknowledging the limits of her individual psychology. Moving on is something *she* cannot do; it is impossible given how *she* is wired.

Stoicism

In a sense, it does not matter. Whether or not Anna is the ideal, the fact remains that she lost her love. She grieves and needs a way to cope. This experience is universal. We have all lost loves; we have all despaired. So, we all have an interest in finding a solution. Kierkegaard claims Anna finds solace by turning to God—and so would the rest of us (EUD 217–22/SKS 5:217–21). But what does this mean?

Kierkegaard's thinking diverges here. Sometimes he takes a stoic route. The proper response to loss is to complete the process: die to the world. We must kill off our concern for the temporal and cling to the eternal (EUD 217–18/SKS 5:217). This is jargon; we need an explanation. The "temporal," according to Kierkegaard, is what comes and goes. It is what is subject to change and dissolution. The "eternal" is what lasts forever and can never be taken away. Our relationship with God fits the bill. No matter what happens, we can turn to him in prayer. The same goes for our memories. We can always honor the dead by calling them to mind. These two need not be disconnected. We can find comfort in the idea that our loved one's passing was God's perfect will, and we can hope for the blessed reunion God promises in the afterlife (EUD 216/SKS 5:215–16).

But if the stoic view is right, then Anna was wrong. Not at the end, when she retreated to the temple. But at the beginning, when she fell in love with her husband. She was right to care about something so deeply, of course. That much is crucial for a meaningful life. But she chose the wrong object. She should not have focused on something as transitory as a human being. She should have cleaved to God from the get-go, or something similarly eternal. Climacus does not mince words here: "It is demented…for a being who is eternally structured to apply all his power to grasp the perishable, to hold fast to the changeable" (CUP 1:422/SKS 7:384).[16] Kierkegaard, writing under his own name, picks on romantic love in particular. It is a deficient form of willing, he grouses (WL 44–90/SKS 9:51–95). At best, it teaches you through loss of your beloved to cling to God (UDVS 35/SKS 8:148).

Getting the World Back

There is another side to Kierkegaard, though. In some of his books, faith is not about stoic otherworldliness.[17] It is not about leaving behind the finite realm. Instead, faith is how we regain hope for this world (FT 20, 39–40,

[16] See Dreyfus, "Kierkegaard on the Internet."

[17] For discussion of the otherworldliness objection, see M. Jamie Ferreira, "Other-Worldliness in Kierkegaard's Works of Love," *Philosophical Investigations* 22, no. 1 (1999): 65–79; Louis Mackey, "The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard's Ethics," *The Review of Metaphysics* 15, no. 4 (1962): 602–20; Thomas Joseph Millay, "Concrete and Otherworldly: Reading Kierkegaard's Works of Love alongside Hegel's Philosophy of Right," *Modern Theology* 34, no. 1 (2018): 23–41; Sylvia Walsh, "Other-Worldliness in Kierkegaard's Works of Love–A Response," *Philosophical Investigations* 22, no. 1 (1999): 80–85.

46–49/SKS 4:116, 133–34, 141–43).[18] It is how we rediscover happiness in the here and now after having lost everything. This is the side of Kierkegaard I find more promising and want to develop.

According to this second strand of Kierkegaard's thought, Anna does make a mistake. But it is what she does at the end—spending her remaining days in the temple—that is wrong. In fact, it is a sickness. It is what Anti-Climacus calls "despair over necessity" (SUD 37–42/SKS 11:153–57). He defines this form of despair as a fatalistic attitude that says, "Nothing can be done about my situation." Like all despair, it is cured by faith. Yet, mark the reasoning. Turning to God helps, Anti-Climacus writes, because "God is this—that everything is possible" (SUD 40/SKS 11:155). It is a puzzling claim. But Anti-Climacus appears to be proposing that to believe in God is just to think that, no matter how dire the situation, there is nevertheless hope. Even though it seems absurd by all human calculation, things can be made right again.

If this is correct, then Anna had the wrong kind of faith. She turned to God in the wrong way. Kierkegaard describes Anna as hoping for the end times. She remained in the temple because she is looking forward to the eschaton. What Anna ought to have believed is that her world could be redeemed right now. She ought to have hoped that she could become happy again in this life. Perhaps with a new husband. Perhaps in some other way. Certainly, this approach to life would have gone against everything Anna understood. It would have conflicted with her views about love and her beliefs about herself. But this is Kierkegaardian faith: to think even the absurd is possible.

The Rationality of Absurd Hope

Is Kierkegaard endorsing irrationalism here? From one angle, maybe so. To follow his advice, we must throw probabilities out the window. We must disregard what the evidence suggests. This is not rational. Yet, let me propose an alternative frame. We can interpret absurd hope as a matter of recognizing the limits of our own minds. There is much we do not know, and we seldom reason well about what we do. We grasp only poorly but a small corner of the world. Thus, we should place but little stock in the conclusions of our intellects. We should remain open to the possibility—nay, the likelihood—that our humble imaginations are not great guides to reality.

Absurd hope has a practical justification too. I started my essay by saying risk is a necessary condition of meaning. If we want our choices to matter, we must venture. We must care deeply about something that might turn out badly. Let me now add that hope is a necessary condition of risk. Fear of despair keeps us from venturing. We hesitate to leap because we are worried about what will happen if we fall. What we need is to believe that crashing will not be unrecoverable. Unlike Humpty Dumpty, we will find a way to pick up the pieces, however unlikely that may seem from our current vantage point.

Advice is cheap, of course, and doing is harder than telling. Few of us can just will ourselves to hope even though we know it is what we need. Bootstrapping seldom succeeds in the world of emotion. So, what are we to do? A final lesson from Kierkegaard comes to mind. The cure for despair does not lie within. We must

[18] For discussion, see Au-Mullaney, "Kierkegaard's Widow: Can Love for the Dead Motivate Authentic Faith"; Mark Bernier, *The Task of Hope in Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Roe Fremstedal, "Kierkegaard on the Metaphysics of Hope," *The Heythrop Journal* 53, no. 1 (2012): 51–60; Jeffrey A. Hanson, *Kierkegaard and the Life of Faith: The Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious in Fear and Trembling* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 90–127; John Lippitt, "Learning to Hope: The Role of Hope in Fear and Trembling," in *Kierkegaard's "Fear and Trembling": A Critical Guide*, ed. Daniel W. Conway (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 122–41.

look outside ourselves to a power that can establish us (SUD 14/SKS 11:130). On my view, this means we can hope for ourselves only if someone else first hopes for us (WL 246–63/SKS 9:246–62). Kierkegaard is thinking about God, as always. But in a world where God feels absent, friends and family may work better. Their love can be the ground of our hope and the foundation of our ability to go on.[19]

Imagination, Empathy, and their Failures: Kierkegaard Scholarship as a Work of Love

Deidre Nicole Green
Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley University

For Kierkegaard, what it means to love another is to help them become who they are divinely intended to be, to realize their distinctiveness rather than assisting them to come to reflect the lover's nature or the lover's ideal of who the beloved should be (WL, 270 and 278). Participating in this process entails imagining the world from the other's subject position, an implication of Kierkegaardian love that becomes more pronounced in Johannes Climacus's parable of the lowly maiden and the king, which emphasizes the need for equality between individuals for authentic love to inhere in their relationships (PF, 27-28). The parable suggests that one aspect of this equality is epistemic—truly loving community only becomes possible when those with more privilege come to know reality through the perspective of those with less privilege.

