

## Philosophy in Review



# Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, Bruce H. Kirmmse, & David D. Possen, eds. "Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks: Volume 11, Part I: Loose Papers, 1830-1843."

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**Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, Bruce H. Kirmmse, & David D. Possen, eds.**  
*Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks: Volume 11, Part I: Loose Papers, 1830-1843.* Princeton University Press 2019. 712 pp. \$150.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780691188799).

(For reviews of the first 10 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; 36.5, 204-209; 39.1, 8-11 and 40.2, 59-63.)

After Kierkegaard's death in November of 1855 the Copenhagen Probate Commission entered his apartment to take stock of what he had left behind. The Probate Commission reported that the apartment contained 'a mass of paper, mostly manuscripts that were found in various places' (xxix). Most of this 'mass of paper' consisted of bound journals or notebooks in 3 different groups: (1) a set of 10 journals labeled by Kierkegaard AA through KK (there is no II); (2) a set of 15 notebooks that were not labeled or numbered by Kierkegaard but that were later numbered 1–15 by the editors of Kierkegaard's papers according to the order in which he wrote in them; (3) a final set of 36 journals labeled by Kierkegaard NB1–NB36. All of these 61 journals and notebooks were published in their entirety in the first 10 volumes of *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*. But the 'mass of paper' in Kierkegaard's apartment also included many 'loose papers' that 'were found in various places,' mostly in small piles in a writing desk and in a chest of drawers. Volume 11 consists of these loose papers. Volume 11 has 2 parts: part 1 includes papers from the years 1830–1843 (the year Kierkegaard published *Either/Or*); part 2 includes the loose papers from the rest of Kierkegaard's life, up to his death at age 42 in 1855. When part 2 of volume 11 was published in May 2020 *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, which began in 2007, will be complete.

*Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* is vastly superior to all previous publications of Kierkegaard's posthumous papers in many ways. First of all, these volumes are completely unabridged: every word of every notebook, journal, and loose paper is included; not a single scrap has been left behind. That is already a remarkable and admirable achievement, but what really sets this series apart is the decision the editors made not to 'clean up' Kierkegaard's papers in any way. In all previous English publications of Kierkegaard's posthumous papers the editors imposed their own system of interpretation and classification to organize the material. That resulted in judging some of the texts not worthy of inclusion, but it also imposed a layer of interpretation on those writings that were included which made it more difficult for a reader to appreciate Kierkegaard's thoughts in their true and original complexity. The primary organizing principle for *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, on the other hand, has been: there shall be no organizing principle; instead, let chaos reign. The editors have diligently tried to get out of the way and allow the reader to experience these texts exactly as Kierkegaard left them: a mass of paper filled with many interesting ideas but not systematized or organized in any way beyond a few dates or labels attached to some of the journals and notebooks.

Of course, to publish these texts in the form of books, which necessarily have a beginning, middle, and an end, and therefore can't avoid organization and systematization completely, requires that some order be imposed on this mass of paper. To do this while also respecting and honoring the original disorder of these papers presents an interesting challenge. In the first ten volumes of this series the solution to this problem was easy and obvious, since the notebooks and journals that compose those volumes were in effect already books, with bindings that indicated a clear beginning and an end. The editors simply reproduced the books that Kierkegaard had already packaged for them, this time leaving nothing out. But in the case of the loose papers that constitute volume 11 there were

no bindings; there were just piles. Since Kierkegaard did not organize these papers between the covers of notebooks or journals as he did for the rest of his posthumous papers, the editors of *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* were compelled to adopt an organizational system of their own.

The solution the editors chose was to revert back to the organizational scheme created by Hans Peter Barford, the second person to attempt to organize and catalogue Kierkegaard's posthumous papers after Kierkegaard's nephew Henrik Lund gave up on the project. Barford's work is widely despised today because he was the first to abridge and edit the papers, imposing his own organization scheme on Kierkegaard's texts, and also because he sent many of the original documents to the printer which resulted in them being lost. The editors of *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* clearly do not agree with the paradigm of abridging and systematizing Kierkegaard's posthumous papers—a tradition that Barford began—but they recognize that for these loose papers some organizational system was necessary, and that using the scheme that Barford had already created was arguably the least arbitrary choice. Consequently, for volume 11 we are treated to a flashback to how Kierkegaard's loose papers were first organized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is the table of contents that results:

- Paper 1: Excerpts on Church History
- Paper 2–Paper 29: Church History, Biblical Exegesis, Excerpts from Schleiermacher's Dogmatics and from Baader's Dogmatics, et al
- Paper 30–Paper 47: Philosophica. Older
- Paper 48–Paper 94: Theologica. Older
- Paper 95–Paper 246: Aesthetica. Older
- Paper 247–Paper 251: Biblical Exegesis, Readings of Faust, Dogmatics, et al
- Paper 252–Paper 253: Literature on Faust et al
- Paper 254: 'Our Journal Literature'
- Paper 255–Paper 258: Small Notes on Varied Contents Inserted in *Journal AA*
- Paper 259: 'Telegraph Messages from Someone who Sees Unclearly to a Clairvoyant concerning the Relation between Xnty and Philosophy'
- Paper 260: The Doctrine concerning Confessions and the Eucharist
- Paper 261–Paper 263: Aphoristic Sketches
- Paper 264: Pages from an Older Journal
- Paper 265–Paper 269: 'My Umbrella, My Friendship,' et al
- Paper 270: 'The Sermon Held at the Pastoral Seminary'
- Paper 271–Paper 276: 'The First Rudiments of *Either/Or*. The Green Book. Some Particulars That Were Not Used'
- Paper 277–Paper 282: On Transition, Category, Interest, et al
- Paper 283: On Quality, Leap, Transition, et al
- Paper 284–Paper 304: Diverse, 1830–1843

I'm sure it's apparent just from this list that this is quite a motley collection. You can also sense Barford's desperation as he attempted to organize these papers in some sort of meaningful way, and in the end just gave up and simply labeled the final batch of papers 'Diverse.' It should be noted that a 'paper' in this collection can be a text of any length. Some of the papers are short aphorisms of barely a paragraph and others are lectures, sermons or articles that are several pages long. Any titles in quotation marks are titles that Kierkegaard himself gave to a document; any titles that are not in quotation marks are simply Barford's attempt to generalize the contents of a particular group

of papers, and in some cases the texts in a collection are so fragmentary and mysterious that Barford's titles may simply refer to one or two texts in the group that have a clear meaning.

As with all of Kierkegaard's journals and notebooks and posthumous papers generally, we ought to ask ourselves what philosophical value these texts could possibly contain. Given the fact that even Kierkegaard's published work is highly unsystematic and even chaotic and given that Kierkegaard left so much material behind in a way that suggested that he very much wanted people to read all of it, I suppose it's inevitable that we feel an impulse to preserve and to publish every word that Kierkegaard left behind. This is understandable, and I personally am grateful and thrilled that this impulse resulted in this totally unabridged collection of Kierkegaard's posthumous papers seeing the light of day, finally a little over 150 years after Kierkegaard's death. On the other hand, I think we should also be able to laugh at some of the consequences of treating every scrap of paper that Kierkegaard happened to write upon as worthy of publication and possibly containing very deep meaning and value. As the editors note, the material published in this volume 'is extremely varied, both physically and with respect to its content.... Physically, the material consists of individual loose pages, folio sheets, scraps of paper, pieces of cardboard, sewn signatures, and more' (xxxv). To avoid the obvious deficiencies of the method of all previous editions of Kierkegaard's posthumous papers—abridging the collection according to the editors' own judgments of what is valuable and what is not—there really is no choice but to publish everything, but that results in fragments such as the following being printed on beautiful archival quality paper in a \$150 (USD) book:

small, mathematically vanishing quantities.—

strange anxiety, every time I have awakened in the morning after having drunk too much, it finally came to pass.

Someone who went mad by remaining continually conscious that the world was going around.

little Peter understand<ing>. Lap—Madonna. M. Magdalene.

Children who rememb[er] thei[r] mother—

Letter from Wilhelm.

My situation, when I borrowed money from Rask and Monrad showed up.

P.E. Lind

Someone who went mad by remaining continually conscious that the world is going around.—

(These fragments are all taken from Paper 258: Small Notes Inserted in Journal AA)

Kierkegaard's many scribbles and doodles (which I can't reproduce here since I'm limited to words) might also seem to be obviously lacking in philosophical value, but I have to say that I found them to be extremely useful insofar as they made plain Kierkegaard's state of mind as he listened to certain lectures or studied certain material. In this volume the scribbles and doodles occur exclusively in the first 2 sections, which deal with church history, Biblical exegesis, Schleiermacher's dogmatics, Baader's dogmatics, etc. Kierkegaard obviously found these topics to be extremely dull and uninspiring since he resorted to filling the paper with sketches of mysterious faces and heads, strange

geometrical designs, and repeated words or fragments of words over and over in an apparent attempt to keep himself from dying of boredom.

