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Ferreira, TRANSFORMING VISION

Caroline J. Simon

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personality variables tend to be present in clusters (people are often anxious, insecure, *and* hypersuggestible, for instance), and many subjects of religious experience escape all of them; and it is clear that the other types of pathological factors (e.g., hallucinogens), whose presence is much easier to detect, are absent from the vast majority of cases of religious experience (p. 223).

In other words, the clustering effect limits the evidential force of there being many pathological forms of reduction. Nor, second, does she believe the *non-pathological* forms of counter-explanation have a cumulative force:

Atheists such as J. L. Mackie admit that no natural history of religious experience so far developed can adequately account for the phenomenon of religious experience as a whole. He is confident, however, that in combination they could provide 'an adequate and much more economical naturalistic alternative' to religious explanations, so that even psychologically sound religious experiences do not escape the reductionist net. But Mackie offers no such account himself. Presumably the combined theory would have to be extremely complex... However, it would still be difficult to show that this was a complete account. In fact, most theists would agree with Mackie that each natural history discussed above 'correctly identifies factors which have contributed to some extent to religion', but that is far from admitting that together they constitute a highly probable and complete reductionist account of religion (p. 230).

Mackie, it is alleged, goes beyond the evidence represented by past reductionist successes in claiming that *all* religious experiences are vulnerable to reduction.

This response seems too quick and optimistic, however. Unless one places a tremendous weight upon the principle of credulity, to claim that religious experience has "evidential force" for others as well as the experiencer is, in my view, to incur an obligation to at least show that there is not a "trend" of successful counter-explanation. Otherwise, such a trend would make it probable that the remaining experiences *can* be reduced just like the others have been. That is, successful religious counter-explanations may have a cumulative effect, at least in terms of affecting the plausibility of believing that some religious experiences will survive reduction. Franks Davis is to be praised for drawing attention to the complexity of these appraisals; perhaps her book will serve as a stepping stone to a full response to the cumulative counter-explanation challenge.

Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith, by M. Jamie Ferreira. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. Pp. 168. \$39.95 (cloth).

CAROLINE J. SIMON, Hope College.

Professor M. Jamie Ferreira's *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* brings an impressive array of resources to bear on the

question of how best to interpret Kierkegaard's concept of a "leap of faith." Ferreira cites writers as diverse as Samuel Coleridge, Donald Davidson, Flannery O'Connor and Richard Rorty on topics ranging from philosophy of religion to metaphor, from romantic love to paradigm shifts, from literary criticism to irrationality. The result enriches our understanding of Kierkegaard, faith and conversion. Her work is densely-woven, rich, and suggestive; this review will, at best, highlight some of the main lines of argument and important questions raised by *Transforming Vision*.

As the book's subtitle emphasizes, Professor Ferreira is interested in reassessing the roles of imagination and will in transitions to faith. She is concerned to counter the "deeply held modern prejudice" that Kierkegaard is a volitionist with regard to faith (p. 147). On the volitionist model of faith, the potential believer sees himself as having to choose among options which are all equally 'real' possibilities for belief. He makes "an intentional, purposeful, deliberate, self-conscious, or reflective 'act of will'" (p. 7) in choosing to believe one among these options. Choosing is taken to be separable from appreciating the options and is a "leap" which bridges the gap between knowing what the options are and appropriating one of them (p. 8). The role of imagination, on the volitionist account, is "to 'produce candidates for belief,' after which 'the will decides which to believe'" (p. 10).

