

Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, Bruce H. Kirmmse, David D. Possen, Joel D. S. Rasmussen & Vanessa Rumble, eds. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 9*. Princeton University Press 2017. 800 pp. \$150.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780691172415).

Bits and pieces from Kierkegaard's journals have been available to English readers for many years, but until now the only way to read the journals in their unedited entirety was to learn Danish, travel to the Søren Kierkegaard Archives at the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen, and ask for permission to examine the original texts. This new edition from Princeton University Press, which began in 2007 and is still underway (volumes 10 and 11, which will complete the collection, have yet to be published) makes everything much easier. Now it's possible to read every word that Kierkegaard wrote in the enormous collection of journals and papers that he left behind when he died at age 42. Volume 9 in this series includes the complete contents of five journals (NB 26 – NB 30) that Kierkegaard filled between 4 June, 1852 and 16 August, 1854. Kierkegaard died on 11 November 1855, and in the last 15 months of his life he managed to fill up 6 more journals (NB 31-NB 36), which will be collected in volume 10 of the series.

It is a profoundly different experience to read Kierkegaard's journals in this unabridged format, rather than reading a selection that has been edited and organized by someone else. Edited selections from the journals—most famously the Hong edition published by Indiana University Press, which is still in print—transform Kierkegaard's journals into polished and systematically organized philosophy books. Kierkegaard of course is notorious for his fragmentary, unscientific style of writing, and his journals are by far the most fragmentary and unscientific texts that he produced; so it is very misleading that previous editions have made these messy texts look like they are carefully and systematically organized. The truth is that they are nothing like that.

The journals are random, repetitive, raw, very unpolished, and intensely personal. Much of what you find in these texts would be rightly regarded as emotional venting. Kierkegaard is often quite bitter and resentful about how the world has treated him, and many of his journal entries radiate sadness and resignation, especially as he nears the end of his life. He complains about the injustices he has suffered and struggles to make sense of the strange twists and turns of his very strange life. If you are interested in Kierkegaard's own biography, or in the history of Denmark in the middle of the 19th century, the relevance of these journal entries would be obvious; but their relevance for philosophy is not at all obvious—so that will be my focus in this review. I'll discuss three ways in which reading Kierkegaard's unabridged journals can contribute to an understanding of Kierkegaard as a philosopher. The texts I'll cite will come exclusively from this volume, but the general principles involved are relevant to all of Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks.

(1) The vast majority of the journal entries concern Christianity—or 'Xnty' as Kierkegaard generally writes it, since in his journals his habit is to use an 'X' to designate anything related to Christianity (E.g. 'Xt' = Christ; 'Xtn' = Christian; 'Xndom' = Christiandom, etc.) But what does Kierkegaard mean by 'Christianity'? What does this 'X' stand for? One journal entry in particular suggests that the 'X' of 'Xnty' can be understood as a placeholder for a topic much bigger than any particular religion.

What is absolutely the decisive factor is that Christianity is a heterogeneity, an incommensurability with the world, that is irrational with respect to the world and with respect to being a hum. being in a straightforward sense.... This is where the battle is to be fought, and where it will come to be fought in the future. In connection with this it will be im-

portant to insist upon Christianity's heterogeneity... I have felt myself to be heterogeneous. This pain, this heterogeneity of mine, I have then understood as my relation to God. (207)

Once 'Xnty' is understood as 'a heterogeneity, an incommensurability with the world, that is irrational with respect to the world and with respect to being a hum. being in a straightforward sense' everything that Kierkegaard writes about Christianity can be seen in a new light, and it becomes philosophically interesting. What appeared at first blush to be a purely theological discussion now becomes a philosophical exploration of heterogeneity, incommensurability, and irrationality in general—topics that are obviously relevant to far more than religion. This opens up a whole new world for understanding Kierkegaard as a philosopher, and makes it possible to find everything he writes in his journals about 'Xnty' to be fascinating even if you have no interest at all in Christianity.

There is a long tradition of regarding Kierkegaard's journals as direct communications and therefore the ultimate authority and definitive last word in the cacophony of voices that we have come to call Kierkegaard's 'authorship.' There are, however, several journal entries that undermine this approach. In one of the many entries that are labeled 'On Myself' (in this volume there are 31 entries with that label, or some very close variation thereof), Kierkegaard writes:

No doubt in what has been written concerning myself in the journals from '48 and '49 a literary touch has nonetheless often crept in. It is not so easy to exclude things of this sort when someone is as poetically productive as I am. It happens as soon as I take pen in hand. For, strangely enough, privately I have a remarkably clear and succinct sense of myself. But as soon as I want to write it down, it immediately becomes literary invention. Thus it is also quite curious that I have no desire to write down religious impressions, thoughts, expressions, as I myself use them—it is as though they were too important to me. I have some few of this sort—but I have produced many. And only when an expression of this sort is, as it were, used up can it occur to me to write it down or let it creep into my literary productivity. (259)

If we take this text seriously, we can't accept at face value the picture that Kierkegaard paints of himself in his journals, and we also can't assume that he's telling the truth about his deepest thoughts on any other subject. This remarkable journal entry is reminiscent of Plato's *Seventh Letter*, where Plato declares that he never wrote down his most cherished ideas—what he truly believed—on any subject:

There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences ... no sensible man will venture to express his deepest thoughts in words, especially in a form which is unchangeable, as is true of written outlines ... anyone who is seriously studying high matters will be the last to write about them and thus expose his thought to the envy and criticism of men. What I have said comes, in short, to this: whenever we see a book, whether the laws of a legislator or a composition on any other subject, we can be sure that if the author is really serious, the book does not contain his best thoughts; they are stored away with the fairest of his possessions. And if he has committed these serious thoughts to writing it is because men, not the gods, 'have taken his wits away' (Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, Hackett, 1997, pp. 1659-1661).

