

Response to Edward F. Mooney's "From the Garden of the Dead: Climacus on Interpersonal Inwardness"

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As one would expect from Ed Mooney, his paper today has offered an elegant and philosophically incisive account of some central features of Kierkegaard's thought. Mooney has the almost unnerving ability to home in on a single passage in Kierkegaard and show how it is perfectly emblematic of themes that permeate the entire authorship. The graveyard scene in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is certainly ripe for the sort of treatment Mooney offers. Graveyards are an important recurring motif for Kierkegaard (see, for instance, George C. Connell's discussion of Kierkegaard's graveyards),¹ not least because the visit to the graveyard provides a reflective space *outside* of everyday life, an in-between-place that breaks up the flow of everyday life. These interstitial places are crucial for Kierkegaard's authorship; for instance, as Carl Hughes has recently argued, the sacramental discourses take place in the intervals *between* sacraments, in the point in time *between* the confessional and the communion table, for instance.² The graveyard as an interstitial space occurs as early as the strangely suspended, otherworldly temporality of "The Unhappiest One" in *Either/Or*,³ and recurs in the discourse "At a Graveside" as a place of reflection upon death, one that paradoxically seeks to throw the reader back into the thick of things: the essential effect of the visit to the graveyard is to expel the visitor back into the world with renewed urgency and velocity.

The address to the dead is also a strikingly recurrent feature of Kierkegaard's authorship, particularly the sense in which one living stands *before* the dead, subject to their uniquely austere and unforgiving judgment. And both the strange temporality of the graveyard and the paradoxical co-presence with the dead are, as Mooney deftly shows, essential features of the graveyard passage in *Postscript* – which, as Mooney also demonstrates, encapsulates the core merits and limitations of the narrator Climacus. In these respects, then, Mooney's paper offers us valuable insights into central features of Kierkegaard's authorship. However, this is not what I'd like to focus on in this response. Instead, in keeping with the conference theme of "Why Kierkegaard Still Matters," I'd like to spend a few moments considering why Mooney's reading of inwardness as interpersonal might be an important move in terms of demonstrating Kierkegaard's ongoing utility for philosophy of mind, moral psychology and philosophy of religion.

One of the most distinctive elements of Kierkegaard's descriptions of consciousness and self-experience is his sensitivity to the importance of irreducibly first-personal, subjective states to certain forms of cognition. Haufniensis' claim that we falsify the very *concept* of sin if we consider the topic in the wrong mood is one that finds important analogues throughout the authorship, in ways that have important implications for moral psychology and indeed philosophy of mind generally.

¹ George C. Connell "Four Funerals: The Experience of Time at the Side of the Grave" in Robert L. Perkins (ed.) *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Prefaces/Writing Sampler and Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006) pp.419-38

² Carl Hughes *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Writing Word and Sacrament in and against Lutheranism* (forthcoming dissertation, Emory University).

³ On the temporality of "The Unhappiest One," and how it fits into the broader pseudonymous authorship, see my "Fearful Asymmetry: Kierkegaard's Search for the Direction of Time" *Continental Philosophy Review* (forthcoming).

Kierkegaard insists that certain non-conceptual, phenomenal properties of experience make a radical difference to the *meaning* of certain cognitions: to think in a detached, bloodless way about the morality of my actions, or the fact that I will die, or the concepts of personal immortality and salvation (which *eo ipso* entail *my* immortality or salvation) is to somehow distort the meaning of those thoughts without altering their conceptual content. Kierkegaard is here reacting against both the Hegelian collapsing of the inner/outer distinction and, more broadly, a scientific philosophical tendency that seeks to reduce, analyse away or simply ignore the first-person perspective. That latter philosophical project is still very much with us, and that alone makes Kierkegaard's thought relevant. Among philosophers of mind, the desire to either reduce subjective, phenomenal states to something publically accessible (such as subpersonal neurological states, or propositional reports), or to deny their very intelligibility or even existence, remains a considerable force. In recent years something of a counter-attack to this tendency has arisen, with philosophers increasingly acknowledging both the irreducibility and importance of the first-person perspective for any serious account of consciousness. Indeed this has been one of the few areas where Continental and Analytic philosophy, as well as the empirical sciences, have found productive common ground. The first-person perspective, and with it the notion of phenomenal properties of experience that are not fully intersubjectively accessible, has become respectable again.

Yet this is not, and cannot, be the end of the story. There is also a growing awareness that a philosophical account that *stops* with the first-person perspective is no better than one that ignores it altogether. Increasing attention has been paid both to the embodied nature of cognition and the ways in which perception and thought are fundamentally intersubjective in nature. Our experience of the world is always mediated by language, by our interaction and dialogue with others, and by shared attention. As phenomenologists have been at pains to show, our experience of others is not one of objects to which we come to ascribe unseen, private mental properties – instead, we *see* the pain, the joy, the anger of others; we know other minds directly, not inferentially. And subjectivity cannot be seen as something that is only contingently embodied: cognition *is* a bodily process, even if it cannot be *reduced* thereto. In these ways, contemporary philosophy has sought to do justice to the first-person perspective while repudiating the Cartesian picture of mind and world – in which, in Nishitani Keiji's hauntingly evocative phrase, “each individual ego became like a lonely but well-fortified island floating on a sea of dead matter”⁴

Seen against this context, Kierkegaard's talk of “inwardness” and “inclosing reserve” sounds – especially to Anglophone ears – alarmingly Cartesian in character. Insisting on the importance of essentially personal subjective states opens Kierkegaard up to the objection that his version of subjectivity is, like Descartes', “all in the head.” Worse, it appears, to use a phrase used in recent work on perception, philosophically *autistic* – it ignores the contributions others make to our experiences of the world.⁵ That being the case, Kierkegaard's ongoing philosophical value will be seriously limited by his unfortunate commitment to a view of mind and world that has long since been roundly rejected.

