

C. Stephen EVANS, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality: Accountability as the Meaning of Human Existence*. Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 2019, 15,2 × 23 cm, xiii-210 p., ISBN 978-0-8028-7286-9

Graeme Hunter

Volume 72, numéro 3, septembre–décembre 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1071166ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071166ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Collège universitaire dominicain, Ottawa

ISSN

0316-5345 (imprimé)

2562-9905 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Hunter, G. (2020). Compte rendu de [C. Stephen EVANS, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality: Accountability as the Meaning of Human Existence*. Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 2019, 15,2 × 23 cm, xiii-210 p., ISBN 978-0-8028-7286-9]. *Science et Esprit*, 72(3), 402–404. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071166ar>

important to understanding Kerr's finer points are left untranslated, in their original Latin. Rather than straddle the two extremes, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* could have benefited from a more middle-ground position, wherein there would be more review of the secondary literature, and the quotations would be presented in English when a crucial argument did not depend on precise meanings of Latin terms.

Yet these negative critical remarks should not deter one from reading this book. *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* is superb in its methodology and explanation of the issues at hand, and Kerr's writing style is rather easy and enjoyable to follow. The physical book itself is exceptionally well put-together; the binding in the hardcover edition is of particular high quality, yet this is outmatched by the quality of philosophy between the covers (I cannot speak to the theology). For all of these reasons, for those who are interested in Thomas, metaphysics, and / or creation, I must recommend *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*.

René Ardell FEHR

*Graduate Studies – Philosophy*  
*Dominican University College*  
*Ottawa*

C. Stephen EVANS, **Kierkegaard and Spirituality: Accountability as the Meaning of Human Existence**. Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 2019, 15,2 × 23 cm, xiii-210 p., ISBN 978-0-8028-7286-9.

We are always running into people who describe themselves as “*very spiritual*,” though not religious.” Usually it is just a virtue signal. They are either flaunting their exceptional intellectual integrity that disdains superstition, or the fuzzy piety manifested in their vegan lifestyle and large collection of crystals.

Because the word “spirituality” is burdened with such connotations, I opened Professor Evans’ book, *Kierkegaard and Spirituality* (henceforward KS), expecting to damn it with a few dismissive words. That expectation grew firmer as I read the preface and the first few pages of Chapter 1. “Spiritual” and “spirituality” were used incessantly, without any attempt to pluck a meaning from the weedy semantic field in which they lie.

The first paragraph of this present review was the salvo with which I intended to launch a speedy demolition of the book. That was then.

In the review I am actually writing, that salvo figures instead as my only objection to this illuminating account of Kierkegaard’s philosophy – the best I have ever come across. Evans has adopted an empirical approach to the meaning of spirituality in Kierkegaard. He constructs the meaning as one might a building. Sentence by sentence, he goes about it, page by page, chapter after chapter, the whole length of this lucid, jargon-free and exciting account of Kierkegaard’s thought. Step by step he shows us what he (and Kierkegaard) mean by “spirituality” and why it is important that we know.

No critique of the current abuse of “spirituality” appears until the construction project is complete. But the need for such a critique is not forgotten. It is addressed

on p. 200, when Evans has finished explaining what he calls "Kierkegaard's relational understanding of spirituality." "That understanding contrasts sharply," he says,

...with the kind of individualist view of spirituality that has become popular in our culture. It is common to view spirituality as a kind of individual choice, something that the individual creates and develops on his or her own. There are many forms of spirituality on offer, and indeed, on this view, spirituality becomes something like a consumer choice.

By the time you reach page 200, Evans has equipped you to see for yourself how empty this vague consumer version of spirituality looks, when contrasted with Kierkegaard's profound and noble account of Christian spiritual life. The critique of consumer spirituality, slowly arrived at and merely implicit for much of the way, is more searching than would have been the analytic one I was hoping for in the opening pages. It is worth waiting for the real thing, but its total absence early on will bother some readers.

Once he gets going, Evans writes clearly and explains Kierkegaard's thought without falling into his bizarre technical vocabulary. Nor does he lose his way among the innumerable eccentric personalities and *noms de plume* under which Kierkegaard is pleased to write. Many Kierkegaard scholars do go astray in these thickets, never to be seen again this side of ordinary English.