In light of Marx's thought, which holds that marginalized people with less *social* privilege bear *epistemic* privilege over those who live comfortably at the center, attempts to collapse the space between people of relatively more or less privilege is advantageous for both parties. Because those on the underside of society directly experience the problems in society of which the privileged can choose to remain blissfully oblivious, they have knowledge and insight that eludes those in the higher echelons of a stratified system of class. Kierkegaard's writings can be read to suggest something similar. For Anti-Climacus, sin is a position that puts one at an epistemic disadvantage. Because a human being is immersed in sin, she cannot define sin but must learn what sin is through a revelation (SUD, 95). Because individuals are so invested in their sin and engage in self-deception, knowledge of sin must come from a source external to the self. Although he explicitly names God as this source, throughout the corpus, Kierkegaard employs marginal figures to illuminate truths—to act in a revelatory way—to help all individuals, including those that are more privileged, learn more loving and just ways of being in the world.

Despite his own subject position as an independently wealthy, highly educated, white European male, Kierkegaard excels at the empathic art of thinking existentially from subject positions other than his own. As I am fond of pointing out to my students, the tendency to universalize one's own experience is indicative of privilege. Although Kierkegaard's subject position merited much privilege within his nineteenth-century Danish society, he chose, presumably out of his own understanding of and commitment to neighbor love, to consider

[19] For development of this theme, see Aumann, *Art and Selfhood*, 79–100.

the embodied experiences of others and how this might shape their unique needs and desires, as well as their unique claims upon love, both human and divine.

Kierkegaard's ability to think from multiple subject positions is evident in the fact that he could name multiple forms of despair, multiple ways human individuals might remove themselves from the position of faithfully resting transparently in God. A more striking example might be the fact that although steeped in the Augustinian-Lutheran tradition, he departs from the traditional view that pride is the universal and most fundamental form of sin, allowing that fear can prove just as problematic for a person aspiring to live faithfully. As Clare Carlisle clarifies, this appreciation leads Kierkegaard to develop a notion of humble courage, which avoids both pitfalls of fear and pride, rather than reductively lifting up only the necessity of humility.[20]

Another example of the multiplicity present in Kierkegaard's thought is the variety of ways he illustrates that a person might depart from proper Christian self-love. He compares the putatively distinct examples of a depressed person who would take the drastic measure of doing self-harm to a person he dubs the "bustler," flitting from project to project or engagement to engagement, never really experiencing coherence or continuity, as both participating in the same basic failure of love (WL, 23). In such instances, he evinces his intellectual agility and appreciation for the variety of human experience, which is further exemplified when Silentio states in *Fear and Trembling* how disparately he would characterize Sarah (of Tobit) if she were a man (FT, 104-105); he further proclaims a conviction of the importance of learning from diverse subject positions in his imperative to "learn from a woman" (WA, 149). His incisive ability to view and name seemingly disparate problems as all of a piece—failures of love and faith that might elude our recognition and categorization as such are identified clearly by him as diverse phenotypic expressions of problems sharing the same genotype. His trenchant, deft ability to give voice to this diversity is exemplary and reveals an empathic ability to imagine what life is like from various subject positions.

This agility speaks to Kierkegaard's imagination, which is crucial to such exercises in empathy and their attendant expressions, yet imagination is not enough. True empathy requires a recognition that one is not another. In his 2014 Tanner lectures, former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams quotes philosopher Edith Stein as saying: "The empathic position is one in which we know that we *are not* the other." Williams comments: "If we were here to speak of an erosion of empathy, it would be more than a failure to appreciate the intensity of another's experience. It could just as easily be the overeager appropriation of another's experience and the denial of its difference and its contingency." To avoid collapsing the distance between oneself and another in a way that amounts to psychic colonization, Williams argued that empathy means that there is "always something to be learned."[21] This perspective resonates with feminist standpoint epistemology, which elucidates the importance of humility and the indispensable nature of interdependence in human knowledge. Pamela Sue Anderson holds that one must guard against epistemic injustice by engaging in communal thinking from the lives of others that is both critical and reflexive. This thinking includes "seeking communal awareness of concrete differences of race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality." The lives that fall within these categories of difference must be recognized as lives "yearning for emancipation by way of rational dissent from dominant configurations at the center." For Anderson, feminist objectivity, which pursues how things really are, as well as

[20] Clare Carlisle, "Humble Courage: Kierkegaard on Abraham and Mary," *Literature & Theology* 30, no. 3 (Sept 2016): 288-90.

[21] "I Have No Idea How You Feel," *Harvard Magazine* (April 15, 2014), https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2014/04/paradoxes-of-empathy%20accessed%20August%2011 , accessed August 11, 2022.

truth and justice, can only be achieved as individuals struggle to "reinvent themselves as other."[22] The attempt to reinvent oneself as other must be counterbalanced by the recognition that one is not the other.

This counterbalancing could avoid the failures of empathy found in Kierkegaard's writings, where the figures that comprise his corpus are presented reductively and one-sidedly. In this way, his writing proves to be both exemplary and something of a cautionary tale, belying his attempt to think dialogically solely through imagination, without actually engaging others in different subject positions. Kierkegaard scholars might view this cautionary tale as an invitation to improve on his approach by not just engaging imagination but actual dialogue with other scholars from various subject positions who, as Anderson emphasizes, not only bear diverse types of embodied experience but are also equipped to reflect on that experience critically. This reliance on others' critical reflection of their own embodied experience entails a recognition of irreducible difference between oneself and another, which precludes transparency and predictability and resists relationships of domination and subordination. As Kelly Oliver opines, "Recognition is a form of love that requires witnessing to that which is beyond recognition, witnessing to what cannot be seen …. love is witnessing to that which is between us, the invisible bond created through the labor of the negative, which is not nothing."[23] For Kierkegaard, what one beholds is indicative of how one is constituted. Seeing others as epistemic authorities who remain more than a projection of oneself is indicative of having cultivated this capability in one's nature so that seeking to views others in this way impels one to become. Becoming oneself in one's full authenticity requires continually remaining open to what one might learn from every other—who one is commanded to love as neighbor and hope for as oneself, and who one must also recognize as having the power to dramatically transform one's self-conception, notion of what is good, and one's modes of acting in the world. In this way, scholarship that engages empathic and dialogical witnessing of others can be a work of love (and justice) that allows both self and other to become.

