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Robert C. Roberts

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Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society, by Merold Westphal. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987. Pp. xii and 129. \$19.95.

ROBERT C. ROBERTS, Wheaton College.

This book collects seven essays, all but one previously published, spanning a period of more than fourteen years. The title accurately indicates the contents of the volume, which displays a remarkable consistency of focus and interpretation.

The book is an overwhelming and to my mind definitive correction of two basic and widely committed mistakes in the interpretation of Kierkegaard. The one is that Kierkegaard's "individualism" ignores the fact that human existence is fundamentally social; the other is that Kierkegaard disvalues correct thinking ("Reason"). In each case Westphal corrects the misreading by seeing Kierkegaard as a social critic (a practitioner of "prophetic philosophy of religion" [chapters 1 & 2], more specifically "ideology critique" [chapter 7]) and clarifying the nature of his criticism.

Kierkegaard's individualism, like Hegel's, is "dialectical": each individual is both a *member* (of a family, a language community, a country) and an *independent self*, and these identities are interdependent. A person cannot be an individual without being a member, and a person cannot be a proper and mature member of a proper and mature society unless he is an individual (p. 47). But Kierkegaard thinks Hegel to be soft on the latter half of this dialectic so that an individual's entire identity comes to be constituted by his relationship to e.g. the state. Kierkegaard's project is thus "to rescue dialectical individualism . . . from a Hegelian philosophy that he views as insufficiently faithful to it and from a society of which Hegel's philosophy is an all too faithful expression" (p. 33). Because the whole dialectic is not stringently maintained, a society is deified, and Hegel is the theoretician in residence: "To a society that inarticulately and thoughtlessly takes itself to be divine, Hegel says, Yes, we are indeed divine, and philosophy can show how this is both possible and necessary" (p. 38). Kierkegaard, as a prophetic philosopher, uses his conceptual and rhetorical skills (see "Kierkegaard's Sociology," pp. 43-59) to break the individual's idolatrous relationship to the social order, or in Westphal's words "*to un-socialize the individual in order to un-deify society*" (p. 34, his italics).

On the subject of "Reason" (chapters 6 and 7), it is according to Westphal Kierkegaard's premise that this honorific term is often deviously used to sell a bill of goods. If there is any such thing as reason in general, it is something pretty thin like the disposition or obligation to eschew propositions of the form 'p & ~p.' On the other hand, propositions like the following are sometimes rather insistently commended as dictates of Reason:

*The Son of God cannot have been exclusively identical with any particular historical human individual.

*Anything that can be known can be known without aid of divine revelation.

- *You must never believe any historical proposition unless you have a certain amount of the kind of evidence for it that history professors traffic in.
- *Being born in Christendom is a sufficient condition for being a Christian.
- *Miracles do not occur.
- *Being generous out of your abundance is a virtue, but it's crazy to abandon your capital to identify with the poor.
- *Faith is for the unsophisticated; knowledge is what the sophisticated seek.
- *It is crazy to insist on the fine points of your integrity when doing so will cost you your life.

When such propositions are taken to express Reason, a person may reasonably opt to reject it and choose instead the paradox, the absurd, the divine madness, the logic of insanity. Indeed, if Kierkegaard is correct, the rejection of Reason is a necessary condition of becoming a Christian. None of this implies that Kierkegaard embraces inconsistent or sloppy thinking or that he has rejected logic. Indeed, it is in part because he is such a sharp and consistent thinker that he notices how fundamentally important it is to reject Reason.

Westphal is thoroughly acquainted with the relation of Kierkegaard's writings to German idealism (see especially "Abraham and Hegel," pp. 61-84), as well as with our European contemporaries who reflect, in one way or another, the influence of Kierkegaard. As a reader of only amateur acquaintance with these traditions, I found his jargon-free sidetrips into their thought, and the comparison of this with Kierkegaard's, interesting and illuminating. I recommend the book highly, both to Kierkegaard specialists and to others interested in rationality, human nature, and society. I plan to have it on the reserve shelf the next time I teach a course in Kierkegaard.