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Review of: Patrick Stokes, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors: Interest, Self, and Moral Vision*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Publishes in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 50:3, 2010: 395-97.

*Kierkegaard's Mirrors: Interest, Self, and Moral Vision* (hereafter, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors*) begins with a thought experiment: Two characters with similar dispositions are informed of a humanitarian crisis while watching television, yet only one is moved to act. Stokes rejects *akrasia* as a sufficient explanation for the difference, arguing instead for what he calls "moral vision." Through analyses of Kierkegaardian terms such as interest (*inter-esse*), passion (*lidenskab*), self-reflection, and imagination, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors* sets forward an account of what it means to see a situation as morally obligating *oneself* rather than "someone." The scope of Stokes' engagement with Kierkegaard's authorship is impressive, ranging from lesser known texts such as *Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, *Christian Discourses*, and *For Self-Examination* to more frequently discussed works including *Sickness unto Death*, *Practice in Christianity*, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Stokes also situates his thesis with respect to diverse contemporary thinkers, including John McDowell and Iris Murdoch. While the breadth and depth of research will be satisfying to any Kierkegaard scholar, the book does not presuppose any special familiarity with Kierkegaard's writings. *Kierkegaard's Mirrors* successfully addresses a wide audience on issues in moral psychology/phenomenology, cognition, and philosophy of the human person.

*Kierkegaard's Mirrors* builds on the work of Stokes' recent publications, including "Kierkegaard's Mirrors: The Immediacy of Moral Vision," (*Inquiry* 50: 1 (2007), 70-94) and "Kierkegaardian Vision and the Concrete Other," (*Continental Philosophy Review* 39:4 (2006), 396-413). Stokes has developed a Kierkegaardian moral phenomenology that finds ethical obligation on transcendental structures of consciousness, where "transcendental" is understood to describe an essential structure of experience (rather than an entity somehow wholly removed from experience). Stokes grounds moral vision in ordinary perception, the most important feature of which is shown to be what Stokes, following Jean-Paul Sartre, calls "non-thetic" or pre-reflective self-awareness (which I discuss below). The argument is that implicit self-reflexivity is at work in all consciousness (including perception) and is the basis for an agent's potential recognition of a situation as obligating her to act. Citing examples of such usage by Kierkegaard, Stokes calls the recognition of one's own involvement "interest" (*inter-esse*) and argues that it accounts for the different reactions in the introductory thought-experiment. Though the "thematic or conceptual contents" of the two characters' reflective processes are the same, only one *immediately* recognizes the situation as involving her personally (p. 4).

Overall, *Kierkegaard's Mirrors* is an original application of conceptual resources in phenomenology and an illuminating account of what is at the heart of Kierkegaard's ethics. I do have reservations about the use of the term "non-thetic" to describe the self-reflexive aspect of all experience. The problem is that the term "non-thetic" is used in different ways by Husserl and Sartre, and both meanings are relevant for Kierkegaard's ethics. While Stokes' use of the term is consistent, it is important to clarify not only which meaning is intended but, if possible, how the two meanings are related. In the space remaining, I will distinguish Husserl's use of "non-thetic" from Sartre's and explain how both meanings are relevant for Kierkegaard's moral phenomenology.

While Stokes takes his elaboration of pre-reflective self-awareness to be essentially the same as that found in Husserl (p. 55, 60), he is strongly influenced by Sartre's philosophy (as is clear from the earlier published articles). The problem is that while Sartre uses the term "non-thetic" [*non-thétique*] to mean pre-reflective self-awareness (as Stokes does), Husserl uses "thetic" [*thetische*, cf. *Ideen 1*, §103] to describe the modality of an object, or what he also calls its "belief-characteristics." Thetic or belief characteristics attach to the intended *object* (noema), not the perceiving or reflecting

*act* (noesis) – though of course these are correlated. It would be helpful for Stokes to clarify here whether “non-thetic” means merely “pre-reflective,” as it seems to, or also “unposited” in the sense of neutral with respect to modality, as it does for Husserl. The term is especially ambiguous in phenomenology because *non-thétique* seems roughly interchangeable with *non-positionelle* in Sartre, and *thetische* is translated as “positional” in F. Kersten’s *Ideas 1* (1982). For the sake of clarity, I wonder if anything would be lost by substituting Husserl’s term “pre-thematic” or simply “pre-reflective” for “non-thetic” in Stokes’ model, which would then refer unambiguously to the implicit aspect of self-awareness rather than also potentially to its (the self’s) modality or, as it would for Husserl, to the modality of the objects of experience.

Indeed, the modality of the state of affairs (in this case, the morally obligating situation) is well worth addressing. Husserl distinguishes the most basic content (called the noematic sense) from the fuller content, which includes these thetic characteristics (called the full noema). Though Stokes consistently rejects the possibility that there is any variation in the content experienced by the two characters in the thought experiment, I wonder if the difference can be accounted for by some difference in modality (i.e., content in Husserl’s wider sense). But Stokes rarely discusses modality directly, even when it would make sense to do so. For example, Stokes quotes Climacus as saying that an “occurrence can be known immediately, but not at all *that* it has occurred; not even that it *is* occurring, even though it is occurring, as they say, right in front of one’s nose” (PF 81-82; Stokes, p. 32). I would expect Climacus’ emphasis on “*that* it has occurred” and “that it *is* occurring” to be understood as an emphasis on actuality—a particular thetic (modal, positional) characteristic of the event. But Stokes interprets Climacus to be saying that we must recognize the event “*as* an event” (p. 32), and that “one needs to mediate the sense data in such a way that we understand the data as data *of* an experience” (p. 33). While I fully agree with the main point here (that experience is always conceptually construed and never “raw” sense data), it seems strange in this case to discuss only the most basic sense content and not the way it is also originally experienced in a particular mode (e.g., as actually occurring and not merely imagined).

When Stokes does discuss modality, he is mainly interested in the existence of the knowing subject. For instance, he calls interest the actuality of reflection (p. 47), and he argues that the self just *is* the relationship between the opposing poles (p. 52). But further distinctions are needed: Is this an actual relationship (of an existing person) to a *possible* object, or an actual relationship (of an existing person) to an *actual* object? If anything, Stokes implies that the object that enables the right kind of self-reflection need not be actual, since imaginary constructions (e.g., parables) are offered as examples of something that “refers the reader back to herself” (p. 48) – i.e., that occasions the right kind of moral vision. But is it really true that a *possible* opposition between ideality and reality would bring about the right kind of *inter-esse* – existence as being-between two irresolvable poles? Would an existing person see herself as interested or implicated in a merely possible but not actually occurring situation? Does an action that is not empirically possible for me but serves as a moral exemplar have the right kind of “for-me-ness” (cf. p. 55)? Perhaps reserving the term “thetic” for the modal characteristics of the contents of experience (e.g., imagined, remembered, or actually occurring) would reserve phenomenological language with which to discuss this additional layer of the content of experience, which was certainly of interest to Kierkegaard.

Stokes’ turn to phenomenology to clarify Kierkegaard’s contribution to moral philosophy is original, constructive, rigorous and overall, I think, successful in its aims. Phenomenologists will easily recognize the basic structures of consciousness set forward in Ch. 3 (“Consciousness as Interest”), and many readers will find the examples and parables in Ch. 6 (“Self-Recognition”) readily applicable to work in other fields. I hope that Stokes, and others, will continue to allow the insights of phenomenological analysis and Kierkegaard scholarship to advance contemporary moral philosophy.