Daphne Hampson, *Kierkegaard: Exposition and Critique,* Oxford: OUP 2013, xiii + 344 pp.

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Daphne Hampson's *Kierkegaard: Exposition and Critique* is a reading of what are arguably the eight most important of Kierkegaard's works: *Fear and Trembling, Philosophical Fragments, The Concept of Anxiety, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Works of Love, The Sickness Unto Death, Practice in Christianity,* and the autobiographical *From The Point of View for My Work as an Author.* The choice of these works is defensible. Unfortunately, the basic thesis of the book is not.[1]

The first chapter, entitled "Kierkegaard's Intellectual Context," looks at the history of theological thought, focusing primarily on Lutheranism, from the period of the Enlightenment until the first part of the nineteenth century, the period of Kierkegaard's authorship. Hampson rightly points out that insufficient attention is given to the Lutheran context in which Kierkegaard

1 Several of the points in this review were made earlier in posts to the blog *Piety on Kierkegaard*. See "Getting Kierkegaard Wrong", 13 November 2016 and "Kierkegaard on Nature and Miracles: A Reply to Hampson," 21 June 2017.

wrote, and much of the information in this chapter will be helpful to scholars who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of Lutheranism.

Hampson is also generally good in defending Kierkegaard against the charge that he was insensitive to the plight of the poor. Kierkegaard, she writes, "is concerned that persons should not appropriate or misuse others, seeing another in relation to her- or himself rather than to God" (191). She acknowledges that he was politically conservative, yet asserts, rightly, that "theoretically and also in practice Kierkegaard knew that one must care for the poor as individuals" (305).

The difficulties with the book, however, begin as early as the table of contents. Two of the books Hampson examines are listed under titles that will be unfamiliar even to Kierkegaard scholars. *The Concept of Anxiety* is referred to as *The Concept Angst* and *Works of Love* is referred to as *Love's Deeds*. Hampson provides arguments for her alternatives to the published titles of these works, but neither of the arguments is convincing. "Kierkegaard's angst," she asserts, "is ill-rendered in English as 'anxiety' [...] Philosophically the distinction between angst and anxiety (or fear) is said to be that whereas fear has an object, angst is devoid of any such" (110.)

Hampson makes a similarly unconvincing case for altering the title of Kierkegaard's *Kærligheds Gjærninger* from the familiar *Works of Love* to *Love's Deeds* (180). The problem is not that *Love's Deeds* is inherently inferior to *Works of Love*. It is arguably just as good, or would be, were it not for the fact that none of the existing English translations of this work use it as a title. That is, it is worse in the sense that to use it to identify a work that exists only under a different title is confusing to the reader.

Hampson's use of *Philosophical Fragments* to refer to the English translation of Kierkegaard's *Philosophiske Smuler* is revealing in that in this instance there actually exists a published translation of the work under a title, *Philosophical Crumbs,*[2] that Hampson acknowledges herself (62) is superior to *Philosophical Fragments*. Yet in this instance, the single instance in which a departure from the familiar form of a title would be defensible, Hampson inexplicably elects to retain the problematic title.

While the arbitrariness in Hampson's decisions concerning how to refer to the works of Kierkegaard she examines betrays a lack of scholarly rigor, the confusion it is liable to engender can be quickly overcome. Unfortunately, this lack of rigor extends beyond the issue of titles to the substance of Hampson's argument.

Hampson's central thesis is that Kierkegaard is essentially a premodern thinker, and that while there are still things we can learn from him, his thought is conspicuously dated. She bases this view primarily on her claim that Kierkegaard rejects 'causality', and more specifically, that he rejects the idea that there are laws of nature. It is this rejection, she asserts, that makes possible his belief in miracles. Her argument is coherent. It's simply wrong. First, Kierkegaard clearly accepts both causality and the idea that there are laws of nature. Second, it is not clear that Kierkegaard believed in miracles in the supernatural sense that sees them as a violation of those laws.

