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Peter Tudvad

Kierkegaards København

[Kierkegaard's Copenhagen]

Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 2004. 514 pp.

As an historian I cannot but admire this rich, wonderful book, bursting with so much original work in various archives and other source materials, much of it done in conjunction with the production of explanatory notes for the grand edition of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* [Søren Kierkegaard's Writings] now being produced at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre.

When reading Tudvad's book one can at times feel that one is actually *in* Kierkegaard's Copenhagen via what might be called (à la the anthropologist Clifford Geertz) »thick description.« This is a book about Kierkegaard's *Copenhagen*, and not a biography of Copenhagen's Kierkegaard; indeed, it might be called a *prosopography* – i.e., a collective biography – of Golden Age Copenhagen. We are escorted on a series of tours through Kierkegaard's Copenhagen, and along the way Tudvad alludes to – or directly quotes – many passages from Kierkegaard's works, and he does so quite deliberately and self-consciously in more or less arbitrary fashion, without regard to chronological sequence, to pseudonymity or non-pseudonymity – just as long as the Kierkegaard passage reflects the *magister's* connection to the particular aspect of Golden Age Copenhagen that Tudvad is examining in a given chapter.

Near the beginning of this massive book the author tells us that we may read it in any order we like, excepting that we perhaps ought to read chapter 1, »Vejviseren« [City Directory], first. He even says that this is not the sort of book that one necessarily wants to read straight through, or even in its entirety: »An author can scarcely expect that everyone might be tempted to read from start to finish a book of such size and thematic breadth as the present one« (p. 12). For the present reader, at least, this was not the case: I found the book so engaging that I wanted to read it straight through, despite the occasional repetitions (about which Tudvad warns us) from one chapter to another.

Among its many virtues, *Kierkegaards København* is richly and beautifully illustrated, and many of its illustrations are not the usual fare that readers have already seen numerous times in other books on Kierkegaard and the Danish Golden Age. In my view, the book lacked only a single illustration,

namely the black-and-white photograph of the meeting room of the Copenhagen Congregation of Brethren [*Brødremenigheden*], which is reproduced in one of the volumes of *Danmarks Kirker* [Denmark's Churches]. The book's reproductions of Severin Sterm's wonderful maps of Copenhagen – the large map of the entire city, and the smaller maps of the individual neighborhoods – are especially welcome. It would be even better if the next printing of *Kierkegaards København* could include *all twelve* of Sterm's maps of the various Copenhagen neighborhoods, preferably grouped together at one or another point in the book, so that the reader does not have to waste time thumbing back and forth in search of the right map.

Peter Tudvad has been diligent and resourceful in his use of sources and has, for example, made much use of the newspaper *Politivennen*, a refreshing change from the usual concentration on more respectable papers such as *Fædrelandet* and *Berlingske Tidende*. *Politivennen* in fact comes in handy for Tudvad: During a discussion of the amorous traffic between serving maids and the seducers who would like to deprive them of their virtue (e.g., Johannes the Seducer in *Either/Or*), Tudvad is able to produce a surprising parallel with a delightful little piece from *Politivennen*, which laments the unfortunate consequences of such seductions – »when he has satisfied his lust, the seducer usually abandons the deceived girl quite utterly and entirely« (p. 313).

Time after time, Tudvad's conscientious work in source materials yields significant profits, and the reader is the fortunate recipient of many little nuggets. Tudvad is absolutely convincing (pp. 249-50) when he places Kierkegaard's sophomoric comedy *The Battle Between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars* in the context of the Royal Theatre's productions, in the first part of 1837, of *Muurmesteren* [The Mason] (Thomas Overskov's translation of *Le Maçon* by Scribe and Delavigne) and Heiberg's *Recensenten og Dyret* [The Reviewer and the Beast]. Thus, too, the reader is given a nuanced picture of Kierkegaard's relation to the theatre and to actors and actresses, e.g., when Kierkegaard's enthusiasm for Anna Nielsen is used to place his devotion to Mrs. Heiberg in a broader perspective than is often the case (p. 265). And just in time for the bicentenary of Hans Christian Andersen's birth in 2005, we learn that Kierkegaard was not quite so blind to the genius of Andersen's fairy tales as many have believed, because (assuming we can rely upon the report given us by the son of D. A. Nutzhorn, the Kierkegaard family physician) the *magister* repeatedly requested that little Nutzhorn read aloud from Andersen's »Steadfast Tin Soldier.«

I learned a great deal about Kierkegaard's Copenhagen – though, I

must confess, occasionally more than I wanted to know and often more than I could retain. It was fascinating to learn that in the 1840's Kierkegaard was both eligible to vote and eligible to be elected to the Advisory Assembly of Estates that met in Roskilde. But it was not merely fascinating, it was *fantastic* to learn (p. 43) that in the 1846 election, despite the fact that Kierkegaard himself certainly refrained from voting, he nonetheless received 21 of the 658 votes cast – totally unsolicited and against his will! So Kierkegaard indeed had a fan club out there, and it wasn't just a group of theological students or anonymous women – neither of those groups could vote! It seems there were people in Kierkegaard's Copenhagen, more subtle perhaps than Kierkegaard's neanderthal-reactionary friend, Prof. Kolderup-Rosenvinge, who understood the complexities of Kierkegaard's views on public and private, material and spiritual, politics and Christianity. And we know this thanks to Tudvad's painstaking archival research!

Tudvad's instructive tour of the Copenhagen clergy of the period also yields a number of surprises and useful explanations. Thus Tudvad directs our attention to H. D. Kopp's biographical appendix to his collection of Johannes Spang's sermons, which was published in 1847, shortly after Pastor Spang's death, and it becomes clear not only how much Spang owed to his friend Kierkegaard, but also how ready Spang was to confess to others (e.g., Kopp) his indebtedness to Kierkegaard, »a younger friend, the well-known, brilliant author of the many pseudonymous writings that have attracted so much attention« (p. 402). In similar fashion, echoing the work of Niels Jørgen Cappelørn (»Die ursprüngliche Unterbrechung. Søren Kierkegaard beim Abendmahl im Freitagsgottesdienst,« *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1996*), Tudvad's careful account of the religious services connected with the Friday communion (pp. 434–36) is very helpful in explaining the external circumstances surrounding a number of Kierkegaard's sermons. It is very interesting to learn who heard Kierkegaard preach. When Kierkegaard preached, his name was not always announced in advance, but on at least two occasions it was: On those occasions the Copenhagen public knew that Søren Kierkegaard would in fact be the person preaching, and lists of those who registered to take the sacrament on those occasions have been preserved. Peter Tudvad does not give us the actual names of those who signed up for communion, but he does provide a thumbnail sociological sketch of the participants.

I was not, however, especially convinced by Tudvad's explanation (p. 405) of how Kierkegaard's father was able to find spiritual sustenance both

in Pastor Bull (whom Tudvad labels as »rationalistic«) and in the Congregation of Brethren – without ending in self-contradiction. Instead of attempting to explain M. P. Kierkegaard's spiritual meanderings by looking for some sort of theological common denominator, it seems to me to make more sense to assume that Kierkegaard's father was either quite flexible in religious matters and/or that he was an ambitious opportunist who made his ecclesiastical connections wherever he thought they would best serve his other interests – thus he was capable of flirting with Grundtvig and J. C. Lindberg, but he stopped before it became too risky. On the other hand, Tudvad's presentation of M. P. Kierkegaard as a businessman is to my knowledge far the best portrait of that man. Here we can really savor the fruits of Tudvad's labors in the archival vineyards. The subchapter entitled »Hosekræmmeren« [The Hosier] is worth the price of the book all by itself. Never before have I seen so clear an account of what it meant to be a hosier in Copenhagen from ca. 1775 until the 1820's. The degree to which the father's business affairs governed his social and family life is quite surprising.

It is also fascinating to read Henrik Møller's tale (pp. 169-70) of the teasing at the Borgerdyd School to which Kierkegaard was undoubtedly subjected – even if, as a number of other reports seem to suggest, Kierkegaard's own provocative behavior brought at least some of this teasing on himself. In the account Tudvad provides us, Kierkegaard was used as »the rope« in a game of tug-of-war. Møller's anecdote (or rather »legend« [Sagn], since the archival source is entitled »Sagn og Smaatræk fra den møllerske Slægt« [Legends and Little Incidents from the Møller Family]) is entertaining. But despite Tudvad's hopeful remark that it »perhaps reveals that Kierkegaard's uneven trouser legs in reality covered legs of uneven length« (p. 169), this tale cannot possibly account for the supposedly uneven length of Kierkegaard's trouser legs.

Why not? Because an historian must bring along a great deal of skepticism when reading Møller's account, and the present reviewer went to the Danish National Archives for a first-hand look at the document. First of all, it is a third-hand story, »told from recollection« by Christian V. Møller (1845-1925), a retired Bishop of Aalborg, to an unknown person who wrote it down some time between 1918 and 1925; it is a story that claims to be an account of something the elderly C.V. Møller believed he could remember having been told by *his* father, Henrik Møller (1814-1880), a military officer and parish pastor. The story purports to recount an incident that took place when Kierkegaard was a pupil at the Borgerdyd

School, and thus the tale was approximately 100 years old by the time it was written down by an unknown hand.

Furthermore, by the time Henrik Møller recounted this tale to his son, Kierkegaard had become very famous, and everyone wanted to have had something to do with his life story. Witness how Regine Schlegel (née Olsen) manipulated and managed her reputation, both in life and posthumously, as Kierkegaard's one-time fiancée! Thus when the first volume of *Af Søren Kierkegaards efterladte Papirer* [From the Søren Kierkegaard's Posthumous Papers] appeared in 1869, it included an introductory section in which editor H. P. Barfod reprinted reminiscences from Kierkegaard's schoolmates at the Borgerdyd School and from others who had known him. Even then, only 14 years after Kierkegaard's death, it was the »in« thing to have known Kierkegaard, and Kierkegaard's former amanuensis, Israel Levin, was furious that Barfod had not asked him to contribute *his* reminiscences. So by the time Henrik Møller's son, the retired bishop C. V. Møller, related what he said were his father's reminiscences about Kierkegaard to a third person, who wrote them down, a great deal of water had gone under the bridge, and Kierkegaard's uneven gait and supposedly uneven trouser legs had become widely known.

