Søren Kierkegaard

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Jump to: navigation, search

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard



Sketch of Søren Kierkegaard by Niels Christian Kierkegaard, c. 1840

Full Søren Aabye Kierkegaard

Born 5 May 1813

Copenhagen, Denmark

Died 11 November 1855 (aged 42)

Copenhagen, Denmark

Era 19th-century philosophy

Region Western philosophy

School

Danish Golden Age Literary and Artistic

Tradition, precursor to Continental

philosophy, [1][2] Existentialism

(agnostic, atheistic, Christian),

Postmodernism, Post-structuralism,

Existential psychology, Absurdism,

Religion, metaphysics, epistemology,

Neo-orthodoxy, and many more

Main
aesthetics, ethics, psychology,

interests philosophy of religion

Regarded as the father of Existentialism,

Notable angst, existential despair, Three spheres of human existence, knight of faith,

ineas

infinite qualitative distinction, leap of faith

Influenced by

Abraham, Aristotle, Christian Molbech, Hamann,

Hegel, Kant, Lessing, Luther, Socrates [3] (through

Plato, Xenophon, Aristophanes), Trendelenburg

Influenced

Most philosophers after him including Auden,

Barth, Binswanger, Bonhoeffer, Borges, Brandes,

Brunner, Buber, Camus, de Beauvoir, Derrida,

Frankl, Heidegger, Hesse, Ibsen, Jaspers, Kafka,

Marcel, May, Percy, Rilke, Sartre, Shestoy,

Strindberg, Tillich, Unamuno, Updike, Urs von

Balthasar, Welsh, Wittgenstein

Signature & Thinkyurd.

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (English pronunciation: /ˈsɔrən ˈklərkəgɑrd/ or /ˈklərkəgɑr/; Danish: [ˈsœːɐn ˈkʰiɐ̯kəˌɑ̊ɒ²] (♣ listen)) (5 May 1813 – 11 November 1855) was a Danish philosopher, theologian, and psychologist. Kierkegaard strongly criticised both the Hegelianism of his time and what he saw as the empty formalities of the Danish National Church. Much of his philosophical work deals with the issues of how one lives, focusing on the priority of concrete human reality over abstract thinking and highlighting the importance of personal choice and commitment. His theological work focuses on Christian ethics and the institution of the Church. His psychological works explore the emotions and feelings of individuals when faced with life choices. His psychological works explore the emotions and feelings of individuals when

As part of his <u>philosophical method</u>, inspired by <u>Socrates</u> and the <u>Socratic dialogues</u>, Kierkegaard's early work was written under various <u>pseudonymous</u> characters who present their own distinctive viewpoints and interact with each other in complex dialogue. He assigns pseudonyms to explore particular viewpoints in-depth, which may take up several books in some instances, and Kierkegaard, or another pseudonym, critiques that position. Thus, the task of discovering the meaning of his works is left to the reader, because "the task must be made difficult, for only the difficult inspires the noble-hearted". Subsequently, scholars have interpreted Kierkegaard variously as, among others, an <u>existentialist</u>, <u>neo-orthodoxist</u>, <u>postmodernist</u>, <u>humanist</u>, and <u>individualist</u>. Crossing the boundaries of philosophy, theology, psychology, and literature, he is an influential figure in contemporary thought. [9][10][11]

Contents

- 1 Life
 - 1.1 Early years (1813–1836)
 - 1.2 Regine Olsen and graduation (1837–1841)
 - 1.3 First authorship and Corsair affair (1841–1846)
 - 1.4 Second authorship (1846–1853)
 - 1.5 Attack upon the Church (1854–1855)
- 2 Thought
- 3 Pseudonymous authorship
- 4 Journals
- 5 Kierkegaard and Christianity
- 6 Criticism
- 7 Influence and reception
- 8 Selected bibliography
- 9 Notes
- 10 References
 - 10.1 Book
 - <u>10.2 Web</u>

11 External links

[edit] Life

[edit] Early years (1813–1836)

Søren Kierkegaard was born to an affluent family in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. His mother, Ane Sørensdatter Lund Kierkegaard, had served as a maid in the household before marrying his father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard. She was an unassuming figure: quiet, plain, and not formally educated. She is not directly referred to in Kierkegaard's books, although she affected his later writings. His father was a melancholic, anxious, deeply pious, and fiercely intelligent man. [12]

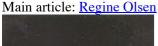
Based on a biographical interpretation of anecdotes in Søren's unpublished journals, especially a rough draft to a story called "The Great Earthquake". [13] some early Kierkegaard scholars argued that Michael believed he had earned God's wrath and that none of his children would outlive him. He is said to have believed that his personal sins, perhaps indiscretions like cursing the name of God in his youth or impregnating Ane out of wedlock, necessitated this punishment. Though five of his seven children died before he did, both Søren and his brother Peter Christian Kierkegaard, outlived him. [12] Peter, who was seven vears Søren's elder, later became bishop in Aalborg. [12]

This early introduction to the notion of sin and its connection from father and son is said by early biographers to have laid the foundation for much of Kierkegaard's work. [14] Despite his father's occasional religious melancholy. Kierkegaard and his father shared a close bond. Kierkegaard is often said to have learned to explore the realm of his imagination through a series of exercises and games they played together, though this particular aspect of the relationship is described only by a pseudonym, in an unpublished draft to a book entitled Johannes Climacus, or de omnibus dubitandum est. [15]

Kierkegaard attended the School of Civic Virtue, where he studied Latin and history, among other subjects. In 1830, he went on to study theology at the University of Copenhagen, but while there he was drawn more towards philosophy and literature.