Hampson bases her view that Kierkegaard rejected causality at least in part on what she claims is his failure to understand Aristotle's two senses of change. She acknowledges that Kierkegaard "picks up the distinction in Aristotle between a 'change' which consists in a coming into existence (*kinesis*) and a change which presupposes existence (*alloiosis*) (what we might call a change taking place within the causal nexus)", but she fails to appreciate the significance of this

2 Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition* and *Philosophical Crumbs,* trans. M. G. Piety (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

distinction for Kierkegaard. She even goes so far as to remark that it is "strange" that Kierkegaard "does not appreciate that there is any real distinction between the two kinds of 'change'" (91) identified by Aristotle, given that he refers to them himself when speaking about the change of coming to be. She chastises Kierkegaard for writing "150 years after Newton", and yet failing to have any "sense of the regularity with which change takes place in predetermined fashion within a causal nexus" (91).

It would be strange if Kierkegaard failed to have any sense for what one could call the "regularity of nature". Kierkegaard does have such a sense, however, as is easily seen in the portion of the *Crumbs* that deals with Aristotle's two senses of change.

After Kierkegaard explains that "[e]verything that has come to be is *eo ipso* historical", he goes on to say that

> That thing, the becoming of which is a simultaneous becoming (Nebeneinander, Space), has no other history than this, but even seen in this way (en masse), independently of what an ingenious consideration in a more specific sense calls the history of nature, nature has a history.
> [...] How can one say that nature, despite being immediately present, is historical, if one does not view it from this ingenious perspective? The difficulty comes from the fact that nature is too abstract to have a dialectical relationship, in the stricter sense, with time. Nature's imperfection is that it has *no history in any other sense*, and its perfection is that it has the intimation of a history (namely that it has come to be, which is the past; and that it is, the present) (*Crumbs*, 143, emphasis added).

That is, nature's whole "history" is that it came to be at some point. The "changes" that subsequently characterize it do *not* represent change in Aristotle's sense of *kinesis* but only in his sense of *alloiosis*. Kierkegaard is clear on this point. Purely natural events are changes in something (i. e. nature) that already exists. They do not come about freely but are subject to natural law. Mountain ranges do not become 'mature' in the same sense that people do. Human beings have choices, according to Kierkegaard, that other animals, not to mention plants and rocks, etc., do not.

The changes, according to Kierkegaard, that characterize nature come about through natural law. He writes in a journal sometime between 1841–42 that "[i]n nature everything is indeed bound by law and hence governed by necessity".[3] Yet another reference to the reality of laws of nature occurs in the very work Hampson cites in support of her claim that Kierkegaard didn't believe in such laws. This reference appears at the end of the second volume of *Either-Or*, in a discourse entitled "The Upbuilding That Lies in the Thought That in Relation to God We are Always in the Wrong". Kierkegaard refers there to "the law which carries the stars on their paths across the arch of heaven" and observes that it would be a "terrible catastrophe" if "the law of nature lost its power and everything disintegrated into dreadful chaos".[4]

Kierkegaard accepts that there are laws of nature. He simply rejects what he calls "naturalism"[5] in the sense of an all-encompassing physical determinism. That is, it's the idea that the laws of nature necessarily determine human behavior that Kierkegaard rejects. Kierkegaard

3 Kierkegaard 2010, 259.
4 Kierkegaard 1987, 354.
5 See, for example, Kierkegaard 2015, 68.

appears to hold something like a Kantian view of the relation between the phenomenal and noumenal view of a person. It may be challenging to make sense of how the phenomenal and noumenal aspects of a person can be brought together in such a way as to preserve human freedom, but Kant asserts they can, and Kierkegaard appears to follow Kant in this respect.[6] In fact, Kierkegaard distinguishes between "rationalism" and "naturalism" in a journal entry that examines this aspect of Kant's thought.[7]

So much for Kierkegaard's purported rejection of the idea that there are laws of nature. What about his position on miracles? A careful reading of Kierkegaard suggests that it is not the purportedly supernatural aspect of miracles that appears to interest him. Kierkegaard is, in fact, openly contemptuous of people who focus on the supernatural rather than the edifying aspects of accounts of miracles. "[I]s it really a greater miracle [Under]", he asks, for example, in a discourse on Matthew 11:30, "to change water into wine than for the heavy burden to continue to be heavy and yet be light!"[8] What makes a burden that remains (one might be tempted to argue, according to natural law) heavy, nevertheless "light", is not some violation of natural law. The "miracle" here is psychological, not physical.

