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Søren Kierkegaard

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (b.1813, d. 1855) was a profound and prolific writer in the Danish "golden age" of intellectual and artistic activity. His work crosses the boundaries of philosophy, theology, psychology, literary criticism, devotional literature and fiction. Kierkegaard brought this potent mixture of discourses to bear as social critique and for the purpose of renewing Christian faith within Christendom. At the same time he made many original conceptual contributions to each of the disciplines he employed. He is known as the "father of existentialism", but at least as important are his critiques of Hegel and of the German romantics, his contributions to the development of modernism, his literary experimentation, his vivid re-presentation of biblical figures to bring out their modern relevance, his invention of key concepts which have been explored and redeployed by thinkers ever since, his interventions in contemporary Danish church politics, and his fervent attempts to analyse and revitalise Christian faith. Kierkegaard burned with the passion of a religious poet, was armed with extraordinary dialectical talent, and drew on vast resources of erudition.

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Kierkegaard's Life

Kierkegaard led a somewhat uneventful life. He rarely left his hometown of Copenhagen, and travelled abroad only three times -- to Berlin. His prime recreational activities were attending the theatre, walking the streets of Copenhagen to chat with ordinary people, and taking brief carriage jaunts into the surrounding countryside. He was educated at a prestigious boys' school (*Borgedydskolen*), then attended Copenhagen University where he studied philosophy and theology. His teachers at the university included F.C. Sibbern, Poul Martin Møller, and H.L. Martensen.

Sibbern and Møller were both philosophers who also wrote fiction. The latter in particular had a great influence on Kierkegaard's philosophico-literary development. Martensen also had a profound effect on Kierkegaard, but largely in a negative manner. Martensen was a champion of Hegelianism, and when he became Bishop Primate of the Danish People's Church, Kierkegaard published a vitriolic attack on Martensen's theological views. Kierkegaard's brother Peter, on the other hand, was an adherent of Martensen and himself became a bishop in the church.

Another very important figure in Kierkegaard's life was J.L. Heiberg, the doyen of Copenhagen's literati. Heiberg, more than any other person, was responsible for introducing Hegelianism into Denmark. Kierkegaard spent a good deal of energy trying to break into the Heiberg literary circle, but desisted once he had found his own voice in *The Concept of Irony*. Kierkegaard's first major publication *From the Papers of One Still Living*, is largely an attempt to articulate a Heibergian aesthetics - which is a modified version of Hegel's aesthetics. In *From the Papers of One Still Living*, which is a critical review of Hans Christian Andersen's novel *Only A Fiddler*, Kierkegaard attacks Andersen for lacking life-development (*Livs-Udvikling*) and a life-view (*Livs-Anskuelse*) both of which Kierkegaard deemed necessary for someone to be a genuine novelist (*Romandigter*).

Kierkegaard's life is more relevant to his work than is the case for many writers. Much of the thrust of his critique of Hegelianism is that its system of thought is abstracted from the everyday lives of its proponents. This existential critique consists in demonstrating how the life and work of a philosopher contradict one another. Kierkegaard derived this form of critique from the Greek notion of judging philosophers by their lives rather than simply by their intellectual artefacts. The Christian ideal, according to Kierkegaard, is even more exacting since the totality of an individual's existence is the artefact on the basis of which s/he is judged by God for h/er eternal validity. Of course a writer's work is an important part of h/er existence, but for the purpose of judgement we should focus on the whole life not just on one part.

In a less abstract manner, an understanding of Kierkegaard's biography is important for an understanding of his writing because his life was the source of many of the preoccupations and repetitions within his *oeuvre*. Because of his existentialist orientation, most of his interventions in contemporary theory do double duty as means of working through events from his own life. In particular Kierkegaard's relations to his mother, his father, and his fiancée Regine Olsen pervade his work.

