

Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist, eds.

Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks Volume 4: Journals NB—NB5.

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These are the fourth and fifth volumes in the series *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* (hereafter *KJN*), which is the new standard English version of Kierkegaard's papers, journals, and notebooks. (For reviews of the first three volumes of *KJN*, see *Philosophy in Review* 30.2, 105–108 and 31.2, 107–10).

The series is edited and translated by several leading Kierkegaard scholars (including Joel Rasmussen, who was added to the lineup for these volumes), and it takes an important step forward by following *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, the Danish critical edition of all of Kierkegaard's writings.

Another important development is that unlike earlier editions of Kierkegaard's journals, this new series does not reorganize entries according to date or topic, but instead replicates the format of Kierkegaard's own documents. Most significantly this means replicating the two-column format that Kierkegaard used in his journals and notebooks: the first column contains the main entries, while the second contains additional comments pertaining to the earlier entries. The obvious advantage of replicating this marginalia is that one can see Kierkegaard's additions and clarifications directly in relation to the earlier entries, and this is a great resource for scholars doing close textual analysis. So far the only disadvantage I have encountered is that this format is not as convenient for locating entries on a particular topic; thus one might hope this series will include an indexing system at some point. As with earlier volumes in the *KJN*, the notes and supplementary material (including maps of Copenhagen, calendars, and concordance) are immensely helpful. Readers will find the endnotes particularly valuable, as the editors have supplied extensive explanations for references and allusions that might otherwise remain opaque.

Volume 4 collects the first five of an eventual thirty-six "NB" journals. These journals date from 1846–1848, which was a time of transition for Kierkegaard. He had just published the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and was seriously considering the possibility that his period of literary productivity was over. At times he was even convinced that his work as an author was completed (16). What was to come next? Kierkegaard seriously considered assuming an

official position as a country priest. Ultimately Kierkegaard left this path untraveled, since he seemed unable to leave his authorial activities behind. Shortly after deciding to enter the ministry, his journals entries already indicate that he had not lost the impulse to write, as he reasons that the life of a priest might allow some free moments for literary productivity, so that he might “breathe more easily” (16–17). Within the next year he realized that he wanted to live the life of a country priest because it promised to be more idyllic than his strenuous existence as an author in Copenhagen. Nevertheless, Copenhagen needed an author like Kierkegaard, and he clearly felt a compulsion to write (80–1, 83, 85).

The lifestyle of a country priest was also appealing because Kierkegaard had financial demands to consider. Despite inheriting a considerable sum from his father, Kierkegaard could not live as an author forever—especially since publishing his books was a losing venture in financial terms, with his publishing expenses far outweighing revenue. As he notes at one point, his proofreader had earned more money than he had (6).

Another important consideration was Kierkegaard’s desire to remove himself from the commotion that followed Kierkegaard’s conflict with *The Corsair*, a satirical political newspaper in Copenhagen. Kierkegaard was highly critical of the paper and its corrupting influence, and he published an article attacking it. The article also invited *The Corsair* to take Kierkegaard as a target of its satire; the paper responded with a series of satirical articles and caricatures mocking Kierkegaard’s clothing, physical appearance, voice, and seemingly eccentric practices. This satirical attack made Kierkegaard a target of public mockery and derision in the streets of Copenhagen, and his journal entries are filled with reflections on his experience of having been turned into a joke. At one point he recounts the experience of sitting in church, when “a couple of oafs” sat next to him and proceeded to stare at the uneven length of his trouser legs and mock him loudly enough that every word could be heard. “This is the sort of thing to which I have become accustomed,” he writes, having compared the mockery of the mob to a slow death, like being “trampled to death by geese” (122). In Volume 5 he compares it to death by 100,000 mosquito bites (317).

Kierkegaard’s extensive reflections on *The Corsair* affair are not merely the lamentations of wounded pride. Instead, they contain some remarkable sociological insights. He writes at length about the corrupting influence of the daily press, which appeals to the basest instincts of the public and facilitates the delusion that the crowd knows best (149–50). As he observes, “there is no art to winning over a crowd; all that is needed is untruth and a bit of knowledge of human passions” (127). Echoing Socrates’ critique of the sophists, Kierkegaard describes the daily press as “the most abominable sophism to have appeared” (149). Kierkegaard was particularly troubled by the power of mass communication. Newspapers come out every day and exert a tremendous influence on public opinion, and yet so few writers have anything worthwhile to say (62–3, 154). Reading these entries, it is hard not to think of the internet, where idle writing exerts an even greater degree of undue influence. But not only does the press wield a dangerous amount of power; it also allows everyone to avoid responsibility: the press allows an “anonymous person” to say whatever they like, even things one would rarely have the courage to say in person, yet avoid responsibility for saying them (127–8). Likewise, the reading public is not responsible, since they never wrote it; they are only subscribers!