This doesn't necessarily mean that Møller's story is a total fabrication, of course, and in fact it accords somewhat with an account that Kierkegaard's schoolmate Frederik Meidell sent Barfod in 1869, except that in Meidell's version, when Kierkegaard was held by his arms and legs, he was not being used as a »rope« in a tug-of-war but was held down on a school desk while his »behind« was given a »vigorous working-over with rulers, book-straps, etc.« Perhaps Møller took part in this beating, perhaps it was only something he had heard about, perhaps, in either case, he added to it the detail that Kierkegaard's leg had been (permanently?) pulled out of joint, thus tying a schooldays incident to the drawings of Klæstrup and the *Corsair* affair of ca. twenty years later. In any case, the story is at so many removes from the incident it reports that no historian should take it seriously as an explanation of the adult Kierkegaard's physical frame, much less the reputed shortness of one of his trouser legs – for even if he had actually had the deformity implied by Tudvad's »perhaps« reading of Møller's story, surely a wealthy man in his thirties would have paid his tailor to fit his trousers to his legs!

And, while Tudvad's method of thick description generally succeeds, there are times when the laying on of detail is just too much. Readers may thus get rather overwhelmed in chapter 1 (»Vejviseren«) when they are

confronted with name upon name of all those associated with Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard's various residences even *before* Søren was born and are then inundated with the names, occupations, etc. of what would appear to be every known tenant of the big house at Nytorv 2 during Kierkegaard's lifetime. All this information is the fruit of careful archival labor, and much of it is valuable and could be useful to the reader later on, in another context, but who can keep track of all this when it is written into the ongoing narrative of the book? One finds oneself longing for an *electronic* edition of the book, which would facilitate searching and cross-referencing of all these individual names and circumstances. At the very least one finds oneself less than delighted with Tudvad's policy, announced early on, »that the notes are exclusively references to sources, so the reader does not continually need to look in the back of the book to see if information he or she might be interested in is concealed there. On the other hand, people will have to put up with the fact that all this very detailed information is written into the main text« (p. 11). The problem with this policy is that readers thus have no choice but to »put up with the fact« that »all this very detailed information« indeed clutters up the narrative of the main text, where a well-chosen selection of several salient examples would serve to make Tudvad's point – and a *systematic* listing of all this valuable information, without doubt the fruits of many hours of Tudvad's labors at Kierkegaard Research Centre, could best be placed in the notes. There *are* good reasons for detailed scholarly notes, which, for example, could provide the reader a systematic overview of who lived where, when, and with what connection to Kierkegaard and his family.

This situation recurs with a vengeance in chapter 6, which concentrates on the Royal Theatre. Here Tudvad warns his readers in advance that they might perhaps prefer »a nap among the purveyors of food and beverages in the mezzanine or a glass of punch in the foyer« (p. 234), and for once I found his warning justified. This chapter was the only part of the book where I became discouraged and was tempted to leap to the next chapter. The reader is marched through every season of the Royal Theatre, from 1827 to 1855, and is showered with information about which plays were performed, when, and by whom, plus occasional plot summaries, information on translators, etc. – the only requirement being that they have the least connection to anything mentioned or alluded to in anything Kierkegaard ever wrote, published or unpublished. As Tudvad himself has warned us, it is tedious, and the net result is numbing. As with the account of the tenants of Nytorv 2, etc. in chapter 1, the individual bits of infor-

mation in chapter 6 could well prove very valuable, later on, for a reader of Kierkegaard. But no one can remember all these details, so the question is: How can one dig out just what is needed from the many-stranded narrative that constitutes the main text? Once again, the ideal solution might be a searchable electronic edition, but a well-written, extensive *scholarly note*, containing one or more tables, systematically arranged, season by season, author by author, title by title, actor by actor, etc., and keyed to Kierkegaard's writings, published and unpublished, would be inestimably valuable and would rescue Tudvad's careful research from drowning in the sea of words. Chapter 6, like chapter 1, makes a powerful case for the occasional detailed scholarly note.

In the introduction to his book Peter Tudvad insists that one must not »base one's eternal salvation on Kierkegaard's biography, nor on a book about his life and doings in Copenhagen. Nonetheless, one must be able to have confidence that, by virtue of a certain scholarly discipline, a book delivers credible information. An author must check his or her sources by inspecting them personally, subject them to critical investigation, and place them in their historical context before stitching them together to make his or her story« (p. 9). Tudvad next takes up a critical posture vis-à-vis Kierkegaard biographies in which it »is difficult to separate historical truth from literary fiction« (p. 10). At the same time, however, Tudvad does not want to be seen as supporting an oversimplified understanding of the proper use of sources: »Now, people must not think that I believe that I can let the sources speak for themselves. Of course, I must also make an interpretation in order to make the sources capable of telling any sort of coherent story – or, more specifically, a long series of stories. What is of decisive importance is that it be possible for the reader to see the difference between sources and interpretations. Even though I hope that my narrative is not without literary qualities, I nonetheless believe that the lasting value of the book resides in the sources themselves and not in my interpretations« (p. 10).

But despite his admirable management of his sources in many individual contexts, the question is whether Tudvad has properly understood his own task, specifically with respect to the dividing line he draws between »sources,« which in principle are elevated above the possibility of intervention by the observer, and »interpretations,« which are »literary« and, as such, *suspect*. Tudvad sends up warning signals and raises significant doubts with respect to »literary fiction,« while »historical truth« will apparently endure forever. This view compels Tudvad to be terribly modest about his

own efforts: True, he hopes that his »narrative« is not without »literary qualities,« but he nonetheless believes that »the lasting value of the book resides in the sources themselves and not in my interpretations.«

But is this really the way things are? Doesn't Tudvad's radical separation between »sources« and »interpretations« involve a fundamental misunderstanding of the historian's task? Sources do not exist in the absence of interpretation. The number of potential sources is infinite. The mere choice of which concrete »facts« one wishes to place in evidence constitutes the choice of a number of specific circumstances – and by this very fact, the exclusion of other circumstances which could be (and perhaps one day will be) of extraordinary interest to scholarly research. Thus, the very choice of one's sources is the choice of an interpretation, or at the very least, it involves the choice of a specific *sort* of interpretation. And it is more salutary to be honest about this than to insist upon an artificial chasm between »sources« and »interpretations.«

The great merit of Peter Tudvad's *Kierkegaards København* is that the work quite tangibly lays bare a great many »material« circumstances, e.g., matters concerning housing and property, income and occupations, probate and inheritance, census figures, taxation, etc., while also taking us through a number of »cultural« archives, e.g., instructional programs at the University of Copenhagen, the repertoire of the Royal Theatre for the seasons from 1827 through 1855, and various ecclesiastical records. In addition to this must be reckoned Tudvad's accomplishments with an impressive number of personal memoirs, letters, and a great many other materials. These are Tudvad's preferred sources, and to the delight of this reader he has extracted a great deal – and much that is new – from them. But since, in the end, interpretations cannot be separated from their sources, Peter Tudvad could have done an even better job of letting his principal narrative tell his story if he had been willing to admit more volubly to himself and to his readers that he *is* telling a story, that facts *never* speak for themselves, and that to include every known fact in the main narrative in the pursuit of »historical truth« is to chase a will-o'-the-wisp.

And so we come to the crux of the matter: There is a clear connection between Tudvad's cumbersome *practice* of including too much detail in his main text and his erroneous *theoretical assumptions* about the nature of historical writing. Tudvad's book would have succeeded even better than it does if, instead of trying to include everything in the main text, he had directed his reader's attention to a number of striking examples that support his story – and had done so quite without embarrassment about enhancing

his story's »literary qualities,« because selection of sources is itself interpretation, i.e., a »literary« act. Such unabashed selectivity – which involves the confession that historians tell tales for a living, the admission that such tales are »literary fictions,« and the insistence that such *fictions* are not necessarily (and often not at all) *lies* – such unabashed selectivity in the main narrative would have allowed Tudvad to pare down his narrative while supplementing it with a series of systematic and comprehensive scholarly notes in which the whole wealth of his detailed investigations would be more readily available to other researchers and tale-tellers in future years, when they may need to draw upon Tudvad's dearly-bought treasures.

Of course one ought not base one's eternal salvation on »Kierkegaard's biography.« No writer is in a position to produce »Kierkegaard's biography« – only God is capable of that. *Kierkegaard's biography*, the real story of his life, is not accessible to us. What we *can* involve ourselves with, on the other hand, are various *Kierkegaard biographies*. Kierkegaard's biography is thus not something that is written, but something that is written *about*, something that is rewritten, again and again. The goal is not – and cannot be – an »objective« or »historically true« presentation of the *magister's* life, but a presentation, a tale, which is the *most plausible* and the *least unsatisfactory* tale that the author can write on the basis of the available information. There is no end to the process. It is certainly true that historians move *away* from less satisfactory presentations, but they do not move *toward* a perfect presentation. The discipline called »history« consists quite literally in telling »stories.« Writing history does not resemble natural science, but is one of the arts, a narrative art; and with history (including the writing of biographies) as with all narration, what matters is to tell *the* story that takes account of all the relevant material that is known at the time and to knit it together into the particular narrative which, in the opinion of its author, seems most compelling and convincing.

