

KIERKEGAARD AND EXISTENTIALISM. Edited by Jon Stewart. Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources 9. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. Pp. xvii+427. ISBN: 978-1-4094-2641-7.

The series, *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, collects articles that treat the sources of Kierkegaard's own thought, the reception of his thought in philosophy, theology, drama, aesthetics, literature, and political life, and reference works in order to guide scholars in their engagement with Kierkegaard's writings. This ninth volume in the series, *Kierkegaard and Existentialism*, comprises part of this series' goal by exploring the reception of Søren Kierkegaard's thought in the movement that, on some accounts, begins with the Dane himself. In the preface, Jon Stewart maintains that though Kierkegaard's thought has been influential for the development of existentialism and has been cast, particularly by Sartre in *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, as a forerunner to existentialism, "recent scholarship has been attentive to the ideological use of Kierkegaard in this context." Thus, this volume, continues Stewart, aims to "reexamine the complex relation between Kierkegaard and the existentialist thinkers" in order to determine whether or not Kierkegaard is misrepresented and distorted in this reception (x). The contributors to this volume accomplish this task with great aplomb by addressing the reception of Kierkegaard's thought in the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche, Miguel de Unamuno, Lev Shestov, Nicholas Berdyaev, Martin Buber, Jacques Maritain, Karl Jaspers, Franz Rosenzweig, Jean Wahl, Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Camus, and Michel Henry. One essay is devoted for each of these figure's reception of Kierkegaard's thought.

The contributors to the volume take an historical and philosophical approach. Historically, they examine where each figure engages directly and explicitly with Kierkegaard's thought. They are concerned with, for example, determining what texts Camus or Shestov or Beauvoir read from Kierkegaard's corpus. Based on their historical determinations, each contributor then engages with the other philosopher's thought to determine his or her understanding and appropriation of Kierkegaard's thought. Three essays, however, are exceptions to this method. Thomas Miles provides, in his essay on Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, a study of Nietzsche's understanding of Kierkegaard based on Nietzsche's indirect

exposure to Kierkegaard through (1) his influential correspondence with Georg Brandes, (2) a German translation of Hans Lassen Martensen's *The Christian Ethics*, and (3) a German translation of the Danish philosopher and psychologist Harold Høffding's *Outline of Psychology on the Foundation of Experience*. Though Nietzsche never quotes or mentions Kierkegaard by name in his works, Miles shows that Nietzsche likely knew much about the Dane's thought. Based on this historical work, Miles constructs a dialogue between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that focuses on the ideal way of life that each philosopher champions—the life of faith for Kierkegaard and the life of sovereignty for Nietzsche.

Jeanette Bresson Ladegaard Knox maintains in her essay on Marcel Kierkegaard that, although Marcel has openly expressed the lack of influence on his thought by Kierkegaard, “[t]he connections between Kierkegaard and Marcel that Marcel himself can identify are one thing; the connections that an interpreter such as myself can identify are another” (200). She shows that Kierkegaard's thought has influenced Marcel, not through his appropriation of Kierkegaardian concepts, ideas, or distinctions, but through the way paved by Kierkegaard “for a particular intellectual climate committed to illuminating the tapestry of existence” (212). Marcel finds in Kierkegaard “a kindred spirit in the fight for the non-objectifiable sphere of life [the subjective] that both encompasses us and transcends us, that both eludes us and captures us” (208). Similarly, Elisabetta Basso argues, in her essay on Merleau-Ponty and Kierkegaard, that Kierkegaard's thought has established the tonality and focus of debates for the philosophical climate in the 1920s and 1930s in France. Though Merleau-Ponty has never written anything specifically on Kierkegaard nor mentions any of his works by name, Basso maintains that Merleau-Ponty sees Kierkegaard as a non-philosopher who provides a language and the beginnings of an interrogation and analysis for his successors. These successors must, says Merleau-Ponty, take up this beginning and provide the final meaning for it.

