need a reason to delay. Because this is part of my temperament, I find it hard to agree with Mawson and Sartre about the value of self-creative autonomy. Mawson writes that "Sartrean meaningfulness" is "a sense of meaningfulness that in and of itself we rightly value" (123). However, I do not regard self-creative autonomy as an intrinsic good. It seems to me to have no more than instrumental value. This is because what I ultimately value is perfect happiness, and I think of it as experiences of nothing but pleasure (disclosure: while I am not a hedonist, I am a hedonist about happiness). Thus, were I to be perfectly happy, I would not care the least about possessing self-creative autonomy or free will. I value having free will and, by implication, self-creative autonomy only to the extent that it provides me with good reason to think and hope that I might be able to do something to remove myself from a situation in life that is less than appealing. But perfect happiness could never be to any degree unappealing. Moreover, it is because I think of perfect happiness as the experience of nothing but pleasure that I am unpersuaded by the objection (standardly traced to Bernard Williams) that eternal bliss would become boring. How could the experience of pleasure be boring? Mawson also finds the "boredom" objection wanting: "And surely worshipping God in the full glory of the beatific vision would not be boredom-worthy" (141). Absolutely so. But I believe it is the pleasurable nature of that vision that makes clear why it could not be boring.

It is because I part ways with Mawson (and Sartre) about the value of self-creative autonomy that I in the end part ways with his polyvalent amalgamist view that not all of the deeply valuable meanings of life are jointly satisfiable. I believe that not having meaning in the Sartrean sense in the heavenly end that is perfect happiness would not in any respect be bad for us. What would be bad for us is my failing to commend once again Mawson's book. It is the gold standard among works on the meaning of life.

Kierkegaard's God and the Good Life, edited by Stephen Minister, J. Aaron Simmons, and Michael Strawser. Indiana University Press, 2017. Pp. xx + 272. $90 (hardback), $40 (paperback).

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Kierkegaard's God and the Good Life presents recent work on love, faith, responsibility, and well-being in Kierkegaard. Several of the essays engage somewhat unusual topics in the context of Kierkegaardian ethics, including early Christianity (Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria), Google,

pp. 508–513 FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY Vol. 35 No. 4 October 2018
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irony, and pentecostal philosophy. Several alternative accounts of love and responsibility (those of Simone Weil, Anders Nygren, Immanuel Levinas, and Dietrich von Hildebrand) are examined in detail and brought in to illuminate Kierkegaard's work. The collection is a valuable contribution to scholarship on Kierkegaard's ethics, and each essay is clear and engaging enough to serve as an introduction to Kierkegaard's thought, including for advanced undergraduates. Some essays also offer close readings of important but lesser known works by Kierkegaard, especially *For Self-Examination* and *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, in addition to new perspectives on *Works of Love* and *Fear and Trembling*.

The editors describe the collection as addressing some persistent misunderstandings of Kierkegaard's thought. His work is still considered by some to either (1) have nothing to say about ethical issues or (2) offer views of ethics and social life that are too individualistic or irrational. The editors describe the book as aimed at

> overcoming any facile view of Kierkegaard as being either irrelevant regarding such issues (due to the mistaken, but still widespread, interpretation of Kierkegaard as being an irrationalist fideist with no concern for social existence) or even dangerous for social life itself (due to the mistaken, but still occasionally found, view of Kierkegaard as being an immoralist). (x)

While this is a lot to take on, I think the collection makes strides in these directions and certainly puts forward readings that, far from "facile," embrace complex and subtle understandings of our human responsibilities toward others. The essays demonstrate that Kierkegaard makes positive, perhaps even indispensable, contributions to ethical thought. Rather than challenging opponents or skeptics directly, the collection outpaces them by presenting interpretations that are philosophically rich and make good sense of Kierkegaard's texts. The book's constructive approach is effective: Why spend time challenging those who claim Kierkegaard has no ethics when there is so much Kierkegaardian ethics to talk about?

In addition to the two misunderstandings mentioned above, the editors also frame the book as addressing two specific areas in which the relationship between "moral action and thinking about God" has become, or has been perceived to have become, "deeply problematic" (ix). First, they describe a tendency in Kierkegaard scholarship to "downplay the orthodox religious aspects of Kierkegaard's thought in order to make his philosophy more relevant to contemporary trends," such as postmodernism. Although they describe this kind of approach as a "current trend," postmodern readings are not particularly new, and it would be hard to make the case that they are becoming more common. Louis Mackey's incorporation of literary theory and Derrida's philosophy in *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* appeared in 1971, nearly half a century (forty-six years) before this collection. And while the postmodern approach has continued to have representatives since then (Roger Poole's *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* [1993], the anthology *The New Kierkegaard* [2004], and John

