

**Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, Bruce H. Kirmmse, David D. Possen, Joel D. S. Rasmussen, and Vanessa Rumble**, eds. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 8: Journals NB21 - NB25*. Princeton University Press 2015. 800 pp. \$150.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780691166186).

(For reviews of the first seven volumes of *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, see *Philosophy in Review* 30(2), 105–108; 31(2), 107–10; 32(6), 485–8; and 36(2), 63–6.)

Søren Kierkegaard was a maniacal journal writer who, by the time of his death at age forty-two, had filled up sixty-one distinct volumes in a very anarchic collection of journals and notebooks. Kierkegaard's nephew, Henrik Lund, was the first to attempt to organize this massive collection of papers. Lund was a zealous enthusiast for his uncle's ideas who is perhaps best known for the impromptu rant he delivered at Søren's burial: an angry diatribe against the Church of Denmark. (For this unruly outburst he was later compelled by the authorities to pay a fine of 100 rixdollars.) When Lund decamped a few years later to take a job as a physician on the island of St. John in the Danish West Indies, Kierkegaard's papers were first stored for a few years at Lund's parents' house and then they were shipped off to Søren's brother, Peter Christian. Since Peter Christian was by then a Bishop in the same Church of Denmark which Søren and his nephew Henrik had critiqued so mercilessly, it's not surprising that he did not share Henrik Lund's enthusiasm for Søren's papers. However, he did—begrudgingly and very slowly—allow for the papers to be cataloged and for some of them to be published.

From that time until now, Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks have been made available to readers only in a fragmentary form. Readers who did not have the means to go to the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen (where the collection has been housed since 1945) and get permission to inspect the original manuscripts have had to rely on various editions of the journals and papers that have been heavily edited and incomplete. For English readers of Kierkegaard this new Princeton edition changes all that and for the first time makes it possible to experience the journals and papers in a completely unabridged and unedited form, exactly as Henrik Lund found them when he entered Kierkegaard's apartment after his uncle's death in November 1855. (For more about the impressive aesthetic and technical accomplishments of this new edition, please see my review of volumes 6 and 7 in *Philosophy in Review* 36(2), 63–6.)

Now that an international team of scholars has painstakingly reconstructed the original anarchy of Kierkegaard's journals and papers so that English readers don't have to learn Danish or trek to Copenhagen to read these manuscripts, we are still faced with one very large question: What are we supposed to do with these extremely odd books? In what follows I will propose several answers to this question. Here, in no particular order, are some of the insights that can be gained from reading this new unabridged edition of Kierkegaard's journals and papers.

- If you read an edited, greatest hits version of Kierkegaard's journals you will easily get the impression that he was brilliant all the time. Reading this unabridged edition will quickly

disabuse you of that idea. The volumes of this new Princeton edition are far more expensive than the previous standard English edition (the Indiana University Press edition translated and edited by Edna and Howard Hong), but one of the things you get for the additional cost is a lot more dross. Kierkegaard does not always present himself as heroic or noble or even particularly intelligent in the pages of his journals. Though there are still moments of great brilliance in the journals, to get to them the reader must often wade through pages of resentment, self-pity, vanity, and occasional delusional thinking (as when Kierkegaard imagines that Regine probably wants to get back together with him because she just walked past him in the street [177-82]). There are, for example, so many journal entries in which Kierkegaard complains that people who are intellectually inferior to him, such as Mynster (especially him!), Martensen, Goldschmidt, and Nielsen, are treated with respect and admiration while he is not, that it doesn't take long before the reader stops paying attention to them (196-8, 212, 240, 284, 308, 334, 349, 389). These are not Kierkegaard's finest moments, but they are good reminders that Kierkegaard was human, all too human, and that the author of *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* has no greater authority than the pseudonymous authors of texts such as *Either/Or* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. I think this is particularly important since there is a long-standing tradition of treating Kierkegaard's journals as if they were utterly trustworthy direct communications from a completely reliable narrator, and therefore the antidote to the indeterminacy that permeates the indirect communications of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. This tradition is undermined by the unabridged journals since the picture of Kierkegaard that emerges there is of someone who was often unsure of what he was doing (110), who often doubted himself (354-61), and who was often far from noble as he allowed himself to sink into self-absorption and self-pity (299). Reading these journals I was often reminded of Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Like Zarathustra, Kierkegaard is not heroic all the time. Occasionally he gets discouraged, depressed, and angry at the world (cf. "The Soothsayer" in *Zarathustra* Part One), but these are essential parts of Nietzsche's narrative since they remind us that poets can't be trusted (cf. "On Poets" in *Zarathustra* Part Two) and that the true disciples of any teacher should run away from that teacher, lest they be crushed by a statue (cf. "On the Bestowing Virtue" at the end of *Zarathustra* Part One).