Dear readers, despite these remarks, remember this: Peter Tudvad's book is a topflight portrait of the city of Copenhagen, executed in pointillist style and with Søren Kierkegaard at the center of the canvas. My advice: Go out and buy yourself a copy of *Kierkegaards København*, read it, enjoy it, it's a terrifically good book, an almost inexhaustible gold mine of facts and stories. Take a walk in Tudvad's and Kierkegaard's beloved capital city and city of residence, look in on the markets, listen to the noise of the city, breathe in its scent and its stench – take a walk in *Kierkegaards København!*

Bruce H. Kirmmse

Alastair Hannay

Kierkegaard: A Biography

*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001,
496 pp. with 8 pp. of illustrations and an index.*

We first encounter Søren Kierkegaard on November 28, 1835, rather than, say, up there around Gilleleje three months earlier (reference is made to this time [12, 33, 54-55]). Why? Answers track the tone and mood [*Stemning*] of this imposing, imaginatively crafted »intellectual biography« of intricate dramatic interaction between »*bios*« and »*grafe*,« »*grafe*« and »*bios*.« Here in November at a meeting of the Student Union, University of Copenhagen, twenty-two-year-old Søren is about to speak: »The speaker on this occasion was a slight young man with a shock of light brown hair brushed up rather ridiculously in a crest« (5). Alastair Hannay knows that »[n]o biography is definitive and every biography is inescapably fictional . . .« (439). This recognition admits even escapable fiction as well as freedom from need to draw the line. For instance, among interesting »long shots« is the suggestion that the fact that Regine's Frederik Schlegel was a teacher »may be why Kierkegaard so insists in the prefaces to the discourses that this is exactly what he is not« (206).

Hannay boldly breaks free of »a strictly chronological order« (xii, 186) in ways which help to give life to *this* life. (Life is not all that chronological). Hannay stands imaginatively at a chosen center (»centre of gravity« becomes thematic, 93, 108, 150-152, 331, 345) and looks out and about (»synchronically«) and backwards and forwards (»diachronically«) illuminatingly and provocatively, offering both a non-chronological biography with chronological »inserts« and a chronological biography with non-chronological inserts. A major instance of the former initiates and animates the entire text: that Student Union address, »Our Journal Literature: A Study of Nature in the Light of Midday.«

Hannay thinks »alongside« Kierkegaard. He puts questions to Kierkegaard, questions resulting from his own reflection alongside Kierkegaard; and he elicits Kierkegaard's sometimes reluctant responses. At the same time, he offers interpretive alternatives – and alternatives of alternatives. He asks probing, animating questions. He sets a problem and challenges the reader to think along. The title of Chapter 1, »From Street to Salon: First Blood,« signals a problem – »What was it that drove Kierkegaard to the lectern?« Hannay identifies »a growing desire for literary fame« (6) – and, an impor-

tant aspect of Hannay's approach to Kierkegaard, »his own typically polemical form of intellect« (6). Hannay imagines Kierkegaard saying, »[Y]ou name it, I'll oppose it« (298), and concludes, »The response to his talk to the Student Union was clearly to his satisfaction, and it whetted his appetite. One might even say he now tasted blood« (21). And he liked the taste.

Kierkegaard lives in no »vacuum« in these pages; »uncovering some of the anatomy of the period« (288) is an abiding concern. Consider the carefully-crafted first chapter as an example of the intricate – not to say labyrinthian – texture of the text. Hannay sets the stage (as he himself says, »The stage is now set for our story« [4]) with a cultural and political glimpse of Europe and Denmark at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This leads to the Danish press and to the Student Union. Names are unavoidable, and a constant issue is when to write »to which we will return« (8), »[i]n the next chapter we shall see« (19), and »[b]ut that is to anticipate« (20) – and when to insert a mini-biography (Poul Martin Møller – later, Johan Ludvig Heiberg – soon, Jacob Peter Mynster – later). Looking into Kierkegaard's address, Hannay notes scriptural allusions, imagery, and fastens upon *form* (»formal striving« [12], and, closely related, »unity«), one of the organizing themes of the book. Form implicates »idea.« We are off on the first of many philosophical forays: Hegel, Kant, and Heiberg's mini-biography (»a competent guitar-player,« an instance of the kind of engaging detail with which the book is laden [15]). Hannay presents the importance of Heiberg for Kierkegaard with philosophical focus on aesthetics and Hegel ever lurking (15–19), referring to Heiberg as »Copenhagen's best-qualified candidate for the position of local Lessing« (284). Hannay returns to Kierkegaard's address and picks out certain ideas, themes, and portents – »the leap,« »unity,« »individual life,« »liking for polemic,« »eye for an opponent's faults,« and »opportunities to score points« (19–21). He traces the aftermath of the talk in an exchange of newspaper articles in early 1836, introducing Orla Lehmann and Johannes Hage and further exemplifying Kierkegaard's »just plain polemics and an exercise in the art of scoring points« (23). Young Kierkegaard's irony, humor, wit, and playfulness (which could be mean – »First Blood«) are appropriately displayed. From this chapter forward into the seventeen which follow, form will keep the discussion company, together with the Student Union talk in which Hannay found form (30, 38, 41, 45, 53–54, 56–57, 75, 171, 329–331, 336, 430–431, 435).

As Chapter 1 instances, chapter titles matter. They are imaginative and suggestive – and explicated in the text. Michael Pedersen writes in a letter

to son Peter Christian, »I do not know what the matter is with Søren« (45). The specific »matter« is why Søren does not write to Peter. But the title of Chapter 2, »The Matter with Søren,« intends the ambiguity – »matter« as trouble, problem (all those years at the university) and »matter« as substance, something which mattered to Søren, something to which he could give himself. The careful organization of this chapter is, again, representative. From the father and two sons living together at 2 Nytorv in the mid-1830s – Hannay is splendid on the relationships among the three, we move to a rehearsal of the many deaths. »Now, just as the twenty-two-year-old Søren is at long last beginning to make his mark – we are still in the period between the autumn of 1835 and early spring of 1836 – deaths in the family are about all he can remember« (32). (The present tense places the reader in the midst of the on-going drama.) Hannay offers a penetrating, sensitive account of the Kierkegaard family deaths. Consider this insightful, well-turned sentence of which there are many: »Death had meant more than the departure of the dear, it had also removed the insulation of numbers and left these three disparate survivors too close to each other« (33). Here as elsewhere mini-biographies are housed within mini-biographies housed within ... We are introduced to the »careers« of Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard (in the context of which Jakob Peter Mynster is introduced) and of Peter Christian Kierkegaard (where Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig appears). As with brother Peter, Hannay accords figures in Kierkegaard's life some dimension – more than mention – and keeps Kierkegaard in complex relational context. Søren's background (for we met him at age twenty-two) and consideration of the relationship between the brothers allow for introductions of Frederick Christian Sibbern, Poul Martin Møller, Peter Wilhelm Lund, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, and Hans Lassen Martensen. Hannay concludes this chapter with perceptive comments on the *significances* of Kierkegaard's journals (52-56) – Hannay is good generally with the journals (see 168-170, 324), not surprisingly for one who has translated a big book, *Papers and Journals: A Selection* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 683 pp. – including Kierkegaard's quest for wholeness, unity, form, shape, and very much the *matter* with Søren. From the center of the Student Union address, this excellent chapter looks back to work its way back up to November, 1835: »This then was the state of the Kierkegaard household when the younger Kierkegaard faced his audience in the Student Union that November evening in 1835« (56). From this center, Hannay moves forward but does not forget to look back (106, 116, 139, 329-331). Thus, we back up to catch up with young

Kierkegaard. We then fumble forth with him in search of some sense of direction.

Here are more examples of chapter-title fecundity. Chapter 4, »The Wild Geese Fly,« concludes, »The same day that he noted the passing of Poul Møller (April, 1838), Kierkegaard wrote: ‘This morning I saw in the fresh cool air a dozen wild geese fly away, first they were right overhead, then further and further and finally they separated into two flocks and arched themselves like two eyebrows over my eyes, which now gazed into the land of poesy’« (100). Hannay moves readily from »poetry« to »writing« in Kierkegaard (100, 139, 151) and implies that the death of Møller – as well as his life – helped provide impetus for Kierkegaard to find a sense of direction (98, 103, 119), to fly away from the family home and to go with the geese.

Chapter 7, »The Breach and Berlin: *Either/Or*,« reminds us that there are different breaches and different either/ors. There is the breach with Regine. There is the breach with »actuality« dialectically related to the possibility of an »actual« self (169). There is the either/or of either Regine or Søren – »one of them would have to lose« (155). There is the either/or of either Regine or writing – another version of »either Regine or Søren« (166–167, 175, 202). There is the either/or of *Either/Or* which, as Hannay sees, is not an either/or at all: the sermon in the »Ultimatum« is accorded appropriate importance (176–178, 186–188, 195, 199, 208, 430).

Chapter 9, »More to Being,« offers a bit of biography and discussions of *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments*. Comments on *Fragments* are especially helpful. For instance: »The God-man may signify several things: man’s ideal of himself (Feuerbach), man’s divinity (maybe Strauss), or God’s humanity. The first two imply that Being is within our grasp, but the latter raises the stakes; it says there is more to Being than we can grasp« (241). Thus the title and the irony-paradox-dialectic that »less« can be a way to this »more.« Hannay refers perceptively to »self-activity (though paradoxically in the form of self-annihilation [282]).« He observes acutely, »for the polemicist the centre of gravity is always elsewhere« (87), hence the irony and the pain for one who views the aesthete as externally dialectical and advocates a choice of self, the internally dialectical, which, Christianly, turns out to be empty (the decisive paradox of »self-activity – self-annihilation«).

An entire chapter devoted to *Prefaces* – Chapter 10, »Notabene’s Meditation« (see 250) – may come as a surprise, but Hannay does pay attention to Nicolaus Notabene (265, 269, 283, 304, 319).

Chapter 12 is »Concluding Business.« »Business« – as in »unfinished business« – implies that Kierkegaard was racing anticipated death. »Time might be short« (277–278, 312–313).