---

[22] Pamela Sue Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: The Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 181.

[23] Kelly Oliver, *Response Ethics,* ed. Alison Suen (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 33.

La melancolía de llegar a ser sí mismo: fuente de la patología del odio en las redes sociales digitales. Perspectivas Kierkegaardianas acerca del filme Hater, 2020, Jan Komasa dir.[24]

Rafael García Pavón
Sociedad Iberoamericana de Estudios Kierkegaardianos
Universidad de Claustro de Sor Juana

Introducción

Hace unos años cuando se daba la llamada revolución de las primaveras árabes, en las que regímenes totalitarios caían, algunos medios e investigadores exponían el rol positivo que las redes sociales digitales (Facebook, twitter, tik tok, etc.) habían tenido que ver para mantener unidas en el discurso y la motivación a una población joven y pujante que deseaba un cambio de forma de vida[25]. En estos momentos, en que vivimos de nuevo tiempos de guerra, las redes juegan un papel también decisivo en cuanto que la retórica de la misma define posiciones o desmiente propagandas. Ni que decir de las ventajas de que personas queridas y amadas puedan tener un contacto más estrecho superando las distancias en tiempo real e inmediato en el ámbito de la movilidad global, así como en su potencial comercial.[26]

Las redes sociales digitales han generado fenómenos que sin ellas probablemente no existirían y que, paradójicamente, han detonado socialmente el proceso contrario a una sociedad democrática y madura, como son las fake news; las cuales se han convertido en un poderoso aliado de nuevas formas de ultraderecha fascista, y en algunos casos con aseveraciones que rayan la estupidez, pero que debido a su extensión y su no filtración interpretativa, captan y le dan legitimidad y visibilidad masivamente a resentimientos no atendidos de las condiciones de vida de muchas personas

Si bien sobre la tecnología en sí misma podríamos estar de acuerdo que es neutra axiológicamente -algo por cierto muy discutible-¿cómo explicar entonces este crecimiento exponencial en el performar de las mismas redes sociales digitales y en las formas de vida de quien las alimentan o las consumen, de un estado mental en donde la polarización o la expresión emocional directa o de odio se ha vuelto una forma de vida patológica? Al punto de que ya se empieza a tematizar el perfil socio-psicológico de nuestros tiempos como el de individuos tiranos u ofendidos.[27]

¿Cómo es que el individuo en su poder de llegar a ser sí mismo se ha convertido en un tirano en relación con las condiciones de mediación digital de la sociedad actual? Por ello, creemos que esto es lo que el pensamiento de Kierkegaard nos puede ayudar a comprender junto con el cine, pues como decía Gilles Deleuze, Kierkegaard escribía de tal forma que era asombrosamente un proto-cinematográfo.[28] Precisamente, porque nos hace

[24] Texto presentado en *The Ninth International Kierkegaard Conference. "Kierkegaardian prescriptions on mental health issues". 6th-8th May 2022.* Hong Kierkegaard Library, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota.

[25] Cf. G.M. Garduño, "La situación de internet, los blogs y las redes sociales como marco de la expresión política en Irán." Ponencia en el X Congreso de la Asociación Española de Ciencia Política y Administración, "La política en la red". Universidad de Murcia, España. [Recuperado el 1 de mayo de 2022 de Academia.edu].

[26] Cf. Jordi Freixas Vidal, "La influencia de las redes sociales en la guerra entre Rusia y Ucrania", El economista.es, opinión. 30/03/2022. [Recuperado el 1 de mayo de 2022].

[27] Cf. Éric Sadin. *La era del individuo tirano.* (Buenos Aires: Caja negra editora, 2022).

[28] Cf. Gilles Deleuze y Félix Guattari. *Mil mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia.* (Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2004), p. 238.

comprender los matices del movimiento interior, que vistos desde fuera, no se comprenden o se reducen a formas de relaciones causa y efecto, o a descripciones asociativas que no explican nada.

Para ello abordaremos el tema con la ayuda del pensamiento de Kierkegaard en relación con el filme polaco de Jan Komasa del 2020 *Hater*. De manera breve, el filme cuenta la historia de un joven menor de 30 años, sin estudios terminados, sin futuro profesional y sin una familia donde se sienta acogido, pero al mismo tiempo deseándolo todo, que encuentra a través de su habilidad de generar discursos falsos en empresas de marketing político el poder de serlo todo sin ser nada en realidad, pero que en el fondo solo expresa cada vez más su profundo odio a quiénes se encuentran fuera de esas redes teniendo consecuencias catastróficas.

La desdicha de la vida en las redes sociales digitales: No tener tiempo. Tomek de Hater como el más desdichado de Kierkegaard.

El personaje principal, Tomek (Maciej Musialowski), padece de una melancolía, como la figura de Nerón que Kierkegaard analiza en *O lo uno o lo otro;* y que la define como *histeria del espíritu*[29] por no poder ser sí mismo al clausurarse en una vida estética sin eternidad. La melancolía es la característica de individuos existencialmente invisibles, que no tienen tiempo por carecer de eternidad, lo cual provoca quedarse en un tiempo meramente cronológico y efímero, que es característico del estadio estético de Nerón, fuente de su melancolía y generador de su odio hacia los otros.

¿Qué significa no tener tiempo y por qué ello es la mayor desdicha de un individuo? En el texto de "El más desdichado" el escritor seudónimo de A de *O lo uno o lo otro. Un fragmento de vida I*, reflexiona a partir del paradójico epitafio de una tumba vacía que encontró en Inglaterra, que rezaba "Aquí yace el más desdichado". Y más adelante, nos dice que éste es el que no ha muerto o no puede morir, porque no tiene tiempo, no porque esté muy ocupado, si no porque nunca lo ha tenido en realidad.[30] Si bien, como dice el escritor seudónimo de A, esto puede tener varias interpretaciones, es desconcertante para el sentido común, pues ¿No es más bien al revés, que el más dichoso es el que no morirá? ¿No es este deseo interno de eternidad el mismo que anima inclusive desde el sueño de Descartes el desarrollo propio de la tecnología?

El autor seudónimo de "El más desdichado" nos está diciendo que sabiendo que moriremos no queremos morir, o sentimos que la muerte no tiene ningún sentido, si durante el tiempo de vida no hemos estado efectivamente presentes; sólo puede morir aquél que ha sido presente a sí mismo, aquél que ha tenido tiempo como una continuidad presente entre pasado y futuro.