While some of the material in this volume is valuable only insofar as it sheds some light on Kierkegaard's state of mind, such as his doodles and drawings, or only as an illustration of the sometimes hilarious consequences of printing every word that an author happened to scribble on a scrap of paper and never bothered to throw away, there are several sections of this volume that I thought were really marvelous. The first two sections, on church history and Biblical exegesis are filled with doodles and incomplete sentences, indicating that Kierkegaard found it boring just to reproduce or transcribe other people's ideas. The next three sections, which contain fascinating original thoughts on philosophy, theology and aesthetics, offer a stark contrast. Here, there are no doodles, and Kierkegaard's creativity and originality are on full display. These three sections on *Philosophica*, *Theologica*, and *Aesthetica* demonstrate how much Kierkegaard stretched and subverted those traditional categories, and how difficult it is to draw hard and fast boundaries between these three areas of his thought. There are excellent philosophical aphorisms that will no doubt catalyze many more profound ideas and insights in readers, very much like some of the best aphorisms from Wittgenstein or Nietzsche. Here are three examples, one from each of the *Philosophica*, *Theologica*, and *Aesthetica* sections:

Because, in my view, every development is finished only with its parody, it will thus become apparent that *politics* is the parodic element in the development of the world—first, gen[ui]ne mythology (God's side); next, hum. mythology (the hum. side), and then a realization of the world's goal within the world (as the highest), a sort of Chiliasm that, however, brings the individual politicians, in their enthusiasm for abstract ideas, into contradiction with themselves. (91)

I think that the following psychological experiment will easily illuminate how difficult it is to truly accept the theory of predestination. If I were to imagine that it had been foretold to a person that he would become one of the most learned of people, then assuming that this was something he wished for, he would probably say, right away: ['] Yes, so I will begin reading very diligently [']—or, if it was something he did not wish for—[']I won't look at a book.['] Both of which statements are indeed equally wrong. For of course, he would in any case become what he was to become, and he completely forgot that everything had been predetermined, so what he said had also been predetermined, and thus he entangled himself in the worst self-contradictions. (95-96)

*Literary scholarship* often resembles an impenetrable primeval forest in which a few spots may be found in which to pray; or it may resemble a family that lays claim to familiarity with the paths through the local area, but only possesses reports of these from tradition rather than from personal experience of having walked its paths. Flocks of wild animals (*reviewers*) also inhabit this literary primeval forest, and all sorts of noisy instruments must be used to keep them at bay, thus, for example, by making alliances with other reviewers. Perhaps the very best thing would be if one could proceed in the same way with reviewers as with rats: train each to bite the others. (126)

I had very high hopes for Paper 259: 'Telegraph Messages from Someone who Sees Unclearly to a Clairvoyant concerning the Relation between Xnty and Philosophy,' but the substance

of the fragments in this section didn't rise to the level suggested by the title. In other words, the title proved to be the most interesting idea in this section. Similarly, Paper 265–Paper 269: 'My Umbrella, My Friendship,' et al. seemed very promising, but this proved to be an instance where the whole section of fragments was assigned a title taken from the one aphorism in the section that seemed most coherent. Here is that aphorism in full:

*My Umbrella, My Friendship*

It never deserts me; it did that only once. It was a terrible storm; I stood alone and deserted by everyone, alone on Kongens Nytorv; then my umbrella turned inside out. I dithered as to whether I should abandon it because of its faithlessness and became a misanthrope. It has become so dear to me that I always carry it, rain or shine; yes, to show it that I do not love it merely for its usefulness, I sometimes walk up and down in my room and pretend I am outside, lean upon it, open it, rest my chin on the handle, bring it up to my lips, etc. (245)

This is certainly a charming story about the love that can develop between a man and his umbrella, but I do think it's safe to say that Kierkegaard would find it quite funny that in the year 2020 this tiny story (?) that he most likely dashed off in a few seconds and then never thought about again would be given an entire page in this elegant book, and would also be called upon to name and represent a small collection of aphorisms because it is by far the most coherent of the bunch.

This is not at all a criticism. The great accomplishment and everlasting merit of *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks* is that it is the first edition of Kierkegaard's posthumous papers that is completely unabridged, and that does absolutely everything in its power not to impose order or interpretation on any of these texts. 'My Umbrella, My Friendship' is a reminder that this editorial decision will sometimes have rather funny consequences, but I'm confident that anyone who takes the time to work through all of the material in this volume will agree that this was the best way to make this a 'mass of paper' available to the world.

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