- Apropos of Kierkegaard not fully understanding what he was doing, one feature of the journals which is a truly delightful embodiment of that fact is the way that he always used the letter 'X' to signify Christianity, Christ, or any variation thereof—for example 'Xt' = Christ; 'Xn' = Christian; 'Xnty' = Christianity, 'Xndom' = Christendom, etc. My own view is that Kierkegaard's fundamentalist Christian upbringing led him to conceptualize Christianity as a collection of impossible existential ideals—standards for how to live that could never be fully realized. Also, he understood religion generally to be a strictly individual matter, something that was fundamentally incompatible with collectives or groups of any kind. Because of this, it was natural for him to conclude that 'Xnty simply does not exist' (122-4) and to be amazed that the entire 'Christian' world could be so oblivious to this fact—

so out of sync with the truth of their own existence. Once Kierkegaard has conceptualized Christianity in these terms, it really has become the equivalent of the variable 'X', a placeholder that could stand for any collection of ideals that emphasize being true to one's own existence and lived experience. Thus, by means of a certain, very extreme version of Christianity, Kierkegaard discovered what today we simply call existentialism (or Xism if you prefer). As Kierkegaard writes quite often in the journals that make up Volume 8, everyone assumed that he was arguing for a new version of Christian fundamentalism, but he wasn't; instead he just wanted honesty. For example, consider this entry in NB 21, which Kierkegaard titles 'What I have Wanted and Want':

I have never in the remotest manner suggested or attempted to extend the cause in the pietistic direction, to pietistic strictness and the like.

No, but what I want is truth in our talk and above all in our preaching, and not, as now, almost pure untruth respecting the existential so that not only is what is higher abolished but the lower even placed in its stead; the prototypes are misused, nothing is made present, and possibility and actuality and their existential relations, etc., etc., are dealt with quite wrongly (47-8).

The connections in Kierkegaard's thinking between Christianity, individuality, and existentialism are also plainly evident in this entry from NB 23:

That Christianity does not exist can be proven from the fact that existences, lives as actually lived, demonstrate that no one believes in 'the single individual' and in intensive actions—existences everywhere demonstrate: 'Let us form a group'.

But Xnty is diametrically opposed to this. (217)

- Since Kierkegaard understands Christianity in starkly existential terms, he will eventually conclude that any sort of institutional Christianity is a contradiction. This becomes the defining obsession of the last two years of his life, as he publicly crusades against organized religion in the press and in the streets of Copenhagen. The eulogy for Bishop Mynster after his death in 1854 seems to crystalize Kierkegaard's thinking on these matters, but it is fascinating to read in the journals from years earlier how the argument was already taking shape in his mind. For example in NB 22 (from 1850) he writes:

The interest of human beings is for there to be a religious establishment; the more complex and grandiose it is, the better, all the more so because of the security and the distance from decisions—which we hum. beings love so much.

God's interest is that there be no religious establishment whatsoever...

How, then, can these two ideas be united: an established order—there is no established order? In such a way that we hum. beings confess that the established

order exists for the sake of our frailty...

But then it ends with people deifying “an established order.” People forget that beyond “the established order” there is, as the ideal, the thought: No established order.