Despite these exceptions to method, all of the essays task themselves with juggling three things. Considering that the volume is on the *reception* of Kierkegaard's thought, the essays do not spend time explaining in great detail the meaning of Kierkegaardian terms that have proved important for the existentialists. Rather, the focus is on first explaining each philosopher's use of Kierkegaardian themes in his or her own philosophy. Second, while discussing each philosopher's own thought, the ways in which each philosopher's use of Kierkegaardian terms differs from Kierkegaard's own thought are highlighted. Lastly, each essay attempts to

show the way(s) in which Kierkegaard is misunderstood or misread. Ultimately, the text suggests that two common misreadings of Kierkegaard have occurred in his existentialist reception. First, many figures neglect to take into serious consideration that Kierkegaard is a Christian thinker. Four essays discuss this kind of misreading. István Czakó maintains that Karl Jaspers' entire philosophy can be seen as "an expansion of the main Kantian thoughts in the life-problems of existential philosophy," that is a confluence of Kantian reason and Kierkegaardian *Existenz* (158). Though Jaspers has been one of the most important figures for introducing Kierkegaard's thought with his philosophy of *Existenz* (particularly to Heidegger), Czakó points out that the literature on Jaspers' reception of Kierkegaard continually emphasizes that the former's methodology fails to recognize, let alone address, both Kierkegaard as a Christian thinker and the import that Kierkegaard's thought has in addressing Christianity. Yet, this failure appears to be intentional by Jaspers: "The core of Jasper's program was to put in parentheses the Christian content of Kierkegaard's thought while appropriating and interpreting his genuine conception of *Existenz*" (190). Czakó also notes that Jaspers refers to Kierkegaard as the origin of "existential thinking," which is a locution never used by Kierkegaard, but is rather "a philosophical *terminus technicus*" used by Jaspers that has, as a result of Jaspers' influence on the dissemination of Kierkegaard's thought, "been attributed to the Danish thinker during the history of reception" (175). In contrast to this appellation to the Dane, Heidegger has famously said in his second and third footnotes that refer to Kierkegaard in *Being and Time* that Kierkegaard does not provide an existential analysis of existence, but an existentiell account. Vincent McCarthy provides an important reading of these footnotes to show that many of the *existentiellia* of *Dasein* in Heidegger's text, as well as some of the *existentialia*, are dependent on such distinctly Kierkegaardian themes as leveling, fallenness, authenticity, being-toward-death, anxiety, and nothingness. For this reason, McCarthy maintains that Heidegger's *Being and Time* is a secularized and phenomenological "re-working of Kierkegaard's pioneering existentiell descriptions." To this end, he sees Heidegger's use of Kierkegaard "as a clarification of, and systematization of, Kierkegaard's insights" (114).

Like Jaspers, Michel Henry intentionally brackets Kierkegaard's Christian focus. Leo Stan notes that Henry's philosophy is phenomenological at its core because it not only focuses on phenomena, but also on the phenomenality of the phenomena, or the way in which they manifest, give, or reveal themselves to us in

¹ Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit in Philosophische Logik*, Vol. 1 (Munich: Piper, 1947), 18.

the world. Henry calls his phenomenology “ideal” or “radical” and regards Kierkegaard among his “sparse forefathers” (129). Henry finds in Kierkegaard a kindred spirit focused on “the living interiority of the ego,” that is on subjectivity, the truth of appropriation, and the affectivity of subjectivity (130). Through his phenomenological perspective on Kierkegaard, Henry places the Christian tonality of Kierkegaard under *epoché* in order to explore “the centrality of affectivity for an ontology of the individual self” (137). In this, Henry not only brackets Kierkegaard’s Christianity but also disregards the pseudonymity of Kierkegaard’s works, thereby causing him to misunderstand the hierarchical relation between anxiety and despair. For Henry, anxiety and despair are both “modalities of life or manifestations of the affective core of the human condition,” whereas, for Kierkegaard, anxiety is “the ‘transcendental’ condition of sin” and “despair is sin as such” (146). In a different essay, Stan argues that Camus *rejects* Kierkegaard’s Christian perspective because Camus “was programmatically impervious to religiosity per se” (85). Stan focuses this essay on the role Kierkegaard plays in *The Myth of Sisyphus* insofar as both Kierkegaard and Camus recognize the absurd as an important aspect of life, yet they have different responses to it. Camus says that we must reject any kind of transcendent hope in the face of the absurdity of life. Accordingly, our choices are either to struggle or to kill ourselves. Camus maintains that Kierkegaard, in contrast, establishes transcendent hope in God and Christ as his exit from the absurdity of life. To Camus, Kierkegaard’s *leap* of faith is a leap away from the immanent, mundane world and toward an invented transcendent world—a move of “subterfuge” (80).² Thus, Camus’s rejection of Kierkegaard’s Christian hope is not for methodical purposes, as it is for Jaspers and Henry, but based on differences in presuppositions.

