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Book Review: Passionate Reason: Making Sense Of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments

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and *Profane*, pages 182, 194, and 204, and *Concordant Discord* [Oxford, 1970], pages 203-205.) If so, they can't be identical. (d) Zaehner cites texts to show that theistic mystics sometimes distinguish between monistic and theistic states on the basis of their own first hand experience. (Cf. e.g., *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, page 189, and Zaehner's discussion of Ramanuja and al-Junayd in *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* [London, 1960].) This too implies that the experiences differ. (e) Zaehner not only thinks that theistic mystics differ doctrinally and behaviorally from monistic mystics; he also believes that the mystical states of the former are an enjoyment of God while those of the latter are (only) an enjoyment of (the unity of) their own souls. I find it hard to believe that Zaehner would have thought that one and the same phenomenological state could either be an enjoyment of God or an enjoyment of one's own soul depending on the behavioral and doctrinal context in which it occurs.

But these are quibbles. Pike's book is a major contribution to the literature on mysticism and to the philosophy of religion in general. It is the best book of its kind to have appeared since the important work of Farges, Poulain, and Butler in the early part of the century. It is superior to theirs in its analytic acumen and philosophical sophistication. I recommend it without reservation.

Passionate Reason: Making Sense Of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments, by C. Stephen Evans. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992. Pp. xii and 205. \$29.95 (Cloth).

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Steve Evans's latest book is the third book-length commentary on Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* to be published in the last ten years.¹ In a time when books on Kierkegaard are hard to publish and elicit little honor from the community of professional philosophers, this much careful attention to one booklet (just over 100 pages) in Kierkegaard's large corpus of works seems to need explaining. I think the explanation is that *Fragments* addresses an issue of momentous relevance to Christian thought, an issue on which the preservation of Christianity itself turns, but couches its pronouncements on that issue in an enigmatic format and sometimes in oracular statements that seem to undermine its own project of preserving the conceptual integrity of Christianity. Thus the booklet seems important, but also seems to call for quite a lot of clarifying.

Unlike Evans's *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Christian Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Humanities Press, 1983), which treated Kierkegaard's whole "Climacus literature" topically, *Passionate Reason* is a more or less chapter-by-chapter discussion just of *Fragments*. Evans distin-

guishes his approach from two others, that he calls the “philosophical” and the “ironical.” “Philosophical” interpreters like Elrod and Pojman read Kierkegaard as though he were an everyday flatfooted propounder of philosophical ideas like Kant, Aristotle and the early Heidegger; they seem to miss the literary force essential to Kierkegaard’s writings. By contrast, “ironical” interpreters like Louis Mackey and Mark C. Taylor and the disciples of Jacques Derrida write as though Kierkegaard stands for nothing, communicates no substance, and undermines at every turn anything he might be seeming to say; such commentators too miss something, namely that Kierkegaard’s writings are dedicated to communicating *Christianity* (a definite way of life embodied in particular teachings) to an audience who have a confused and disabling understanding of it. Evans seeks a middle ground that avoids both literary clubfootedness and French craziness, one that is sensitive to irony and Kierkegaard’s other literary devices, while keeping sight of the fact that our author has some quite definite *ideas* to get across.

Some of the central issues of substance that *Fragments* addresses, all centering around the concept of faith, are the following: How accessible is human fulfilment, the good for human beings? Is it generally accessible, as Greek and German philosophy have tended to suppose, or does it depend on a special, culturally and historically particular intervention of God, as orthodox Christianity has claimed? Is it rational to believe in the incarnation of God? Is historical research relevant to belief in the incarnation? What are the relative roles of the believer’s assessment of evidence and the believer’s will and subjectivity in his coming to faith and remaining in it? With the interpretive problems raised by *Fragments* as point of departure, Evans gives us judicious, substantive discussions of these and related topics. Thus the book is not just a commentary, much less a merely historical or philological study, but a significant offering in Christian philosophy.

Fragments poses as a thought experiment in which the way Socrates relates to his disciples is contrasted with a “hypothetical” case of a teacher-learner relationship that differs from the Socratic in every possible fundamental way. In the course of counterposing these two conceptions of the realization of one’s human nature, Johannes Climacus (the pseudonymous author of *Fragments*) forcefully makes a number of conceptual points about faith: 1) faith is a real dependency, in the sense that any departure from fellowship with one’s “teacher” is a departure from “the truth” (whereas Socrates is only a dispensable occasion for his “disciple’s” becoming self-realized); 2) faith is the realization of a telos from which one is deeply estranged (on the Socratic view, one bears in oneself the potential for self-realization); 3) faith marks a process of being recreated by the teacher (the Socratic disciple comes into possession of the truth through self-exploration, “recollection”); 4) faith is thus in significant ways discontinuous with what is taken to be normal or

