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Editorial

"Kierkegaard, Virtues and Vices": Editorial Introduction

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In recent years, scholars have been divided on what to make of Kierkegaard's relation to what some have called the virtues tradition. Sylvia Walsh (2018), for instance, is highly sceptical of thinking of Kierkegaard as a kind of "virtue ethicist". Others, such as Robert C. Roberts (2022), have seen Kierkegaard as firmly rooted in the virtues tradition, while Pieter Vos (2020) sees Kierkegaard as part of a broader tradition of Protestant theological ethics that both reveals basic virtue ethical characteristics and makes a distinct contribution to contemporary virtue ethics. On specific virtues, one of us has recently argued that the virtue of accountability is central to Kierkegaardian spirituality (Evans 2019), while the other has drawn on Kierkegaard to explore the relationships between forgiveness, love, justice, humility, and hope (Lippitt 2020).

Certainly, there are profound reflections to be found in Kierkegaard's writings on virtues or "spiritual qualities" (Walsh's preferred term) such as courage, forgivingness, gratitude, hope, humility, honesty, and patience, as well as more unusual qualities such as "joy" [*Glæde*], contrition, earnestness, and sobriety. Furthermore, while Kierkegaard does not explicitly explore faith, hope, and love as the three "theological virtues", all three notions play important roles in his thought and his view of the religious life. No reader can miss the centrality of faith, and scholarship over the last two decades or so has increasingly recognized the importance and profundity of his thought on love. The question of what it means to love well is one that runs through much of Kierkegaard's authorship, pseudonymous and signed. Love arguably has its own epistemic standards connected to other putative virtues such as generosity of spirit, trust, and hope. Hope—which Kierkegaard most commonly discusses under the name of "expectancy" [*Forventning*]—may be seen as the antithesis of that central Kierkegaardian theme of despair, which may arguably be understood as at root the unwillingness to hope (Bernier 2015).

For Kierkegaard, the philosophical task of unpacking such qualities is almost always in service of the role they play in the religious or specifically Christian life. Kierkegaard's approach to these qualities is typically not explicitly to talk of them as virtues (perhaps because of the influence of Luther, whose dislike of Aristotle and virtue-talk was intense). Yet, many have judged that it makes sense to do so given that each may be thought of as contributing to the formation of character. Broadly in line with the classical tradition, he typically sees each such quality as involving certain ways of thinking, feeling, and seeing correctly. However, Kierkegaard holds, along with many other Christian thinkers, that many of the most important human excellences cannot be achieved without divine grace and assistance.

Pace Walsh, there seems to be a growing recognition of Kierkegaard as being a significant source of insight into understanding the role of numerous virtues in the task of allowing oneself to be "built up". Likewise, his writings can be tapped for profound insights into such vices as pride, envy and self-righteousness. The expressed aim of this Special Issue, therefore, was to seek to explore various aspects of Kierkegaard's relation to the philosophical and theological traditions of thinking about virtues and vices, from a range of perspectives. Submissions were invited on either Kierkegaard's relation to

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philosophical and theological work on virtues and vices in general, or his contribution to our understanding of specific virtues, vices and their inter-relationships—whether those commonly regarded as such or those more quirkily "Kierkegaardian".

Our fifteen contributors cover this ground in multiple ways. First, there are a series of articles on **qualities commonly regarded as virtues**, including patience and the "theological virtues" of faith, hope, and love. In "Taking on the Habit: Kierkegaardian Faith as an Aristotelian Virtue", Fernanda Rojas and Nassim Bravo argue that the conception of faith that arises from key Kierkegaardian writings has striking structural similarities to an Aristotelian virtue, insofar as faith is based on habit; makes human beings good; and allows them to perform their characteristic activity well. In "Kierkegaard on Hope and Faith", Anthony Rudd takes a different view. Rudd distinguishes between an Aristotelian-style virtue of hope and the way in which Kierkegaard's main positive discussions of hope relate it closely to both faith and love. Rudd argues that Kierkegaard's understanding of all three is closer to Aquinas' account of the theological virtues than it is to Aristotle, while Aquinas and Kierkegaard nevertheless diverge on their accounts of faith (the former's being more intellectualist, the latter's more affective). Rudd also discusses how Kierkegaard thinks both faith and hope work as antidotes to despair.

