

Book review: Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 7: Journals NB15—NB20

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The European Legacy

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Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 7: Journals NB15—NB20, edited by Niels Jorgen Cappelorn, Alastair Hannay, Bruce H. Kirmmse, David D. Possen, Joel D. Rasmussen, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2014.

This volume of the new complete translation of Søren Kierkegaard's *Skrifter* (for my review of earlier volumes, see *The European Legacy* 17.2 and 19.4), includes the journals and notebooks archived as NB15 to NB20, written throughout 1850. As with previous volumes, this edition features a translation of the journals in a two-column format, in order to best represent the multiple alterations and drafting Kierkegaard made to his own personal documents. These are followed by a "Critical Account of the Text" (discussing both the physical appearance and chronological information of each notebook), and "Explanatory Notes" by the editors. These notes include maps of the cities and areas that Kierkegaard discusses, the calendar for the year he followed (particularly pertinent in this edition, given the number of reflections on holy feast days Kierkegaard reflects on in NB15), and any illustrations that he refers to in his writing.

While the themes that run throughout the journals are familiar to any reader of Kierkegaard—the problem of faith, and philosophy's continuous failure to account for it; the politics of the Danish state, and the rise of the "mass" people; the problem of communication, and its relation to the modern press; the nature of love, and Regine Olsen—the reflections of 1850 demonstrate a notably heightened intensity of frustration and indignation. He sees Christianity as becoming a protection of livelihoods (402) rather than faith; the clergy have "looked on with inconceivable calm while the community... has become afflicted with a moral corruption even more frightful than antiquity's corruption, the same clergy that has lived undisturbedly because we are all Christians"; yet, "that same clergy is instantly prepared to take up arms when its livelihood is disturbed" (402).

This is a mature writer, whose thinking is now deeply marked by the antagonism he has experienced between his work and its audience, and between his faith and the institutions around him. There is, consequently, a strong sense of conflict within this particular volume of notebooks, which manifests itself in the form of specific confrontations: Kierkegaard repeatedly turns his ire towards the priesthood and the clergy; he cites Martenson as a representative figure of those against him; he writes of the "1000 people who have an extreme interest in making sure others do not discover what Xnty [sic] is" (401). Such confrontations continue in his own, inner reflections (passages often titled "About Myself" or something similar), where he situates his work to date in conflict with those around him, and the suffering this prompts and perpetuates. Sometimes, this pitches his work against Denmark itself: "My torment as an author is that the country has no standard by which to judge me, and this daily suffering is painful and furthermore intensifies over time" (136). In other

passages, his reflections resonate with Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*: "What I have achieved will be admired for a long time," he notes; before characterizing this boast with a typically Kierkegaardian caveat: "I have had extraordinary abilities (alas, how I recognize myself in this past tense that I always use; even when I feel strongest, I said: I have had—this is a unity of melancholia, reflection and piety, and this unity is my nature): what I lack is the animal side of being a human being" (300–301). He marks out a conflict between those who take "bestial delight" in mocking him. "I am surely the only one of my kind—to whom, therefore, no one feels any connection" (301).

Unlike Nietzsche, who repeatedly speaks to a future readership that would emerge well after his death, for Kierkegaard, the concern remains contemporary: both in the sense of the current state of Christianity, and of Denmark, as he sees it, and in the sense of his own timeliness, which sits at odds with the historical age around him. He notes the popularity of the view held by some individuals that they do not need Christianity, but can understand that others need it. By contrast: "I can well understand that I need Xnty—but I simply cannot understand what these other millions of others want with it" (451).

Of course, we do not need Kierkegaard's notebooks to tell us of his angst and alienation; and, it must be said, that it is unlikely this volume will surprise readers in that respect. But there remain some interesting themes that emerge within his private writing. One such theme would be his frequent comments on the state of Denmark, and the complex relationship this has with the stature of his own authorship; his comments, in these notebooks, are given wider dimensions by his accounts of visiting the Danish royalty. From his journals, rather than his published work, we can gather a sense—and a fairly literal one—of where Kierkegaard was standing when he passed judgment on Denmark as "little"; a "provincial market town" (135); the conjoining of his activities within Copenhagen, and the ideas he continuously arranged and rearranged on the desk before him. While certainly not an exegetical key—which would, after all, hardly be "Kierkegaardian"—these notebooks are a key subtext to his published works.

These subtexts can also serve to link up themes within his published works in interesting ways. For example, we noted above his comment on how he lacks the animalism of others; and this adds an interesting dimension to his earlier pseudonymous work on the demonic, which appears in Kierkegaard's work in a form quite distinctive from the seductive, brutish images often associated with it. Instead, the demonic articulates the role of indirect communication and medium in the expression of authenticity (see Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* [London: University Press of Virginia, 1993]; and Tom Grimwood, "Kierkegaard's Printing Errors: On a Curious Passage from 'Stages on Life's Way'," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 3, no. 4 [2013]: 913–27). It is technical, in that sense, rather than bestial. As with many other aspects of his published works, the questions that Kierkegaard asks of his own production as an author here in the privacy of his notebooks, allow such themes to be clarified, or even reframed.

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