rational for human beings, and thus requires overcoming the possibility of “offense;” 5) the “teacher” of faith is God, whereas Socrates is only a human being; 6) the God to whom one clings for self-realization is also a human being, that is, incarnate, a historical figure; 7) historical inquiry about this “teacher” has a questionable status vis-à-vis our self-realization since a) the teacher is God and is thus equally accessible to every generation, and yet b) is a historical figure in the ordinary sense of “historical”—sense-perceptually observable by his contemporaries, subject to less or more accurate reports passed on in more or less reliable ways, etc.—and c) is the paradox (to unconverted or inadequately converted minds, conceptual oddity) of God’s living in time and space incarnate as this single historical individual.

The distinction between the Socratic and the Christian understandings of the teacher-disciple relationship is momentous because A) our understanding of our relationship to Christ affects the shape that faith takes in our lives—the issue being whether we will develop as “Socratic” individuals or as Christians;² and B) on the *Fragments* reading of the distinction, a number of prominent Christian theologians, including not just Hegel but also Schleiermacher, Bultmann, Tillich, and Cobb (but not Barth, Brunner, or Hauerwas) seem to turn Jesus into a Socratic teacher, and thus to undermine Christian faith in the congregations that are influenced by their thought. Protecting the reader’s faith from conceptual sag and shift is the therapeutic purpose of *Fragments*.

As Evans’s subtitle suggests, the book is not easily made sense of, and Evans offers one plausible reading of its literary form. Chapter 1 of *Fragments* begins the thought experiment in which Climacus starts from the idea of a Socratic teacher and his relationship to his disciples, and deduces, by negation of each of the features of that relationship, the idea of another kind of teacher. The deduced idea—that the teacher is a unique divine savior and that the disciple is in bondage to sin and needs to be reborn through a miraculous intervention of this savior—looks remarkably like Christianity. Has Christianity thus been invented, using just elementary logic and some acquaintance with Socratic teachers? No, says, Evans; the hypothetical character of the chapter is Kierkegaard’s irony; but this does not prevent the chapter from having a serious Christian-philosophical purpose: the logical distinctions between the Socratic and the Christian models of teacher-disciple relationship that are made indirectly under the guise of the “deduction” are all precisely correct and of great importance to those who would nurture Christian faith.

On Evans’s reading, chapter 2 (subtitled “A Poetical Venture”) functions quite differently from chapter one. “The pretense of a logical deduction is here dropped” and now imagination, rather than logical reflection, is used to sketch the way the divine teacher “might carry out the task of teaching the

learner by transforming him” (46). The chapter’s conclusion is that the divine teacher must humble himself and become incarnate as a human being who is equal to the lowliest of humanity, and that the relationship he thus forms with the disciple is one of love. A chief vehicle of Climacus’s ruminations is a story of an exalted king who falls in love with a humble maiden and deliberates about how to woo her without violating her autonomy. Despite the obvious “poetic” character of this chapter, it seems clear to me that it continues the “deductive” program of the first chapter. The conclusion of chapter 2 is more Christian doctrine (the incarnation and God’s love), to be added to that garnered in chapter 1, and though the imagination functions in the concoction of the fairy tale, the latter is really a vehicle for some heavy argumentation, helped along by some ad hoc assumptions, such as that the divine teacher is an unmoved mover and that love requires equality between its parties. This is clear enough from Evans’s treatment, for he discusses all the arguments.

Philosophical Fragments is a leading inspiration for Kierkegaard’s reputation as an enemy of reason. This reputation comes from such concepts as the absurd, the leap of faith, and Jesus Christ as the absolute paradox. This last concept is the centerpiece of chapter 3. For nearly twenty years Evans has been defending Kierkegaard against the charge (or praise) that he is an irrationalist—that he holds faith to involve believing some contradictory set of statements like “God cannot be temporal” and “Jesus is identical with God” and “Jesus is temporal.” Evans’s arguments against this interpretation are conveniently brought together and forcefully stated in *Passionate Reason*. On his reading Kierkegaard holds that the concept of reason—that is, the set of standards for rationality—is itself contestable, and that the Christian faith transforms any concept of rationality that we may start with. (It does not change the rules of formal logic.) This is largely because Christianity attributes sin to us, which is a condition of not being able to realize our telos without a special intervention from God. So faith is contrary to reason insofar as reason is conceived as implying our “imperialistic” ability to know ourselves and our situation apart from the miracles of the incarnation and our own spiritual rebirth. But Christians carry on their lives by a set of epistemic and practical standards that presuppose the incarnation for the knowledge of self and situation and telos; so on another reading of reason, faith is not contrary to reason; indeed, *this* version of reason is of faith’s very essence. We might say that much of *Fragments* is a delineation of the contrast between Socratic reason—a sort of generic pagan outlook on matters of knowledge relating to self-realization—and *Christian* reason. Evans shows convincingly that when Kierkegaard calls the incarnation a “contradiction,” he is not saying that it violates the laws of logic, but instead that it violates the deeply engrained expectations of people whose minds and hearts are oriented by Socratic reason.