Como dirá Kierkegaard a través de Vigilius Haufniensis en *El concepto de la angustia*, la eternidad del espíritu es lo presente y lo pleno, el tiempo solo lo es si tiene presencia, es decir si tiene eternidad, luego entonces la presencia se define como la eternidad en el tiempo: "lo eterno significa primeramente lo futuro, o al hecho de que el futuro es el incógnito en que lo eterno inconmensurable con el tiempo, quiere, con todo, mantener su relación con el tiempo."[31]

---

[29] "¿Qué es entonces la melancolía? Es la histeria del espíritu" Søren Kierkegaard. "El equilibrio entre lo estético y lo ético en la formación de la personalidad." en *O lo uno o lo otro. Un fragmento de vida II.* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007), p. 174 / *SKS* 3, 183.

[30] Cf. Søren Kierkegaard. "El más desdichado" en *O lo uno o lo otro. Un fragmento de vida I.* (Madrid: Trotta, 2006), p. 234 / *SKS* 2, 216.

[31] Søren Kierkegaard. *El concepto de la angustia en Migajas filosóficas. El concepto de la angustia. Prólogos.* (Madrid: Trotta, 2016), p. 203 / *SKS* 4, 393-394.

En otras palabras, tener tiempo es siempre tener presencia del futuro, y como el futuro es equivalente a lo posible, tener tiempo es siempre tener posibilidades; ambas son la presencia del espíritu que deviene singular, es decir la libertad, lo cual sin embargo angustia y por eso es una responsabilidad ética de cada individuo tener tiempo. Parafraseando a Kierkegaard como Vigilius Haufniensis en *El concepto de la angustia*, lo posible es para la libertad lo futuro, y el futuro es para el tiempo lo posible[32], así tener tiempo es tener posibilidades, y tener posibilidades es tener libertad, y por ello en "El equilibrio entre lo estético y lo ético en la formación de la personalidad" el Juez Wilhelm nos dice que la ética, como ese impulso de la personalidad de elegirse a sí mismo como libertad, es una pregunta por el futuro, por más que tenga una comprensión exacta y precisa de los hechos pasados o de la historia, siempre queda pendiente la pregunta ¿qué debo hacer hoy para mañana?, así la ética, nos dice el Juez Wilhelm, es luchar por el futuro, por el tiempo por venir.[33]

Esto quiere decir que el presente siempre es futuro y pasado al mismo tiempo, porque cuando irrumpe el futuro como eternidad en el tiempo, en el instante por la acción del espíritu, cuando entran las posibilidades a la inmediatez de una existencia, se deja de tener una identidad con lo inmediato, y se vive afectado hacia el por venir; pero, al mismo tiempo, lo que está viniendo, y que antes de venir era futuro, se conserva en el presente como la memoria del pasado sin perder sus relaciones con ese futuro, solo cambiando de modalidad de virtual a actual; es decir, la memoria del pasado conserva tanto la actualidad de lo que pasa del presente como la contingencia de donde ha llegado a ser, lo que Kierkegaard bajo el autor seudónimo de Johannes Climacus en *Migajas filosóficas* llama "el así de lo devenido" y "el así fue posible de lo devenido".[34] Esto quiere decir que el futuro no se agota por ser pasado, y por ello su sentido de presente no es debido a su irreversibilidad fáctica, si no al futuro que conserva en relación con ello, de tal forma la memoria puede ser una forma de recordar el futuro o de recuperar el tiempo perdido, ese futuro no realizado o ese futuro implícito que nos hace tener relaciones diferentes, y por lo tanto devenir sí mismo.

Podemos entonces decir, retomando el texto de "El más desdichado", que éste es aquel que está ausente de sí mismo en la medida de no tener presencia, por no elegirse en el instante como espíritu por un salto de fe, por lo cual el futuro y el pasado no son reales, sino abstracciones o idealizaciones.

Como nos dice A en "El más desdichado", estas formas de estar ausente son las personalidades que solo son rememorantes o expectantes, que, como afirma A: "continuamente espera lo que deberá rememorar; su esperanza se decepciona continuamente y, cuando esto sucede, el desdichado descubre que no se debe al hecho de que la meta quede aún más lejos, sino al hecho de haberla quedado atrás, al hecho de haber sido ya vivida o de que debería haber sido ya vivida, y así, al hecho de que debería formar parte del recuerdo. Por otro lado, rememora continuamente lo que debería esperar; pue solo venidero ha sido ya asumido en su pensamiento y, en su pensamiento, ha sido ya vivido, y esto que ha vivido, lo rememora, en lugar de esperarlo. Así aquello que espera se encuentra a sus espaldas, y lo que rememora ante sí."[35]

---

[32] Cf. *Ibídem*, p. 203 / *SKS* 4, 393-394.

[33] Cf. Søren Kierkegaard. "El equilibrio entre lo estético y lo ético en la formación de la personalidad." en *O lo uno o lo otro. Un fragmento de vida II.* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007), p. 164 / *SKS* 3, 172.

[34] Cf. Søren Kierkegaard. *Migajas filosóficas* en *Migajas filosóficas. El concepto de la angustia. Prólogos,* pp. 89-91 / SKS 4, 278-280.

[35] Søren Kierkegaard. "El más desdichado" en *O lo uno o lo otro. Un fragmento de vida I*, pp. 237 / *SKS* 2, 219.

Esto es precisamente lo que sucede en el filme de *Hater*[36], sobre todo el protagonista, el joven Tomek, cuyo arco dramático es la de convertirse existencialmente en nadie a costa de conseguir el poder que le otorga su anonimato en las redes sociales digitales.

En el primer acto del filme, Tomek se nos presenta como un joven de origen humilde y rural, que se encuentra estudiando derecho en la Universidad de Varsovia bajo el auspicio de unos benefactores de la élite de la sociedad polaca, liberales y demócratas, que han pasado muchas veces en su pueblo natal de vacaciones, como una especie de altruismo superficial. Pero Tomek, como se verá en el filme, es alguien que se siente resentido ante la sociedad que lo hace sentir impotente y rechazado; aparentemente es una víctima del sistema -como lo que piensan los integrantes de los movimientos fascistas y contra-migrantes que conforman el contexto social del filme- pero en realidad la sutileza del filme es mostrarnos que ese rechazo e impotencia se debe más bien a la mentira que es Tomek para sí mismo y que conforme avanza el filme se hace cada vez más profundo hasta el grado de que el final del filme su mirada es vacía y fría, así como sus gestos sin expresión, que aunque queda impune de sus crímenes, en el fondo expresan que es nadie.

La primera mentira de Tomek para sí mismo es cuando pretende estudiar derecho plagiando, por lo cual es expulsado de la Universidad, y ante sus benefactores no solo les miente de la situación, si no que se inventa un pasado, y unos recuerdos idealizados desde cuando se conocían, que a ellos por lo mismo les parece demasiado, absurdo o fuera de lugar, es decir Tomek rememora un pasado que en realidad nunca ha sucedido. Y al mismo tiempo, en relación con la hija de sus benefactores Gabi (Vanessa Aleksander), tiene siempre falsas esperanzas de una relación amorosa, cuando en realidad lo que los unía como niños fue un pasado que ya no es futuro. Entonces, Tomek, es desde el inicio alguien cuyo resentimiento parece provocado por la sociedad, pero en realidad está motivado porque no tiene una relación auténtica con su propio devenir como individuo, viviendo en un pasado que no sucedió y esperando un futuro que ya ha pasado.