Kierkegaard's mother died on 31 July 1834, age 66. One of the first physical descriptions of Kierkegaard comes from an attendee, Hans Brøchner, at his brother Peter's wedding party in 1836: "I found [his appearance] almost comical. He was then twenty-three years old; he had something quite irregular in his entire form and had a strange coiffure. His hair rose almost six inches above his forehead into a tousled crest that gave him a strange, bewildered look." [17]

[edit] Regine Olsen and graduation (1837–1841)





Regine Olsen, a muse for Kierkegaard's writings

An important aspect of Kierkegaard's life, one generally considered to have had a major influence on his work, was his broken engagement to Regine Olsen (1822–1904). Kierkegaard and Olsen met on 8 May 1837 and were instantly attracted to each other. In his journals, Kierkegaard wrote about his love for her: "Thou sovereign of my heart treasured in the deepest fastness of my chest, in the fullness of my thought, there [...] unknown divinity! Oh, can I really believe the poet's tales, that when one

first sees the object of one's love, one imagines one has seen her long ago, that all love like all knowledge is remembrance, that love too has its prophecies in the individual." [18]

Kierkegaard's father died on 9 August 1838, age 82. Before his death, he is said to have asked Søren to finish his education in theology. Søren was deeply influenced by his father's religious experience and wanted to fulfill his wish. On 11 August, Kierkegaard wrote:

My father died on Wednesday. I had so very much wished that he might live a few years longer, and I look upon his death as the last sacrifice which he made to his love for me; [...] he died for me in order that, if possible, I might still turn into something. Of all that I have inherited from him, the recollection of him, his transfigured portrait [...] is dearest to me, and I will be careful to preserve [his memory] safely hidden from the world. Power Kierkegaard, Journals, p. 62, 11 August, 1838

On 8 September 1840, Kierkegaard formally proposed to Olsen. However, Kierkegaard soon felt disillusioned about the prospects of the marriage. He broke off the engagement on 11 August 1841, though it is generally believed that the two were deeply in love. In his journals, Kierkegaard mentions his belief that his "melancholy" made him unsuitable for marriage, but his precise motive for ending the engagement remains unclear. [12][21]

Also in 1841, Kierkegaard wrote and defended his dissertation, *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, which was found by the university panel to be a noteworthy and well-thought out work, but too informal and witty for a serious academic thesis. [22] He graduated from university on 20 October 1841 with a Magister Artium, which today would be designated a Ph.D. With his family's inheritance of approximately 31,000 rigsdaler, Kierkegaard was able to fund his education, his living, and several publications of his early works. [23]

[edit] First authorship and Corsair affair (1841–1846)



Kierkegaard in a coffee-house, an oil sketch by Christian Olavius, 1843

Although Kierkegaard wrote a few articles on politics, women, and entertainment in his youth and university days, many scholars, such as Alastair Hannay and Edward Mooney, believe Kierkegaard's first noteworthy work is either his university thesis, *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, which was presented in 1841, or his masterpiece and arguably greatest work, *Either/Or*, which was published in 1843. [21][24] Both works treated major figures in Western thought (Socrates in the former and, less directly, Hegel and Friedrich von Schlegel in the latter), and showcased Kierkegaard's unique style of writing. *Either/Or* was mostly written during Kierkegaard's stay in Berlin and was completed in the autumn of 1842. [24]

In the same year *Either/Or* was published, Kierkegaard found out Regine Olsen was engaged to be married to <u>Johan Frederik Schlegel</u> (1817–1896), a civil servant. This fact affected Kierkegaard and his subsequent writings deeply. In <u>Fear and Trembling</u>, a discourse on the nature of faith published in late 1843, one can interpret a section in the work as saying, "Kierkegaard hopes that through a divine act, Regine would return to him." <u>Repetition</u>, published on the very same day as *Fear and Trembling*, is an exploration of love, religious experience and language reflected in a series of stories about a young gentleman leaving his beloved. Several other works in this period make similar overtones of the Kierkegaard–Olsen relationship. <u>[25]</u>

Other major works in this period include critiques of <u>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel</u> and form a basis for <u>existential</u> psychology. *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and *Stages on Life's Way* include observations about existential

choices and their consequences, and what religious life can mean for a modern individual. Perhaps the most valiant attack on Hegelianism is the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* which discusses the importance of the individual, subjectivity as truth, and countering the Hegelian claim that "The Rational is the Real and the Real is the Rational". [26]



A caricature of Kierkegaard published in *The Corsair*, a satirical journal

Most of the works in this authorship were philosophical and psychological in nature and written using a pseudonym and indirectly, representing different viewpoints and ways of life. However, Kierkegaard published two or three theological discourses, written under his own name, alongside each pseudonymous work. [27] Kierkegaard's discourses make an appeal to a different type of reader and present in a religious context many of the same existential themes treated by his pseudonyms. [28]

On 22 December 1845, <u>Peder Ludvig Møller</u>, a young author of Kierkegaard's generation who studied at the University of Copenhagen at the same time as Kierkegaard, published an article indirectly criticising <u>Stages on Life's Way</u>. The article complimented Kierkegaard for his wit and intellect, but questioned whether he would ever be able to master his talent and write coherent, complete works. Møller was also a contributor to and editor of <u>The Corsair</u>, a Danish satirical paper that lampooned everyone of notable standing. Kierkegaard published a sarcastic response, charging that Møller's article was merely an attempt to impress Copenhagen's literary elite. Kierkegaard's article earned him the ire of the paper and its second editor, also an intellectual Kierkegaard's own age, <u>Meïr Aron Goldschmidt</u>. [29]