Hannay's approach to the pseudonyms is obviously crucial. He points out regarding *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments* (he prefers »crumbs«): »at first Kierkegaard intended neither of these works to be pseudonymous. Does that mean that whatever reasons finally decided him to make them so were not the same as those that had led him to pseudonymity in the previous works?« (207–208). But a note for »Problemata« (*Fear and Trembling*) was once »af S. Kierkegaard« (IV B 60). The substantial discussion of *The Concept of Anxiety* (212–227) recognizes Vigilius – after a fashion (»Kierkegaard in the guise of his pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis [»the wide-awake Copenhager«] [216, see 221, 225]); but Hannay feels free to refer to Kierkegaard as the author, moving back and forth. In the context of *Fragments*, Hannay comments, »Kierkegaard ...under the flimsy disguise of his pseudonym...« (236, see 242–243). Is a »last-minute« pseudonym (227) a »thin« pseudonym, a »doesn't-really-count« pseudonym? Or is a last-minute pseudonym a pseudonym to be respected nonetheless? A vote for the latter respects the »First and Last Explanation« but also allows for dissonance. If one begins with discrete voices, one can move toward localized accord; if one begins with »Kierkegaard says,« one has foreclosed on all appreciation of diversity. Hannay speaks to the issue (see 277, 314, 383–384) and refers, curiously, to »the inconvenience of inventing pseudonyms« (344) – in the invention of which delight surely outdistanced »inconvenience.«

Regarding that all-important sense of direction, Hannay refers to »the one single theme that continues throughout Kierkegaard's intellectual life, namely his concern to protect religion from philosophy« (195) and suggestively sees this theme as a tribute to and gesture of atonement with his father. Let us see this significant insight as *one* important element in Kierkegaard's sense of direction. To the same point: »One particular question is, was the religion [»his father's religion«] keeping its hold on him or was he keeping his hold on it? (203). Both. »Kierkegaard is saving a place for the religion of his father, a religion of 'personality' and of resolute faith, open to anyone – except for intellectuals for whom the term has lost all meaning. A certain anti-intellectualism is being asserted here, too, except that it is put into the learned hands of Climacus, a would-be philosopher« (237, see 208). »Certain« must be the operative word, but it will almost certainly be upstaged by »anti-intellectualism« which will eclipse also the important »except.«

This is a formidable book, challenging to write (and to read), by one who is »a suitably erudite biographer« (viii) – and much more. Correlative power is impressive. Churches, pastors, apartment addresses, streets, geography – all are present in this packed account. Hannay maintains a serviceable sense of where he is in Kierkegaard's life (»still seven years away,« »five years later« (85–86). The structure is inventive and complex, informed by perceptive integration of the authorship. The author's capacity to move from particularity to panorama and back again is fruitful as the wedding of *bios* and *graphie* witnesses throughout. A vivid instance is the question Hannay asks of the *Postscript*: »An elaborate joke? Hardly. Why should Kierkegaard spend eight months of what he feared might be the last year of his life preparing a party trick he might never enjoy, and an untopical jest at that, since Hegel's star had long been in decline?« (310, see 297).

Hannay invites us to begin – again – to appreciate the staggering accomplishment of those years in the 1840s. The mysteries, the gaps in the journals (68, 96, 101), and the Big Questions (Indescribable Joy, Great Earthquake, Broken Engagement, etc.) are contextualized and lower-cased. A word concerning the broken engagement: Hannay submits, »for Kierkegaard any sense of love in an erotic form ...seems to have been out of the question. For that he would actually have to fall in love, and ...Kierkegaard was too full of reflection and preoccupation for anything so spontaneous to occur« (154). »She said: Kiss me. I did – but without passion – Merciful God!« (158). Does not that »Merciful God!« suggest that passion – erotic passion – was present? Hannay discerns that even before the engagement, writing was apparently winning (137). If so, Kierkegaard needed the engagement to find that out. Is the distinction among kinds of love so tidy? Erotic love was there, a significant part of the problem. The proposal seems to have been spontaneous – for one who lived on the other side of the world from spontaneity. From the consequences of such spontaneity Kierkegaard had somehow to extricate himself.

»Erudite biographer« and more: Hannay has translated many fascinating and diverse passages. Translation is a major aspect of this book. Philosophical virtuosity is everywhere in evidence. Hannay consistently moves from life narrative to philosophical discussion and back. A significant part of this biography reads as if it were part of Hannay's largely philosophical introduction to Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard* (London, Routledge, 1991, in Ted Honderich, ed., *The Arguments of the Philosophers*, 1982). Kierkegaard's relationship to Hegel is very much part of Hannay's agenda; and, in Hannay's hands, Hegel keeps being departed from by Kierkegaard but finally

never does decisively go away. Hannay insists on dangling Hegel in front of us and contends that Kierkegaard does the same (see 460–461, n. 72). How much of Kierkegaard one can find philosophically when one looks around – how much of Kierkegaard and yet not Kierkegaard; for Kierkegaard can make philosophy sing – and not alone philosophy. Hannay knows this (in the same breath, he refers twice to »Johannes’s magnificent writings« [310–311]); and much of the significance of his book is secured in the recognition that »Kierkegaard was as much a writer as a thinker« (x). Largely for this reason that spark called »Kierkegaard« is alive in Hannay’s pages.

The style varies from homey to abstruse – from »other things were afoot« (3), »which side their bread was buttered on« (7), »messing up his life« (36), »a very rare bird« (106), »cocking a snook« (149), »in the know« (193), »stick to his guns« (251), »[t]he long and the short of it« (274) to »as complex in the intertwining of the contraposed attitudes it expresses as any text can be« (403). Substitute »life« for »text« and think of Kierkegaard. Bishop Mynster dies and is lauded as a »witness to the truth.« Hannay muses, »One might say either of two things: it was too much for Kierkegaard, or it was just what he was waiting for, the moment for decisive action« (401–402). Surely the appropriate response, as in so many other instances, is: Both.

Questions arise. We are at a party at the Heibergs on June 4, 1836, and Kierkegaard and Poul Møller are present. Hannay writes, »It may have been then that Møller, with whom he [Kierkegaard] was *still* on close terms . . .« (69, italics added). This seems to imply a break. What break? Then in the context of Kierkegaard’s *Jyllandsrejse*, as Kierkegaard spends the night on the return journey at Them Kro (August 4, 1840), Hannay tells us, »He was invited by an acquaintance, Elias C. F. Ahlefeldt-Laurvigen, to his estate, Vestergaard in Langeland, where he also met . . .« (133). This reads as if Kierkegaard did indeed journey to Langeland; but evidence is wanting, and a side trip is unlikely. The calendar is another consideration if Kierkegaard was back in Copenhagen the evening of August 6.

The »Edifying Discourses« are noted but do not receive the consideration of the pseudonymous works (203, 337, 387). (We are told that two discourses were published in »the middle of May [1843] while he [Kierkegaard] was in Berlin [second trip]« [203] but also that »they came out two days before Kierkegaard left for Berlin« [205]. Kierkegaard departed on this second trip to Berlin on May 8; the discourses were published May 16).

Puzzlingly, Hannay writes, »*Fear and Trembling* assumes that Abraham is

a hero . . . » (194, see 196), whereas Johannes *de silentio* strives to separate Abraham from construal as any kind of »hero.« Those fifth-of-the-month (Kierkegaard's birthday was May 5) entries in *Stages on Life's Way* are not mined for autobiographical implications, although Hannay acknowledges that *Stages* is »a deeply personal work« (275).

Hannay is generous in giving credit to colleagues. (Great Kierkegaard scholars of earlier days are largely absent). The »Preface« might serve more helpfully as an »Appendix.« Consideration of the challenges of »intellectual biography« (viii) – though »intellectual« has not been permitted to become part of the title – accompany intertwinings of *bios* and *grafe* complicated by pseudonymity. Keep an eye on the treatment of Kierkegaard's relationship with Regine, with his father, with his brother Peter, with Mynster, with Hegel, and with Christian faith. (Something is going on with Walter Scott [108, 325]).

What is Hannay up to in placing »To whom this may concern« and a line from the *Aeneid* in a rectangular box opposite the »Contents«? Is this a »repetition« of another rectangle – in *Repetition* when Constantin Constantinus proffers a calling card, »To Mr. X, Esq. [»*Velbyrdige Hr. N. N.*«] the real reader of this book« – introducing his »Concluding Letter«? What of the line from Virgil: »*adflictus vitam in tenebris luctuque trahebam / et casum insontis mecum indignabar amici*« (*Aeneid* II.92) – »I dragged on my ruined life in darkness and grief, wrathful in my heart over the fate of my innocent friend« (Virgil, *Ecllogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 323)? The speaker is Sinon, a Greek youth, who is deceiving the Trojans into receiving the Greek gift horse inside their gates. Sinon's »innocent friend,« Palamedes, has been slain by the Trojans. »To whom this may concern«: who knows the layers of meaning here? Alastair Hannay and »To whom this may concern«? At the risk of disqualifying myself as one such »whom,« could one layer be an »indirect communication«? One can imagine a Kierkegaard saying, »I dragged on my ruined life in darkness and grief«; but this does not adequately capture the complexity of Hannay's sense of Kierkegaard (in the same sentence, »malice« and »glee« [256], in another sentence, »vanity« and »loyalty« [269]). What of »wrathful in my heart over the fate of my innocent friend«? Who could this »innocent friend« be (assuming biographical implication)? Regine? *Another* Kierkegaard? The Kierkegaard who might have married Regine? But Sinon deceives. Indirect communication indeed. Suppose we change »wrathful« to »grateful« (or to wrathful-grateful), grateful that I did not become that other

Kierkegaard; and though I dragged my ruined life in darkness and grief, this life has been strangely delivered and also sees light and joy. »To whom this may concern« ...

