Anarchierkegaard
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Understanding S. K.'s pseudonyms can be an interpretive minefield—or, rather, some kind of interpretive dance that refuses to adhere to category or form. Sometimes, they seem to offer us valuable insights into the "worldview" we are meant to adopt in order to ascertain the proper meaning of a text; other times, they serve to confuse and undermine our preconceptions; other times yet again, consulting the journals uncover that we have been duped into overthinking, with the pseudonym being adopted seemingly at random (we might suggest that a spectral chuckle rises from a graveyard in Copenhagen, constantly amused and bemused by the "assistant professorial" desire to turn S. K. into a system-builder). For a thinker who intended to "make things difficult" for the reader, we could only really applaud him on his success. Understanding the oeuvre is, indeed, a difficult thing to do.

This, of course, has led to a wide variety of Kierkegaardian interpretations in a wide variety of fields: theologians, philosophers, physicists, literary theorists, poets, physicians, psychol-

ogists, etc. have all drawn upon S. K.'s ideas to inform their work. And the teleological goals that those individuals have drawn S. K. towards have been equally as diverse: Hirsch appropriated the leap towards the ends of Lutheran nationalism, Schmitt again towards the ends of an absolute sovereign; Sartre drew the notion of possibility towards anti-colonialism and social liberation and Barth saw the importance of Christ *qua* prototype in establishing social democracy, whilst Ellul and Eller both took the entire *oeuvre* as the clarion call towards an anarchic Christianity against the state. At the very least, there are credible grounds for drawing upon S. K. in all of these approaches. This diversity, of course, is quite unsettling and is due in no small part to the pseudonymous misdirection and "indirect communication" present from the diapsalmata in *Either/Or* to the posthumously published *Judge For Yourselves!* and the final issue of *The Instant*.

This is why, my reader, I wanted to pause for a moment. To distinguish a "Kierkegaardian" political theology from Kierkegaard's political theology is a difficult task, especially when he wrote such reflections as these:

> "Christianity is political indifference; engrossed in higher things, it teaches submission to all public authorities."[1]
>
> "That the state in a Christian sense is supposed to be what Hegel taught—namely, that it has moral significance, that true virtue can appear only in the state… that the goal of the state is to improve men—is obviously nonsense."[2]
>
> "Of all tyrannies a people's government is the most excruciating, the most spiritless, unconditionally

[1] *JP* IV 4193
[2] *JP* IV 4238

a third person into his secrets. What does he do ? He takes a dictionary and sits down to spell out the letter, looking up every word so as to get at the translation. Let us suppose that while he is sitting employed in this labour there comes in an acquaintance of his. The friend knows that he has received this letter, and, looking at the table and seeing it lying there, exclaims, 'Oho! There you sit reading the letter you got from your lady-love.' What dost thou think the other will say ? He replies, Are you out of your senses? Is this what you call reading a letter from a lady-love? No, my friend, I sit here toiling and drudging to make a translation of it by the help of the dictionary; at times I am on the point of bursting with impatience, the blood rushes to my head so that I want to fling the dictionary down on the floor and that's what you call reading! You are mocking me. No, thank God, I shall soon be through with the translation, and then, ah, then I shall get to the point of reading the letter from my lady-love that is an entirely different thing. But to whom am I speaking… stupid man, get out of my sight, I don't want to look at you. Oh, that you could think of insulting my lady-love and me by speaking of this as reading her letter! Yet stay, stay, it is only a jest on my part; indeed I should be glad to have you stay, but honestly I have no time, there still remains something to translate, and I am so impatient to get to the point of reading therefore don't be angry, but go away so that I may finish.[13]

[13] *For Self-Examination and Judge For Yourselves! and Three Discourses (1851)*, p. 51–52, S. Kierkegaard

> the downfall of everything great and sublime…A people's government is the true picture of hell."[3]

When our thinker is obstinate in the insistence that "politics is egotism dressed up as love, is the most frightful egotism, is Satan himself in the form of an angel of light,"[4] we might suppose that any political exegesis from the work is actually merely a reflection of the reader. S. K.'s apparently anti-political mind could potentially be used to justify any politics—largely due to the contradiction apparent in the text. However, what we can do is attempt to understand him in relation to the characters that best overlap with his approach to writing and the clear political insights that run through *A Literary Review* and the *Attack Upon "Chistendom"* means that we must be more nuanced. The politics of indifference (which, to the uneducated eye, might seem like a *bourgeois* ineffectuality—the same ineffectuality that arises with the creation of "the public sphere" and the simultaneous alienation therefrom for the average individual in liberal society[5]) is held in dialectical tension with the contextual radicalism of Christian indifference. But, we can only diagnose this difference, this difference in indifference, when we can hold the pseudonyms and the variety of Kierkegaards in conversation with one another. When we have done this, we can identify the way in which his "anti-politics stance" was against the prevalent political method, not an outright rejection of socio-political action.