Professor Ferreira contrasts the volitionist model with what she argues is the Kierkegaardian model of faith. On this model, the "leap" of faith is a passionate, imaginative "revisoning" which is more like a *Gestalt* or paradigm shift or the act of apprehending a metaphor than a deliberate decision (pp. 72-81). Preparation for such a transition can be deliberate, but this brings one to a critical threshold, the crossing of which is not itself a deliberate act. "We can choose to look *for* what we cannot choose to see; looking *at* the world in a new way cannot be achieved by the same kind of decision which effects a looking *for* a new way of seeing" (p. 121). Faith is "an imaginative gathering, a synthesis and extension by imagination—which effects a reorienting shift of perspective" (p. 105). It involves a surrender (a finding-one-self-engaged) which cannot be directly willed (p. 117) and which is both active and passive (p. 87). It is free "without being self-consciously intentional and without having an explicit acknowledgement of a variety of options" because it is not necessary or compelled (p. 39). It is also cognitively efficacious, incorporating elements of both continuity and discontinuity:

The letting go or surrender assumes an imaginative suspension because it is a paradoxical seeing of what is both not yet there and already there, for sometimes it is only by putting-together imaginatively what could be there that we are able to recognize what is in some sense already there.... Moreover, such a shift in perspective arising from imaginative activity—a seeing things together differently—would be a free, qualitative transition or leap as much as any deliberate, self-conscious decision would (p. 107).

Besides an enriched role for the imagination, this model also involves seeing the will as appetitive reason or rational desire rather than as volition (p. 154). Choice with regard to worldviews or love-objects just is becoming decisively interested, rather than being a separable decision to adopt a stance (p. 127). Decision, on this model, is “a moment of realization, of becoming ‘thoroughly aware’ of what was already decided” (p. 158).

Ferreira has made a convincing case that the volitionist is mistaken if she thinks that all leaps of faith are like e.g. the decision to jump (or not) from the side of a swimming pool which is clearly seen in broad daylight. In contrast, Ferreira wants us to see what Kierkegaardian faith is more like the luxuriantly complex scene, set deep in a Puget Sound island’s forest, deftly portrayed at the end of Annie Dillard’s recent novel, *The Living*:

The forest floor was soft and familiar underfoot: the papery, pitchy fir cones stuck to Hugh’s bare feet as they had when he was a boy in Goshen. The dense welter of trees hid the sky completely. After a long walk, he heard voices. Will Ruffin called to him, Vinnie called to him, and held the lantern up to find the fir trunk down which their voices fell. He climbed the tree one-handed on many rungs, emerged at a high platform and pulled himself up.

Hugh found a dozen unrecognizable people on the platform, and heard unfamiliar voices.... Hugh held the lantern aloft and saw it illumine the stiff boughs of trees; he set the lantern down. He stripped to his union suit, and somebody handed him the heavy, knotted rope.... Before his eyes in every direction he saw nothing: no pond, no ocean, no forest, sky, nor any horizon, only unmixed blackness.

‘Swing out,’ the voices said in the darkness.

‘Push from the platform, and when you’re all the way out, let go.’

When? he thought. Where?

The heavy rope pulled at him. He carried it to the platform edge. He hitched up on the knot and launched out. As he swung through the air, trembling, he saw the blackness give way below, like a parting of clouds, to a deep patch of stars on the ground. It was the pond, he hoped, the hole in the woods reflecting the sky. He judged the instant and let go; he flung himself loose into the stars.¹

Ferreira does not herself give such an example, but it contains analogues of the features of Kierkegaardian faith. Here, the elements of activity and passivity, continuity and discontinuity, community and individuality, pull and push, concrete actuality and transcendence, seeing, not-quite-seeing, not-yet-seeing, and seeing-as intertwine. Ferreira performs the valuable service of helping us see that many come to faith through an analogously complex transition.

One goal of *Transforming Vision* is to argue that Kierkegaard is neither a

prescriptive nor a descriptive volitionist. As a means to this, the book contains careful textual arguments for the central role of imagination in Kierkegaard's account of faith. Some of these arguments rest on Ferreira's often repeated assertion that it is "the distinctive function of imagination to hold elements in tension" (p. 5, see also pp. 13, 32, 62, 90, 109, 126). Given this assumption, Ferreira can argue that Kierkegaard implicitly appeals to imagination whenever he discusses paradox, passion or possibility. For example, she argues that "insofar as the transition to faith is seen in terms of 'passion' as well as 'leap,' the implicit category of paradox—of tension between opposites—qualifies the category of leap by bringing in imaginative activity" (p. 13). The argument that Kierkegaard himself thought that only imagination can hold elements in tension appears to be indirect, resting on the Kierkegaardian pseudonym "Climacus" and its connection with the sixth century author of *The Heavenly Ladder* coupled with the ladder's use among medieval theologians as a symbol for imagination, taken as the mediating faculty between reason and the senses (pp. 11-12). Some may doubt that this will bear the weight which Ferreira's interpretation puts on it. Even those who are convinced that Kierkegaard thought of imagination as exclusively having this function may question whether it is wise for *us* to endorse this view. One might see this claim and its defense as an unhelpful reversion to faculty psychology.