This lack of individual responsibility is one of the main reasons for Kierkegaard's recurring pronouncement that "the crowd is untruth" (126). In his view, truth concerns the single individual, not the anonymous, impersonal crowd. The crowd is hostile to truth, and likewise to anything like authority, qualitative differences, or the extraordinary. According to Kierkegaard, it is easy to underestimate the influence of the crowd's hostility and persecution. Those who are persecuted by the government look good, but "those who suffer persecution by the mob, by the people, by the public, in short by whatever ruffraff the daily papers can dredge up" gain no prestige and do not appear heroic (316–17). "These days, when a man is the victim of a slight injustice, merely a slight injustice, on the part of the king, on the part of someone prominent, etc., everyone has sympathy for him; he is a martyr. But when someone is derided, day in and day out, persecuted, mistreated, in a spiritual sense, by the stupidity, curiosity, and insolence of the crowd, the rabble, the public, etc., then this is quite in order; it is nothing at all" (142). People fancy the crowd to be the agent of resistance to tyranny, but they overlook the way in which the crowd can become a power-hungry, tyrannical force of its own. Thus Kierkegaard offers a novel suggestion: the time will come when the task of the true reformer will be to reform the crowd rather than the government (135).

Kierkegaard saw no help coming from the aristocracy of his time. In his view the aristocracy had a responsibility to be a mark of distinction in society, a reminder to check the leveling effects of the crowd. But the aristocracy of his time withdrew and kept its distance from the people (48). The task of reforming the crowd called for someone like Socrates, and like Socrates, Kierkegaard wanted to make the crowd aware of their own ruin (94). For Kierkegaard, however, this was not a matter of merely challenging the public with higher ideals of discourse and conduct. Instead, it meant challenging the misconception that Christendom is authentically Christian. And like Socrates, Kierkegaard incurred the wrath of the crowd.

But would Kierkegaard's Socratic task lead to a Socratic demise—that of being put to death by the people? In the NB journals from 1848–1849, collected in Volume 5, we see Kierkegaard's increasing preoccupation with the question of whether it is possible that he might be put to death. This might seem a bit melodramatic to the contemporary reader, but Kierkegaard would say that estimation is merely a sign of our times. He observes that there is no execution for ideas in the age of reason; instead, one faces the martyrdom of ridicule (178). Thus he muses that "if Christ came to the world now, he would perhaps not be put to death, but would be ridiculed. This is martyrdom in the age of reason. In the age of feeling and passion people were put to death" (178, 323). A martyrdom of mockery might seem less threatening, and yet Kierkegaard notes that what people fear most is to be singled out and ridiculed by other people (91). This might be why Kierkegaard later suggests that if Christ came into the world today, he would not take aim at the high priests but at the journalists (358).

The journals collected in these volumes are full of other great insights. Volume 4 contains a famous passage in which Kierkegaard examines the relation between divine omnipotence and human freedom. Whereas some metaphysicians see this as an either/or, such that divine agency and human agency are competing in a zero-sum game, Kierkegaard writes the following: "The absolutely greatest thing that can be done for a being, greater than anything one could make it into, is to make it free. It is precisely here that omnipotence is required... All finite power creates dependence; only omnipotence can create independence, creating from

nothing something that has its being in itself, while omnipotence continually retreats into itself. Omnipotence does not remain embedded in a relation to another... no, it can give without giving up the least bit of its power—that is, it can make someone independent” (56–7).

Volume 4 also contains some of the few passages in which Kierkegaard discusses the natural sciences. Kierkegaard raises the self-referentiality problem for natural science—namely, that the enthusiastic scientist wants to grasp and understand things, but is “continually positing that which he wants to abrogate. He is enthusiastic about understanding everything else, but he does not come to understand that he himself is enthusiastic.” In other words, can the scientist account for his or her own subjectivity? This is why Kierkegaard is apprehensive about the natural sciences: they are dangerous insofar as “physiology” wants to expand and annex ethics by explaining away human consciousness, agency, and responsibility (58–9). Kierkegaard maintains that this ethical perspective is not obscurantist, but is nevertheless “an enemy of a knowledge that, after having occupied a man for his entire life, finally ends with his being unable to explain what is most important” (61).

The journals collected in Volume 5 also contain some of Kierkegaard’s extensive reflections on his authorship. He notes that he cannot take ownership of the entire authorship as though it were something he intended, but that it was guided by divine Governance (379). He believes that he himself had been educated by his own authorship, so that he came to self-understanding through writing (56, 371). In another entry from 1849, Kierkegaard also notes that he has yet to write a direct word about himself in relation to his authorship: everything he had published about his authorship up to that point has been indirect, and at best a hint (310). Thus he deliberates on how to handle his new book, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*: should it be published, and if so, when (258, 260, 305)?

Overall, the majority of entries in these new volumes will be of greatest interest to those studying Kierkegaard’s life and historical context. Readers with a strictly philosophical interest in Kierkegaard will likely find less material of interest than earlier volumes, which contain a wealth of insight regarding the composition of Kierkegaard’s early pseudonymous authorship as well as his engagement with German idealism and Danish Hegelianism. Nevertheless, anyone interested in the serious study of Kierkegaard has reason to be grateful to the editorial board and the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center for undertaking this invaluable project.

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