For this, we turn to McKinnon:

> Following a latter hint of Kierkegaard, I propose to order the more interesting pseudonyms in relation to their creator. This should enable us to take

[3] *JP* IV, 4144

[4] *JP* I, 1004

[5] "Kierkegaard in the Context of Neo-Pragmatism" J. A. Simmons, from *Kierkegaard's Influence on Philosophy — Tome III: Anglophone Philosophy*, p. 194, ed. J. Stewart

> account of Kierkegaard's warnings [not to read the pseudonymous works as if they were his own] and at the same time preserve the pseudonymous works as a source for the understanding of his thought.[6]

By carrying out a systematic analysis to identify just how unique each pseudonym's "thumbprint" actually was, McKinnon drew interesting findings from the texts.

> "Our method has two separate stages, each with its own role corresponding to the claims already men? tioned. The first stage has two parallel parts; a comparison of the vocabulary densities of the pseudonymous (PS) and acknowledged (SK) sets and, secondly, a comparison of their internal coherence or homogeneity by means of the vocabulary connectivity method. The purpose of these comparisons is to show that, both individually and collectively, the PS selections are significantly different from the SK. The second stage of the procedure is a pair-vocabularly test the purpose of which is to establish a hierarchy of the pseudonyms in relation to the acknowledged Kierkegaard."[7]

Ratio	*Pseudonym*
1.0087	Anti-Climacus

[6] "Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms: A New Hierarchy", A. McKinnon, from *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Apr., 1969, vol. 6, no. 2 , pp. 116

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 118

> am doing, hoping, fearing—and especially what I am."[12]

A note on S. K.'s hermeneutics to finish up—the view of the Bible *qua* love letter:

> My hearer, how highly dost thou esteem God's Word? Do not say now that thou dost esteem it more highly than words can express; for one may speak so highly that one says nothing. Let us therefore, in order to get somewhere, take a simple human relationship. If thou dost esteem God's Word higher, so much the better.
>
> Think of a lover who has now received a letter from his beloved as precious as this letter is to the lover, just so precious to thee, I assume, is God's Word; in the way the lover reads this letter, just so, I assume, dost thou read God's Word and conceive that God's Word ought to be read. But perhaps thou wilt say, 'Yes, but the Holy Scripture is written in a foreign tongue.' It is indeed more properly the learned who have the obligation to read the Holy Scriptures in the original tongues; but if thou dost insist, if thou wouldst stick to it that thou must read the Holy Scriptures in the original tongues all right, we can very well retain the picture of the lover, only we add a little qualification to it.
>
> I assume then that this letter from the beloved was written in a language which the lover did not understand; and there is no one at hand who can translate it for him, and perhaps he did not even desire any aid of that sort, which would initiate

[12] *Money & Power*, p. 25–26, J. Ellul

to an ethical theory or a particular way of life is absolute faithlessness.

In this same way, there is no particular Christian approach to politics. To each Christian conservative who looks for the next bustling strongman to represent "traditional values", Christ calls us out of Egypt; to each "Christian" "Marxist", Christ reminds us that not one iota can be added to God's plan for us; we make the decision (because these things always begin with a decision) to start our philosophical musings with Paul and not Plato—in a moment of childlike naivety, we start from the basic presupposition that God has spoken to us, walked amongst us, and continues to act as mediator between and our neighbours. For the high-minded thinker, this refusal to begin with secular or "pagan" categories, inevitably just another attempt to keep up with the philosophical fashions of the day—whether it is German Idealism, pragmatism, or post-modernist deconstruction adopted in the name of reinventing Christ for our purposes.

In short, this is the Christian anarchism I have attempted to present to you, my reader: not a closed system of critique, ethics, or political agitation, but rather the openness that comes with the freedom of Christ—as there is no one freer than the one willing to serve the unloveable object, "the neighbour", as one would a true love; as there is no one freer than the one willing to love the unseeable, unknowable Lord of the "infinite qualitative difference".