Hannay gives us some help. Duly considering that »revocation« and »First and Last Explanation« at the end of the *Postscript*, he wonders,

Can't we find some »essential« reason for the polypseudonymity that doesn't leave the texts just floating about for anyone to do what they will with them? ... [in looking at *Either/Or*, Hannay finds Kierkegaard's »plan« to be »... to have readers read their own experience into the work as well as they can« (172): does this open dangerously the hermeneutical door?] It is easy enough to see how Kierkegaard's explanation can lead one to think that the whole authorship...is simply let loose on the world to mean, at any time and in any circumstance, what it may – »to whom it may concern.« But what if their concerns are not his? Might not Kierkegaard's denial that the words are his own be better explained by his realization of the inextricability of his involvement than by any desire to sever the texts from their origin? (314).

So the denial is motivated by a realization of its futility rather than by hope for its success? One might own the paradox by suggesting – yet again: »Both.« Hannay: »Kierkegaard jealously guarded freedom to decide for himself what to make of his 'authorship.' Perhaps ... he hoped it would amount to something, and he was damned if he was going to let others decide what that was« (315, see 256–258, 268, 341, 344–345, 366–368). Hannay is right to wrestle here – as Kierkegaard wrestled with a kind of controlled, guided, shepherded freedom, a highly controlled forfeiture of control in relation to that ever-ruminated-upon »reader,« »to whom it may concern« (with Regine never far away). Freedom makes the authorship sparkle and dance; framework makes it »work.« »To whom it may concern« sets free »To whom it concerns not at all« as well as »To whom it may concern.« We are near the »take it or leave it« theme in Kierkegaard, which Hannay discusses in the context of the oddly self-effacing »*Postscript*« to the »Preface« of *From the Papers of One Still Living* together with the related and enigmatic declaration on the title page: »Published / Against His Will« (101–106). In this »*Postscript*,« where Hannay finds Kierkegaard »withdrawing even before he starts« (104), Kierkegaard writes that readers might skip the preface »and skip so far that they skipped over the dissertation too, which wouldn't matter« (104). Hannay: »Take it or leave it, he

seems to be saying« (104, see 149-152). And why? Hannay effectively identifies and focuses upon this central issue. Then comes a page and a half in which he steps aside from Kierkegaard – or does he? – to Descartes, Hegel, and Wittgenstein and to worry about »relativism« (105) and »the place of rational thought in human understanding« (106). (This is one of several discussions which are, perhaps, more confusing than clarifying at least in relation to Kierkegaard's own thought).

Why all this literary posturing? Not to belittle »the place of rational thought in human understanding« but to suggest »where the limits of philosophy lie« (100). To abnegate authority. To respect the pseudonyms. Finally, to intimate that defense is betrayal. Defense of that which is good enough to take care of itself is betrayal of that very goodness. In this light, Kierkegaard can take care of himself. Hannay allows for that. What Kierkegaard does with his authorship, Hannay does with the authorship's author. He keeps a respectful distance, which Kierkegaard would have respected. Hannay does not make things easier. He does not give us *a* Kierkegaard. He does not present us with *a way* through Kierkegaard's works. He makes things more difficult – *à la* Johannes Climacus (see 300-301) – by suggesting *ways into* the person and *into* the works: »The author's hope is, in the spirit of one of his subject's pseudonyms, to have provided at least enough biographical and expository material to make the task of arriving at final judgments ... not so much easier as more difficult, and therefore more rewarding« (xiii). Hannay succeeds grandly. He highlights the essential recognition that »Kierkegaard the writer is evidently enjoying himself« (64). He gives us a Kierkegaard in shepherded freedom.

The text is an interweaving of many strands and stories – as are lives – and displays an eye for threads of continuity and connectedness. In a richly suggestive assessment which binds *bios* and *grafe*, Hannay writes,

...Kierkegaard haunts his works like a ghost *unable* to free itself, which some would agree was the very essence of ghostliness. That may be his and the works' great strength, and the reason why his art is so radical. If to master one's irony is to retain what one has written as a »moment« in one's own development, then in order to share that development with the reader one must tip the reader continually forward, or backward, to as-yet indeterminate centres of gravity that converge on the author's own (152, see 171, 175-177).

The view that pseudonymity secures »centres of gravity« encounters the view that the pseudonymous works – ironically and deliberately – defer centers of gravity or project them beyond themselves (151). Cannot something like a »center of gravity« in a pseudonymous work be the basis for leverage which »tips« the work beyond itself? And those »moments« – must they be moments in Kierkegaard's own past for us to say he haunts the works – sometimes autobiographically and sometimes in imaginative union with the human? In any case, prepare to be tipped.

Hannay tours briefly interpretative approaches which »invite us to read Kierkegaard from somewhere quite far from his elbow. The nearer we approach his elbow and catch glimpses of what steered it both to [*bios*] and on [*graphie*] the page, the less easy it is to ...[catagorize this writer]« (439). Hannay invites and enables us to risk reading nearer to the elbow.

David Cain

Robert L. Perkins (ed.)

International Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love

Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999; x + 378 pp.

In his recent biography of Kierkegaard, Alastair Hannay describes *Works of Love* as the creation of »a writer at the peak not only of his literary and intellectual powers but of what might be called a power of moral psychological insight.«¹ The growing critical attention to *Works of Love* suggests that readers of Kierkegaard are increasingly coming to agree with this appraisal of a book which, perhaps more than any other in his entire corpus, forces us to discontinue the myth that the theoretical and the edifying can be neatly separated. One of the chief merits of this set of essays is to show that *Works of Love*, a treatise in religious ethics, ought to be regarded as a contribution to philosophy in many other areas as well: including, for instance, metaphysics and epistemology. Among the best essays in the collection – indeed, among the best in the entire *International Kierkegaard Commentary* series – are two that focus upon the metaphysical and epistemological aspects of Kierkegaard's magnum opus: »Kierkegaard's Ontology of Love« by Arnold B. Come (pp. 79–119) and »'Believing All Things': Kierkegaard on Knowledge, Doubt, and Love« by Anthony Rudd (pp. 121–136). In his incredibly rich essay, Come explains that, for Kierkegaard,

the experience of God as Love provides us with »phenomenological insight« (p. 116) into the nature of the »ultimate dynamic that permeates and qualifies« all things (p. 91). Since this conception of being »requires a language peculiar to itself« (p. 83), it is appropriate that *Works of Love* is written in a voice different from that of scholastic ontology. Similarly, in his essay Rudd discusses the sense in which Kierkegaard »gives an ethical application« to traditional epistemological terms in his account of what it means for love to believe all things (p. 121). This does not mean that ordinary conviction is formed by a »conscious effort of the will,« but that in an existential sense »it is only after the possibility of doubting has arisen« that one can consciously adopt an attitude of trust and interpret all actions in a charitable light despite the objective grounds for uncertainty (p. 133; cf. 123, 127). If this sounds like an echo of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, it is no accident: a secondary thesis of Rudd's paper is that there is a connection between the spiritual exhortation found in *Works of Love* and the conceptual elucidations which appear in some of the pseudonymous writings.²

Begonya Sàez Tajafuerce goes further than Rudd, arguing that the persuasive effect of Kierkegaard's text depends upon its linguistic success in communicating a message that could not be expressed in a less poetic way. As she points out, it is an aesthetic challenge to render love as beautiful as it truly is (»Rhetoric in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*,« pp. 305–337, esp. 311). The social and political dimensions of *Works of Love* are the topic of contributions by Lee Barrett (»The Neighbor's Material and Social Well Being in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*,« pp. 137–165) and Mark Dooley (»The Politics of Exodus,« pp. 167–192), the latter of which includes a fine treatment of related themes in Derrida. The implications of *Works of Love* for an ethics of intersubjectivity are also the focus of a comparative essay by Michael Oppenheim, in which Kierkegaard is fruitfully brought into dialogue with Levinas, Buber, and Rosenzweig (»Four Narratives on the Interhuman,« pp. 249–278): what comes across as most striking in this article are the correspondences between Kierkegaard and Rosenzweig. Ronald Green and Theresa Ellis examine the role of unselfish love in more intimate relationships, in a co-authored essay (»Erotic Love in the Religious Existence-Sphere,« pp. 339–367) which has quite a bit more in common with Ellis's impressive undergraduate thesis than with Green's unfortunate study of Kierkegaard and Kant.³ Other noteworthy contributors include Andrew Burgess and M. Jamie Ferreira, and the anthology as a whole is concluded with a helpful index.

In short, the *International Kierkegaard Commentary to Works of Love* happens to contain a number of valuable essays. Like other volumes in the series, however, it fails to live up to its name: those in search of a commentary that proceeds chapter by chapter through the text ought to look elsewhere, for instance, to *Love's Grateful Striving* by Ferreira. And this collection is not exactly international, either: all but one of thirteen essays are written by scholars from English-speaking countries. It would be nice to see something by Pia Søltøft or Sylviane Agacinski – but this would mean opening up a discussion of the continuities and contradictions *within* Kierkegaard's corpus, or of the ways in which he is *not* akin to Kant. And it seems that the editor, Robert L. Perkins, is in favor of interpretations that stay within a limited frame of reference. The result is that certain areas are overdone, while others are not done at all. If Adorno's essay on *Works of Love* can be dismissed in one phrase – as the editor says, he gets it almost »entirely wrong« (p. 6) – then why should we be given, not one, not two, but three full essays which go into detail engaging with Adorno's critique only to conclude that it is mistaken? This is not the only reason to suspect the editor's judgment, either: he also permits his authors to ascribe to »Kierkegaard« a number of pseudonymous quotations, and to import conservative theological views which are not at home in Kierkegaard's thought. In his introduction, Perkins characterizes Kierkegaard as a »Good Lutheran« and Kant as »another Lutheran« (p. 4): this is a dubious pairing of one thinker who complained that Luther turned Christianity upside down and another for whom God is confined within the limits of reason alone, but such is the editorial discretion we are faced with in the *IKC* series. For all of its philosophical emphasis, this collection has almost nothing to say about the 19th-century German idealists, or about more recent thinkers for whom love is a central theme (e.g., Scheler and Marion). There is little engagement with psychoanalytic theory, or with the mystical tradition extending from Pseudo-Dionysius to Nicholas of Cusa. Such additional inquiries would better our understanding of Kierkegaard's moral psychology, and of his radically original vision of human existence as grounded in love. It is not possible to do everything in one volume, but the sins of omission are too conspicuous to be overlooked in this case. A few of the subjects that are not covered in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary to Works of Love* are explored by Kierkegaard scholars in other works; all of them indicate promising directions for future research.