Love is fundamental to much of Kierkegaard's work but is perhaps most deeply explored in *Works of Love*, a book that explores the nature of love for the neighbor. Kierkegaard takes pains to argue that neighbor-love cannot simply be identified with forms of human "special love", such as marital love, romantic love, and friendship. Though some writers have expressed worries that neighbor-love on Kierkegaard's view is incompatible with these forms of love, the majority view is that for Kierkegaard, such forms of love can also be forms of neighbor-love. In "The Oneness of Love in *Works of Love*', Jeffrey Hanson defends this majority view and pushes it further by arguing that ultimately all forms of genuine love are forms of neighbor-love. The unity of love means not only that "preferential" loves such as romantic love and friendship can be forms of neighbor-love, but that some features of these special loves, when they are fully realized, are also characteristic of neighbor-love.

C. Stephen Evans' "Patriotism and Love of the Neighbor: A Kierkegaardian View of a Contested Virtue", looks at the relationship of neighbor-love to a rarely discussed form of "special" love: love of one's country. Kierkegaard thinks that all forms of natural human loves which have a special character are subject to distortion and corruption, and this is particularly the case with patriotism. However, Evans argues that the general pattern of the relation between neighbor-love and special human loves also holds for patriotism. Love of one's country can be a form of neighbor-love, though for this to be so, the patriotic person must have neighbor-love for those of other nationalities as well, and thus reject forms of nationalism in which non-compatriots are regarded as having lesser value.

In "To Gain One's Soul: Kierkegaard and the Hermeneutical Virtue of Patience", Amber Bowen treats the 1843 and 1844 upbuilding discourses on patience in hermeneutical terms. On her account, patience is not simply a quality which a person may be said to possess, but a distinctive way of inhabiting space and time in relation to God. Patience's openness to a future that only God can provide is, on Bowen's reading, a way of being in time constitutive of the hermeneutical self.

A second set of articles directly address **Kierkegaard's relation to "virtue ethics"** *per se*. In "Kierkegaardian Virtues and the Problem of Self-Effacement", Patrick Stokes notes that the tradition of reading Kierkegaard as a Christian virtue ethicist relates to the attempt to debunk the charge of self-absorption with which Kierkegaard's moral philosophy has often been charged. Recognising Kierkegaard as part of the virtues tradition is one way of demonstrating his other-orientedness. Yet virtue ethics has itself been charged with egoism and self-absorption, as well as self-effacement (i.e., the most virtuous way of acting often requires us to act relatively unreflectively, rather than taking virtue as the motivating reason for action). In considering these objections in relation to Kierkegaard, Stokes argues that the Dane's moral psychology allows him to make a quite distinctive response to them. In "Thankfully and Joyfully Receiving the Father and Becoming a Christian", Matt Aroney

stresses that Kierkegaard's express aim to show someone the path to becoming a Christian is crucial to the question of whether Kierkegaard was a kind of virtue ethicist. Aroney uses thankfulness and joy—understood as divine gifts—as examples of virtues that can operate as pathways to relationship with God the Father, while noting some key differences Kierkegaard's relational teleology makes to what we would be committed to in placing him in the virtue ethics camp.

The topic of joy serves as a segue into a third group of articles on **relatively unusual, perhaps quirkily "Kierkegaardian", virtues**. In "The Grammar and Socio-Political Implications of Kierkegaard's Christian Virtue of Meekness", Pieter Vos argues that Kierkegaard's discourses and late journal entries present meekness or gentleness [*Sagtmodighed*] as a quality with virtue characteristics. What distinguishes it from, say, courage or patience, is its dispositional attitudes of forgiveness towards wrongdoers and non-violent resistance towards injustice. In drawing out the socio-political implications of this, Vos aims to show how meekness can nevertheless be a distinctive—forgiving and non-violent—form of protest.