> "We cannot extract any system from God's revelation without twisting the texts and coming up with unwarranted conclusions because redemption is not a system…
>
> When we open the Bible we do not find a philosophy, a political statement, a metaphysic or even a religion. We find instead the promise of dialog, a personal word addressed to me, asking me what I

0.8854	A
0.8682	Johannes Climacus (2)
0.8426	B (Judge Wilhelm)
0.8073	Johannes Climacus (1)
0.7546	Johannes de silentio
0.7134	Vigilius Haufniensis
0.6047	Constantin Constantius[a]

[a] *Ibid.*, p. 120

It is clear, despite the presumed similarity of Climacus to S. K.'s own thought, that Anti-Climacus and A (the aesthetic character!) are closer together with S. K.'s own philosophical groundings. The unity of the aesthetic and the ethical-religious is found in the "outward" nature of their values, their search for meaning in *becoming* something else, and their joy to be within creation. Much like Sartre after him, S. K.'s view that one's ethical outlook on life, as opposed to the more conventional philosophical perspective that we can impose abstract and normative rules onto reality, is that living morally requires us to live

out our moral existence as a positive expression of what one wills. The ethical life cannot be reduced to "the ethical" life of *die Sittlichkeit*—no abstract collection of principles or methodologies can deliver us the free, transforming love of Christ. In the words of the Apostle: "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (***Romans 13:8***)—it is in love, the will to love the other, that we find genuine ethical behaviour.

This does lead to a point about "the ethical", however.

S. K. was quite sharp in noting that good and evil only make sense within particular "worldviews". If you don't "play by the rules of the game" then you do not recognise that rules are being broken or followed—in fact, it doesn't make sense to suggest that they are. This is where "the aesthetic" and "the ethical-religious" overlap: they are expressions of a love for creation that are not hindered by *die Sittlichkeit*. The social order does not stop someone from acting as they believe. The Knight of Faith is *always* breaking from all systems of intelligible ethics because they break from, rise above, and return to *die Sittlichkeit* in their positive expression of freedom that loves God above any and all system of ethics. In Bellinger's words: "human action is always either directly ethical in the eyes of the actors, or it is a kind of "teleological suspension of the ethical" which amounts to the same thing."[8]

When Abraham breaks from, rises above, and returns to the ethical order, he does so in the knowledge that there is no ethical system of thought which could encompass God's commandments—he is, from the perspective of *die Sittlichkeit*, as unethical as the aesthete womanizer (e.g., "The Seducer's Diary") or the journalist. But to worry about that is to prioritise the worldly over God… which is what Christendom did, said S. K.! When someone understands God's will (and this faith is

[8] "Yoder's Christ and Girard's Culture: With Reference to Kierkegaard's Transformation of the Self", p. 10, C. Bellinger

always "the objective uncertainty due to the repulsion of the absurd held fast by the passion of inwardness, which in this instance is intensified to the utmost degree"[9]), they undergo a "turned-aroundness" in their mental state which allows for the absurd (and, by extension, the paradox) to become clear to the individual. The ethical-religious thinker is internally consistent but incongruent with "the ethical thinker".

In those fearsome words from the lips of Augustine: "love, and do what you like."[10] *That* is a step towards the ethical-religious as much as the would-be adherents to zombie Christendom think that turning to Christ would mean instituting draconic slavishness of the mere reception of laws that excuse us for actually wanting to find the Kingdom. In short: for Kierkegaard, as for Christ, faith is a matter of expressing a "positive" and passionate desire for the Lord and His "yes!"; for Kierkegaard, as for Christ, faith is not only a "negative" self-restriction towards the Lord's "no!". Here is the qualitative leap between Religiousness A and Religiousness B, the dialectical knot of Christian faith for the "existing individual"—Christianity is not slavish adherence to ritualism or academic pompousness over doctrinal minutiae,[11] but rather the freedom of faith to live as one will live in the service of the Lord. And that has potentially infinite possibilities: the rich man of God in Abraham, the man of war in Joshua, the faithful companion in Ruth, the expectant widow in Anna, the evangelist of wanderlust in Paul—the truth seems to be that there is no "essential Chrsitian life", no Christian concept of "the ethical", that endures. To reduce Christ's gift to humanity

[9] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments: A Mimic-Pathetic-Dialectic Composition — An Existential Contribution*, p. 504, [J. Climacus], tr. D. F. Swenson, ed. W. Lowrie

[10] *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Augustine

[11] Note that Christ called the poor and the uneducated to His ministry—how strange that we decided this was a bad decision and replaced that archetype with professorial historians and logicians.