Rick Anthony Furtak

1. *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 364.
2. Rudd's sarcastic dismissal of the »ironic« readings of the Climacus authorship, as represented especially by James Conant (see page 129), should not be missed by anyone concerned about this particular debate.
3. See Theresa M. Ellis, »'A Kiss Which Was Something More than a Peck': Kierkegaard's Embrace of Romantic and Erotic Love in the Pseudonymous and Religious Writings,« Dartmouth College honors dissertation, 1997; Ronald M. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

David Mercer

Kierkegaard's Living-Room: Between Faith and History in *Philosophical Fragments*

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, 207 pp.

David Mercer's *Kierkegaard's Living-Room* is a contribution to the strand of Kierkegaard scholarship that regards Kierkegaard's corpus as a rhetorically unorthodox presentation of Protestant orthodoxy. As such, Mercer's project bears some similarity to the work of Arnold Come, David Gouwens, and even Niels Thulstrup. Mercer contends that Kierkegaard's entire authorship is an elaboration of a theologically »conservative« type of Christianity, in that it makes the historically specific incarnation of God in Jesus Christ the central motif, rather than reducing Christianity to moral ideals, amorphous religious experience, or an immanent historical teleology. For Mercer, the unique feature of Kierkegaard's writing, distinguishing it from other traditional theologies, is its persistent concern to preserve the freedom of the reader to respond to the incarnation with either faith or offense.

Most of *Kierkegaard's Living-Room* is concerned with one aspect of Kierkegaard's exploration of the theme of incarnation: the relationship of faith and history, particularly as it is explored in *Philosophical Fragments*. Mercer claims that the full complexity of this issue has not been addressed in previous Kierkegaard scholarship. For Mercer, the elusive issue of faith's relationship to history remains the unacknowledged »elephant in the living-room« of Kierkegaard scholarship.

According to Mercer, a crucial connection exists between the attribution of decisive existential significance to a specific historical event and the ascription of existentially critical freedom to a self. Kierkegaard, using the persona of Climacus to make this formal point apart from the material par-

ticularities of Christian belief in the incarnation, argues that the two themes necessarily entail one another. According to the argument concerning the possibility of freedom, freedom requires a non-necessary historical event as an object for choice. The self can be free only if history is not governed by an internal necessity, for the prospect of Hegelian-like historical necessity only invites aesthetic observation and despairing resignation rather than passionate choice. Also, the individual's own development in its most significant dimensions must be free of any internal teleological necessity. Consequently, a truly personally momentous use of freedom requires that the individual encounter an external event in response to which it can exercise its freedom in the making of a decisive choice. The most momentous use of freedom can only be a response to a contingent historical event, described in the language of Climacus as the product of the free agency of »the god« (and not to the entire sweep of history as an ineluctable process), in which »the eternal truth« enters time. For a truly free, uncoerced response to this historical event to be possible, its true nature must be sufficiently ambiguous that empirical evidence does not compel a particular response. Certain knowledge of the true nature of the event would coerce assent, thereby destroying the opportunity for a decision. According to the parallel argument for the possibility of an existentially decisive historical event, an historical event can only have such significance if the »truth« is not socratically located within the individual, but is external to the individual's self-consciousness. If the truth is not socratically within the individual, it cannot arise automatically in the individual's life through any inherent teleology. Consequently, the »truth« which confronts the individual as an historical event must be intentionally appropriated by a free act. The decisive event in history must have as its counterpart the moment of decision in the life of the individual. Mercer concludes that the decisiveness of an historical event requires an exercise of freedom as the appropriate response, and conversely that the decisiveness of freedom requires an historical event as its appropriate object.

Mercer reminds us that Climacus' project is the exploration of a set of formal relationships between hypothetical themes. When this argument is clothed in its »historical dress« elsewhere in Kierkegaard's literature, it suggests that the possibility of Christian faith requires an object in history, namely, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the argument of *Philosophical Fragments* warns that no amount of alleged historical evidence can prove, or even render probable, the reality of this incarnation. Paradoxically, the incarnation must be in history, but not demonstrable by

history. Even for the generation of contemporaries, the coming of the eternal into time could not be a matter of direct observation without destroying the possibility of the free response of faith. As Mercer notes, Kierkegaard adds that any such historical certainty is impossible even if it were desirable, for no type of historical causation is directly observable, particularly not such extraordinary causation. History provides faith with its object, but not with its certainty. History only furnishes the awareness that an event happened (in this case the birth of a child) and that certain mysterious claims were made about this event.

The necessarily inconclusive nature of historical evidence leads Mercer to consider another issue. If historical data does not provide the grounds for belief, something else must provide the momentum. At this point Mercer elaborates one of his more distinctive and controversial contentions. He argues that, in order for belief in the incarnation to have a ground, the god must provide the »condition,« which, according to Mercer, is faith. To justify this claim, Mercer distinguishes two different uses of the Danish word »Tro,« maintaining that sometimes Kierkegaard uses the word to suggest »faith,« and sometimes to suggest the very different concept »belief.« Although Mercer's own use of these concepts is sometimes slippery, by »faith,« he seems to mean a direct experiential encounter with Jesus Christ, in which the past historical event of Jesus' earthly existence becomes contemporaneous with the individual in the present. God first graciously provides this immediate encounter with the eternal deity incarnate in Jesus, and then the individual must freely choose whether to believe that this experience is true and valid or not. »Belief« seems to be the voluntary, freely chosen assent to and appropriation of that which was encountered in faith. Faith, in the sense of the encounter, makes the response of either belief or offense possible.

In general, Mercer's main contention that, at least for Climacus, freedom and the contingent historicity of a crucially significant event are correlative concepts is important and convincing. Mercer draws attention to the ways in which, for Kierkegaard, the dynamics of history, particularly the pivotal nature of freedom and the »moment,« reflect the dynamics of the life of the self, and vice versa. One does wonder, however, whether this insight is as novel as Mercer claims that it is. Perhaps the »elephant in the living-room« had already been noted, described, and even domesticated by Arnold Come and others. But even if this is so, the singularity with which Mercer untangles the multiple intricate connections between faith and history is admirable and helpful.

Mercer's subordinate thesis concerning the relationship of faith and belief is provocative but does require more clarification and investigation. It may indeed be the case that Climacus' enigmatic remarks about »faith« as »the condition« do refer to some type of direct experiential encounter with the incarnate one, but that is by no means clear. Climacus' text seems to be sufficiently underdetermined to sustain several different construals of what »the condition« might mean. Mercer would need to provide more textual or extra-textual evidence to defend his experiential reading against plausible alternatives.

Also, at times Mercer may not pay sufficient attention to the particularities of the rhetorical contexts and purposes of Climacus' various remarks about »faith« and »the condition.« For example, Mercer presents Climacus as being a more or less straightforward Arminian, believing that God first supplies grace to the individual, who then freely accepts or rejects it. This reading may overly systematize Climacus and fail to do justice to those passages in which the individual is encouraged to take no credit at all for faith, and to gratefully ascribe all responsibility to God. Sometimes in *Philosophical Fragments* the »condition« seems to be such a pure gift that all talk of personal agency is eclipsed. Climacus maddeningly juxtaposes the descriptions of faith as a gift and faith as a task, employing the rhetoric of passivity as well as the rhetoric of activity without synthesizing them. More attention to Climacus' purposes in sometimes stressing human responsibility while at other times emphasizing divine agency might do more to clarify the meaning of »the condition« than the attempt to schematize faith, freedom, and belief in a sequential pattern.

Lee C. Barrett

Jørgen Bukdahl

Søren Kierkegaard and the Common Man

*ed. and trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse, William B. Eerdmans,
Grand Rapids MI, 2001, xviii + 154 pp.*

This translation of Jørgen Bukdahl's *Søren Kierkegaard og den menige mand* will be a welcome addition to the libraries of all English-speaking Kierkegaard students, helping them to get access to Kierkegaard in his historical setting and to explore ways to apply the social and political impli-

cations of his work. Although Bukdahl's work was originally published in 1961 and later revised in 1996 – both editions in the Søren Kierkegaard's *Populære Skrifter* series – it deserves a wider readership than it has had this far. Bruce Kirmmse's short introduction about Kierkegaard's life, together with his extensive annotation to Danish figures and movements of the period, renders the book accessible even to readers beginning their study of Kierkegaard, transforming Bukdahl's 1961 monograph into a text for specialist and neophyte alike.

The thesis of the book is simple: Kierkegaard's frequent protests that he is writing on behalf of the »common man« get to the core of his message. Bukdahl argues that Kierkegaard is more revolutionary than Marx, only in a more basic way. The approach Kierkegaard takes in his religious writings, addressing them to »the individual,« matches his approach in everyday life. His favorite avocation was to walk up and down Copenhagen streets and talk with a sailor, a maid servant, a barber, or the like. He could get almost panic-stricken at the end of a day if he recalled he had not mentioned in a conversation something that was important to one of them. That is why the *Corsair* affair proved so devastating, because it took away his access to the common people and left him no way to explain himself to them. Accordingly, when Kierkegaard declines to sign on with his century's mass revivals, political rallies, or social manifestoes, it is not because he ignores the need for radical change but because such movements often leave things the same, or worse, than before. The kind of revolution that changes the world positively comes when enough individuals (in Kierkegaard's sense) who see the need for change also have the same change of heart.