Caputo's *On Religion* [2001, new edition this year] all come readily to mind), these voices in the wider scope of Kierkegaard scholarship, while influential, hardly constitute a trend. More recent starting points for reading Kierkegaard include engaging with work in contemporary analytic philosophy (such as personal identity, immortality, epistemology, and aesthetics) as well as reconsidering traditional views of Kierkegaard's relationship to German Idealism. Given that one stated aim of the collection is to move beyond postmodern interpretations, it is counterproductive to treat postmodern interpretations to begin with as having so much clout. On the other hand, while neither new nor dominant, postmodern approaches are well worth engaging. The strongest, most sustained discussion of a postmodern view in the collection is Strawser's engagement with Mackey on love; Simmons also briefly discusses Caputo, though one of the more interesting critiques is buried in a footnote of his chapter. In any case, I hope new readers will not come away with the idea that the authors in this volume are an embattled minority rather the leading, trend-setting voices they in fact are. While many contemporary scholars do not treat Kierkegaard as a religious thinker, there have been and remain a good many that do. Rather than a solution to an emerging problem, I think the collection is better understood as a set of noteworthy and welcome additions to a well-represented tradition. The book advances ideas from a similar collection edited by Mooney a decade ago (*Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, 2008), with essays by some of the same authors (Davenport, Furtak, Piety, and Mooney) and offering in-depth discussions of other contributors to the earlier volume (Pattison, Roberts, and Ferreira).

The second point the editors describe as "increasingly prominent" is the "intersection between religious existence and social life," including as it impacts political contexts (ix). The essays offer helpful foundations for addressing contemporary socio-political questions rather than direct applications to contemporary issues (with the exception of the essay on Google). The collection shows that Kierkegaard "offers profound resources for contemporary existence, not despite his religious commitments, but precisely because of them" (ix) and "offer[s] reasons to think that there are no simple answers when it comes to understanding Kierkegaard's complex, theologically oriented authorship and its ethical impact" (ix–x). The authors' integration of Kierkegaard's ethics into his thinking as a whole also demonstrates that "to think about Kierkegaard's God requires thinking seriously about what the good life is and should be" (xvii) and moreover asks readers to respond to a call to "engaged living" (xviii). The overall impression there is something (or many things) one ought to go out and *do* after reading Kierkegaard is part of the unusual energy and importance of the collection.

The book consists of three main parts. In the first part, "Faith and Love," the essays examine the intersection of love, the good life, and their shared foundation in God. One distinguishing feature of this first group of essays is their in-depth engagement with other thinkers, including Leo

Tolstoy (Krishek), Anders Nygren (Søltoft and Davenport), Dietrich von Hildebrand (Davenport), and Simone Weil (Tietjen and Mooney). Sharon Krishek argues that Kierkegaard offers an explanation for the brief peace experienced by Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych at the end of his life, left unexplained by Tolstoy. According to Kierkegaard, love is the highest achievement of a good life, and his own potential to love is what Ilyich finally realizes. Michael Strawser characterizes the activity of relating to others through love, rather than passively enjoying eternal happiness, as the highest good in Kierkegaard, arguing that "the good life on Earth must be our primary affirmation" (27). Pia Søltoft shows ways in which agapic neighbor love, as a kind of passion, need not be separated from erotic love, contra Nygren's view. John Davenport addresses the same problem of preferential (or "special") loves and love of neighbor, arguing (like Søltoft) that erotic and agapic loves need not be opposed, suggesting instead that special loves can be "infused" with agapic love. Mark Tietjen takes on the provocative question of whether the good life requires Christian theism, concluding that Christianity offers a strong justification for the aim of equality. He argues for "agapic moral fideism," which expects to find love in others we can never fully confirm.

Part 2, "Moral Psychology and Ethical Existence," examines the relationship between faith and moral development. John Lippitt argues that the virtue of humility is not self-effacement but rather self-confidence that facilitates gratitude, as a disposition not to experience negative emotions related to competition. Lippitt articulates a complex network of virtues: humility and gratitude motivate contentment and joy and are expressed through hope and patience, which in turn communicate humility as trust in goodness beyond one's own power and understanding. Rick Furtak's essay reveals how affections and moods influence our perception of reality, and in fact contribute to constituting that reality; a purely dispassionate approach to knowledge would fail to understand the world as it really is. Furtak includes extended analogies to acknowledging one's own mortality and recognizing the value of one who has died, noting that it can be difficult to appreciate the positive qualities of existence until they are lost or threatened. Christopher Barnett proposes a similarity between Google's aim of making information accessible and Hegel's system of knowledge, proposing contemplation (*Betragtning*) as an antidote to both. Lastly, Stephen Minister describes how Levinas seeks to reconcile his gratitude toward individual Christian who reached out to vulnerable Jews with the "coexistence of the rise of National Socialism and the Holocaust with Christianity's dominance in Europe" (153). Minister suggests that Kierkegaard, while having more to say about ethics than many think, is still subject to Levinas's criticisms of him and of Christianity more generally. Namely, Levinas points out the troubling reality that individuals must often rely on the loving sacrifices of others when structural justice has failed them, and neither Kierkegaard nor Christianity place enough emphasis on structural justice.

