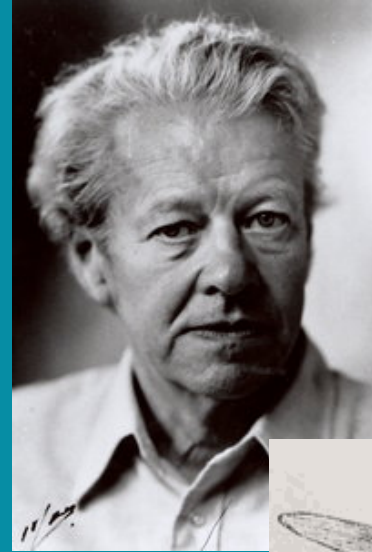


THE MIRROR OF SPONTANEOUS GOODNESS

FROM KIERKEGAARD AND
LØGSTRUP (VIA ZHUANGZI
AND ECKHARDT)



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KNUD EJLER LØGSTRUP

- Still largely unknown outside Scandinavia
- Recent discussions by Simon Critchley, Zygmunt Bauman, two papers by Alasdair MacIntyre
- A trenchant critic of Kierkegaard – but is he really as far from SK as he thinks?



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KIERKEGAARD VS SPONTANEITY?

- “In general, consciousness, self-consciousness, is decisive in relation to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also.” (SUD, 29/SKS 11, 145)



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THE ETHICAL DEMAND

“Trust is not of our own making; it is given. Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts him or herself into that person’s hands either by showing or desiring trust.

By our very attitude to another we help to shape that person’s world. By our attitude to the other person we help to determine the scope and hue of his or her world; we make it large or small, bright or drab, rich or dull, threatening or secure. We help to shape his or her world not by theories and views but by our very attitude towards him or her. Herein lies the unarticulated and one might say anonymous demand that we take care of the life which trust has placed in our hands.” (*The Ethical Demand* p.18, trans. slightly modified)



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THE ETHICAL DEMAND

Features

- Silent
- Radical
- One-Sided
- Unfulfilable



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ONTOLOGICAL GOODNESS

The Sovereign Expressions of Life

- Phenomenally self-underwriting
- If compromised, turn into their opposites: incomplete sincerity is insincerity, incomplete trust is distrust etc.

Suværene livsytringer

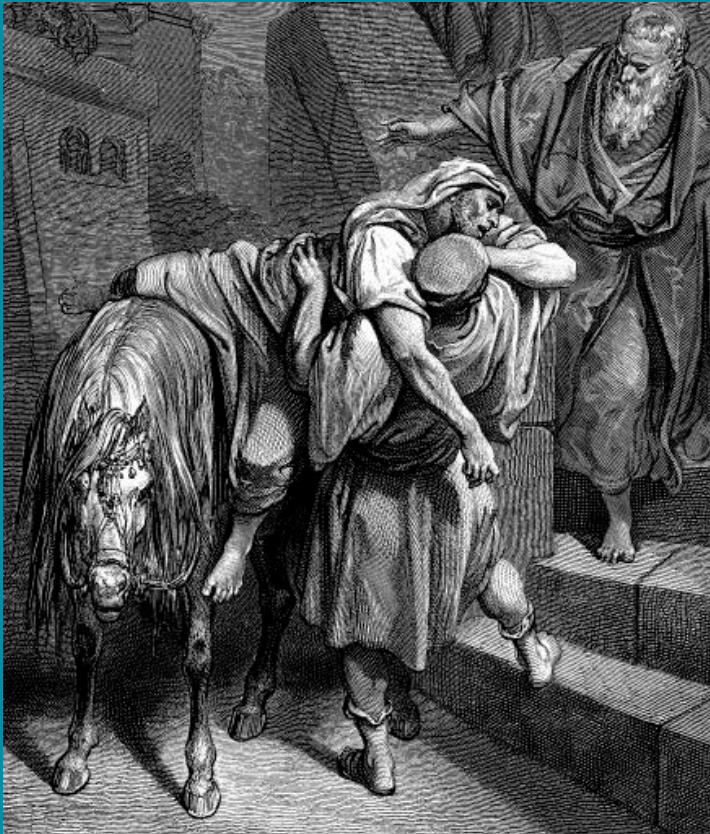
- = “sovereign expressions, utterances, manifestations”
- Includes trust, mercy (but not pity), openness/sincerity



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SOVEREIGN EXPRESSIONS OF LIFE

Moral Samaritans



Gustav Dore, *Arrival of the Good Samaritan at the Inn*

- The *Good Samaritan* is occupied *solely* with the needs of the person he helps
- The *Kantian Samaritan* is occupied with the thought of fulfilling his *duty*
- The *Political Samaritan* operates with the idea of neighbourly love but does not realize it.