Kierkegaard wrote two small pieces in response to Møller, *The Activity of a Traveling Esthetician* and *Dialectical Result of a Literary Police Action*. The former focused on insulting Møller's integrity while the latter was a directed assault on *The Corsair*, in which Kierkegaard, after criticizing the journalistic quality and reputation of the paper, openly asked *The Corsair* to satirize him. [30] Over the next few months, *The Corsair* took Kierkegaard up on his offer to "be abused", and unleashed a series of attacks making fun of Kierkegaard's appearance, voice, and habits. For months, Kierkegaard perceived himself to be the victim of harassment on the streets of Denmark. In a journal entry dated March 9, 1846, Kierkegaard made a long, detailed explanation of his attack on Møller and *The Corsair*, and also explained that this attack made him rethink his strategy of indirect communication. In addition, Kierkegaard felt satisfied with his writing so far, and intended to focus on becoming a priest. [23]

[edit] Second authorship (1846–1853)



Kierkegaard's manuscript of <u>The</u> Sickness Unto Death^[31]

However, Kierkegaard began to write again, and where his first authorship focused on Hegel, this authorship focused on the <a href="https://hybrol.google.go

After giving his critique of the story, Kierkegaard made several insightful observations on the nature of the present age and its passionless attitude towards life. One of his complaints about <u>modernity</u> is its passionless view of the world. Kierkegaard writes that "the present age is essentially a sensible age, devoid of passion [...] The trend today is in the direction of mathematical equality, so that in all classes about so and so many uniformly make one individual". In this, Kierkegaard attacks the <u>conformity</u> and <u>assimilation</u> of individuals into an indifferent public, "the crowd". Although Kierkegaard attacks the public, he is supportive of communities where individuals keep their diversity and uniqueness.

Other works continue to focus on the superficiality of "the crowd" attempting to limit and stifle the unique individual. *The Book on Adler* is a work about Pastor Adolph Peter Adler's claim to have had a sacrilegious revelation and to have suffered ostracism and expulsion from the pastorate as a consequence. According to biographer Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard experienced similar social exclusion which actually brought him closer to his father. [14]

As part of his analysis of the "crowd", Kierkegaard accused the <u>Christian church</u> of decay and decadence, especially the <u>Danish National Church</u>. Kierkegaard believed Christendom had "lost its way" on the Christian faith. According to him, Christendom in this period ignored, skewed, or gave mere 'lip service' to the original Christian doctrine. Kierkegaard felt his duty in this later era was to inform others about what he considered the shallowness of so-called "Christian living". He wrote several criticisms on contemporary Christianity in works such as <u>Christian Discourses</u>, <u>Works of Love</u>, and <u>Edifying Discourses in Diverse</u>

Spirits. [21]

<u>The Sickness Unto Death</u> is one of Kierkegaard's most popular works of this era, and although some contemporary atheistic philosophers and psychologists dismiss Kierkegaard's suggested solution as <u>faith</u>, his <u>analysis</u> on the nature of <u>despair</u> is one of the best accounts on the subject and has been emulated in subsequent philosophies, such as <u>Heidegger</u>'s concept of <u>existential guilt</u> and <u>Sartre</u>'s <u>bad faith</u>. Around 1848, Kierkegaard began a literary attack on the <u>Danish National Church</u> with books such as <u>Practice in Christianity</u>, <u>For Self-Examination</u>, and <u>Judge for Yourselves!</u>, which attempted to expound the true nature of Christianity, with <u>Jesus</u> as its role model. [35]

In 1847, Regine Olsen, Kierkegaard's former fiancée, and Frederik Schlegel were marrried. On several occasions in 1849, she and Kierkegaard crossed paths on the streets of Copenhagen. Kierkegaard wrote to her husband, asking for permission to speak to her, but Schlegel refused. Soon afterwards, the couple left the country, Schlegel having been appointed Governor General of the <u>Danish West Indies</u>. By the time they returned, Kierkegaard was dead. A few years before his death, Kierkegaard stated in his will that she should inherit his estate, and all his authorial activity was dedicated to her. Regine Schlegel lived until 1904 and was buried near Kierkegaard in the <u>Assistens Cemetery</u> in Copenhagen. [13]

[edit] Attack upon the Church (1854–1855)



Søren Kierkegaard's grave in Assistens Kirkegård

Kierkegaard's final years were taken up with a sustained, outright attack on the <u>Danish National Church</u> by means of newspaper articles published in *The Fatherland (Fædrelandet)* and a series of self-published pamphlets called *The Moment (Øjeblikket)*.

[36] Kierkegaard was initially called to action after Professor <u>Hans Lassen Martensen</u> gave a speech in church in which he called his recently deceased predecessor Bishop Jakob P. Mynster a "truth-witness, one of the authentic truth-witnesses." [5]

Kierkegaard was fond of Mynster, but had come to see that Mynster's conception of Christianity was in only man's interest and devoid of true selflessness. Kierkegaard believed that, in no way, was Mynster's life comparable to that of a real 'truth-witness'. Before the tenth chapter of his work *The Moment* could be published, Kierkegaard collapsed on the street and was eventually taken to a hospital. He stayed in the hospital for over a month and refused to receive communion from a pastor. Kierkegaard regarded the pastor as a mere political official with a niche in society who was clearly not representative of the divine. He said to Emil Boesen, a friend since childhood who kept a record of his conversations with Kierkegaard, that his life had been one of immense suffering, which may have seemed like vanity to others, but he did not think it so. [21]

Kierkegaard died in Frederik's Hospital after being there for over a month, possibly from complications from a fall he had taken from a tree in his youth. He was interred in the Assistens Kirkegård in the Nørrebro section of Copenhagen. At Kierkegaard's funeral, his nephew Henrik Lund caused a disturbance by protesting the burying of Kierkegaard by the official church. Lund maintained that Kierkegaard would never have approved, had he been alive, as he had broken from and denounced the institution. Lund was later fined for his public disruption of a funeral. [12]