The book develops this argument in a series of short chapters. The first three chapters portray Kierkegaard's predecessors, notably Henrich Steffens, whose appreciation for the folk tales and stories of the common people helped stimulate Kierkegaard's work, as well as Jacob Christian Lindberg, whose attack on the established church in the 1820s and 1830s prefigured Kierkegaard's own. The fourth chapter is the centerpiece of the volume, telling about Kierkegaard's parents and the family's participation in the local Moravian congregation. No wonder Kierkegaard was not afraid to challenge the cultural elite of Copenhagen; he had grown up tutored by a father who was of tough, peasant stock, a self-taught man whose ability in dialectic was anyone's match. Kierkegaard's mother, too, emerges from Bukdahl's pages more clearly than I have ever seen before. For example, on the basis of the memoirs of Søren Kierkegaard's brother, Peter, she is identified as the source of many of Kierkegaard's folk sayings and turns of

phrase. The center of Bukdahl's argument, however, waits until chapters five and six, especially the latter, which draws from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to say that there is only a vanishing difference between the wise person, rich in culture, and the simple person, lacking formal education. From that point, chapters seven and eight go on to carry this theme through Kierkegaard's journals about the *Corsair* affair and the final attack in 1855. The climax comes with the well-known words at the very end of the last issue of *The Moment*, on Kierkegaard's desk when he died: »You common man! The Christianity of the New Testament is something infinitely high, but of course it is not high in a manner that has to do with differences between one person and another with respect to talent and the like. No, it is for everyone.... « (p. 127). Bukdahl goes on to tell of a letter by Bishop Martensen, who was watching Kierkegaard's funeral from a window of his bishop's palace and reported that no dignitaries were present but »a large number of obscure persons.« According to another report, »the church was full of a large number of sinister-looking people of the simple class, who crowded around the little coffin in the nave of the church« (p. 129).

One of the unexpected features of Bukdahl's work is that, although deeply appreciative of Kierkegaard, the book is written by someone from the tradition of Nicolai Grundtvig. Thus the reader is told that Kierkegaard's critique of Grundtvig in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is »rather thin and unsatisfactory,« because he had not studied Grundtvig's later works and based his judgment »on an emotional reaction to the overwhelming bombast and fecundity of Grundtvig's personality« (p. 23). Moreover, Kierkegaard »probably did not understand that his campaign...could also have social consequences« (p. 56). These may be defensible positions, but the reader is left wishing for more documentation and support for Bukdahl's views, something the brevity and popular nature of Bukdahl's lectures does not allow. Still, Bukdahl is always fair, and he is willing to grant that Grundtvig had weaknesses, too; for example, in his inability to talk to common people (p. 43). Bukdahl also writes that the way the famous »folk high school« idea was implemented in Denmark was »more in the spirit of Kierkegaard than in that of Grundtvig« (p. 18). In any case, Bukdahl's account of the Grundtvigian context of some of Kierkegaard's ideas is even more helpful for this translation than it was for the original edition, since, while Grundtvig was far better known than Kierkegaard in nineteenth century Denmark, for the typical reader of this English-language version the situation is exactly reversed.

This translation comes at an opportune moment. The recent publica-

tion of Alastair Hannay's masterful Kierkegaard biography, and the forthcoming translation of Joakim Garff's even more comprehensive work, fill a pressing scholarly need, but they threaten to overwhelm the Kierkegaard student. How, with such a wealth of biographical data to absorb, will students ever find time during a seminar to read Kierkegaard's own works? Bukdahl's little volume provides an excellent solution for this problem. The book is not a biography, but many of the biographical items omitted – such as the »great earthquake« and the broken engagement with Regine – turn out to be dead ends in most investigations. On the other hand, several of the topics Bukdahl does take up – such as early romanticism and the Schelling school, the nineteenth-century revivals led by the Moravians and by Grundtvig, the social and political effects of the 1848 revolution, and a whole host of others – he develops in a succinct, insightful way. Students might not even complain if their professor were to sneak such a short and inexpensive book onto the required course list. The story Bukdahl tells is so fascinating, and Kirmmse's English rendering so engaging, that the book keeps one reading on and on, right to the end.

Andrew Burgess

Timothy Houston Polk

The Biblical Kierkegaard: Reading By the Rule of Faith

Mercer University Press, Macon, GA USA, 1997, 232 pp.

Like the religious voices in the Kierkegaardian corpus, particularly Anti-Climacus and the Kierkegaard of the devotional literature and the *Point of View*, Timothy Polk is primarily concerned about the spiritual health of the Church, especially its academic leadership. He addresses his book to an audience of biblical scholars, theologians, Christian ethicists, church historians, and theologically-committed Kierkegaard scholars. He asks this audience how Christian intellectuals today can have a Bible-based faith that speaks to contemporary issues, when this collection of sacred texts often defends or presupposes forms of patriarchy, racism, slavery, and other injustices. He addresses this complex question in two ways. He advocates the merits of a reading of the Bible that stresses its authoritative role for Christians, a canonical reading that he identifies as »canon-contextual.« And he presents Kierkegaard as a proponent of such a reading.

Polk's endeavor is neither naïve nor simplistic. He is a sound, well-informed, and earnest scholar aware of the perils of juggling contemporary issues, while also trying to interpret a historical figure. He provides a clear, balanced, and coherent presentation of his own and other scholars' exegetical and theological positions, and he is basically aware that Kierkegaard's exegetical and theological voices are not entirely equivalent to his own. In other words, he gives his reader a solid demonstration of how one might use or, as he puts it, »constructively« engage, the theological past as a resource in one's own theological reflection (p. 1). Part II of the book, which focuses on Kierkegaard's reading of the Bible, is especially exemplary of this. Polk's use of Kierkegaard's strategy of weaving together academic questions with personal issues of faith and existence is also exemplary.

The central argument of the book is something like this: Kierkegaard uses his religious imagination to read the Bible in a manner that enriches modern and post-modern spiritual life and that accords with Christian traditions as well as with major aspects of contemporary canon-contextual biblical exegesis and narrative theology. Respecting early Christian traditions of biblical interpretation, Kierkegaard reads the Judaeo-Christian scriptures according to an Augustinian rule of faith that enables him to construe the Bible in an imaginative way as a »divine love letter.« This Augustinian rule of faith, an »authoritative summary of« and guide to how the Church thinks that one should approach the Bible, makes it possible for Kierkegaard and his readers to see the love of God everywhere in these sacred pages – in spite of the fact that philosophical, theological, and moral problems abound on these same pages. In doing so, the rule and its construal of the Bible as a testament of divine love also allow the Bible to serve as a fundamental authority for a life of prayer, worship and love (pp. 13, 32-33, with 19-118).

Polk presents this argument in an introduction and two major parts, comprised of three chapters each. The introduction and the first part of the book roughly address the contemporary biblical and theological scene in which Polk is involved – namely, the English-speaking theological communities of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, with emphasis on the United States. Polk brings Kierkegaard onto this scene by contending that Kierkegaard's characterization of the Bible in *Works of Love* and *For Self-Examination* supports the canon-contextual biblical criticism and narrative theology that he advocates. Part two of the book is devoted primarily to Kierkegaard's reading of the Epistle of James and the Book of Job. Here Kierkegaard takes center stage as a kind of canon-contextual exegete

and narrative theologian who uses his religious imagination to grapple with the problematic relationship between faith and works and the hard issue of theodicy.

Throughout the book, Polk is explicit about his exegetical and theological commitments. He believes that historical-critical, sociological, and especially feminist biblical interpretative methods threaten those traditions of reading the Bible that take it to provide authoritative models for Christian living. He is especially troubled by the way in which certain feminists construe the Bible. He takes seriously the claims of those feminists who contend that the Bible has been used to keep women in oppressive situations, but he cannot ultimately accept their construals because he thinks that they undermine the Bible's authority as a whole. Polk's problems with feminist and other progressive readings of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures naturally lead us to an assessment of his efforts.

Polk seems to present two related, but distinct projects. The first is to defend his approach to biblical interpretation against those who, he believes, would undermine biblical authority. The second is to enlist Kierkegaard in these efforts.

Polk defends the canon-contextual criticism of Brevard Childs and the narrative theology of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck (pp. 3-7). His ongoing defense of Childsean biblical criticism, with its construal of the Bible as Scripture, and his regular references to narrative theology, and its emphasis on the role of the imagination in biblical interpretation, permeate the book (pp. 2-15, 19-31, 60-125, 147-169, 178-184, 201-210).

Childs, the leading proponent of one major type of canon criticism, is attractive to Polk for several reasons. First, Childs emphasizes the »canonical impulse« in early Christian communities – the need to establish authoritative texts that define their identity. At the same time, Childs discreetly utilizes historical-critical methods, when he thinks that they can yield important insights. Second, Childs provides Polk with sophisticated objections to the solely critical and contextual focus of historical-critical biblical interpretation and to the narrow and historically naive stance of ultra-conservative biblical interpretation. Third, Childs' form of canon criticism gives Polk a welcomed alternative to a second type of canon criticism that only examines the function, as opposed to the theological authority, of texts in early Christian communities. (The leading figure of this second form of canon criticism is James Sanders). All of this allows Polk, who has an avowed investment in the Protestant »sola scriptura,« to read the Bible as an authoritative whole *and* retain his integrity and credibility as a scholar.

Frei and Lindbeck are attractive to Polk because they contend that biblical narratives are constitutive of Christian identity. They are also attractive to Polk because they advocate the use of different forms of literary criticism in the interpretation of the Bible. Like them, Polk wants the Bible's stories, parables, psalms, and symbols to be known, utilized, and valued by thinking believers. This is the reason he draws insights from literary critics such as Stanley Fish and Frank Kermode (pp. 7–10, 24–31). This is also the reason that he appreciates and utilizes Stanley Hauerwas' and David Kelsey's insights on the significance of the imagination in biblical interpretation (pp. 10–11).