Pero esta condición del personaje se acrecienta y profundiza durante el filme cuando, obligado por encontrar un trabajo, adquiere un empleo como creador de contenidos de marketing con el objetivo de desprestigiar o manipular las tendencias de popularidad de las figuras públicas en las redes sociales digitales. Para lo cual no solo utiliza miles de cuentas falsas, si no que Tomek va siendo ascendido en su trabajo por su gran habilidad para inventarse todo tipo de historias falsas y de tergiversar los contenidos para beneficio de los clientes, sin importar la verdad, la ética, lo legal y las consecuencias que estos mensajes puedan tener en las personas. Esto no solo le hace percibir una falsa autoestima de sí mismo, si no que en sus propias redes sociales digitales se autosatisface por los logros obtenidos.

Pero todo este mundo se desvanece al enterarse que Gabi se irá a Nueva York con su novio, haciendo realidad sus falsas esperanzas de amor con ella. Esto hace que se detone en él la profunda conciencia de que es nadie en realidad, generando en su interior un profundo resentimiento contra la sociedad y odio real, ya sea por ser nadie, o por no tener tiempo en realidad.

Así el personaje de Tomek está perfectamente perfilado, como nos dice A en "El más desdichado" como aquel que "Abandonado solo a sí mismo se halla en el vasto mundo sin ningún tiempo presente al que vincularse, sin ningún precedente por el que sentir nostalgia, pues su precedente aún no ha venido, sin ninguna posteridad en

[36] Jan Komasa Dir., *Hater (Sala smobójców. Hejter),*(Polonia: Naima Film, TVN, Canal+ Polska, dFlights, Coloroffon, Netflix, 2020).

la que confiar, pues su posteridad es ya pretérita. Sólo tiene por delante al mundo, frente a sí, como el tú con el que mantiene un conflicto, pues el resto del mundo es para él solo un personaje, y este personaje, este importuno amigo inseparable es malentendido. No puede envejecer pues nunca ha sido joven; no puede rejuvenecer pues ya ha envejecido; en cierto modo no puede morir pues no ha vivido; en cierto modo no puede vivir pues ya está muerto; no puede amar pues el amor es siempre presente y él no dispone de tiempo presente alguno, ni venidero ni pasado; con todo, es de naturaleza simpática y odia el mundo sólo porque lo ama; no dispone de pasión alguna, no porque carezca de ella sino porque en el mismo instante dispone de una y de su opuesta; no tiene tiempo para nada, no porque su tiempo esté colmado de otra cosa, sino porque no dispone en absoluto de tiempo; está desfallecido, no porque carezca de fuerza, sino porque su propia fuerza le hace desfallecer."[37]

Esta situación se vuelve exponencial con las redes sociales digitales en el filme, porque éstas simulan que el individuo tiene poder sobre el tiempo, es decir sobre la eternidad, cuando en realidad no lo tienen, porque clausuran o encapsulan al espíritu a la inmediatez estética y a la aceleración de las respuestas solicitadas por la necesidad de exhibición de las mismas y que le generan una autosatisfacción debido a su habilidad para manejar lo que las redes solicitan, pero que solo tienen valor mientras su realidad está ausente de la red misma.

La patología se da cuando el personaje va obligándose a sí mismo y al personaje de Guzek (Adam Gradowski) -un joven condenado a cuidar a su abuela enferma con ideas equivocadas sobre el futuro de Europa y la historia con tintes fascistas pero que solo se realizan en un videojuego- a confundir el ámbito real de su existencia con este ámbito inexistente, es decir el paso de lo simulado a lo real no se basa en un acto de fe, si no en una imposición de una realidad sobre la otra que obedece a la manipulación falsa de la información para mover los miedos y las pasiones más primigenias de las personas. Lo cual termina provocando que Guzek irrumpa en medio de una campaña política asesinando sin razones ni causales a todas las personas presentes. En la relación entre Tomek y Guzek, se inventan el tiempo que no tienen, es decir unas memorias y unas esperanzas, que son solo abstracciones o idealizaciones encarnadas en la lógica de las redes sociales, como la idea de la conspiración o de una organización especial o de que Guzek ha sido elegido para salvar a Europa.

Pero esto genera en ambos personajes la imposibilidad de realizarlo, el sentido de su propia impotencia, de tal forma que la red se vuelve el campo de su odio contra todo lo que sí puede serlo. El personaje es impotente de tener una vida real y por ende una relación de amor auténtica, y el joven Guzek que asesina, vive una realidad de clausura por la enfermedad de su abuela, ambos, Tomek y Guzek, son solo el producto de las redes sociales digitales, y viendo el efecto de poder que sus opiniones generan en otros, polarizan las relaciones para llevar a todos a un vértigo de perdición que no pueden controlar.

El discurso del odio como melancolía del espíritu: Tomek de Hater como el Nerón de Kierkegaard.

El odio o discurso de odio que se denota en el diálogo entre Tomek y Guzek, cuando éste estalla de ira por que Gabi no lo corresponde, (51:47) y donde afirma, escribe y grita, "No somos nadie" es como si Tomek se hubiera convertido en un pequeño Nerón, en vez de quemar Roma, lo hace en las redes, quemando las emociones de las personas, su sensatez, y llevándonos a un vértigo de relaciones y sentimientos tribales, que tienen efectos catastróficos en la medida en que hacen a las personas abstraerse de su propia responsabilidad temporal.

[37] Søren Kierkegaard. "El más desdichado" en *O lo uno o lo otro. Un fragmento de vida I*, pp. 237-238 / *SKS* 2, 219-220.

En el fondo lo que el personaje va desarrollando, desde mí perspectiva, es esa melancolía del espíritu que perfila Kierkegaard en Nerón[38], ya que la ira, el resentimiento del personaje es tan poderasomente melancólico, expresivamente impotente, que llora y se lamenta, pero no por lo que está provocando, o por sus mentiras, si no porque se da cuenta que no puede ser el que desesperadamente se ha inventado y que debería haberse asumido de otro modo.

El personaje de Tomek como Nerón vive una vida estética que consiste en gozar, en la medida en que la condición de felicidad de esto es externa al individuo o está en el individuo, pero que es independiente de su voluntad. Tomek y Nerón sólo son lo que inmediatamente ya son, y en el caso de Tomek esto se da en relación con la identidad inmediata y el goce estético de su vida con los discursos de odio en las redes sociales digitales, al grado que cree que tiene el poder de manipular a los clientes poderosos y a su misma jefa. Al final del filme esto se vuelve tan perverso, que después de los asesinatos de Guzek, incitados por Tomek, él se vuelve por suerte el héroe que detiene a Guzek, y recibe los favores de aprecio de la familia, de Gabi y del trabajo que no recibía de otro modo.