KIERKEGAARD ON SPONTANEITY

- Løgstrup accuses Kierkegaard of repudiating all 'immediacy' and thereby the spontaneous moral life
- But Kierkegaard also endorses a regulative ideal of immediate, spontaneous action, which we fail to live up to
- Cf. his use of mirror metaphors – we need to be reminded, in effect, “that’s *you*”
- Centrality of *non-thetic self-referentiality*



C.W. Eckersberg *Woman In Front of a Mirror* (1841)



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SPONTANEOUS MERCY

“...there is no slippage between their thought and action even though they are risking their lives [...] While detesting Jimmy Wait, they display all the character traits and realize the sovereign expressions of life that correspond to the morality to which they are committed: daring, solidarity, self- forgetfulness, but, not, not for the sake of morality but on account of their absorption in on of the tasks for which morality is needed and from which it springs.”
(*Norm og Spontaneitet*, in *Beyond the Ethical Demand* p.93)



PERFECTION AS NOTHINGNESS

- Basic egoism of humans means spontaneous goodness can only be a regulative idea
- Implies a very different kind of perfectionism and character-formation from that endorsed by MacIntyre: learning to *remove* selfish tendencies that impede ontological goodness operating *through* the agent – becoming a frictionless conduit



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PERFECTION AS NOTHINGNESS

One who embraces the fullness of virtue

Can be compared to a newborn babe - *Daodejing* 55

In order to enter the kingdom of heaven a person must become a child again, but in order that his life can express that he has entered the kingdom of heaven he must become a youth a second time. To *be* a child and to *be* a youth when one is a child or a youth is easy enough, but a *second time* – the second time is what is decisive. To become a child again, to become nothing, without any selfishness, to become a youth again (although one has become sagacious, sagacious from experience, worldly-wise), to disdain acting sagaciously, to *will to be* the youth, to *will* to preserve youth's enthusiasm, rescued in all its original character, to *will* to struggle to the end, more uneasy and ashamed about haggling and bargaining and, what amounts to the same thing, about acquiring earthly advantage than the modest girl is uneasy about an impropriety – yes, that is the task. – Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity* (PC, 192/SKS 12, 191)



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DANISH DAO?

Analogies with Classical Daoism

- Fundamental *dao* (“way”) cannot be named.
- *Wu wei*, “acting without acting”: the agent comes to spontaneously and non-deliberatively express the *dao*
- Hence these agents become conduits for an underlying ontological goodness

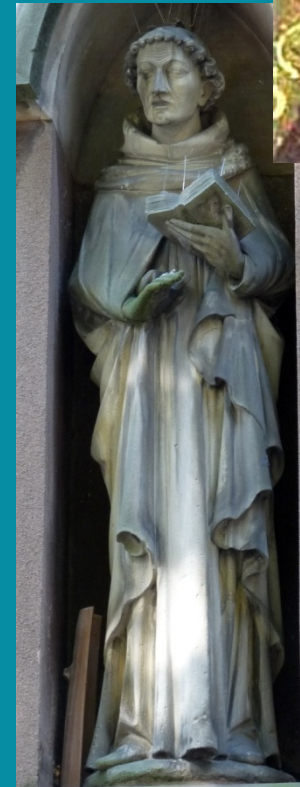


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MYSTICAL PURGATION

Imitatio and *Via Purgativa*

- Kierkegaard's debt to mystical writers e.g. Eckhart, Tauler
- The self must become *nothing* before it can mirror God
- Purgation of ego and selfishness before one can reflect divine goodness



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BECOMING NOTHING

Finally it seems to him that he is reduced to nothing at all. Now the moment has come. Whom should the struggler desire to resemble other than God? But if he himself is something or wants to be something, this something is sufficient to hinder the resemblance. Only when he himself becomes nothing, only then can God illuminate him so that he resembles God. However great he is, he cannot manifest God's likeness; God can imprint himself in him only when he himself has become nothing. When the ocean is exerting all its power, that is precisely the time when it cannot reflect the image of heaven, and even the slightest motion blurs the image; but when it becomes still and deep, then the image of heaven sinks into its nothingness.

(EUD, 399/SKS 5, 380)



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