On such substantive issues of Christian philosophy as the one I have just mentioned, I find it very hard to fault Evans's book, but on the issue of its form I think *Passionate Reason* can be improved on. Chapter 3 of *Fragments* can seem like a hodge-podge, with some dark sayings about the depth-psychology of "reason" and the god being "the unknown," claims about the absolute paradoxicality of the divine teacher, a critique of some arguments for God's existence, and an appendix on the psychology of "offense." Evans points out that the following chapter (4) begins where "chapter 2 leaves off and continues the tale of the god who becomes a human being." Thus chapter 3 "seems to be a kind of digression," and Evans thinks "it is best to see the chapter as a kind of starting-over, a retracing of some of the same ground covered in chapters 1 and 2, though from a slightly different angle" (58). I think this is correct, but seeing in what sense it is a retracing of the same ground and what the different angle is, enables us to see this "digression" as a continuation of the mock-deduction of Christian doctrine begun in chapter 1. It is a retracing of the same ground in the sense that this chapter too is about the relationship of the incarnate divine teacher to the disciple, but now the angle taken on this subject is *psychological* (in a broad sense): whereas chapter 2 was about the incarnation from the point of view of the divine teacher, chapter 3 is about the incarnation from the point of view of the human disciple or potential disciple. The Christian doctrine that is deduced—again, via a number of ad hoc assumptions and elusive arguments—and then explored, is the doctrine of offense found in Matt. 11.6, 13.21, 13.57, 24.10, 26.31-33, and I Cor. 1.18-25.

A very judicious aspect of Evans' book is his criticism of what he takes to be *Fragments'* position on the relation of faith and history. I summarize Evans's position in the following remarks:

1. While Christian faith is more than just assenting to christological propositions, it does involve believing that the historical person Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnation of God. It cannot be reduced to an experience or insight or set of character traits in response to Jesus taken as a symbol expressive of some deep aspect of ourselves. (With that we would have returned to the "Socratic.")
2. The belief that Jesus is God incarnate is always in some sense a response to something historical—in the case of the original disciples, Jesus himself, in the case of later generations of disciples, a report about Jesus.
3. No amount of information about Jesus (historical evidence that he is the incarnation of God) is sufficient for faith.
4. Neither is historical evidence necessary for Christian faith, since faith may be properly grounded in a direct encounter with the risen Lord. Such an encounter may ground one's confidence in the historical record, rather than vice-versa.

5. However, historical evidence is not irrelevant to Christian faith. If the church had not regarded much of the New Testament as supporting belief in the incarnation, it would not have offered the witness that has in fact occasioned faith in many people over the millenia, and if serious challenges to the reliability of the New Testament as evidence for the incarnation are presented, they are to be countered with historical arguments.
6. However, "evidence" has a double "for." It is evidence *for a proposition*, but it is also evidence *for somebody*. What counts as evidence for the incarnation for somebody who has encountered the risen Lord may differ markedly from what counts as evidence for somebody who has not.

While I think we have reason for taking somewhat less seriously than Evans does the passages in *Fragments* that seem to deny #5, I agree with Evans in holding ##1-6 to be true. Evans has done a genuine service in clarifying and enriching these and many other aspects of *Philosophical Fragments*. I think it is safe to say that Evans's reading of *Fragments* is more sober and less controversial than the readings of Nielsen and Roberts.

NOTES

1. The other two are Harry Nielsen's *Where the Passion Is: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (University Presses of Florida, 1983) and Robert Roberts's *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Mercer University Press, 1986).

2. Kierkegaard never disdains a truly Socratic personality development; indeed he holds it up as a model to be admired and imitated. But he insists throughout his authorship that it is not the same as Christian faith.

The Love Commandments: Essays in Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy, ed. by **Edmund N. Santurri** and **William Werpehowski**. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992. Pp.307, \$25.00 (paper).

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Contrary to what the title suggests, this collection focusses on the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, although many of the authors acknowledge that this commandment is subordinate to the first and great commandment, to love God with one's whole heart, and mind and soul. It contains a brief introduction and nine papers all apparently written by theologians or experts in religious studies. I shall discuss each of these papers in turn.

Gene Outka's "Universal Love and Impartiality" addresses this question: given that we ought to love our neighbors as ourselves, ought we to be impartial between others and ourselves? It is important to be clear about what