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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Sense of Antirationalism: The Religious Thought of Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard* by Karen L. Carr and Philip J. Ivanhoe

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Source: *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (Jul., 2003), pp. 477-479

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1205742>

Accessed: 18-05-2022 00:42 UTC

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On the whole, the book is a fine introduction to a philosopher particularly difficult to introduce. And while Antonaccio may not have supplied all the details the reader would like, she has provided a spacious and useful framework in which those details can be fitted, once they have been supplied.

KELLY DEAN JOLLEY, *Auburn University*.

CARR, KAREN L., and IVANHOE, PHILIP J. *The Sense of Antirationalism: The Religious Thought of Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard*. New York and London: Seven Bridges Press, 2000. 158 pp. \$23.95 (cloth).

This book is cowritten in a lively, engaging form by Karen Carr, from the discipline of religious studies and Philip Ivanhoe, whose background is in the disciplines of religious studies and Asian languages and philosophy. Unlike typical co-authorship, these two authors write separate pieces about Zhuangzi and Søren Kierkegaard and then together offer a combined vision. Refreshingly, the emphasis is on contrast of exemplars of two different and irreconcilable ways instead of comparison between similar thinkers. In a striking passage, which sums up the book, the authors, writing jointly, aver: “This contrast—between an inherently healthy and harmonious, prerational self in the Zhuangzi and an inherently corrupted and defiled self in Kierkegaard’s writings—is perhaps the most profound and dramatic difference between their respective positions” (p. 89).

The authors unite these thinkers under the rubric of antirationalism: “We came to believe and have argued that the most characteristic features of antirationalist thinkers are that they do not wholly reject rationality but they also find it not only inadequate but potentially inimical to a proper appreciation of the truth” (p. 118). Perhaps this tendency would be better described by the phrase “limited rationality,” since the “antirationalist thinkers . . . do not wholly reject rationality.” For example, it is stated that Kierkegaard was not an irrationalist (p. 29). The authors point out that “it is helpful to recognize that both Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard were antirationalists but their antirationalisms are distinct in form, function differently, and lead toward profoundly dissimilar religious goals” (p. 57). With such wide gaps, is the concept of antirationalism—which, the authors acknowledge, derives from Angus Graham (pp. 117, 130)—sufficient to bring these two thinkers together? Despite the possible limitations of this bridging concept, this book has much to offer.

In Carr’s account of Kierkegaard, her interpretation of the story of Abraham and Isaac is very different from the view that the Knight of Faith holds his faith in fear and trembling. For her, *Fear and Trembling* “is . . . a discussion of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac because G-d told him to” (p. 105). However, Kierkegaard “rejects all ownership of the ideas expressed in the pseudonymous works” (p. 106). And, “the pseudonymous authorship [here referring to *Fear and Trembling* as a case in point] on a general level, represents Kierkegaard’s effort to provoke the individual into thinking about what different types of living mean, even as he attempts through it to distance himself from the reader’s project” (p. 106). In the authors’ joint conclusion, however, the story of Abraham and Isaac is taken as representative of Kierkegaard’s position—not as one of his pseudonymous positions—and as “one of his most famous and powerful discussions” (p. 119). Which version is the reader to choose? Is this another Either/Or? Is Kierkegaard distancing himself from this version? Or is this “one of *his* most famous and powerful discussions” (emphasis added)?

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This question discloses a deeper question. For these authors, Kierkegaard's version of the story of Abraham and Isaac serves as an example that drives a wedge between Kierkegaard and Zhuangzi. In their joint conclusion, the authors state: "The remarkable commitment that Kierkegaard's vision demands is captured well in one of his most famous and powerful discussions: the story of Abraham and Isaac. The idea that not only something but everything depends upon one's relationship to G-d is brought home with more precision and power when compared to Zhuangzi's naturalized form of religion. . . . Kierkegaard's position seems not merely absurd but unthinkable from the Daoist point of view, which seeks to return to what it believes to be the underlying harmony between us and the world" (p. 119).

For Kierkegaard, to follow G-d, one must throw ethics away. This kind of blind faith is not to be found in Zhuangzi. As the authors write together, "One cannot imagine Zhuangzi—or any Confucian thinker—invoking an example such as the parable of Abraham and Isaac" (p. xv). Is the reader intended to reduce this difference via the single author's device of claiming this to represent Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works? Unless this is a delicious attempt at postmodern irony, Kierkegaard's distancing himself from his own writings (the story of Abraham and Isaac in particular) would make Kierkegaard into a skeptic and would then ally him more closely with the view taken of Zhuangzi as a skeptic. But this is not the course that is taken in this book. In both their introduction and their conclusion the joint personae consider the story of Abraham and Isaac an unbridgeable divider between the two thinkers. But if this story is one from which Kierkegaard himself distances himself, how can it be attributed to him? And if it is not attributed to him, then how can it be used as evidence of Kierkegaard's position as contrasted with that of Zhuangzi? Without *Fear and Trembling* as evidence of Kierkegaard, it is difficult to sustain the contrast between Kierkegaard and Zhuangzi.

