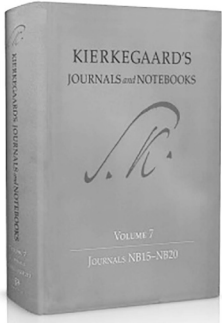


# REVIEWS

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## **Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 7: Journals NB15-NB20**

Søren Kierkegaard  
Edited by Bruce H Kirmmse, K  
Brian Söderquist, Niels Jørgen  
Cappelorn, Alastair Hannay,  
George Pattison, and Vanessa  
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**S**øren Kierkegaard comments:  
True enough, the shrewdest thing may be to ignore the rabble (that is, daily, every blessed day of one's life, while on an occasional Sunday one declaims oratorically about loving one's neighbor), existentially expressing that only a tiny portion of society exists. But a Christian priest is truly not permitted to do this. God in Heaven, how dare a priest say: It is beneath my *dignity* to involve myself with the rabble. Miserable fellow, do you know what you are saying, that it is blasphemy, that you are mocking Xt [Christ] who introduced a new concept of dignity, the Christian concept, which consists precisely of existing for the rabble, of suffering its misunderstanding, perhaps its persecution, but all in order to help it forward (313).

Kierkegaard's cosmopolitanism predates the neo-cosmopolitanism of Martha Nussbaum (b. 1947) and Kwame Appiah (b. 1954). Thinkers during high continental and analytic modernism lacked Kierkegaard's sense of religion as being more of a restorative discourse, than being a life-throttling narrative of power. Matthew Arnold (1822–88), Freidrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), and Theodor Adorno (1903–69)

all hated the 'rabble'. Taking a cue from these thinkers, we have Roger Scruton (b. 1944) now attacking what from Arnold to Adorno all term as mass culture. Unlike Kierkegaard they do not understand that the popular is what validates a culture as etymologically valid. Culture when accepted and realised as such by the mass, becomes truly itself.

On a different note, Jesus Christ as we find him in the New Testament is the one who can be asked, 'Quid est veritas' (John 18:38) in front of that archetype of all intellectuals; jesting Pilate whose shadow has taunted all seekers for the Truth. Kierkegaard knew that neither the Sanhedrin, nor the powers of this world can understand Christ. Thus, elsewhere in his *Journals* in this series so painstakingly prepared by the Princeton University Press and the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre at the University of Copenhagen, we have Kierkegaard repeatedly warning himself—for he did not see any audience for his diaries and notebooks except when he wrote as Anti-Climacus and wanted to be known—that Christianity is for the masses and not meant to be the ivory-tower sort later on imagined by TS Eliot (1888–1965).

Kierkegaard resonates with traditional Christianity, which has baulked at the disastrous changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). A large section of the Roman Catholic populace today would agree with what Kierkegaard has to say of the sacerdotal ministry:

A police officer is not permitted to be a private person. If he passes by a place where there is a disturbance or a crime is being committed—and it would perhaps be most convenient for him to slip past without identifying himself as a police officer—if a bystander recognizes him, he is permitted to say to the police officer: Please be so kind as to do your job. Similarly, neither is a priest permitted to be a private person and arrange his affairs so that

he only declaims one hour a week and is otherwise a private person. If he is contemporary with something demoralizing, he must bear witness (267).

As traditional Roman Catholics know and as Robert Cardinal Sarah (b. 1945) in his books, *The Day is Now Far Spent* (2019) and in his *God or Nothing: A Conversation on Faith* (2015), affirms, the Western society has erased the radical nature of Christ's call through the centuries so much so that many of today's Christian priests or presbyters are unrecognisable as those who have witnessed the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* who is Yahweh. Of all times in history, we now need Kierkegaard's frank Christianity if Christianity has to become the radical movement which Christ began and was seen as radical by Saul of Damascus.

Philosophy in the West had always been non-experiential and has now become so obscurantist that it is hard to understand what academic philosophers really mean. Thus, we have so many desacralised books on what philosophy means. Giogio Agamben's (b. 1942) *What is Philosophy?* (2016) is an example of this rambling about the existence of philosophy. Agamben is not alone in this mad scramble to find armchair answers. According to Kierkegaard, Socrates began this playing with words (394).

Kierkegaard's is a take it or leave it kind of practical Christianity, which will be incomprehensible to any but the best of Christians. For further reflections on the weakness of God, see the deconstructionist John Caputo's (b. 1940) *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (2006). Caputo, and before Caputo, Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926) in his *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (1973) ushered in a paradigm shift within Christian theology in Europe. Kierkegaard, Moltmann, and Caputo are all Protestant thinkers. Yet their Christianity is more vital to the Christianity that is practised today in traditional Catholic Benedictine Congregations like that of the Solesmes Congregation, with their stress on the *vita contemplativa*: 'People who warn against introspection might just as well warn against Xnty [Christianity]. Aided by grace they seek to block up the way leading inward and direct one away from it out into the worldly. But in fact, they are anxious about the real,

strenuous life of the spirit that only emerges with introspection, while they now live in worldliness and then prattle on about the highest' (393).

This stress on the interior life is the patrimony of all thinking people; Kierkegaard's is the true phenomenological turn in European thought. It is erroneous to think that phenomenology in Europe began with Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Husserl simply intensified this inward turn; but in Husserl's non-ascetical hands, phenomenology became solipsistic. It is another entire story, how Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) strengthened Husserl's imagination with Heidegger's own Nazi abracadabra in his *Being and Time* (1927) only to be recovered by Edith Stein (1891–1942) before Stein was gassed in Auschwitz. Stein in her works, particularly in her *On the Problem of Empathy*, her doctoral dissertation under Husserl, had restored much of the spirit of Kierkegaard, but she had little time for she was hastened to the gas-chambers by Heidegger. [For a thought-provoking study on Stein's works, see Kris McDaniel's *Edith Stein: On the Problem of Empathy* (See Kris McDaniel, 'Edith Stein: On the Problem of Empathy', *Ten Neglected Classics of Philosophy* (London: Oxford University, 2016))]. The point here is that at least Stein recovered the lost radicality of Kierkegaard's theologising or philosophising. Very few can understand that Socratic irony, so valued within intellectual circles, is just another form of the penumbra of jesting Pilate's resounding question to Jesus Christ: 'What is the truth?', the Latin of which is given above in this review.

Like the other *Journals* in this series, we also have copious annotations and facsimiles of Kierkegaard's original handwriting, and covers of the original notebooks faithfully reproduced here. These books are collectors' items and enough gratitude to the editors and translators cannot do the series justice. It is almost unbelievable that such works are still possible today when one feels fortunate if one has one's fifteen seconds of fame on social media. Kierkegaard as found in this series makes us halt and ask ourselves: 'What is the Truth?'

*Subhasis Chattopadhyay*

Biblical Theologian

Assistant Professor of English

Narasinha Dutt College, Howrah