J. Aaron Simmons examines a virtue that could be called "single-mindedness" in "On the Virtues and Vices of the Singular Will: Seeking 'One Thing' with Kierkegaard". In an essay that includes a personal, autobiographical element, Simmons explores what Kierkegaard means in "An Occasional Discourse", the first part of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Here Kierkegaard claims that a person must "will one thing" and that this one thing can only be the Good. Simmons tries to show that if we realize Kierkegaard is describing a virtue, we can avoid seeing this as an empty formalism without over-determinately identifying willing the Good with a set of particular actions.

John J. Davenport explores yet another distinctively Kierkegaardian virtue in "Kierkegaard on 'Sobriety': Christian Virtues, the Ethical, and Triadic Dyads". Before focusing on sobriety, Davenport gives a general treatment of Kierkegaard's view of "the ethical" and its relation to the "higher" forms of religious life. He argues that if we focus on the "triadic structure" that Kierkegaard often employs, we can see that although there is a "break" between natural forms of "immanence" and the "transcendent", there is also continuity between the ethical life and the religious life. If this is so, then recognizing Kierkegaard as a virtue thinker who focuses on ethical qualities is compatible with recognizing the distinctively Christian character of his thinking. His treatment of sobriety illustrates this general claim.

A final group of articles focus on **particular vices**. The contributions by Rob Compaijen, Wojciech Kaftanski and John Lippitt inter-relate in various ways. In "Valuable Vice: Kierkegaard on Collective Envy in *A Literary Review*", Compaijen explores Kierkegaard's account of envy in the context of the "capital vices" tradition of the early to medieval Church. Two key themes of Kierkegaard's account—"the public" and "leveling"—are further illuminated through a discussion of L. P. Hartley's dystopian novel *Facial Justice*. Two original aspects of Kierkegaard's account, for Compaijen, are the way in which it portrays envy as a *collective* vice (thus anticipating some important contemporary work on the virtues and vices of groups) and the way in which it shows envy can be valuable despite being vicious. In "The Vice of Social Comparison in Kierkegaard: Nature, Religious Moral Psychology, and Normativity", Kaftanksi investigates the complex phenomenon of social comparison and seeks to demonstrate why Kierkegaard considers it a vice. Showing its links to modernity and the way in which it operates "below our cognitive register", Kaftanksi explores non-moral, non-religious and moral-religious aspects of this vice, which for Kierkegaard needs to be combatted with virtues such as humility and reliance on God. In "Kierkegaard, 'the Public' and the Vices of Virtue-Signaling: the Dangers of Social Comparison", Lippitt focuses on one particular form of social comparison: the phenomenon of so-called "virtue-signaling" or moral grandstanding, especially prevalent online. Virtue-signaling has had both critics and defenders in recent philosophical literature. Stressing the importance to this issue of online epistemic bubbles and echo chambers, Lippitt argues that the overconfidence to which they give rise exacerbate certain vices with the capacity to

do moral, social and epistemic harm, focusing in particular on self-righteousness. Lippitt argues that Kierkegaard's discussions of the public and leveling in *A Literary Review*, and the contrast with his category of the "single individual", helps deepen our understanding of why attempted defences of virtue-signaling fail. It allows us to distinguish between two kinds of virtue-signaler, each of whom contributes, in different ways, to the negative impact of self-righteousness.

Also in the category of particular vices, in "Thoughtlessness as an Intellectual Vice in Kierkegaard and Aristotle", Eleanor Helms explores the contrast between thoughtlessness and *phronesis* (or practical wisdom). While Helms does not deny that thoughtlessness has a moral dimension, she argues that it is primarily an intellectual vice. Focusing on this vice helps us see that Kierkegaard, like Aristotle, has a rich conception of practical wisdom, the opposite of thoughtlessness, and that the intellect plays a key role in the development of faith.

In sum, we hope that this Special Issue will contribute to ongoing debate about Kierkegaard's relation to philosophical and theological approaches to the virtues and vices of human life. Finally, we would like to thank the anonymous readers and the members of the editorial board of *Religions* who guided us through the review and evaluation process in a timely fashion. Their insightful remarks have enabled our contributors to improve the quality of the final version of their articles.

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