Not only has Kierkegaard often been neglected as a Christian thinker in his reception, but also the importance of his use of pseudonyms has often been overlooked or ignored. George Pattison explains the importance that such a reading has on Shestov’s critique of Kierkegaard. Shestov believes that “the dominance of reason [and its necessity] in the history of Western thought” has led “philosophy to an attitude of detachment and indifference in [the] face of existence and to deny the possibility of radical novelty” (358). In this way, Pattison notes Shestov’s sympathies with Kierkegaard’s thoughts on faith and reason, possibility through repetition, and the importance of subjectivity. As a result, Shestov sees Kierkegaard as a proponent in the battle against rational necessity. However, he believes that Kierkegaard eventually abandons his battle against necessity and for possibility. Shestov critiques

² Cf. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 50.

Kierkegaard in this way partly because he reads *Fear and Trembling* as “a fictionalized account of the unhappy love story of Søren Kierkegaard and the fiancée he jilted, Regine Olsen” (364). Like Johannes de Silentio, then, Kierkegaard also cannot make the movement to faith but only the movement to infinite resignation. Consequently, Shestov argues that Kierkegaard’s faith is unable to overcome the necessity and limits imposed by ethics and, thereby, abandons the struggle for possibility or freedom.

Nathaniel Kramer notes that Maritain, as well, makes “little effort [...] to distinguish between Kierkegaard as historical person and the numerous pseudonyms which Kierkegaard uses” (223). Kramer elucidates Maritain’s own admission that Kierkegaard’s focus on subjectivity and the single individual serves as “a certain note, a characteristic sign” for his own work (221). Nevertheless, Kramer notes that Kierkegaard does not play a substantial point of reference for Maritain’s development because Maritain has responded not to Kierkegaard’s own works, but to misreadings of Kierkegaard in his historical reception among the French existentialists. As a result, Maritain’s understanding of Kierkegaard is filtered through the French reception of Kierkegaard’s thought. Such an influence has caused him to regard Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms as masks that can be dismissed because the important figure to grasp is the person behind those masks.

Beauvoir’s understanding of Kierkegaard was also affected by the same French reception of his thought. Ronald M. Green and Mary Jean Green show that Beauvoir is not just a critic of Kierkegaard. In fact, they find some of her critiques based on misreadings of Kierkegaard. The Greens also show that Beauvoir is deeply influenced by, primarily, *Fear and Trembling* and the first two sections of *Stages on Life’s Way* for her own understanding of ethics and her thoughts on woman’s situation in culture. The Greens are concerned throughout that Beauvoir interprets Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous texts as biographical. This reading of Kierkegaard is most notable in her *Second Sex*. Drawing on the first essay of *Stages on Life’s Way*, titled, “In Vino Veritas,” where, in a manner reminiscent of Plato’s *Symposium*, a group of men are brought together in order to present different male perspectives on woman, Beauvoir maintains that this text serves as a precursor to her own project, namely that woman, as the Other, is defined negatively “as she appears to man” (15). In this, the Greens note that Beauvoir incorrectly associates the pseudonym’s thoughts to Kierkegaard; this appellation is important for the development of Kierkegaard’s thought in existentialism because “in the European philosophical tradition in which [Beauvoir] and Sartre based their own work,

Kierkegaard emerges as the only thinker who gave sustained attention to the question of woman” (17). Ultimately, much of the existentialist tradition draws from Beauvoir when concluding that Kierkegaard has a disparaging view of women.

