

Stephen Minister, J. Aaron Simmons, and Michael Strawser (eds.)

Kierkegaard's God and the Good Life (Bloomington, IN; Indiana University Press, 2017). 295 pp. \$40.00 paperback.

When one reads the work of the Danish philosopher/theologian/poet/existing individual Soren Kierkegaard he or she will often encounter challenging passages that examine forms of life that are inauthentic, unchristian, and despairing. While these penetrating descriptions and evaluations that he offers can be edifying in their own right, it can be less clear what Kierkegaard's positive vision for the good life actually involves. The thirteen essays in *Kierkegaard's God and the Good Life*—edited by Stephen Minister, J. Aaron Simmons, and Michael Strawser—seek to illuminate this understanding of the good life found within his body of work. While each writer focuses on a different aspect of his corpus, they all see Kierkegaard's work as extolling a life of faith and love lived before God and with others as holding the key to human flourishing. The essays are comprised of a variety of authors including philosophers, theologians, and psychiatrists who all believe Kierkegaard possesses unique insights into a life well lived. The chapters are divided into three subsections titled “Faith and Love”, “Moral Psychology and Ethical Existence”, and “Existence Before God.”

In the first two chapters, the authors praise love as both the highest good and the chief end of humanity. In careful readings of *Works of Love* and a variety of later discourses, Sharon Krishek explains that Kierkegaard extolled love as the highest human potential gifted by God and actualized by humanity. Using the metaphor of a water gushing forth from a hidden spring, Kierkegaard explains that human love finds its origin and fulfillment in the limitless ocean of God's love. Given that God's character is love and humanity is created in God's image, humans are most themselves in the act of giving and receiving love. In the third chapter, Pia Soltoft further articulates this point, arguing that humans are first lovers. Their comportment to the word is not primarily characterized by disinterested rationality, but rather by affective knowing. Unlike early modern and later 20th century thinkers, Kierkegaard recognizes the importance of connecting the erotic and the agapic when speaking of love. This reading seems counterintuitive given Kierkegaard's extreme emphasis on neighbor love over against romantic or self-interested love, but just as faith operates as a passion of infinite proportions so to love unfolds at this fever pitch. Within Kierkegaardian scholarship there has been an ongoing debate regarding the significance of neighbor love vs. other special loves. John Davenport provides an overview of this debate while also demonstrating a way forward that attempts to integrate both Kierkegaard's chastening of special interests when giving love and the significance of seeing relatives or friends as a unique type of neighbor. In the fol-

lowing chapter, Mark Tietjen argues that Kierkegaard provides a framework of moral trust that is both opposed to strong foundationalism and irrationalism. In a framework that Tietjen dubs “agapic moral fideism” Kierkegaard argues that one trusts in a loving moral sensibility in the same way that one would have to trust with faith in God.

The essays in the next two sections retain somewhat less continuity, though this allows that they cover different territory. In chapter 6 John Lippit explores the virtues of humility and gratitude in Kierkegaard’s discourse on the birds of the air and lilies of the field. Rick Antony Furtick then demonstrates Kierkegaard’s understanding of the way that knowing occurs. He provides a phenomenology of coming to knowledge arguing that love and affect take epistemic priority. This chapter can be read fruitfully against a more pragmatic Heideggerian understanding of care that is less attentive to the disclosive mood of love. In the final two chapters of this section, Christopher B. Barnett offers a Kierkegaardian protest of Google’s (almost) Hegelian internet system and Stephen Minister offers a Levinasian criticism of Kierkegaard’s prioritization of private spirituality over social justice.

In the first chapter of the final section, Edward Mooney argues from *Fear and Trembling* that faith is a difficult and risky task involving both sacrifice and resurrection. M.G. Piety then explores how this risky faith of Kierkegaard maintains a significant continuity with early patristic understandings of faith as subjective commitment combined with intellectual assent. Following this, Grant Julin reflects on the significance of the figure of Job in Kierkegaard’s writings arguing that he represents a figure who holds the paradox of faith in both his own correctness and God’s love without any resolution. The final chapter by J. Aaron Simmons will be of special interest to *Pneuma* readers in that it places Kierkegaard in a fruitful dialogue with Pentecostal thought. Simmons begins by recalling the five characteristics of Pentecostal philosophy that James K.A. Smith extolled: Radical Openness to God, An Enchanted Theology of Nature and Culture, A Nondualistic Affirmation of Embodiment and Materiality, An Affective, Narrative Epistemology, and An Eschatological Orientation to Mission and Justice. Simmons reads Kierkegaard’s commentary on the day of Pentecost as attending to all of these characteristics by demanding that a Christian life is one lived with the Spirit, in sobriety, and constantly dying to self. By incorporating Kierkegaard’s work into the new field of Pentecostal philosophy, Simmons seeks to reveal the hauntological dimension of the Holy Ghost in the life of the church and the individual Christian.

This book benefits from the diversity of the presenters, the depth of the research, and the various concerns that it addresses without straying from the book’s central theme. Within this one volume, one will find discussions

of patristic theology, virtue ethics, continental philosophy, analytic philosophy, psychology, and contemporary theology all converging around the theme of God and the good life. The collection is also exemplary in that it places Kierkegaard in productive dialogue with figures as disparate as Leo Tolstoy, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Simone Weil, Emmanuel Levinas, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and William J. Seymour. While comparisons can be drawn between this and other edited volumes on Kierkegaard's work, it contains a unique contribution to the body of literature commenting on his corpus. I may disagree in part with particular authors regarding their interpretations of Kierkegaard's emphasis, (I would be closer to Tietjen than Mooney regarding the significance of Christian doctrine for Kierkegaardian faith) it would be difficult to pinpoint one theme that I disagree with as even different authors in the book wrestle with one another. As a whole, this volume is full of excellent articles that pertain to a common theme without becoming repetitive. Anyone interested in Kierkegaard, philosophy, theology, or simply living a good life will find their understanding enriched and their life challenged by reading this book.

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