

Rick Anthony Furtak, ed.

Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide.

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The *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* does not make for easy reading; a guide of any merit should be welcome, and this one surely will be. Major themes familiar to those with only a slight acquaintance with the *Postscript* are treated here by a group of 'guides' deeply informed by this complex work. Subjectivity and truth, existence and the 'system', objective knowledge and 'essential knowing', the leap, historical truth and eternal truths, reason and faith, Socratic subjectivity, religious belief, and other familiar topics are treated from many angles. Thus the *Postscript's* epistemology is treated in relation to modern philosophy by Furtak, and examined in relation to some peculiarities of the Danish text by M. G. Piety, but nearly every essay in this collection makes significant and overlapping observations on the kinds, and the various statuses, of knowledge as Kierkegaard, or Climacus, the pseudonym, understands them. Climacus' constant references to the Greeks, and particularly to Socrates, are treated perceptively by Paul Muench, but are also central topics for M. Jamie Ferreira, Furtak, and Jacob Howland. The significance for Christian faith, and for religious faith in general, of the concepts of inwardness and subjectivity that figure so centrally in the *Postscript* are the focus of Clare Carlisle and David Law's essays, but this topic is also a central preoccupation of C. Stephen Evans' paper, in which he expounds his notion of 'responsible fideism'. Merold Westphal, whose credentials as an interpreter of Hegel are well known, gives an incisive account of subjectivity and the (Hegelian) system, but that same theme figures importantly in almost every essay. Likewise the discussion of humor and irony in the *Postscript* by John Lippitt is complemented by Alistair Hannay's important treatment of the place of humor in this work, as well as by comments in other essays on the interplay of jest and earnestness in the work of Climacus the humorist.

While the grammatical complexity of Kierkegaard's text invites renewed consideration of major themes central to his authorship as a whole, there are some puzzles and difficulties peculiar to the *Postscript* that get treated in a fresh way in this collection. Here are two of them.

One difficulty concerns the 'postscript' status of the *Postscript*. Does Climacus intend to add to, or revise, or qualify, his earlier *Philosophical Crumbs* by adding a 'p.s.' to it several times as long? M. Jamie Ferreira argues that Climacus intends an *addition*, to wit, a view of Socrates that associates his kind of subjectivity with 'religiousness A', which Climacus treats as a necessary condition for the specifically Christian faith that is dependent upon an historical revelation. But in *Crumbs* Socrates' thought is associated with a Platonist idealism that assumes people already possess the truth immanently and only need to have it drawn out. Since Climacus claims that Christian faith, resting as it does on historical contingencies, requires a break with immanence, how can Socrates

continue to be an important model for Christians, as Climacus seems to claim, particularly in the longer Part 2 of the *Postscript*? Ferreira proposes that in the *Postscript* Socratic subjectivity, inwardness, ethical striving, can be taken up into faith without a ‘reductive mediation’, just as elements of the aesthetic are taken up into the ethical in Kierkegaard’s treatment of the stages of life in *Either/Or* and other earlier pseudonymous works. The transition to religiousness B (Christianity) can actually be enabled by Socratic subjectivity, even though immanent Platonic dialectic affords no foothold for such a movement. Paul Meunch’s discussion complements Ferreira’s helpful reflections on this issue. Socratic subjectivity, Meunch observes, is essential to faith insofar as it is marked by a ‘primitive impression’ of the religious, the kind of impression that recedes from consciousness in those philosophical accounts of religion favored by Hegel and his Danish acolytes, as well as in popular aestheticized Christianity.

Another difficulty concerns Climacus’ puzzling ‘revocation’ toward the end of the *Postscript* of his own treatise, which he declares ‘superfluous’. Alastair Hannay canvases various attempts to explain this move: perhaps Climacus the humorist is suggesting that his work is merely an ironical jest or a satire on definition, or perhaps the revocation itself is a joke. But Hannay argues that the revocation must be taken seriously in the following sense: Climacus treats humor as a ‘confinium’ or border area between the ethical and the religious, in which he himself is confined. Humor looks backwards, while the religious (or Christian) seeker must move forward in time and thought. Therefore the existentially serious reader must cast Climacus and his treatise aside—that is, put a limit on reflection and the infinite approximations of intellectual activity that bedevil both readers and authors of treatises like this. The capacity to move existentially is freedom, and the revocation thus aims to preserve the reader’s freedom. Edward Mooney, in his lyrical meditation on Climacus’ ‘interpersonal inwardness’, reinforces Hannay’s account, connecting the revocation with respect for the inwardness of the other. This solution thus brings into focus central Kierkegaardian themes—inwardness, existential movement, freedom—and his strategy of indirect communication, a strategy exhibiting, *inter alia*, a refusal to tamper with or intemperately impose upon the reader’s inward self-activity.

Furtak has brought together an international assembly of quite sure-footed guides with similar senses of the terrain of Kierkegaard’s work. None of them are anxious to affirm a ‘post-modern’ Kierkegaard, all of them take the book to be a serious work of philosophy and theology, but at the same time all of them recognize and duly credit the difficulties that drove Kierkegaard to indirectness, irony, and humor even as he undertook the serious work of reintroducing Christianity to Christendom.

This book is remarkably free of typos or editing errors of any kind. It is to be highly recommended both for Kierkegaard scholars and for novices or those who want to explore for the first time one of the major works of a writer whom Wittgenstein praised as the greatest religious writer of the 19th century.

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