Evans is exceptional. Where necessary, he will explain Kierkegaard's terminology and account for the pseudonyms, but mainly he constructs a convincing account of Kierkegaard's philosophy in plain, neutral, philosophically informed, English. Sometimes scholarly language has to be dealt with, and philosophical subtleties need to be explained. Sometimes different legitimate interpretations must be considered. Evans passes these tests with honours. He plainly states the evidence that persuades other scholars, alongside the evidence he finds more persuasive. The reader is brought up to speed, without being badgered.

KS is a masterpiece of concision. The whole Kierkegaardian *oeuvre* is taken into account in its 203 pages. As we make our exciting way along, the focus narrows to human spirituality, made distinctive by the freedom with which we are endowed. Our freedom, though not absolute, sets us apart from other natural things. It commands us to become a human person and enables us to do so.

Self-definition is a posture we strike in relation to other things; it is "a relation we pursue to some ideal that is outside the self." Many false ideals may attract us. They are idols which cannot give us satisfaction. "Genuine spirituality always involves a relation to an ideal that is truly divine." However when God enters our life it is not as our equal. We use our freedom to become "accountable" to God for the use we make of it. Hence the subtitle of KS: *Accountability as the Meaning of Human Existence*.

"The task of becoming a self is transformed," Evans writes, "when a person encounters God as the incarnate Christ. At that point we begin to live before "a historical person, someone who makes clear demands on those who would be his followers. The task of human selfhood is itself given new meaning and value by the fact that God became a human self."

The last chapter of KS is devoted to the bitter turn Kierkegaard took in his final years and final writings. They seem less a completion of his philosophy, than a sneering abandonment of it. Kierkegaard encumbers Christian life with such harsh demands that he can assure his reader that not a single Dane qualifies.

Evans calls the work of this final period "attack literature." He is critical of it, but he shows his quality as a commentator in the tenderness of his critique. "I conclude," he writes, "that the attack literature, rather than being the culmination of Kierkegaard's authorship, should be viewed as an unfortunate aberration. It describes a form of spirituality that is really incompatible with the spirituality found in Kierkegaard's authorship up to that point."

It is hard to read Kierkegaard without an informative and careful guide. This book is such a guide.

Graeme HUNTER

*Faculty of Philosophy  
Dominican University College*

Graeme NICHOLSON, **Heidegger on Truth: Its Essence and Its Fate**. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2019, 15,5 × 23,1 cm, xi-181 p., ISBN 978-1-4875-0441-0.

Nicholson's *Heidegger on Truth* is best described as a detailed commentary on Heidegger's *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (hereafter *WW*), proceeding methodically, slowly, tracing the various *corners* and *arcs* (p. 14) in Heidegger's thought. As is well known, following Heidegger's pathways of thinking (*Denkwege*) is not always easy. To the untrained reader he appears to meander aimlessly, moving from one idea to the next and circling back as if lost. In order to get us thinking, or to think through a question with him, Heidegger offers us only signposts, *Wegmarken*, along the way, like the ones we might find along the trails surrounding his writing hut in the Black Forest. Nicholson enables the reader to navigate Heidegger's path by leaving a more discernible trail of white pebbles.

The central notion that Nicholson attempts to develop in this book is that "truth is the *medium* in which all human experience occurs." In Heideggerian fashion, he asks us to recall the analogy Plato offers in the *Republic* – "as light permits objects to be visible and the eye to see, so truth permits genuine beings to be intelligible and our *nous* to understand" (p. 3). When most readers think of Heidegger on truth, especially in connection with the Greeks, they will recall his account of truth as *alētheia* or unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*) – the "historical" essence of truth. As Nicholson explains in the Introduction, this is one of three themes regarding the essence of truth that we find in Heidegger's writings. The others are truth as *correspondence* – the "usual" concept of truth – and *untruth*, which belongs to the essence of truth in the forms of concealment and error. Heidegger's aim in *WW* is to show how these three themes are connected. Perhaps the most difficult turn to follow in his train of thought is the notion that "the essence of truth is freedom" (p. 39). It is here that Heidegger opens up the possibility to move from the correspondence