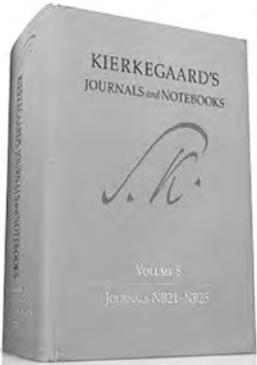


REVIEWS

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Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 8: Journals NB21–NB25

Søren Kierkegaard
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Søren Kierkegaard is the first modernist, only preceded by Desiderius Erasmus. It is the disregard for Erasmus as the first Renaissance philosopher who ushered in the modernist turn in Western philosophy and literature alike, that has consigned Kierkegaard to being considered only a Christian philosopher.

It is only anecdotal that Kierkegaard injected scepticism into Christianity and did more damage to Christendom than the atheist Friedrich Nietzsche ever could. This is a wrong assessment since Kierkegaard refashioned early and late modernism into what it really was: the European Renaissance did not reject Christianity as is often wrongly taught, but it was a deeply Christian and faith-informed theological movement, which we now mistakenly read as non-Christian philosophy.

In passing we should remark that all Western philosophy after the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either a confirmation of Christianity or a reaction to the Logos. The former we find in the works of Hannah Arendt, for instance, her dissertation on St Augustine of Hippo is a proof of

Christianity's power over Arendt's crypto-Zionism, and the latter is to be found both in the charlatan Nazi, Martin Heidegger's works and in Derrida's minor reflections on the Logos. The point here is that Christian theology is Western philosophy and only Kierkegaard understood this and was fearless enough to pen it all down. In his *Christian Discourses: The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, Kierkegaard writes this of what it means to be free, what it means to live the Beatitudes:

To be without care—indeed, it is a difficult walk, almost like walking on water, but if you are able to have faith, then it can be done. In connection with all danger, the main thing is to be able to get away from the thought of it. Now, you cannot get away from poverty, but you can get away from the thought of it by continually thinking about God: this is how the Christian walks *his* course. He turns his gaze upward and looks away from the danger; in his poverty, he is without the care of poverty. But the thoughts of the one who wants to be rich are continually on the earth; in his care he is on the earth, with his care is on the earth; he walks bowed down, continually looking ahead to see if he might be able to find riches. He is continually looking ahead—alas, ordinarily this is the best way to avoid temptation, but for him, yes, he does not know it, for him looking ahead is the very way to walk into the pitfall, the way to finding the temptation greater and greater and to sinking deeper and deeper into it. He is already in the power of the temptation, because the care is the temptation's most ingenious servant. And the temptation is down on the earth ... the temptation is down on the earth—the more it gets a person to look downward, the more certain is his downfall. What is *the temptation* that in itself is many temptations? Certainly it is not the glutton's temptation to live

in order to eat; no (what rebellion against the divine order!), it is to live *in order to slave*. The temptation is this, to lose oneself, to lose one's soul, to cease to be a human being and live as a human being instead of being freer than the bird, and godforsaken to slave more wretchedly than the animal. Yes, to slave! Instead of *working* for the daily bread, which every human being is commanded to do, to *slave* for it—and yet not be satisfied by it, because the care is to become rich. Instead of *praying* for the daily bread, to *slave* for it—because one became a slave of people and of one's care and forgot that it is to God one must pray for it. Instead of being willing to be what one is, poor, but also loved by God, which one certainly is, never happy in oneself, never happy in God, to damn oneself and one's life to this slaving in despondent grief day and night, in dark and brooding dejection, in spiritless busyness, with the heart burdened by worry about making a living—smitten with avarice although in poverty! (*Christian Discourses: The Crisis and A Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, ed. and trans. Howard V Hong and Edna H Hong (Princeton: Princeton University, 2009), 21–2).

It is of this philosophy of being without care derived from the Lord's prayer in the New Testament that Kierkegaard stresses in the volume under review: 'Owing to the rigor with which Xnty [Christianity] was originally insisted upon, the unyieldingness of blood witnesses, Xnty prevailed and was victorious, reshaped the world, tempered morals, etc' (241).

Kierkegaard says further: 'With respect to finite and worldly goods (which precisely because of their inferiority and are not essentially related to any reduplication), the mode in which I obtain them (provided it is not impermissible) is pretty much a matter of indifference, and it can easily become prudishness to be too strict in this connection' (243).

Further, quoting Girolamo Savonarola, Kierkegaard says: 'The power of faith is secure in dangers, but in danger when a person is secure' (340).

Kierkegaard's modernity lies in his awareness of unguarded, emotional spirituality giving way to prudishness. Unlike the English Puritans, who having butchered hundreds, perversely called themselves pure, we have a truly holy man who

preferred ignominy and anonymity warning us of prudishness which destroys souls. Kierkegaard's warnings against pharisaic ways is what is modern in literature. Only much later, Sigmund Freud iteratively figured out that prudishness is psychologically debilitating. This insight into puritanism's destructiveness is enough to prove Kierkegaard's modernity.

Karl Marx in a very different context, spoke of the need for philosophy to be practical and not merely pragmatic. Kierkegaard too wants *realpolitik* within philosophising and thus, insists on dying for one's beliefs unlike the priests portrayed in Shusaku Endo's *Silence*. Armchair religious praxes are of no use. Running fancy and coveted normatively religious educational institutes are of no value unless one can teach students that education is laying down one's life for the sake of their beliefs. Even if these beliefs are wrong. Che Guevara was intellectually wrong in his moral conclusions but unlike Fidel Castro, Guevara did not sell himself to capitalist forces which as Kierkegaard shows in *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* mentioned above, are detrimental to any philosophising.

That consumerism and capitalism are both evils is a modernist Weltanschauung. Modernism arose from the triple sources of the refashioning and not the rejection of the religious sensibility; modernism arose from a deeper understanding of the death grip of capitalism, and finally, it arose in the insecurity which characterises our existence in the here and the now. Kierkegaard's quotation from Savonarola is itself proof of Kierkegaard's understanding of religion and life. He knew much before Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber, and Jean-Paul Sartre that security is death. No person is alive who feels certain that there are no uncertainties in the very business of living out any kind of human life; leave alone spiritual lives.

Princeton University Press through publishing these journals and notebooks has done a commendable task in popularising Kierkegaard's magnificent oeuvre.

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