The essays of the third part, "Existence Before God," offer more specific recommendations for living a good life and for further thinking about religion and philosophy (though again, not mainly by addressing contemporary issues directly). Edward Mooney affirms the importance of gratitude and thinks of faith as offering a kind of resilience, which he describes as an ability "to weather disruptions and to stay open to marvels" (188). Mooney's essay focuses on self-deception as the main obstacle to such resilience, offering a Kierkegaardian account of how and why it occurs. Marilyn G. Piety argues that knowledge is essential to love (referencing Furtak as one of the few to recognize this) and provides an account of knowledge in Kierkegaard, describing faith as providing a "foundation for Christian knowledge, just as sensory experience provides the foundation for empirical knowledge" (197). She emphasizes such knowledge is always embedded in concrete life and that living a good life cannot be separated from the quest for truth. Grant Julin undertakes an exploration of Job's suffering, drawing attention to Job's inner relation to himself (in contrast with his degree of correctness against God), which can similarly apply to how we understand ourselves before God. Finally, Aaron Simmons contributes to both Kierkegaard studies and pentecostal philosophy, arguing that Kierkegaard's philosophy is "understood productively in relation to Pentecostalism" (xvii). Making use of guideposts for pentecostal philosophy provided by James K. A. Smith, and then examining William J. Seymour and Kierkegaard in this light, Simmons shows the importance of the Holy Spirit in Kierkegaard's writings, where Christianity transforms the world by "breathing different air" (241), offering new ways of "inhabiting the world and relating to our neighbors within it" (243).

There are other interesting strains in the book that are not named as themes, including incorporations of phenomenology in the chapters by Søltoft , Strawser, and Furtak, and indirectly in Mooney's discussion of self-deception (with a brief mention of Sartre). Emphasizing Kierkegaard's roots in phenomenology (e.g., Hegelianism) and similarities with twentieth-century phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Furtak) offers a promising alternative to postmodern interpretations (as I have also argued) by showing how Kierkegaard reveals universal structures of experience. Another unmarked strain is the reappearance in different essays of the parable of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air as retold in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (in chapters by Tietjen, Lippitt, and Barnett, the latter two referencing George Pattison). The recurrence suggests there is something timely and perhaps yet unresolved in this set of parables as retold by Kierkegaard, and I hope they will be taken up by yet more readers and scholars.

I also hope someone will take up and respond to Minister's Levinasian challenge to Kierkegaard (and Christianity in general) which, while carefully qualified, goes more or less unanswered by any essay in the volume. One observation I do have about the Levinasian challenge (namely, that Kierkegaard pays little attention to political justice, but that ethics

does require this wider concern), is that Minister's critique of Kierkegaard draws mainly on *Practice in Christianity*, where it is likely that Kierkegaard presents an exaggerated fictional viewpoint more extreme than his own. (Pattison has described its pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, as a "hyper-Christian" in George Pattison, "Philosophy and Dogma: The Testimony of an Upbuilding Discourse," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Edward F. Mooney [Indiana University Press, 2008], 155–162.) Throughout his essay, Minister attributes the quotations to Kierkegaard (rather than the character Anti-Climacus), which is unusual. The issue of citing pseudonyms is especially relevant in the context of engaging with postmodernism, since Poole faulted "blunt" theological readings for neglecting to read with literary sensitivity, and in particular for failing to be mindful of differences among pseudonyms. (Roger Poole, "'My Wish, My Prayer': Keeping the Pseudonyms Apart," in *Kierkegaard Revisited: Proceedings from the Conference 'The Meaning of Meaning It,'* edited by Niels Jorgen Cappelorn and Jon Stewart [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997], 156–176, and *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993].) While Minister appeals to the example of the charwoman from *Works of Love* to confirm that a passive approach to structural justice and material well-being is found throughout Kierkegaard's work, I doubt as strong a case could be made against Kierkegaard if the "hyper" claims by Anti-Climacus are read as made by a fictional character, like Ivan's speeches in *The Brothers Karamazov* or Ivan Ilych's point of view in Tolstoy's short story. I think adding more textual subtlety here would in the end support Minister's project of making political justice more central to ethics: it could mean Kierkegaard agrees with Levinas on the importance of social goodness (and not just inner goodness) even more than is usually thought. On the other hand, it may just be that Kierkegaard (and Christianity) are ethically weaker here than Levinas (and Judaism). If so, is this merely a difference in emphasis, or is a neglect of material conditions essential to Kierkegaard's thought and perhaps to Christianity more broadly? How would this challenge affect our understanding of other essays in the volume?

These are hard questions, revealing some healthy disagreement among contributors. It would be difficult to dismiss the essays in this collection as the "blunt" theological readings criticized by Poole. Overall, the authors embrace tension and difficulty with courage and hope. In the care taken with the ideas of others, in the concern to make love and justice more central to our understanding of Kierkegaard and Christian ethics, and in the goal of offering new positive directions for religious thinking, the collection is both effective and admirable. Each essay merits and rewards careful attention, and the volume as a whole is a valuable resource for examining the roles of love and faith in the quest for a good life.