⁴ Keiji Nishitani *Religion and Nothingness* trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982) p.11

⁵ See e.g. Shaun Gallagher “Two Problems of Intersubjectivity” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16:6-8 (2009) pp.289-308

What Mooney's paper has gestured towards is, I'd suggest, the possibility of overcoming this Cartesian picture of Kierkegaardian subjectivity and replacing it with a new understanding of Kierkegaard that makes his philosophical psychology more accessible for contemporary philosophy of mind. Mooney's startling claim that "*subjectivity is a shared natural, embodied, and interpersonal space*" represents a considerable departure from the canonical picture of Kierkegaard as endorsing a hard separation between the "inner" and the "outer." Instead, Mooney argues, inwardness is itself "a manner of interpersonal address," a way of being *with* others rather than essentially apart and shut off from them. This may sound like an anachronistic way to read Kierkegaard, though we'd do well to remember the importance of intersubjectivity to figures like Hegel and Fichte,⁶ who both (the former overtly, the latter covertly) exert an enormous influence on Kierkegaard's conceptions of self and consciousness.

Mooney speaks of the way in which the scene Climacus witnesses in the graveyard *claims* him – the appropriation is not one-way, but is instead a subjective appropriation of a situation that calls to or claims the one who observes it. As I've argued elsewhere, Kierkegaard's account of this sort of moral perception involves a considerable volatilization of the object/subject schema,⁷ a volatilization that is already inherent in the "poetic fit" Mooney describes between subjective mood and objective scene. Such poetic fit implies a conception of subjectivity as *a way the world is*, not as a special sort of object that interacts with an objective world. Or as Mooney strikingly puts it, "Subjectivity is a boundless sphere in which *nature, death, and other persons interweave in mutual resonance.*" Of course Kierkegaard emphasises the importance of ways in which we come to see ourselves as utterly distinct *from* the world, but as he makes clear in, for instance, the discourse "Strengthening the Inner Being," we are nonetheless utterly *within* a world to which we belong and which belongs to us (EUD, 86/SKS 5, 93).

Mooney's interpersonal reading of Kierkegaardian subjectivity breaks down the false dichotomy of outward action and inward affect. This in no way commits Kierkegaard to any sort of behaviorism – without question, the truth of grief, passion, disgust and fear is first-personal, affective and phenomenal, and without this experiential dimension we have, as Mooney tells us, a mere *simulation*. Mooney takes this further by claiming that even *inderlighed* is primarily public and shared, a feature of the ways in which we interact with each other and "how we abide with others." It's worth noting here that even if we want to retain some of *inderlighed*'s associations with interiority, this intersubjective character of inwardness might serve to make sense of some of what Kierkegaard says about how consciousness and self-reflexivity arise in individuals. Mooney claims that inwardness is fundamentally social, but it can be developed into "The limiting case of the truth that inwardness is interpersonal," namely "the occasion when lasting affect arises for God only, bypassing one's neighbor, priest, spouse, or friend." All this is consistent with the ways in which individuation, for Kierkegaard as for developmental psychology, is something that is gradually attained in consciousness rather than being the starting point from which our understanding of the world proceeds. We tend to think of the interior world as a

⁶ See e.g. Allen W. Wood "Fichte's Intersubjective I" *Inquiry* 49:1 (February 2006) pp.62-79

⁷ Patrick Stokes *Kierkegaard's Mirrors: Interest, Self, and Moral Vision* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2010) p.111

realm of private thoughts which we project outwards into the outside world: we have thoughts, and then speak whichever of those thoughts we choose to externalize. But as Gilbert Ryle asserted,⁸ this puts the cart before the horse: just as reading out loud preceded (phylogenetically) reading silently, so, developmental psychology has demonstrated, thinking out loud precedes (ontogenetically) thinking silently. We don't learn to articulate our thoughts out loud so much as we gradually learn *not* to do so. We don't find ourselves inside and then project outside: we find ourselves in the world and then learn how to keep things to ourselves. Hence we can understand the essential privacy of a direct relation to God, unmediated by other persons, as an *achievement* of consciousness, a state that goes *beyond* the originally public character of subjectivity.

These rather tentative comments have, I hope, at least suggested ways in which Mooney's reading of Kierkegaard can overcome the charges of philosophical autism and Cartesianism that might stand as an obstacle to Kierkegaard being taken seriously as a writer with something to say to contemporary philosophy. That, by itself, may not convince the majority of philosophers working on live problems that Kierkegaard is worthy of their attention – but it's an excellent place to start.

⁸ Gilbert Ryle *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)