However, the value of Ferreira's insightful description of Kierkegaardian faith does not hinge on this issue; her characterization need not appeal to a reified "faculty of imagination" or insupportable claims about its "function." A much more important issue is just how Ferreira sees Kierkegaardian faith as relevant to volitionism. Her interpretive counterclaim to volitionism appears to be that Kierkegaard is a Kierkegaardian prescriptivist—true faith as opposed to the "faith" of those in Christendom involves suspension, engagement and a transformative revisioning. It is less clear whether Ferreira is recommending that *we* should be descriptive Kierkegaardians or prescriptive Kierkegaardians. To be a descriptive Kierkegaardian (in the strong sense) would be to think that no one ever does make the transition to faith in the way volitionists claim one does. Since Ferreira views her proposal as delineating "an alternative reading of the human activity required in the actual transition" to faith (p. 145), this may be her view. But supporting this claim would necessitate careful examination of many conversion stories, preferably from a wide spectrum of Christian traditions and perhaps others as well (Ferreira cites less than a handful, p. 105ff).

To be a prescriptive Kierkegaardian would be to think that "true" conversion is never a mere act of volition or that Kierkegaardian conversion is preferable to volitional conversion. Advocates of such a view would seem to have two choices when faced with someone whose conversion story takes a

volitionist line: see such people as misdescribing their own experience or see their "conversion" as somehow substandard. Either alternative might give one pause; however, one can hypothesize about Kierkegaardian reasons for such a claim. For example, one could doubt that 'will power' is ever enough to engage decisively one's being, arguing that weighing and making a deliberate choice among equally real options would at best bring one to Christendom, not to Christianity. Or, one might apply Ferreira's very interesting suggestions about the role of the understanding and critical appraisal in Kierkegaardian faith (pp. 129-144) by arguing that volitionist conversion would be irrational in ways that Kierkegaardian conversion would not. A filling out and evaluation of such lines of argument would be a worthwhile extension of Ferreira's project.

An alternative would be to take the volitionist and the Kierkegaardian to be describing two different, but equally valid, modes of conversion (a position one might call weak Kierkegaardianism or weak volitionism, depending on one's initial loyalties). After all, God's house has many mansions and the Spirit "blows where it wills." Perhaps there are leaps and leaps. It may be that many more conversions are like Dillard's breathtaking description of Hugh's plunge into a Puget Sound pond than like the more prosaic decision to jump from the side of a well-illuminated swimming pool; we would have to, as Wittgenstein so often recommends, *look and see*. But, within the Christian tradition, we should also humbly keep in mind that we see ourselves as well as others "through a glass darkly."

NOTE

1. Annie Dillard, *The Living* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 397.

An Apology for Apologetics, by Paul J. Griffiths. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991. Pp. xii and 113. \$16.95 (paper).

JAMES WETZEL, Colgate University.

This is a polemical book, written to challenge conventional academic wisdom on the value of religious apologetics. Griffiths would like the university to remain open to those who would, as scholars, advocate the truth of a particular tradition. His proposal is striking, to put it mildly. Religious advocacy and scholarly objectivity have not commonly been thought compatible. In the Western academy, a murky religious pluralism has been the order of the day. Departments of religion encourage the comparative study of religion, as long as that remains a descriptive task, but they generally discourage comparative evaluation. In part this is because individual religious traditions are demanding objects of study, and very few of us are in a position to make substantive