

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

Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks Volume 3: Notebooks 1-15.

Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press 2010.

845 pages

US\$150.00 (cloth ISBN: 978-0-691-13893-0)

This is the third volume in the new series *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* (hereafter *KJN*), which aims to become the standard English version of Kierkegaard's papers, journals, and notebooks. The series is certainly well positioned to achieve this goal: it is edited and translated by an excellent group of Kierkegaard scholars, in collaboration with the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center in Copenhagen; it follows the recent and authoritative *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*; and rather than reorganizing the documents according to date or topic, the series replicates the organization of the documents as they appeared in Kierkegaard's own journals and notebooks. (For a discussion of the format and usability of *KJN*, see my review of the first two volumes in *Philosophy in Review* XXX [2010], no. 2, 105-08).

While the editors have not imposed any external organization on these documents, the reader will find that the entries in Volume 3 generally fall into four or five categories: 1) lecture notes from courses in philosophy and theology; 2) notes and commentary on the history of philosophy; 3) reflections and observations on aesthetic and literary topics, such as Don Juan, Faust, and the legend of the Wandering Jew (Notebook 2), lengthy quotations and observations on Goethe and German literature (Notebook 3), and reflections on the differences between the comic and the tragic, the epic and lyric (Notebook 12); 4) assorted remarks on edifying and biographical themes (Notebooks 7 and 8); 5) personal and biographical accounts—Notebook 6 documents Kierkegaard's trip to Jutland in the summer of 1840, and Notebook 15 gives his account of his broken engagement to Regine Olsen. From a biographical perspective, Kierkegaard's version of his 'relation to her' is undoubtedly the most interesting material in this volume. For the purposes of this review, however, I will highlight some of the points that are most salient from a contemporary philosophical perspective—recognizing, of course, that for Kierkegaard biography and philosophy are not so easily separated.

Several of these notebooks collect lecture notes from philosophy and theology courses given by prominent professors in Copenhagen and Berlin. In addition to providing great insight into Kierkegaard's intellectual formation, these texts also help to fill out our understanding of the Hegelianism of Kierkegaard's day, so that we can better see who Kierkegaard is targeting when he criticizes 'speculation'. It is well known that Kierkegaard was sharply critical of Hegel, but it can be misleading to overemphasize this

point, since his concern was the widespread influence of speculative thinking rather than Hegel alone. As the Kierkegaard scholar Jon Stewart has shown, Kierkegaard's reading of Hegel's primary texts was neither exhaustive nor as extensive as one might expect. Moreover, Kierkegaard was happy to use Hegel's ideas in an *ad hoc* fashion when helpful, and was willing to give Hegel credit when due. To cite one example from these notebooks, Kierkegaard credits Hegel with showing that 'thought is immanent in language and developed within it'. This insight stands in contrast to the critical philosophy of the recent past, which maintained that language is unable to express the thing in itself, thereby hinting at the unwelcome conclusion that language exists merely to conceal thoughts (181).

In any case, the crux of Kierkegaard's critique of speculative thinking concerns its presumptuous claim to fulfill Christian faith by translating it into philosophical conceptuality. This speculative conceit was not limited to Hegel, but had infected numerous theologians and clergymen of the time. This is evident in several of the notebooks in this volume. For example, Notebook 4 contains lecture notes from H. L. Martensen's 1837-38 course on speculative dogmatics. Martensen begins by appealing to what he took to be the medieval ideal that the philosopher—qua philosopher—should be a theologian, and the theologian—qua theologian—should be a philosopher. Although this union of philosophy and theology was lost, modern speculative dogmatics purports to retrieve it by reuniting philosophy and theology in a Christian metaphysics (125). To this end Martensen undertakes a 'theological phenomenology' that presents the development of science working toward its ultimate telos, viz., the absolute identity of Christian revelation and self-consciousness (127). The notes on this phenomenology focus in particular on the development of self-consciousness from Descartes, through British empiricism, to Kant.