[edit] Thought

Main article: Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard has been called a philosopher, a theologian, [37] the Father of Existentialism, both <u>atheistic</u> and <u>theistic</u> variations, [38] a literary critic, [34] a social theorist, [39] a humorist, [40] a psychologist, [6] and a poet. [41] Two of his popular ideas are "subjectivity", [42] and the notion popularly referred to as "leap of faith". [2][43]



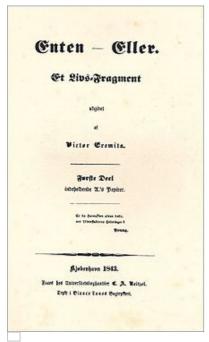
Kierkegaard's manuscript of *Philosophical Fragments* [31]

The <u>leap of faith</u> is his conception of how an individual would believe in God or how a person would act in love. Faith is not a decision based on evidence that, say, certain beliefs about God are true or a certain person is worthy of love. No such evidence could ever be enough to pragmatically justify the kind of total commitment involved in true religious faith or romantic love. Faith involves making that commitment anyway. Kierkegaard thought that to have faith is at the same time to have doubt. So, for example, for one to truly have faith in God, one would also have to doubt one's beliefs about God; the doubt is the rational part of a person's thought involved in weighing evidence, without which the faith would have no real substance. Someone who does not realize that Christian doctrine is inherently doubtful and that there can be no objective certainty about its truth does not have faith but is merely credulous. For example, it takes no faith to believe that a pencil or a table exists, when one is looking at it and touching it. In the same way, to believe or have faith in God is to know that one has no perceptual or any other access to God, and yet still has faith in God. [44] As Kierkegaard writes, "doubt is conquered by faith, just as it is faith which has brought doubt into the world". [45][46]

Kierkegaard also stressed the importance of the self, and the self's relation to the world as being grounded in self-reflection and introspection. He argued in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* that "subjectivity is truth" and "truth is subjectivity." This has to do with a distinction between what is objectively true and an individual's subjective relation (such as indifference or commitment) to that truth. People who in *some sense* believe the same things may relate to those beliefs quite differently. Two individuals may both believe that many of those around them are poor and deserve help, but this knowledge may lead only one of them to decide to actually help the poor. [47]

Kierkegaard primarily discusses subjectivity with regard to religious matters, however. As already noted, he argues that doubt is an element of faith and that it is impossible to gain any objective certainty about religious doctrines such as the existence of God or the life of Christ. The most one could hope for would be the conclusion that it is probable that the Christian doctrines are true, but if a person were to believe such doctrines only to the degree they seemed *likely* to be true, he or she would not be genuinely religious at all. Faith consists in a subjective relation of absolute commitment to these doctrines. [48]

[edit] Pseudonymous authorship



Either/Or, one of Kierkegaard's works, was authored under the pseudonyms "A" and "B", or Judge William, and edited under the pseudonym Victor Eremita.

Half of Kierkegaard's authorship was written under pseudonyms which represented different ways of thinking. This was part of Kierkegaard's theory of "indirect communication." According to several passages in his works and journals, such as <u>The Point of View of My Work as an Author</u>, Kierkegaard wrote this way in order to prevent his works from being treated as a philosophical system with a systematic structure. In the *Point of View*, Kierkegaard wrote: "In the pseudonymous works, there is not a single word which is mine. I have no opinion about these works except as a third person, no knowledge of their meaning, except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them." [49]

He used indirect communication to make it difficult to ascertain whether he actually held any of the views presented in his works. He hoped readers would simply read the work at face value without attributing it to some aspect of his life. Kierkegaard also did not want his readers to treat his work as an authoritative system, but rather look to themselves for interpretation. [50]

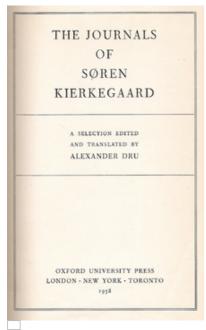
Early Kierkegaardian scholars, such as <u>Theodor W. Adorno</u>, have disregarded Kierkegaard's intentions and argue the entire authorship should be treated as Kierkegaard's own personal and religious views. [51] This view leads to many confusions and contradictions which make Kierkegaard appear incoherent. [52] However, many later scholars such as the <u>post-structuralists</u>, have respected Kierkegaard's intentions and interpreted his work by attributing the pseudonymous texts to their respective authors. [53]

Kierkegaard's most important pseudonyms, [54] in chronological order, are:

- Victor Eremita, editor of *Either/Or*
- A, writer of many articles in *Either/Or*
- Judge William, author of rebuttals to A in *Either/Or*
- Johannes de silentio, author of *Fear and Trembling*
- Constantin Constantius, author of the first half of *Repetition*
- Young Man, author of the second half of Repetition
- Vigilius Haufniensis, author of *The Concept of Anxiety*
- Nicolaus Notabene, author of *Prefaces*
- Hilarius Bookbinder, editor of Stages on Life's Way
- Johannes Climacus, author of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*
- Inter et Inter, author of *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*

- H.H., author of *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*
- Anti-Climacus, author of *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Practice in Christianity*

[edit] Journals



The cover of the first English edition of *The Journals*, edited by Alexander Dru in 1938