Kierkegaard's relation to his mother is the least frequently commented upon since it is invisible in his work. His mother does not rate a direct mention in his published works, or in his diaries -- not even on the day she died. However, for a writer who places so much emphasis on indirect communication, and on the semiotics of invisibility, we should regard this absence as significant. Johannes Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* remarks, "... how deceptive then, that an omnipresent being should be recognisable precisely by being invisible." Kierkegaard's mother, who was not well educated, is represented in his writings by the mother tongue (Danish). Kierkegaard was deeply

enamoured of the Danish language and worked throughout his writings to assert the strengths of his mother-tongue over the invasive, imperialistic influences of Latin and German. With respect to the former, Kierkegaard had to petition the king to be allowed to write his philosophy dissertation *On the Concept of Irony with constant reference to Socrates* in Danish. Even though permission was granted he was still required to defend his dissertation publicly in Latin. Latin had been the pan-European language of science and scholarship. In Denmark, in Kierkegaard's time, German language and culture were at least as dominant as Latin in the production of knowledge. In defiance of this, Kierkegaard revelled in his mother-tongue and created some of the most beautifully poetic prose in the Danish language -- including a paean to his mother-tongue in *Stages On Life's Way*. In *Repetition* Constantin Constantius congratulates the Danish language on providing the word for an important new philosophical concept, viz. *Gjentagelse* (repetition), to replace the foreign word "mediation". In general, the Danish language is Kierkegaard's umbilical attachment to the mother whereas Latin and German represent the law of the father, especially when employed in systematic scholarship (*Videnskab*).

The influence of Kierkegaard's father on his work has been frequently noted. Not only did Kierkegaard inherit his father's melancholy, his sense of guilt and anxiety, and his pietistic emphasis on the dour aspects of Christian faith, but he also inherited his talents for philosophical argument and creative imagination. In addition Kierkegaard inherited enough of his father's wealth to allow him to pursue his life as a freelance writer. The themes of sacrificial father/son relationships, of inherited sin, of the burden of history, and of the centrality of the "individual, human existence relationship, the old text, well known, handed down from the fathers" (*Postscript*) are repeated many times in Kierkegaard's oeuvre. The father's sense of guilt was so great (for having cursed God? for having impregnated Kierkegaard's mother out of wedlock?) that he thought God would punish him by taking the lives of all seven of his children before they reached the age of 34 (the age of Jesus Christ at his crucifixion). This was born out for all but two of the children, Søren and his older brother Peter, both of whom were astonished to survive beyond that age. This may explain the sense of urgency that drove Kierkegaard to write so prolifically in the years leading up to his 34th birthday.

Kierkegaard's (broken) engagement to Regine Olsen has also been the focus of much scholarly attention. The theme of a young woman being the occasion for a young man to become "poeticized" recurs in Kierkegaard's writings, as does the theme of the sacrifice of worldly happiness for a higher (religious) purpose. Kierkegaard's infatuation with Regine, and the sublimated libidinal energy it lent to his poetic production, were crucial for setting his life course. The breaking of the engagement allowed Kierkegaard to devote himself monastically to his religious purpose, as well as to establish his outsider status (outside the norm of married bourgeois life). It also freed him from close personal entanglements with women, thereby leading him to objectify them as ideal creatures, and to reproduce the patriarchal values of his church and father.

Kierkegaard's Rhetoric

Kierkegaard's central problematic was *how to become a Christian in Christendom*. The task was most difficult for the well-educated, since prevailing educational and cultural institutions tended to produce stereotyped members of "the crowd" rather than to allow individuals to discover their own unique identities. This problem was compounded by the fact that Denmark had recently and very rapidly been transformed from a feudal society into a capitalist society. Universal elementary education, large-scale migration from rural areas into cities, and greatly increased social mobility meant that the social structure changed from a rigidly hierarchical one to a relatively "horizontal" one. In this

context it became increasingly difficult to "become who you are" for two reasons: (i) social identities were unusually fluid; and (ii) there was a proliferation of normalizing institutions which produced pseudo-individuals.