This would make Plato indistinguishable from any of the many characters that appear in his dialogues, and perhaps Kierkegaard must also be regarded as just one more pseudonym—one more

mask or point of view, with no decisive authority to tell us who is in charge of all the strange characters who wander through his writings.

There is a fascinating moment in this volume that illustrates the difficulty—and perhaps the impossibility—of separating Kierkegaard’s presentation of himself in the journals from his practice of indirect communication. Immediately after a journal entry describing how he happened to bump into his former fiancée Regine Olsen—always a jarring and deeply significant event for Kierkegaard—the very next journal entry is labeled, ‘On Myself—On Indirect and Direct Communication.’ (Note that in the very title of this journal entry Kierkegaard makes himself and indirect communication inextricable.) In this entry Kierkegaard argues that even though indirect communication will always make the author’s life more difficult, and the communication won’t be understood until later, (probably not until after the author’s death, if it is understood at all), still it’s a necessity whenever you’re trying to explain something to the world that the world is convinced it already knows—such as what it means to be a Christian if you ‘live in Xndom, where everyone is a Xn’ (174). As is well known, Kierkegaard thought that it was necessary to break his engagement with Regine by means of an indirect communication, and that was one of the purposes of the book *Fear and Trembling*. As he goes on to explain in this same journal entry (‘On Myself—On Indirect and Direct Communication’), every moment in his life when he reverted to direct communication was something of a failure; the ideal situation would be to communicate indirectly from beginning to end.

From a purely ideal point of view what I have accomplished ought to have been done as follows. There ought to be a person who, when he began, was fully and firmly in accord with himself, before God, that he was a Xn, also fulfilling a Christian ethic existentially—and who then began with indirect communication. Then he would also stick with indirect communication, unwavering to the end. He would quite genuinely be God’s spy. (175)

Since Kierkegaard aspired to be God’s spy, and regarded anything short of constant indirect communication as falling short of this ideal, we are all in the same position as Regine—left to wonder who the real Søren Kierkegaard was, and puzzling about the many masks that he wore, even when writing in his own journals.

(Incidentally, understanding the ‘Kierkegaard’ who appears in the journals as a fictional character or pseudonym may be the only way to make sense of that fact that even though he continually attacks priests for their laziness, hypocrisy, and general thoughtlessness, at the same time he never stopped making plans to become a priest himself; it was the one and only career he ever contemplated.)

Finally, Kierkegaard’s unabridged journals provide a wonderful opportunity to get to know Kierkegaard as a writer, and since for Kierkegaard philosophy and writing are inextricable, any insights we can gain into Kierkegaard as a writer will also illuminate his philosophy. These journals are first and foremost a writing workshop for Kierkegaard—an opportunity for an author who was obsessed with getting the presentation just right to try out first or second or third drafts. Everyone who has been affected by Kierkegaard’s writing should take the time to read at least one volume from his journals and notebooks if only to become better acquainted with Kierkegaard as a writer and to better appreciate his concern for style. In a journal entry labeled simply ‘style’ Kierkegaard writes this description of his thoughts about language and his practice of writing:

Sometimes I have sat for hours in this fashion, in love with the sound of language when it echoes with the fecundity of thought; thus I have sat for hours at a time, like a flautist who entertains himself with his flute. Most of what I have written has been spoken aloud

many. Many times, perhaps scores of times; it has been heard before being written down. My sentence constructions could be called a world of recollections, so much have I lived and enjoyed and experienced these thoughts as they came into being, as they searched for and found their form or, even if in a certain sense they possessed this more or less at the outset, then until every detail, even the least significant (because that work—the stylistic tinkering—was naturally done afterward: everyone who really has ideas also immediately has the form immediately)—was fully unfurled and arranged in such a way that the thought could find itself well situated in the form. (419-420)

For Kierkegaard, philosophy can never be separated from how it is presented, so questions concerning writing and style are always already philosophical questions. Reading Kierkegaard's journals in their complete, unabridged form provides a much more complete picture of Kierkegaard as both a writer and a philosopher. This is one more reason to be grateful for this excellent new volume that allows us to experience Kierkegaard's journals in their original completeness and complexity.

(For reviews of the first eight volumes of *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, see *Philosophy in Review* 30.2, 105–108; 31.2, 107–10; 32.6, 485-488; 36.2, 63-66 and 36.5, 204-209.)

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