Notebook 4 also contains notes and commentary on J. E. Erdmann's *Vorlesungen über Glauben und Wissen (Lectures on Faith and Reason)*. Erdmann argues that faith is the immediate consciousness of human reconciliation with God (145), but that this immediacy gives way to mediation when faith finds its true self-understanding in speculative knowing (158). The goal of Erdmann's philosophy of religion was to articulate the necessary development of this self-consciousness. In an entry marked November 1837, Kierkegaard objects to this position:

The real reason it is so difficult to get people to see this dialectical movement—and why the phenomenological analogies that Erdmann cites appear much easier to them—is that such a transition seems to involve the incommensurability *of life*, which is inaccessible to the abstract dialectic that develops itself through the tangled thoughts of necessity. (147)

Here we see an early version of the criticism that would later become one of Kierkegaard's trademarks, as he insists on the contingency of historical existence rather

than the necessity of abstract conceptuality. As he writes in Notebook 13, contra Hegel, ‘Being does not belong to logic at all.’ Although Hegel and his followers present the historical development of Spirit as following a necessary logic, Kierkegaard objects that ‘Hegel has never justified the category of transition’ (413). As such, his speculative philosophy cannot do justice to concrete historical existence, punctuated at it is by contingency and paradox, which resists conceptual mediation. The paradox *par excellence* is the god-man, i.e., the incarnate Christ, whose historical existence cannot ultimately be mediated by metaphysical and aesthetic categories (416; cf. 207). Kierkegaard thus devotes a significant portion of his authorship to articulating a genuinely Christian metaphysics, which takes seriously—in other words, leaves unmediated—the historical contingency and paradox at the heart of Christian faith.

For contemporary philosophers, perhaps the most notable documents in this volume are found in Notebook 11, which contains Kierkegaard’s notes from Schelling’s lectures in Berlin. Schelling’s course bore the title ‘Philosophy of Revelation’, and he used it to present his new system of a ‘positive philosophy’ (331). Kierkegaard records his excitement at the promise of Schelling’s lectures:

I’m so glad to have heard *Schelling’s* 2nd lecture—indescribable. I have been sighing and the thoughts within me have been groaning long enough; when he mentioned the word ‘*actuality*’ concerning philosophy’s relation to the actual, the child of thought leaped for joy within me as in Elizabeth. After that I remember almost every word he said. Perhaps here there can be clarity... (229)

Kierkegaard wasn’t alone in his enthusiasm, as Schelling’s lecture course was a highly anticipated event in German intellectual circles. The new Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, had persuaded Schelling to succeed Hegel as professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin. Schelling saw this as an opportunity to overcome Hegel, as did the king, who publicly presented Schelling’s appointment as the means to root out the destructive influence of Hegelian thought. Of course, such a billing heightened the expectations and tension among the various Hegelian factions, and stirred up so much interest that the lecture hall was overflowing with a boisterous crowd of hundreds (665-7). Despite his initial enthusiasm, however, Kierkegaard soon grew disenchanted with Schelling’s lectures, and eventually stopped attending altogether:

Schelling spouts the most insufferable nonsense.... I am too old to listen to lectures, just as Schelling is too old to give them. His entire doctrine of potencies reveals the highest degree of impotence.... I think I could have become completely stupid if I had continued to listen to Schelling. (678)

After working through Kierkegaard’s notes on these lectures, some readers might worry they themselves already *are* ‘completely stupid’. Schelling’s thought is not easy to

grasp, and his presentation in this course is highly condensed, but to their credit the editors have included an extensive summary of Schelling's positive philosophy, as well as his presentation of it in these lectures. This is a merit of the *KJN* series as a whole, since Kierkegaard's notes and commentary can be rather difficult to follow; he was, after all, making notes for himself rather than composing a book for publication. This is evident in Notebooks 13 and 14, where we find numerous remarks on the history of philosophy—especially concerning Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza—that are both dense and provocative. The editors have done the reader a great service by including extensive endnotes explaining Kierkegaard's obscure references and comments. (The reader seeking additional insight can also find an excellent companion to the *KJN* in the multi-volume series *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, which is another ongoing project of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre).

In sum, this volume is an excellent addition to an excellent series. It is a rich resource for English-language Kierkegaard scholars, and reason to look forward to future volumes with great anticipation.

Brian Gregor
Boston College