Given this problematic in this social context Kierkegaard perceived a need to invent a form of communication which would not produce stereotyped identities. On the contrary, he needed a form of rhetoric which would force people back onto their own resources, to take responsibility for their own existential choices, and to become who they are beyond their socially imposed identities. In this undertaking Kierkegaard was inspired by the figure of Socrates, whose incessant irony undermined all knowledge claims that were taken for granted or unreflectively inherited from traditional culture. In his dissertation *On the Concept of Irony with constant reference to Socrates* Kierkegaard argued that the historical Socrates used his irony in order to facilitate the birth of subjectivity in his interlocutors. Because they were constantly forced to abandon their pat answers to Socrates' annoying questions, they had to begin to think for themselves and to take individual responsibility for their claims about knowledge and value.

Kierkegaard sought to provide a similar service for his own contemporaries. He used irony, parody, satire, humor, and deconstructive techniques in order to make conventionally accepted forms of knowledge and value untenable. He was a gadfly -- constantly irritating his contemporaries with discomforting thoughts. He was also a midwife -- assisting at the birth of individual subjectivity by forcing his contemporaries to think for themselves. His art of communication became "the art of *taking away*" since he thought his audience suffered from too much knowledge rather than too little.

Hegelianism promised to make absolute knowledge available by virtue of a science of logic. Anyone with the capacity to follow the dialectical progression of the purportedly transparent concepts of Hegel's logic would have access to the mind of God (which for Hegel was equivalent to the logical structure of the universe). Kierkegaard thought this to be the hubristic attempt to build a new tower of Babel, or a *scala paradisi* -- a dialectical ladder by which humans can climb with ease up to heaven. Kierkegaard's strategy was to invert this dialectic by seeking to make everything more difficult. Instead of seeing scientific knowledge as the means of human redemption, he regarded it as the greatest obstacle to redemption. Instead of seeking to give people more knowledge he sought to take away what passed for knowledge. Instead of seeking to make God and Christian faith perfectly intelligible he sought to emphasize the absolute transcendence by God of all human categories. Instead of setting himself up as a religious authority, Kierkegaard used a vast array of textual devices to undermine his authority as an author and to place responsibility for the existential significance to be derived from his texts squarely on the reader.

Kierkegaard distanced himself from his texts by a variety of devices which served to problematize the authorial voice for the reader. He used pseudonyms in many of his works (both overtly aesthetic ones and overtly religious ones). He partitioned the texts into prefaces, forewords, interludes, postscripts, appendices. He assigned the "authorship" of parts of texts to different pseudonyms, and invented further pseudonyms to be the editors or compilers of these pseudonymous writings. Sometimes Kierkegaard appended his name as author, sometimes as the person responsible for publication, sometimes not at all. Sometimes Kierkegaard would publish more than one book on the same day. These simultaneous books embodied strikingly contrasting perspectives. He also published whole *series* of works simultaneously, viz. the pseudonymous works on the one hand and on the other hand the *Edifying Discourses* published under his own name.

All of this play with narrative point of view, with contrasting works, and with contrasting internal partitions within individual works leaves

the reader very disoriented. In combination with the incessant play of irony and Kierkegaard's predilection for paradox and semantic opacity, the text becomes a polished surface for the reader in which the prime meaning to be discerned is the reader's own reflection. Christian faith, for Kierkegaard, is not a matter of learning dogma by rote. It is a matter of the individual repeatedly renewing his/her passionate subjective relationship to an object which can never be known, but only believed in. This belief is offensive to reason, since it only exists in the face of the absurd (the paradox of the eternal, immortal, infinite God being incarnated in time as a finite mortal).

Kierkegaard's "method of indirect communication" was designed to sever the reliance of the reader on the authority of the author and on the received wisdom of the community. The reader was to be forced to take individual responsibility for knowing who s/he is and for knowing where s/he stands on the existential, ethical and religious issues raised in the texts.

Kierkegaard's "inverted Christian dialectic" was designed not to make the word of God easier to assimilate, but to establish more clearly the absolute distance that separates human beings from God. This was in order to emphasize that human beings are absolutely reliant on God's grace for salvation.