Kierkegaard's journals are essential to understanding him and his work. Samuel Hugo Bergmann wrote, "Kierkegaard journal's are one of the most important sources for an understanding of his philosophy". Kierkegaard wrote over 7000 pages in his journals describing key events, musings, thoughts about his works and everyday remarks. The entire collection of Danish journals has been edited and published in 13 volumes which consist of 25 separate bindings including indices. The first English edition of the journals was edited by Alexander Dru in 1938. His journals reveal many different facets of Kierkegaard and his work and help elucidate many of his ideas. The style in his journals is written in "literary and poetic manner". Kierkegaard took his journals seriously and even once wrote that they were his most trusted confidant:

I have never confided in anyone. By being an author I have in a sense made the public my confidant. But in respect of my relation to the public I must, once again, make posterity my confidant. The same people who are there to laugh at one cannot very well be made one's confidant. [58]

—Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, p. 221 (4 November 1847)

His journals are also the source of many aphorisms credited to Kierkegaard. The following passage is perhaps the most oft-quoted aphorism from Kierkegaard's journals and is usually a key quote for existentialist studies: "The thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die." It was written on 1 August 1835. Although his journals clarify some aspects of his work and life, Kierkegaard took care not to reveal too much. Abrupt changes in thought, repetitive writing, and unusual turns of phrase are some among the many tactics he uses to throw readers off track. Consequently, there are many varying interpretations of his journals. However, Kierkegaard did not doubt the importance his journals would have in the future. In a journal entry in December 1849, he wrote: "Were I to die now the effect of my life would be exceptional; much of what I have simply jotted down carelessly in the Journals would become of great importance and have a great effect; for then people would have grown reconciled to me and would be able to grant me what was, and is, my right." [60]

[edit] Kierkegaard and Christianity

See also: Theology of Søren Kierkegaard



Kierkegaard mounted an attack on Christian institutions in his final years. He felt the established state church was detrimental to individuals.

As mentioned above, Kierkegaard took up a sustained attack on the official kind of <u>Christendom</u>, or Christianity as a political entity, during the final years of his life. In the 19th century, most Danes who were citizens of Denmark were necessarily members of the Danish National Church. Kierkegaard felt this <u>state-church</u> union was unacceptable and perverted the true meaning of Christianity. [5]

In Kierkegaard's pamphlets and polemical books, including *The Moment*, he criticized several aspects of church formalities and politics. According to Kierkegaard, the idea of congregations keeps individuals as children since Christians are disinclined from taking the initiative to take responsibility for their own relation to God. He stresses that "Christianity is the individual, here, the single individual." Furthermore, since the Church was controlled by the State, Kierkegaard believed the State's bureaucratic mission was to increase membership and oversee the welfare of its members. More members would mean more power for the clergymen: a corrupt ideal. This mission would seem at odds with Christianity's true doctrine, which, to Kierkegaard, is to stress the importance of the individual, not the whole. Thus, the state-church political structure is offensive and detrimental to individuals, since anyone can become "Christian" without knowing what it means to be Christian. It is also detrimental to the religion itself since it reduces Christianity to a mere fashionable tradition adhered to by unbelieving "believers", a "herd mentality" of the population, so to speak. In the Journals, Kierkegaard writes:

If the Church is "free" from the state, it's all good. I can immediately fit in this situation. But if the Church is to be emancipated, then I must ask: By what means, in what way? A religious movement must be served religiously—otherwise it is a sham! Consequently, the emancipation must come about through martyrdom—bloody or bloodless. The price of purchase is the spiritual attitude. But those who wish to emancipate the Church by secular and worldly means (i.e. no martyrdom), they've introduced a conception of tolerance entirely consonant with that of the entire world, where tolerance equals indifference, and that is the most terrible offence against Christianity. [...] the doctrine of the established Church, its organization, are both very good indeed. Oh, but then our lives: believe me, they are indeed wretched. [65]

—Søren Kierkegaard, Journals, p.429 (January 1851)

Attacking what he considered the incompetence and corruption of the Christian churches, Kierkegaard seemed to have anticipated philosophers like <u>Nietzsche</u> who would go on to criticize the Christian religion itself. [66]

I ask: what does it mean when we continue to behave as though all were as it should be, calling ourselves Christians according to the <u>New Testament</u>, when the ideals of the New Testament have gone out of life? The tremendous disproportion which this state of affairs represents has, moreover, been perceived by many. They like to give it this turn: the human race has outgrown Christianity.

—Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, p.446^[23] (19 June 1852)

[edit] Criticism

Some of Kierkegaard's famous philosophical critics in the 20th century include <u>Theodor Adorno</u> and <u>Emmanuel Levinas</u>. <u>Atheistic</u> philosophers such as <u>Jean-Paul Sartre</u> and <u>agnostic</u> philosophers like <u>Martin Heidegger</u> support many aspects of Kierkegaard's philosophical views, but criticize and reject some of his religious views. [67][68]

Several Kierkegaardian scholars argue Adorno's take on Kierkegaard's philosophy has been less than faithful to the original intentions of Kierkegaard. One critic of Adorno writes that his book *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* is "the most irresponsible book ever written on Kierkegaard" because Adorno takes Kierkegaard's pseudonyms literally, and constructs an entire philosophy of Kierkegaard which makes him seem incoherent and unintelligible. Another reviewer says that "Adorno is [far away] from the more credible translations and interpretations of the Collected Works of Kierkegaard we have today." [52]

Levinas' main attack on Kierkegaard is focused on his ethical and religious stages, especially in <u>Fear and Trembling</u>. Levinas criticises the leap of faith by saying this suspension of the ethical and leap into the religious is a type of violence.

Kierkegaardian violence begins when existence is forced to abandon the ethical stage in order to embark on the religious stage, the domain of belief. But belief no longer sought external justification. Even internally, it combined communication and isolation, and hence violence and passion. That is the origin of the relegation of ethical phenomena to secondary status and the contempt of the ethical foundation of being which has led, through Nietzsche, to the amoralism of recent philosophies.