Toda vida en la red, como la vida estética, es así una vida sin voluntad, es una vida inmediata, cuyas formas pueden variar dependiendo de la condición externa que la determine y en este caso las solicitudes de las redes digitales. Lo que el filme presenta es que esta es la condición dominante en la sociedad actual y sus movilizaciones, así Tomek es un Nerón, aunque anónimo.

Por analogía podemos ver cómo las redes sociales digitales, como en el caso del filme de *Hater,* al simular el tiempo y darnos el poder de la inmediatez, multiplican las posibilidades de pequeños nerones, por que en las redes cada uno puede sentir que tiene el poder de todo para satisfacerse a su modo. Es como si las redes no nos permitieran madurar, porque cuando llega el momento de la vida cuando el espíritu, el yo, desea ponerse, salir de su escondite, formar la personalidad, y lo cual implica contradecir en gran medida la vida inmediata que se vivía hasta ese momento, la vida en la red nos hace creer que todo ello se puede traducir en su propia inmediatez. Pero como a Nerón, a Tomek, le llega este momento cuando él ya ha experimentado todos los deseos imaginables y ahora se le exige no serlo, pél como Nerón desea seguir descansando en el deseo, por tanto utiliza su poder para que otros le inventen deseos y diversiones, esta es la relación con Guzek en los videojuegos y el modo como aniquila a sus compañeros de trabajo.

Esto va haciendo que el espíritu rechazado ante su propia posibilidad se incube en sí mismo produciéndole angustia. Esa angustia que le mete ruido al deseo, esa angustia que en la diversión es sospecha de la nada, de que la vida es nada, de que la vida que se nos aparece en realidad esclaviza, más que liberar. Tomek y Nerón lo saben, por eso intentan acallar su angustia a través de mayores diversiones. El problema, es que después de las diversiones, su angustia persiste, porque al ser una determinación del espíritu es eterna; mientras el espíritu no se ponga como tal en la vida del individuo y se entre en la determinación de la ética, la angustia sigue creciendo, los deseos dispersándose y desapareciendo, entonces Tomek y Nerón se ven frente a sí mismos y su condición de vacío a cada instante que desean escapar. Esto los esclaviza aún más porque ya no se dominan, los domina la angustia, y por eso su mirada, espejo del alma, se vuelve sombría y llena de miedo ante los demás, porque ve en los demás la posibilidad de nuevo del espíritu que puede sujetarlo, dominarlo y hacerle perder toda inmediatez.

[38] Cf. Søren Kierkegaard. "El equilibrio entre lo estético y lo ético en la formación de la personalidad." en *O lo uno o lo otro. Un fragmento de vida II.* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007), pp. 171-175 / *SKS* 3, 179-183.

Su espíritu está reprimido por la inmediatez, su personalidad está sofocada por la diversión, por eso en el desenlace y el final del filme Tomek aparece con un rostro de muerto literalmente, frío y calculador.

Nerón o Tomek o cualquiera, son los más desdichados ya que por no tener tiempo, no pueden morir, y desarrollan esta melancolía del espíritu, tanto del pasado, porque nunca fueron, como del futuro que nunca serán, cayendo entonces en desesperación. Esta desesperación como pérdida de toda esperanza de ser, por creer que se es en lo inmediato, es lo que lleva a personas como Tomek, Guzek o Nerón a cometer atrocidades con el fin de saber si su desesperación puede llevar a la pasión, a una nueva expresión que lo divierta. Este tipo de vidas, son un constante fracaso de sí mismos

Conclusión

Las redes sociales digitales se han convertido en un simulacro de estar frente a otro, de recibir la confianza de otro, y por tanto del tiempo mismo por el cual devenimos, pero al no haberlo en realidad son solo vidas estéticas, donde el criterio de elección es la indiferencia, porque no difiere nada en el fondo, es solo lo que conviene a la inmediatez que da autosatisfacción.

Tomek es el mas desgraciado porque no elige devenir espíritu y por tanto no fluye el tiempo como duración, como un presente que se desdoble en pasado y futuro, como memorias y como aperturas de lo finito y lo inmediato; en donde el yo se ponga frente a otro que lo ha amado o lo ha puesto, donde el yo se sepa un tú en su propia vulnerabilidad, de tal forma que su fortaleza esté en aceptar esa recepción de saberse acogido y de acoger a otros. Donde no hay polaridades, sino devenires y contrastes, desde lo cual se diferencian o se disciernen las cosas.

El evitar estar frente a otro, en el fondo es no tener presencia en el tiempo, lo cual nos puede llevar a desarrollar ese pequeño Tomek o Nerón digital, potenciados por la velocidad y el anonimato de las redes; no hay yo frente a nadie, y no hay flujos de tiempo, sino identidades excluyentes, de tal forma que no hay devenires, ni vulnerabilidad acogida, si no cada vez mas melancolía del espíritu, es decir de la eternidad en el tiempo.

Por ello el discurso del odio es la forma digital de nuestros tiempos en que se expresa esa melancolía de ser espíritu del más desgraciado, que no tiene tiempo porque no se ha elegido a sí mismo en el devenir de su eternidad en el tiempo, al grado de ser una patología, un padecimiento sin voluntad porque para ello la libertad requiere ser una elección de recibirse a sí mismo, y cuyo criterio es la pasión de la personalidad del elegir-elegir, que no es la vida estética, sino su trascendencia, este recuperar la fe en el mundo, afrontando y recuperando el rostro de sí.

Kierkegaard and the Question Concerning Technology

by Christopher B. Barnett

Reviewed by Thomas J. Millay, Senior Research Fellow at HKL

As one of the 19th century's preeminent thinkers, Kierkegaard offers his readers an embarrassment of riches. The abundance of his themes and suggestive fecundity of his pedagogy make it almost impossible to come to terms

with every aspect of his thought. Perhaps this provides some excuse, then, for the fact that Kierkegaard scholarship has rarely appreciated Kierkegaard's analysis of modern technology. In fact, creative philosophers and theologians ranging from Martin Heidegger to Thomas Merton have done a more competent job assessing Kierkegaard's thought in this respect than technical scholarship on Kierkegaard has done. Thankfully, Christopher B. Barnett's 2019 book *Kierkegaard and the Question Concerning Technology* has remedied this rather shameful situation.

Barnett's approach is comprehensive. In successive chapters, he surveys modern technological development in the Western world, modern technological development in Denmark, and Kierkegaard's response to the development he witnessed. In these pages, it becomes clear that Kierkegaard paid close attention to the technological innovations of his age. His analyses, though often critical, were informed. In fact, the technology he was most critical of—the modern press—was also the technology he knew most about, as he wrote for newspapers from the time of his earliest writings. After completing this series of historical surveys, Barnett turns to what we should make of Kierkegaard's analyses in our own age, first staging an encounter between Kierkegaard and Google, then re-introducing Kierkegaard as a significant figure within current philosophical and theological discourses on technology, demonstrating that whenever someone draws on Jacques Ellul or Paul Tillich, they are making use of thinkers heavily indebted to Søren Kierkegaard.