For the joint personae, "Zhuangzi ends his life as he has lived it, in practice, a happy skeptic" (p. 7). Did Zhuangzi live his life as a happy skeptic? "Sometimes clashing with things, sometimes bending before them, he runs his course like a galloping steed, and nothing can stop him. Is he not pathetic? Sweating and laboring to the end of his days and never seeing his accomplishment, utterly exhausting himself and never knowing where to look for rest—can you help pitying him? I'm not dead yet! he says, but what good is that? His body decays, his mind follows it—can you deny that this is a great sorrow? Man's life has always been a muddle like this. How could I be the only muddled one, and other men not muddled?" Is this Zhuangzi who is writing, or Kierkegaard? It is Zhuangzi in his second chapter, not the existentialist Kierkegaard. Part of this passage is quoted (not the part that includes the self-reference) and interpreted as a description of those seduced by society who have not mastered the Daoist way (p. 61). But where is the evidence for this interpretation? In light of the self-reference, Zhuangzi himself must be included in this group. If so, this quotation from Zhuangzi is inconsistent with one term of the authors' contrast, the term describing Zhuangzi versus Kierkegaard in the passage quoted at the beginning of this review (p. 89). But if Zhuangzi himself thinks (sometimes) that life "is a great sorrow," then can this be taken as evidence of a harmonious self? It also sounds like a very rational self in its reasoning about life. But without Zhuangzi's harmonious, prerational self, it becomes difficult to use a harmonious, prerational self in Zhuangzi to maintain the contrast between Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard.

Sometimes the authors of this book adopt a view that Zhuangzi's project is one of transformation of the reader: "Zhuangzi offered the Daoist vision, according to

which individuals were to . . . learn to hear and heed the spontaneous inclinations and tendencies of the Heavenly *dao*" (p. 29). Involving Zhuangzi in a transformative quest, albeit to a different goal, would certainly be one that would be held in common with Kierkegaard. But if Zhuangzi is a skeptic, what sense can be made from such passages in his second chapter as "and someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream" (*Chunang Tzu, Basic Writings* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1964], p. 43)? Is this skepticism? Would skepticism permit the view that we can know the distinction between reality and illusion? But if Zhuangzi is not a skeptic, then skepticism cannot be relied upon as a means to contrast Zhuangzi with Kierkegaard.

Perhaps the problem lies in the immensely complex and sometimes self-conflicting thought of each thinker (Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard) that makes them notoriously difficult to interpret singly, not to speak of in tandem. Or, perhaps neither thinker thought his own answers adequate to his own great questions. Nonetheless, they are very different from each other. As the authors write in their joint personae, "the radical nature of their respective positions is more fully seen when each is read in light of the other" (p. xv).

The two authors are to be congratulated for this in-depth interchange both with each other and with these two iconoclastic thinkers. It is hoped that this innovative genre—a study of contrasts that partially crosses disciplines, maintains the integrity of each coauthor, and yet attempts a comprehensive vision—will provide inspiration for comparative studies in the future.

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DE VRIES, HENT. *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. xxiii+443 pp. \$55.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

This book is a welcome exploration of the link between violence and religion, a linkage that, the author argues, spills over into philosophical and ethical thinking, manifesting itself in some of modernity's most cherished secular ideals, such as "Enlightenment," "democracy," and "cosmopolitanism." In a series of four densely written but compelling chapters, Hent de Vries offers a probing rendering of Jacques Derrida in the light of figures ranging from Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, and Walter Benjamin to Emmanuel Lévinas and Michel de Certeau. The author suggests not only that the public and political arenas of human action are always already overdetermined by the "religious" (i.e., God, the other, faith, miracle, testimony, sacrifice) but that religion itself is noteworthy—indeed, exemplary—because it illustrates the operative "pervertibility" of any decision, any act of responsibility, religious or not.

The basic thesis of *Religion and Violence* is that the "transcendental historicity" of religious, ethical, and political witness entails an aporetic testimonial logic that makes violence practically inescapable. De Vries sets this up masterfully in a treatment of Kant's distinction between "pure" (moral, rational, true) religion and religion infected by alien, nonreligious elements, by error. Following Derrida's lead, de Vries notes how "pure" religion's sense of absolute responsibility requires the critique, censorship, indeed sacrifice, of nonreligious elements in order to mitigate heteronomy and radical evil. Yet the truth of religion itself is indeterminate and contentless, existing only supplemented by the shapes of determinate, singular ("revealed") testimonies, the likes of which "can only approximate [their]