The order is: No 1—there is no established order (125)

- To balance my previous remark about Kierkegaard occasionally displaying resentment and jealousy in his journals, I should add that there are also several remarkable examples of social and cultural criticism that are far more successful because they achieve something closer to Socratic irony. Many of the criticisms in this volume that succeed in this way are directed against the careers made available by institutional Christianity rather than against the particular individuals who occupy those professions. Often these entries are titled simply ‘Priests’. Here is one of my personal favorites from NB 22:

If one were to count very carefully, one could not say that the country has 1000 priests, but 1000 priests’ gowns.

People do not really immerse themselves into being priests, not at all. No, inside a priest’s gown there is a man who is entirely different from a priest, even though he is wearing a priest’s gown.

Despite the fact that, generally speaking, I hate machines, I could really wish that someone would invent a kind of machine that could be wound up to deliver these charming and uplifting sermons. Then every congregation could acquire a machine of this sort. Then at least people would at least not be confronted with the offensive situation in which a priest does not do what he himself says—there would be nothing offensive about it. (194-5)

- One last comment on Christianity: reading Kierkegaard’s journals in their unabridged form makes it clear how singular Kierkegaard’s focus was on Christianity. In Volume 8 there are barely a handful of journal entries that don’t concern Christianity in some way. I counted only one entry that dealt with Hegel, for example (‘The System’, 191), and the discussion of Hegel there is brief and oblique. Texts such as *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* discuss Hegel *ad nauseam* but he rarely makes an appearance in Kierkegaard’s journals; in these pages, Kierkegaard sees the world almost exclusively through the lens of his own unique understanding of Christianity.
- Kierkegaard’s journals provide abundant evidence that even as he was immersed in his own writing he continued to read from an extremely eclectic collection of authors. Volume 8 contains many interesting entries in which Kierkegaard comments on books he was reading

at the time, which ranged from classical sources such as Seneca and Epictetus to more recent essays by Pascal, Montaigne, and Benjamin Franklin.

- Since Kierkegaard's authorship seems like such a chaotic menagerie of diverse pseudonyms, styles, and ideas—sometimes communicated directly and sometimes indirectly—it's instructive to read in the journals about the careful planning that was behind this production. Not to suggest that the intentions of the author deserve the last word or that they have any claim to control the history of effects produced by these texts, but the journals can at least provide a corrective to the tendency to dismiss Kierkegaard's work as simply random or careless. The journals provide abundant evidence that Kierkegaard meticulously planned every piece of the complex puzzle of his authorship (354-61), and knowing this encourages anyone wrestling with Kierkegaard's writings to approach them with a similar degree of seriousness rather than dismiss them as mere frivolities. This is an example of Kierkegaard's journals providing useful background information that facilitates a better understanding of his published texts.
- At other times the journals are more like continuations or supplements to Kierkegaard's published work. In Volume 8, for example, there are three entries that are essentially additions to *Fear and Trembling*—three more imagined scenarios involving Abraham and Isaac, and they are all quite good and worth reading along with *Fear and Trembling* (379-80, 392-3, 465-6).
- Finally, Kierkegaard often used his journals to meditate on the proliferation of nonsense in the present age—the phenomenon of people speaking or writing when they have nothing to say. Journal entries, such as this one from NB 23, help to explain Kierkegaard's influence on other philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, who are focused on identifying the limits of language and meaning:

The more a person strives in daily existence himself, the less he is inclined to give speeches. Take Socrates. Someone like him understands only all too well that these splendid speeches and masterpieces of eloquence do not lead peop. into, but away from, the existential, which always merely poses small tasks in the course of the day, but does not have glorious situations and transports of delight. Therefore a person of that sort will say, "Oh good Lord, what does an hour's oratory once a week or once a year amount to?" No, therefore a person of that sort becomes an ironist, a tease....

On the other hand, the less a pers. himself exists, the greater the need for effusions of eloquence.

That one finds this argument about the value of silence in the midst of the chaotic and unruly collection of words that make up the mountain of journals and papers that Kierkegaard bequeathed

to the world is only fitting—one more paradox, or perhaps even an outright contradiction, in the bizarre authorship that continues to challenge readers to think for themselves and be honest about their own lives.

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