The same emphasis on miracles as psychological rather than physical phenomena can be seen in Kierkegaard's observation that

> [a]t times, the circumstances determine that a penny signifies little more than it usually signifies, but if someone wants to perform a miracle [gjør et Vidunder], he makes the one penny signify just as much as all the world's gold put together if he gives it out of compassion and the penny is the only one he has.[9]

That kind of generosity, or compassion, is certainly extremely rare but it doesn't violate any natural law.

Kierkegaard's interest in miracles appears to concern the sense in which they can be subjectively meaningful, or, more particularly, edifying. This can be seen yet again in his observation in his journal on the story of the feeding of the five thousand in John 6:1–15.

> Since it was through a miracle [Mirakel] that enough food was obtained [skaffet] to feed five thousand men, one would [be inclined to] believe that no thought would be given to the leavings [der blev ødslet med Levningerne]. But no, God is never like that. Everything was carefully gathered up according to the Gospel. The human is, to be unable to perform miracles [Mirakler] and yet to waste the leavings [at ødsle med Levninger]. The divine is to perform the miracle [Mirakel] of abundance and yet to collect the crumbs [samle Smulerne op].[10]

6 See, for example, Kierkegaard 1987, "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage", and "The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality", especially 660 f. and 250, respectively.
7 Kierkegaard 2010, 139 f.
8 Kierkegaard 1993, 233.
9 Kierkegaard 1990, 362.
10 Kierkegaard 2011, 110.

Kierkegaard's point here is not to emphasize that Christ had supernatural powers, but to communicate something about God's nature that would have an edifying effect on the reader.[11]

The question remains, of course, as to whether Kierkegaard believed miracles were supernatural events, despite that he chose not to focus on that aspect of them. That's a difficult question to answer. There is evidence that Kierkegaard viewed all of empirical science as merely probabilisitic[12] and that suggests there is room for him to view miracles as merely exceptionally unusual, or highly improbable, events rather than events that violated laws of nature.

Support for this view can be found in the fact that Kierkegaard refers repeatedly to "the paradox" of Christianity as "improbable" rather than "impossible" (cf., e. g. *Crumbs,* 123, 159 and *CUP*, 195, 196). Support can also be found in the fact that when Kierkegaard refers to the feeding of the five thousand, he writes that food was miraculously "obtained" (skaffet) not "created" (skabt) that was sufficient to feed five thousand people. Who knows how it was obtained? The implication of the word "obtained", however, is that the means used to secure it were not necessarily supernatural.

That said, even if Kierkegaard believes miracles are supernatural events, he does not reject the reality of either causality in general or laws of nature in particular. Hampson's thesis that Kierkegaard is essentially a premodern thinker whose thought has been superseded unfortunately rests on this point. That means Kierkegaard's thought is not dated in the manner Hampson claimed. In fact, understood properly, it seems remarkably contemporary.

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Piety, M. G. 2010. *Ways of Knowing: Kierkegaard's Pluralistic Epistemology.* Waco, TX.

11 Do not be misled by the fact that the term that is translated as 'miracle' in the first passage is 'Under,' the term that is translated as 'miracle' in the second is 'Vidunder,' and the term that is translated as 'miracle' in the third passage is 'Mirakel.' Kierkegaard uses the terms 'Under,' 'Vidunder,' and 'Mirakel' interchangeably, and indeed, they are synonyms according to both *A Danish-English Dictionary,* eds. J. S. Ferrall and T. G. Repp, Copenhagen, 1845, and the venerable *Ordbog Over det Danske Sprog* 28 bind [Dictionary of the Danish language in 28 volumes]. Copenhagen, 1918–1956, ordnet.dk/ods.

12 See Piety 2010.