-Emmanuel Levinas, Existence and Ethics, (1963)[70]

Levinas points to the <u>Judeo-Christian</u> belief that it was God who first commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and that it was an angel who commanded Abraham to stop. If Abraham were truly in the religious realm, he would not have listened to the angel to stop and should have continued to kill Isaac. "Transcending ethics" seems like a loophole to excuse would-be murders from their crime and thus is unacceptable. One interesting consequence of Levinas' critique is that it seems to reveal that Levinas views God not as an absolute moral agent but as a projection of inner ethical desire.

On Kierkegaard's religious views, Sartre offers this argument against existence of God: If existence precedes essence, it follows from the meaning of the term sentient that a sentient being cannot be complete or perfect. In <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, Sartre's phrasing is that God would be a <u>pour-soi</u> [a being-for-itself; a consciousness] who is also an <u>en-soi</u> [a being-in-itself; a thing]: which is a contradiction in terms. [67][73]

Sartre agrees with Kierkegaard's analysis of Abraham undergoing anxiety (Sartre calls it anguish), but Sartre doesn't agree that God told him to do it. In his lecture, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre wonders if Abraham ought to have doubted whether God actually spoke to him or not. [67] In Kierkegaard's view, Abraham's certainty had its origin in that 'inner voice' which cannot be demonstrated or shown to another ("The problem comes as soon as Abraham wants to be understood"). To Kierkegaard, every external "proof" or justification is merely on the outside and external to the subject. [74] Kierkegaard's proof for the immortality of the soul, for example, is rooted in the extent to which one wishes to live forever.

[edit] Influence and reception



The Søren Kierkegaard

Statue in Copenhagen

Kierkegaard's works were not widely available until several decades after his death. In the years immediately after his death, the Danish National Church shunned his work and urged other Danes to do likewise. In addition, the obscurity of the Danish language, relative to German, Japanese, French, and English, made it nearly impossible for Kierkegaard to acquire non-Danish readers.

The first academic to draw attention to Kierkegaard was his fellow Dane Georg Brandes, who published in German as well as Danish. Brandes gave the first formal lectures on Kierkegaard in Copenhagen and helped bring Kierkegaard to the attention of the rest of Europe. In 1877, Brandes also published the first book on Kierkegaard's philosophy and life. The dramatist Henrik Ibsen became interested in Kierkegaard and introduced his work to the rest of Scandinavia. While independent German translations of some of Kierkegaard's works began to appear in the 1870s, Image academic German translations of whole portions of Kierkegaard's work had to wait until the 1910s. During the 1890s, Japanese philosophers began disseminating the works of Kierkegaard, from the Danish thinkers, Brandes and Harald Høffding. Image are philosophers began disseminating the works of write an introduction on the philosophy of Kierkegaard in 1915. Kierkegaard's main works were translated into German by Christoph Schrempf from 1909 onwards, Image and manifold philosophical and theological reception in Germany was one of the decisive factors of expanding his works, influence, and readership throughout the world.

Important for the first phase of his reception in Germany was the establishment of the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* (*Between the Ages*) in 1922 by a heterogeneous circle of Protestant theologians: Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann and Friedrich Gogarten. Their thought would soon be referred to as dialectical theology. Roughly at about the same time, Kierkegaard was discovered by several proponents of the Jewish-Christian philosophy of dialogue in Germany, and In addition to the philosophy of dialogue, existential philosophy has its point of origin in Kierkegaard and his concept of individuality. Martin Heidegger sparsely refers to Kierkegaard in Being and Time (1927), obscuring how much he owes to him. Martin Heidegger emphasized Kierkegaard's (and Nietzsche's) continuing importance for modern philosophy.

In the 1930s, the first academic English translations, [91] by Alexander Dru, David F. Swenson, Douglas V. Steere, and Walter Lowrie appeared, under the editorial efforts of Oxford University Press editor Charles Williams. [2] The second and currently widely used academic English translations were published by the Princeton University Press in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, under the supervision of Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. A third official translation, under the aegis of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center, will extend to 55 volumes and is expected to be completed sometime after 2009. [92]

Many 20th-century philosophers, both theistic and atheistic, and theologians drew many concepts from Kierkegaard, including the notions of angst, despair, and the importance of the individual. His fame as a philosopher grew tremendously in the 1930s, in large part because the ascendant existentialist movement pointed to him as a precursor, although he is now seen as a highly significant and influential thinker in his own right. As Kierkegaard was raised as a Lutheran, he is commemorated as a teacher in the Calendar of Saints of the Lutheran Church on 11 November and in the Calendar of Saints of the Episcopal Church on 8 September.

Philosophers and theologians influenced by Kierkegaard include Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Barth, Simone de Beauvoir, Niels Bohr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Emil Brunner, Martin Buber, Rudolf Bultmann, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Reinhold Niebuhr, Franz Rosenzweig, Jean-Paul Sartre, Joseph Soloveitchik, Paul Tillich, Miguel de Unamuno. Paul Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism was inspired by Kierkegaard's idea of subjectivity as truth. Ludwig Wittgenstein was immensely influenced and humbled by Kierkegaard, claiming that "Kierkegaard is far too deep for me, anyhow. He bewilders me without working the good effects which he would in deeper souls". Karl Popper referred to Kierkegaard as "the great reformer of Christian ethics, who exposed the official Christian morality of his day as anti-Christian and anti-humanitarian hypocrisy".

Contemporary philosophers such as Emmanuel Lévinas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Richard Rorty, although sometimes highly critical, have also adapted some Kierkegaardian insights. Hilary Putnam admires Kierkegaard, "for his insistence on the priority of the question, 'How should I live?'".