Polk's second project is to make Kierkegaard central to his defense of canon-contextual and narrative theology. Polk is just as committed to defending the significance and the power of Kierkegaard's religious writings as he is to defending canon-contextual criticism and narrative theology. This is because his understanding of Kierkegaard is inextricably linked to these exegetical and theological commitments. (Polk's roots in Paul Holmer's reading of Kierkegaard, a position that Frei and Lindbeck appreciate, help the reader to understand this. See p. 3, n. 5). Herein is the deliberate conflation of what one might hope would remain two distinct topics – namely, Kierkegaard's reading of the Bible and Polk's exegetical and theological commitments – at least until separate cases could be made for each topic on its own terms.

Polk wants to show that Kierkegaard's often-neglected religious writings are as relevant to twentieth- (and one might add twenty-first-) century, theologically-minded intellectuals as the ever-popular philosophical and pseudonymous literature (p. 2), because they take seriously the power and the authority of the Bible in the formation of Christian identity. Unfortunately, neither the theological reader nor the ordinary reader of Kierkegaard gets an analysis of Kierkegaard the biblical exegete on Kierkegaard's own terms or in terms of Kierkegaard's historical and intellectual context.

This leads to two major issues: 1) the limitations of canon-contextual criticism and narrative theology to handle the challenges of progressive readings of the Bible; and 2) the limitations of understanding Kierkegaard and his contributions to post-modern Christian life, when he is co-opted by such commitments.

Discussing the role of the Bible in Christian identity is an inescapable issue for theological communities in the Christian traditions. But the problems with Polk's book are precisely in his theological and exegetical com-

mitments. The implications of his views are troubling to a person who is both an intellectual and a person of faith, committed to social justice issues. He implies that if one follows feminist, sociological, and historical-critical approaches, and construe the scriptures in a manner that rejects or subverts the construal of Augustine's rule of faith, then one runs the risk of becoming an apostate.

More important perhaps for an understanding of Kierkegaard is the fact that Polk's interpretation of Kierkegaard's exegetical practices is too narrow. Not enough attention is paid to Kierkegaard's own ecclesiastical, intellectual, and socio-political context, which would undoubtedly reveal a broader range of factors operative in Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Bible than just the Augustinian tradition.

Kierkegaard's anthropology certainly draws from Paul, Augustine, Luther, and other figures in the ancient and medieval worlds, but these are not his sole influences. The influence of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, German Romanticism, and the Danish thinkers, Mynster and Møller, in the modern era (not to mention Plato in the ancient world) are also prevalent in his conception of the self before God. Therefore, if Kierkegaard's anthropology is indeed central to his Christianity, as many Kierkegaard scholars think, then should we not expect it and its influences to be operative in Kierkegaard's reading of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures? Probably so. Kierkegaard reads the Bible not only in accord with an Augustinian rule of faith, but also in accord with his peculiar existential response to the intellectual currents of his day. We might call this union of tradition and contemporary concerns a revised rule. If so, then Kierkegaard demonstrates how contemporary issues might join with tradition to produce a complex approach to the Bible respectfully updated for today.

The struggle to listen and to integrate diverse approaches to the scriptures is part of what it means to keep Christianity's faith traditions viable in a changing world. This includes pressing compelling religious thinkers like Kierkegaard in the very ways in which they fail to do just this, even as they interpret the Bible.

Marcia C. Robinson

Mark Dooley

The Politics of Exodus: Kierkegaard's Ethics of Responsibility

Fordham University Press, New York 2001, xxiv + 285 pp.

Both Kierkegaard and Derrida have been criticized and stereotyped as anti-social, even unethical, thinkers. Kierkegaard is the radical individualist whose »teleological suspension of the ethical« helps justify the actions of murderers and terrorists. Derrida is the capricious nihilist whose deconstructive »play of signifiers« undermines all grounds for ethical concern. In *The Politics of Exodus*, Mark Dooley defends Kierkegaard and Derrida against these charges by arguing they share in common a critical appraisal of the established order and a fundamental, ethical concern for the well-being of the singular »other«: the weak, the marginalized and the dispossessed. As Dooley sees it, reading Kierkegaard from a Derridean perspective illuminates important and unique aspects of Kierkegaard's thought and helps make him relevant to contemporary readers. This book offers an interpretation of Kierkegaard as proto-deconstructionist and an ethical defense of deconstruction that will be useful to readers with an interest in postmodern concerns.

The Politics of Exodus is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, drawing primarily on *Two Ages*, outlines Kierkegaard's critique of society and the abstract individual, and points to the notion subjectivity as the Kierkegaardian response. The second chapter introduces Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit* and argues that, contra Hegel, Kierkegaard believes responsibility must go beyond simple adherence to the laws of the state. Chapter three examines Socrates and Abraham as »ethical prototypes« who assume a critical stance toward the established order. Chapter four treats the related concepts of repetition and selfhood and argues for the importance of God as an ethical prototype and ideal. Kierkegaard's ethical ideal is further developed in chapter five as the paradoxical »God-man« who challenges the established order and responds to the needs of the suffering and the lowly. Chapter six, the longest chapter of the book, explores various Derridean themes such as book-binding, *différance*, iteration, »the impossible« and the dialectics of gift-giving and makes the argument for Kierkegaard as a »proto-deconstructionist« with reference to his concept of neighbor love. Also in this chapter, Dooley defends deconstruction against the criticisms of Sylvia Walsh and contrasts a Kierkegaardian/Derridean approach to the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas.

For Dooley, the concept that most strongly ties Kierkegaard and Derrida together is the notion of singularity (or alterity, »otherness«). In contrast to the totalizing tendencies of the Hegelian »system,« singularity refers to that which cannot be systematized or made part of a universal whole, [that] which is foreign to our understanding and experience, and consequently, which »shocks, surprises, and unsettles« us (202). Following Dooley's interpretation, several Kierkegaardian themes center on the contrast between singularity and the universality of the established social order. Inwardness, for example, is understood by Dooley to involve cultivating a critical stance toward the established order and its prevailing norms; faith stands for engagement with particularity and an openness to future possibilities that diverge from inherited truths; and Jesus (the »God-man«) is understood as the ethical criterion or prototype who models for us a life of neighbor love centered on concern for the other. The figure of Abraham symbolizes the Kierkegaardian self, who suspends the notion of a universal, »one-size-fits-all« morality and focuses instead on particular individuals whose needs cannot be accommodated by the universal order. Such a life is concretely and historically represented in the figure of Jesus Christ, a man who took on the form of a servant and made the cause of the lowly and suffering his own. Likewise, Dooley argues that Derridean notions of »gift-giving,« »book-binding« and »iteration« demonstrate on Derrida's behalf a similar concern for justice and the cause of the dispossessed. Against the criticisms of Sylvia Walsh, Dooley maintains that deconstruction is not merely destructive, but is ultimately oriented toward justice. From the very start of Derrida's career, the goal of deconstruction has been to relativize the authority of the established order for the sake of those on the margins.

Dooley is careful to make the point that a Kierkegaardian/Derridean ethic does not seek to destroy existing laws and institutions, but rather to make them more attuned to the needs of existing individuals. For Kierkegaard and Derrida, responsibility involves (1.) taking a critical stance over against the established social order; (2.) calling attention to the established order's contingency and insufficiency vis-à-vis the other; (3.) affirming the revisability of laws and institutions and making provision for singular needs; and (4.) practicing »excessive generosity and hospitality« (136) on behalf of weak and marginalized persons.

Another theme that receives repeated emphasis is the contingency and revisability of the moral and social order. As Dooley sees it, Kierkegaard and Derrida have three main reasons for believing that the institutions and

norms of the established order ought to remain open to revision: first, because universal principles cannot fit every particular case and new ethical dilemmas arise that the established order is unable to accommodate; second, because ethical and religious truths are subjective – meaning, person-specific relations – and persons are historically contingent beings, always in flux; and third, because there is no »transcendental or objective basis« serving to ground moral truths (168).

Dooley supports this view of Kierkegaard as an anti-realist by arguing that it follows from the concept of truth as subjectivity: »The upshot of the Climacean idea that truth is subjectivity is that truth does not have any transcendental or objective basis« (ibid.). Since human persons are historically contingent beings, then ethical and religious truths are contingent and have no objective basis. »So-called objective truths, according to Climacus, have little to do with existing beings who are situated in the inexorable tide of temporal becoming, and because truth is an issue only for existing individuals, it too 'becomes'« (4). Dooley's interpretation can be challenged, however, if it turns out that Climacus's intention in the *Postscript* is not to describe two different *kinds* of truth – subjective and objective truths – as, for instance, some philosophers distinguish between facts and values, but rather to distinguish between two *ways of relating* to the truth: either inwardly and passionately, or objectively and dispassionately. In that case, our knowledge of truth – including ethical and religious truths – may be historically conditioned and limited, but still have an objective, mind-independent basis that we do not know, but in which we passionately believe.

The Politics of Exodus is clearly written and, aside from the highly polemical introduction in which Dooley vows to »loosen the thread of Kierkegaard's Lutheran straitjacket« (xv) and save Kierkegaard from intellectual obscurity, it avoids the rhetorical excesses common among post-modern writers. The main weakness of the book, in my opinion, is its tendency too quickly to put a Derridean spin on Kierkegaardian ideas without taking adequate time to provide textual support for these claims. Dooley's chapters are sprinkled with quotes, but there are no sustained readings of any single Kierkegaardian text. Dooley provides no historical context for Kierkegaard's ideas and gives no attention to Kierkegaard's rhetorical strategies or the various functions of the pseudonyms. In other words, *The Politics of Exodus* offers a surprisingly »blunt« reading of Kierkegaard for a book that emphasizes the importance of contextual embeddedness and individual particularity. That being said, it serves as a

good introduction to deconstructive ethics and to the way in which Kierkegaard has served to inspire postmodern concerns.

Michael Wassenaar