As we can see, a number of Kierkegaardian terms and themes, even when misunderstood and misrepresented, have been influential in the shaping and forming of existentialism. These themes include: repetition, leveling, anxiety, despair, being-toward-death, the aesthete, the single individual, subjectivity, objectivity, a focus on existence, the relation of faith and reason, the absurd, nothingness, freedom, individual choice, and responsibility. Three other essays highlight the importance of some of these central themes. Jan E. Evans teases out Kierkegaard’s influence on Unamuno’s central existential themes. These themes include the notion that propositional truth is objectively uncertain, the need to live in the tension between rationality and faith to imbue life with meaning through belief in God’s existence, the importance of passionate appropriation of *lived* truth, the need for indirect communication in order to communicate such lived truth, and the maieutic approach through the novel. Peter Šadja discusses the importance of the Kierkegaardian themes of subjectivity and the single individual in Buber’s philosophical development. According to Šadja, Buber sees in Kierkegaard’s notion of the single individual a corrective to “contemporary philosophical trends” in that it has prepared “the ground for dialogical philosophy” (33). Though, says Buber, the single individual is an acosmic concept because it only concerns the relation of the I with the Other as God and not the Other as human being, the single individual is an important theme because it is an inherently relational term. Yet, for Buber, the acosmism of the single individual engenders the monologism of Heidegger because Heidegger adopts Kierkegaard’s single individual with his own use of *Dasein* but extricates God from the picture—the only dialogical element in Kierkegaard’s thought—without replacing it with anything else. Moreover, Manuela Hackel quibbles with Sartre’s claim that Kierkegaard has not had much influence on his thought because, she concludes in a way similar to Knox’s article on Marcel, Kierkegaard has provided a penumbra of concepts that have allowed Sartre to develop his own philosophy. Hackel also focuses on the importance of the Kierkegaardian concepts of freedom, the abyss, nothingness, vertigo, and anxiety with regard to how Sartre develops these concepts beyond Kierkegaard’s own uses thereof.

Overall, this book is a wonderful addition to the work already completed in the *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources* series. It is certainly a fantastic research tool to have when working on the reception of Kierkegaard’s

thought among the existentialists. To this end, one of its greatest elements are the bibliographies found at the end of each essay; together these provide a plethora of further resources in a number of languages which highlight the references to (and uses of) Kierkegaard in each philosopher's *oeuvre*, the sources of each thinker's knowledge of Kierkegaard, as well as the relevant secondary literature treating Kierkegaard's relation to each given figure. Furthermore, the essay on Jean Wahl by Alejandro Cavallazzi Sánchez and Azucena Palavicini Sánchez is important for understanding the grave importance of Jean Wahl's work for the introduction of Kierkegaard to the French existentialists. Before his *Études kierkegaardienes*, "few people knew much about Kierkegaard in France. But after it, everybody did" (397).

The only problem with this text is the organization of its essays. The volume seems to lack any particular organizational principle for these articles. This leads to problems with understanding the full importance of some of the contributions. For example, George Pattison's essay on Berdyaev relies upon former knowledge of Pattison's other essay on Shestov. The essay on Berdyaev is most illuminating when read after the essay on Shestov. However these essays nearly serve as bookends to the volume in a seemingly wrong order. Moreover, the essay on Heidegger appears before the essay on Jaspers even though Jaspers's work is highly important for Heidegger's own introduction to and understanding of Kierkegaard. Based on this disorganization, Stewart appears to have not intended for readers to read the text from beginning to end. For those who might prefer to read the entire text, the following order is suggested for reading the essays: first, begin with the German reception of Kierkegaard's thought in Nietzsche, Buber, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Rosenzweig; next, read the essay on Unamuno, which concerns Kierkegaard's Spanish reception, because Unamuno is important for Heidegger's and Sartre's reception of Kierkegaard; then, read the essays on the French reception in Wahl, Maritain, Marcel, Sartre, Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Camus, and Henry; and lastly, conclude with the essays on the Russian reception in Shestov and Berdyaev. Overall, despite this minor organizational difficulty with the essays, this text is, and will prove to be, an important addition to our own reception of Kierkegaard's thought in the twenty-first century.

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