Kierkegaard has also had a considerable influence on <u>20th-century literature</u>. Figures deeply influenced by his work include <u>W. H. Auden, Jorge Luis Borges</u>, <u>Hermann Hesse</u>, <u>Franz Kafka</u>, <u>1001</u> <u>David Lodge</u>, <u>Flannery O'Connor</u>, <u>Walker Percy</u>, <u>Rainer</u>

Maria Rilke, and John Updike. [101]

Kierkegaard also had a profound influence on psychology and is more or less the founder of Christian psychology [102] and of existential psychology and therapy. [6] Existentialist (often called "humanistic") psychologists and therapists include Ludwig Binswanger, Viktor Frankl, Erich Fromm, Carl Rogers, and Rollo May. May based his *The Meaning of Anxiety* on Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*. Kierkegaard's sociological work *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age* provides an interesting critique of modernity. [34] Kierkegaard is also seen as an important precursor of postmodernism. [96] In popular culture, he has been the subject of serious television and radio programmes; in 1984, a six-part documentary Sea of Faith: Television series presented by Don Cupitt featured a programme on Kierkegaard, while on Maundy Thursday in 2008, Kierkegaard was the subject of discussion of the BBC Radio 4 programme presented by Melvyn Bragg, *In Our Time*.

Kierkegaard predicted his posthumous fame, and foresaw that his work would become the subject of intense study and research. In his journals, he wrote:

What the age needs is not a genius—it has had geniuses enough, but a martyr, who in order to teach men to obey would himself be obedient unto death. What the age needs is awakening. And therefore someday, not only my writings but my whole life, all the intriguing mystery of the machine will be studied and studied. I never forget how God helps me and it is therefore my last wish that everything may be to his honour. [103]
—Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, p.224 (20 November 1847)

[edit] Selected bibliography

For a complete bibliography, see <u>List of works by Søren Kierkegaard</u>

- (1841) On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates (Om Begrebet Ironi med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates)
- (1843) <u>Either/Or</u> (Enten-Eller)
- (1843) Fear and Trembling (Frygt og Bæven)
- (1843) *Repetition* (Gjentagelsen)
- (1844) Philosophical Fragments (Philosophiske Smuler)
- (1844) The Concept of Anxiety (Begrebet Angest)
- (1845) Stages on Life's Way (Stadier paa Livets Vei)
- (1846) Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments (Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift)
- (1847) Edifying Discourses in Diverse Spirits (Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand)
- (1847) Works of Love (Kjerlighedens Gjerninger)
- (1848) <u>Christian Discourses</u> (Christelige Taler)
- (1849) The Sickness Unto Death (Sygdommen til Døden)
- (1850) Practice in Christianity (Indøvelse i Christendom)

[edit] Notes

- 1. <u>^</u> This classification is anachronistic; Kierkegaard was an exceptionally unique thinker and his works do not fit neatly into any one philosophical school or tradition, nor did he identify himself with any. However, his works are considered precursor to many schools of thought developed in the 20th and 21st centuries. See 20th century receptions in Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard.
- 2. ^ a b c (Hannay & Marino, 1997)
- 3. ^ The influence of Socrates can be seen in Kierkegaard's Sickness Unto Death and Works of Love.
- 4. ^ (Gardiner, 1969)
- 5. ^ <u>a b c</u> (Duncan, 1976)
- 6. ^ a b c (Ostenfeld & McKinnon, 1972)
- 7. ^ (Howland, 2006)
- 8. ^(Kierkegaard, 1976, p. 303)
- 9. ^ (Hubben, 1962)
- 10. ^ (Lippitt & Hutto, 1998)
- 11. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> <u>c</u> (Creegan, 1989)
- 12. ^ <u>a b c d e</u> (Garff, 2005)
- 13. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Watkin, 2000)