That Kierkegaard thought deeply about the question concerning technology is now, with the publication of Barnett's book, beyond doubt. But is that thought actually significant? Is it worthwhile to read Kierkegaard specifically? Why not simply engage later thinkers like Martin Heidegger or Herbert Marcuse or Walter Benjamin, who spoke more explicitly to a tech-suffused culture? Barnett believes it is worthwhile to read Kierkegaard for his thoughts on technology, and—at least on one uniquely Kierkegaardian thematic—I am in complete agreement with him.

While other thinkers may consider more profoundly such things as the connection between entertainment media and fascism (Benjamin), Kierkegaard remains important reading on the question concerning technology. Kierkegaard is significant not simply for genealogical reasons but because, of all the thinkers surveyed in this volume, he provides the most incisive critique of a technical apparatus which especially dominates our time: namely, Google. More specifically, Kierkegaard's thought is critical of what Google is doing to our minds.

When it comes to Google, the question concerning technology is a question concerning knowledge. What sort of knowledge does Google encourage its users to cultivate? The answer is clear: the type of knowledge Google encourages its users to value is knowledge characterized by extensity. Google is constantly gathering information on every possible human concern. Its scope is everything. But what is wrong with that? you may be wondering. Doesn't Google provide answers that enable people to solve all sorts of previously unsolvable problems? Surely only a melancholy curmudgeon would begrudge people easy access to a resource that helps them solve their problems. From a Kierkegaardian perspective, what is wrong with Google is precisely that it does seem to solve all problems. Did the headlight in your car burn out? Just search Google for instructions on how to replace it. Did you forget the name of that actor in *Game of Thrones*, and now he's in a new movie, and it's driving you crazy? No worries! A complete career itinerary can easily be found on Google. Hungry for Thai food? Google will tell you where to find the closest, most highly rated restaurants. Kierkegaard has no problem with these types of problems being easily solved. As he says in *The Moment*, No. 2: "Water is something that can be obtained in the hard way by fetching it from the pump, but it also can be obtained in the convenient way by high pressure; naturally I prefer the convenient way" (The Moment *and Late Writings*, 110). What Kierkegaard

does take issue with is the reduction of all human problems to such comparatively superficial difficulties, complications which are easily solved once the correct information is provided. The truly great human problems—such as what it means to be an ethical person, who we should consider our neighbor, and how to synthesize the eternal and temporal aspects of our natures—these problems cannot be solved by an extensive approach to knowledge, no matter how infinite the information gathered. As Barnett puts it: "All of the information in the world, if it is abstracted from actual existence, amounts to nothing, and so the thinker disposed to objective knowledge 'becomes something infinitely great and nothing at all.' She has an untold expanse of data but no concrete life in which to make it meaningful" (103); "As with previous systems, Google cannot help but divert persons from ethico-spiritual exigencies. It does not orient learning toward wisdom about oneself but, instead, treats it as a means to an external end, whether the rapid assimilation of knowledge for the sake of social productivity or the simple satisfaction of idle chatter. In short, Google molds its users into fetishizers of information, who prefer to browse and to manipulate data rather than to apply it" (109). We live in a Googlified age, but for all that we know we have forgotten that—when it comes to knowledge—the greater the extensity, the lesser the intensity.

So how do we address this spiritual crisis? How do we combat the push toward an extensity that permits a distracted, superficial human existence? Barnett finds an answer in what Heidegger called meditative thinking or what Kierkegaard and the broader Christian tradition call contemplation. (For a history of contemplation within the Christian tradition, readers can look forward to a forthcoming volume from Kevin Hart, titled *Lands of Likeness*.) To contemplate is not to solve problems but to suspend oneself within them (109), and as Barnett perceptively notes, this affirmation of suspended thought works its way into the very form of Kierkegaard's circuitous and demanding upbuilding discourses: "Kierkegaard does not merely endorse *Betragtning* but, quite literally, fosters it. The upbuilding discourses require the reader to slow down, to concentrate, and to open himself or herself up to the presence of the eternal, both in the world and in the self" (111).

Barnett's recommendation of Kierkegaardian contemplation is full of illuminating sentences like these, but it is brief, and some readers may consider it rather thin, especially in comparison to the enormity of the problem at hand. To make such a judgment is, however, to forget Barnett's wider corpus. In fact *From Despair to Faith*, Barnett's 2014 study of Kierkegaard's spirituality, is perhaps the most in-depth scholarly treatment of Kierkegaardian contemplation to date. Read Chapter Four of *From Despair to Faith* on contemplating the natural world and Jenny Odell's book *How to Do Nothing*, and you will be well on your way to recovering your humanity in the face of a world which would like to do nothing more than profit upon its loss

I have focused on what I found most insightful in Barnett's book, which is Kierkegaard's exposé of the limits of a limitless search engine. However, I should mention that *Kierkegaard and the Question Concerning Technology* includes significant material on mass media, public opinion, and the entertainment industrial complex. Perhaps another reader will be attracted to different aspects of Barnett's comprehensive volume. There is much to wrestle with and consider within the pages of *Kierkegaard and the Question Concerning Technology*. Like all great works of scholarship, then, Barnett's book both encourages meditative thinking and gives us much to meditate upon.

Kierkegaard's Muse: The Mystery of Regine Olsen

(Princeton University Press, 2017)

By Joakim Garff, translated by Alastair Hannay

Troy Wellington Smith, University of California, Berkeley

The centennial of Denmark's sale of the West Indian islands Saint Thomas, Saint John, and Saint Croix to the United States in 2017 was commemorated with the publication of *Danmark og kolonierne* (Gads Forlag), a five-volume history of Danish colonialism, and *Blind spots: Images of the Danish West Indies Colony*, an exhibition at the Royal Library in Copenhagen. Although the one-hundredth anniversary of the purchase of what are now known as the US Virgin Islands passed by almost unnoticed in the continental United States, 2017 did see the appearance of an English translation of Joakim's Garff's biography *Regines gåde: Historien om Kierkegaards forlovede og Schlegels hustru* (lit. Regine's mystery: The story of Kierkegaard's fiancée and Schlegel's wife) (Gads Forlag, 2013). The bulk of this narrative is set on the island of Saint Croix, where Regine moved with her husband, Fritz Schlegel, after he assumed governorship of the Danish West Indies in 1855.