- 14. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Lowrie, 1942)
- 15. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1985)
- 16. ^ (Walsh, 2009)
- 17. (Garff, 2005, p. 113); Also available in Encounters With Kierkegaard: A Life As Seen by His Contemporaries, p. 225.
- 18. ^ (Dru, 1938, p. 70); Journal entry written 2 February 1839.
- 19. △ According to the *Journals*, Michael died at approximately 2:00 a.m., early Thursday morning.
- 20. ^ (Dru, 1938, p. 62)
- 21. ^ <u>a b c d</u> (Hannay, 2003)
- 22. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1989)
- 23. ^ <u>a b c d e</u> (Dru, 1938)
- 24. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Mooney, 2007)
- 25. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Lippitt, 2003)
- 26. <u>^</u> (Hegel, 1979)
- 27. In English, the first of these discourses have been published under the title *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* by Princeton University Press, ISBN 0691020876.
- 28. ^(Pattison, 2002)
- 29. \(\triangle \) (Kierkegaard, 1978, pp. vii–xii)
- 30. \(\triangle \) Kierkegaard, Søren. Dialectical Result of a Literary Police Action in Essential Kierkegaard.
- 31. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Royal Library of Denmark, 1997)
- 32. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1978)
- 33. ^ (Kierkegaard, 2001, p. 86)
- 34. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> <u>c</u> (Kierkegaard, 2001)
- 35. ^ (Lowrie, 1968)
- 36. ^(Lowrie, 1962)
- 37. ^ (Kangas, 1998)
- 38. <u>^</u> (McGrath, 1993, p. 202)
- 39. <u>^</u> (Westphal, 1997)
- 40. ^ (Oden, 2004)
- 41. ^(MacKey, 1971)
- 42. \(\triangle \) Kierkegaard is not an extreme subjectivist; he would not reject the importance of objective truths.
- 43. <u>^</u> The Danish equivalent to the English phrase "leap of faith" does not appear in the original Danish nor is the English phrase found in current English translations of Kierkegaard's works. However, Kierkegaard does mention the concepts of "faith" and "leap" together many times in his works. See Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap in Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard.
- 44. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1992, pp. 21–57)
- 45. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1976, p. 399)
- 46. A Elsewhere, Kierkegaard uses the Faith/Offense dichotomy. In this dichotomy, doubt is the middle ground between faith and taking offense. Offense, in his terminology, describes the threat faith poses to the rational mind. He uses Jesus' words in Matthew 11:6: "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me". In Practice in Christianity, Kierkegaard writes: "Just as the concept of "faith" is an altogether distinctively Christian term, so in turn is "offense" an altogether distinctively Christian term relating to faith. The possibility of offense is the crossroad, or it is like standing at the crossroad. From the possibility of offense, one turns either to offense or to faith, but one never comes to faith except from the possibility of offense" (p. 80). In the footnote, he writes, "in the works of some psuedonymous writers it has been pointed out that in modern philosophy there is a confused discussion of doubt where the discussion should have been about despair. Therefore one has been unable to control or govern doubt either in scholarship or in life. "Despair." however, promptly points in the right direction by placing the relation under the rubric of personality (the single individual) and the ethical. But just as there is a confused discussion of "doubt instead of a discussion of "despair," So also the practice has been to use the category "doubt" where the discussion ought to be about "offense." The relation, the relation of personality to Christianity, is not to doubt or to believe, but to be offended or to believe. All modern philosophy, both ethically, and Christianly, is based upon frivolousness. Instead of deterring and calling people to order by speaking of being despairing and being offended, it has waved to them and invited them to become conceited by doubting and having doubted. Modern philosophy, being abstract, is floating in metaphysical indeterminateness. Instead of explaining this about itself and then directing people (individual persons) to the ethical, the religious, the existential, philosophy has given the appearance that people are able to speculate themselves out of their own skin, as they so very prosaically say, into pure appearance." (Practice in Christianity, trans. Hong 1991, p.80.) He writes that the person is either offended that Christ came as a man, and that God is too high to be a lowly man who is actually capable of doing very little to resist. Or Jesus, a man, thought himself too high to consider himself God (blasphemy). Or the historical offense where God a lowly man comes into collision with an established order. Thus, this offensive paradox is highly resistant to rational thought.

- Søren Kierkegaard Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia 47. △ (Pattison, 2005) 48. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1992) 49. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1998a, p. xii) 50. <u>^</u> (Carlisle, 2006) 51. ^ (Adorno, 1989) 52. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Morgan) 53. ^ (Evans, 1996) 54. <u>^</u> (Malantschuk & Hong, 2003) 55. ^ (Bergmann, 1991, p. 2) 56. A Given the importance of the journals, references in the form of (*Journals*, XYZ) are referenced from Dru's 1938 Journals. When known, the exact date is given; otherwise, month and year, or just year is given. 57. △ (Conway & Gover, 2002, p.25) 58. ^ (Dru, 1938, p.221) 59. ^ (Dru, 1938, p. 15) 60. ^ (Dru, 1938, p. 354) 61. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1998b) 62. ^ (Kirmmse, 2000) 63. ^ (Walsh, 2009) 64. ^ (Kierkegaard, 1999) 65. ^ (Dru, 1938, p. 429) 66. <u>^</u> (Angier, 2006) 67. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> <u>c</u> (Sartre, 1946) 68. ^ (Dreyfus, 1998) 69. ^ (Westphal, 1996, p. 9) 70. ^ (as cited in Lippitt, 2003, p. 136) 71. ^ (Katz, 2001) 72. ^ (Hutchens, 2004) 73. ^ (Sartre, 1969, p. 430) 74. ^ (Stern, 1990) 75. ^ (Kosch, 1997) 76. (Hall, 1983) 77. ^(Cappelorn, 2003) 78. <u>^</u> (Masugata, 1999) 79. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Bösl, 1997, p. 12) 80. ^ (Stewart, 2009) 81. ^ (Bösl, 1997, p. 13) 82. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Bösl, 1997, p. 14) 83. ^ The German Wikipedia has an article on <u>Dialogphilosophie</u>. 84. ^ (Bösl, 1997, p. 16-17) 85. ^ (Bösl, 1997, p. 17) 86. A Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, Notes to pages 190, 235, 338 87. ^ (Bösl, 1997, p. 19) 88. ^ (Beck, 1928) 89. ^ (Wyschogrod, 1954) 90. ^ (Jaspers, 1935) 91. A However, an independent English translation of selections/excerpts of Kierkegaard appeared in 1923 by Lee Hollander, and published by the University of Texas at Austin. 92. ^ (Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret, 2010) 93. ^ (Weston, 1994) 94. ^ (Hampson, 2004) 95. ^(Popper, 2002) 96. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> (Matustik & Westphal, 1995) 97. ^ (MacIntyre, 2001) 98. ^(Rorty, 1989) 99. ^ (Pyle, 1999, p. 52-53)
 - 103. △ (Dru, 1938, p.224)

102. △ (Society for Christian Psychology)

100. ^ (McGee, 2006) 101. <u>^</u> (Updike, 1997)

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<u>v • d • e</u>

Søren Kierkegaard

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- Contents
- Featured content
- Current events
- Random article

Search



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- Community portal
- Recent changes
- Contact Wikipedia
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- What links here
- Related changes
- Upload file
- Special pages
- Printable version
- Permanent link
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- <u>Asturianu</u>
- Azərbaycan
- বাংলা
- Bosanski
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- Cymraeg
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