Although Regine spent only five years on Saint Croix, Garff chooses to focus on her Caribbean exile, interspersed with flashbacks to her life in Copenhagen before and after her breakup with Kierkegaard. Garff's reasons for doing so become clear in the preface, which provides a frame narrative worthy of Victor Eremita himself:

> One summer evening in 1996 I found myself in the small Lolland town of Søllestad, where I gave a talk on Kierkegaard for high school pupils and interested locals. At the reception that followed, I was introduced to a well-preserved elderly couple, she with carefully arranged hair framing a pair of lively eyes, he unassuming and immaculate, with bowtie and a dark blue blazer, newly pressed, with shining brass buttons. The lady proved to be a grandchild of Regine's elder sister Cornelia, and without warning she made me an offer that took my breath away. If interested, I was more than welcome to read the over one hundred letters that Regine had exchanged with Cornelia during her stay in the Danish West Indies, where her husband had occupied the position of governor for a five-year period. If interested! (xii)

In his *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2005), Garff offered a fresh and stimulating reading of a hitherto published archive, but here, in *Kierkegaard's Muse: The Mystery of Regine Olsen*, he brings private correspondence into print for the first time.

If the reader expects to find Regine baring her soul on the subject of Kierkegaard in these letters, that reader will be disappointed, but when one considers nineteenth-century epistolary practices, such an expectation is perhaps unwarranted. According to Garff,

> It was quite normal at the time for letters to be circulated between members of the family, then to friends and acquaintances wanting to keep abreast of the letter writer's latest news. Cornelia was not necessarily, in other words, the letter's only reader; nor indeed the first, for when Regine had written a letter it sometimes happened that Fritz wanted to add his personal greeting and, if in the mood, he could therefore acquaint himself with the letter's contents—it needed only a quick glance. (13)

Throughout her correspondence with Cornelia, Regine resorts to "a kind of invisible ink" or (in a more Kierkegaardian turn of phrase) "an indirect form of communication" (13). As Garff has proven in his Kierkegaard biography, he is quite adept at decoding messages of this kind. Sometimes, the secrets slip out despite Regine's best intentions. On the first day of 1856, she and her husband received a missive from Kierkegaard's brother, Peter Christian, announcing that Søren's entire estate had been bequeathed to her. That Regine's thoughts dwelled on her ex-fiancé during this period is apparent, as she accidently writes "Copenhagen" next to the date of her 10 January 1856 letter to Cornelia: "Dear beloved Cornelia! Look at what I began to write over my letter; I have wondered that I haven't done so before, especially to begin with, but today it is quite typical, since all my thoughts are in the dear city with you" (qtd. 51).

As one might expect, Fritz refused on Regine's behalf the bulk of the estate, but his wife persuaded him to accept her letters to Kierkegaard, as well as some of the writings to and about her. Once these items are received on St. Croix, they provide an intriguing subtext to letters such as this one, in which Regine writes to Cornelia that "there is a place in my heart that I seldom open up, for I am afraid it will prove stronger than myself, and what is it that lies hidden there? You know without me mentioning it" (qtd. 115).

The letters in *Kierkegaard's Muse* from Regine to Cornelia abound in tantalizing references to what may very well—but not definitively—be Kierkegaard. From what we know about Regine before and after her stay in the West Indies, it does seem that she harbored a life-long preoccupation with her erstwhile fiancé. According to Kierkegaard's journals, there was even a period in which their paths crossed frequently in Copenhagen—in silence, of course—but far too often to be a mere coincidence; and, on her last day in the city before sailing to the West Indies, she tracked down Kierkegaard and said, "God bless you—may all go well with you!'" (qtd. 9). The librarian Julius Clausen reports that in her old age Regine "no longer spoke of Schlegel but only of Kierkegaard" (qtd. 293). That she perceived herself as being entrusted with Kierkegaard's legacy is apparent in her browbeating of a Copenhagen priest who knew nothing of Kierkegaard: "This is unacceptable in an educated man in the country where Kierkegaard was born and worked, and especially so with a pastor in the Danish Church" (qtd. 291).

Ultimately, Regine's letters from the West Indies do not yield any earth-shattering revelations about her relation to Kierkegaard. Regine's "mystery" remains unsolved or, rather, unsolvable. Or perhaps it has been solved already, insofar as the historical record has long contained a number of accounts that would substantiate Garff's speculations about Regine's life-long devotion to Kierkegaard. What makes *Kierkegaard's Muse* indispensable is the portrait of Regine that emerges, from her own hand, in the letters. This portrait is not always a flattering one, particularly when Regine describes the recently emancipated Black people of the Danish West Indies in terms that Fritz, as she admits, would find objectionable, and that are all the more intolerable today. Regine may have been a muse to Kierkegaard, but, in this biography, she steps down from her pedestal and presents herself in her concrete historical situation, as a flesh-and-blood person with vulnerabilities, prejudices, and desires—something she was never allowed to become in Kierkegaard's authorship. Garff lets Regine's letters to speak freely, but he also has a delicate ear for their indirect communication.

As fascinating as these letters are, readers are never permitted to lose themselves entirely in Regine's personality, or in her subtextual relation to Kierkegaard. Garff makes a point of grounding his narrative in the history of the West Indies, starting with Christopher Columbus dropping anchor off of Santa Cruz (or Saint Croix) in 1493, which led to the native people being eradicated on the order of the Spanish King Ferdinand in 1512. After describing the additional horrors of the triangular trade and slavery on the islands, Garff then depicts the

revolt that led Schlegel's predecessor, General-Governor Peter von Scholten, to abolish slavery in the momentous year of 1848. In sum, Garff thankfully has none of the "blind spots" that have typically obscured Danish colonial history in the national consciousness.

In closing, I will permit myself a few words on the English edition. Unfortunately, it is not as richly illustrated as the Danish original, which has more black-and-white reproductions of paintings, drawings, and photographs of persons and locales. With that said, Alastair Hannay has done an admirable job translating Garff, a writer whose love for wordplay and allusion is barely surpassed by Kierkegaard himself. Hannay seamlessly conveys the brio of Garff's prose into elegant and eminently readable English, even if some of the wit has inevitably been lost in translation. How is one to know, for example, that Garff's description of a Neapolitan musical trio as "de fortabte spillemænd" (353) is a reference to William Heinesen's novel of the same name (English trans.: *The Lost Musicians*) if it is translated as "these doomed fiddlers" (224)? John Updike referred to Garff's *Kierkegaard* as an "undeniably a *Danish* biography,"[39] and the same could be said of *Kierkegaaard's Muse*; it presupposes a sound familiarity with Kierkegaard's life and times, although this level of historical sophistication will probably be welcome for the majority of this *Newsletter*'s audience. All in all, *Kierkegaard's Muse* is essential reading for anyone who is familiar with Kierkegaard's biography and wants to learn more about the beloved woman at the heart of his authorship.

[39]. John Updike, "Incommensurability: A New Biography of Kierkegaard," review of *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, by Joakim Garff, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse. *The New Yorker*, March 28, 2005, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/03/28/incommensurability.