Kierkegaard's Aesthetics

Kierkegaard presents his pseudonymous authorship as a dialectical progression of existential stages. The first is the aesthetic, which gives way to the ethical, which gives way to the religious. The aesthetic stage of existence is characterized by the following: immersion in sensuous experience; valorization of possibility over actuality; egotism; fragmentation of the subject of experience; nihilistic wielding of irony and scepticism; and flight from boredom.

The figure of the aesthete in the first volume of *Either-Or* is an ironic portrayal of German romanticism, but it also draws on medieval characters as diverse as Don Juan, Ahasverus (the wandering Jew), and Faust. It finds its most sophisticated form in the author of "The Seducer's Diary", the final section of *Either-Or*. Johannes the seducer is a *reflective aesthete*, who gains sensuous delight not so much from the act of seduction but from engineering the possibility of seduction. His real aim is the manipulation of people and situations in ways which generate interesting reflections in his own voyeuristic mind. The aesthetic perspective transforms quotidian dullness into a richly poetic world by whatever means it can. Sometimes the reflective aesthete will inject interest into a book by reading only the last third, or into a conversation by provoking a bore into an apoplectic fit so that he can see a bead of sweat form between the bore's eyes and run down his nose. That is, the aesthete uses artifice, arbitrariness, irony, and wilful imagination to recreate the world in his own image. The prime motivation for the aesthete is the transformation of the boring into the interesting.

This type of aestheticism is criticized from the point of view of ethics. It is seen to be emptily self-serving and escapist. It is a despairing means of avoiding commitment and responsibility. It fails to acknowledge one's social debt and communal existence. And it is self-deceiving insofar as it substitutes fantasies for actual states of affairs.

But Kierkegaard did not want to abandon aesthetics altogether in favor of the ethical and the religious. A key concept in the Hegelian

dialectic, which Kierkegaard' s pseudonymous authorship parodies, is *Aufhebung* (sublation). In Hegel' s dialectic, when contradictory positions are reconciled in a higher unity (synthesis) they are both annulled and preserved (*aufgehoben*). Similarly with Kierkegaard' s pseudonymic dialectic: the aesthetic and the ethical are both annulled and preserved in their synthesis in the religious stage. As far as the aesthetic stage of existence is concerned what is preserved in the higher religious stage is the sense of infinite possibility made available through the imagination. But this no longer excludes what is actual. Nor is it employed for egotistic ends. Aesthetic irony is transformed into religious humor, and the aesthetic *transfiguration* of the actual world into the ideal is transformed into the religious *transubstantiation* of the finite world into an actual reconciliation with the infinite.

But the dialectic of the pseudonymous authorship never quite reaches the truly religious. We stop short at the *representation* of the religious by a self-confessed humorist (Johannes Climacus) in a medium which, according to Climacus' s own account, necessarily alienates the reader from true (Christian) faith. For faith is a matter of lived experience, of constant striving within an individual' s existence. According to Climacus' s metaphysics, the world is divided dualistically into the actual and the ideal. Language (and all other media of representation) belong to the realm of the ideal. No matter how eloquent or evocative language is it can never *be* the actual. Therefore, any representation of faith is always suspended in the realm of ideality and can never *be* actual faith.

So the whole dialectic of the pseudonymous authorship is recuperated by the aesthetic by virtue of its medium of representation. In fact Johannes Climacus acknowledges this implicitly when at the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* he *revokes* everything he has said, with the important rider that to say something then to revoke it is not the same as never having said it in the first place. His presentation of religious faith in an aesthetic medium at least provides an opportunity for his readers to make their own leap of faith, by appropriating with inward passion the paradoxical religion of Christianity into their own lives.

As a poet of the religious Kierkegaard was always preoccupied with aesthetics. In fact, contrary to popular misconceptions of Kierkegaard which represent him as becoming increasingly hostile to poetry, he referred increasingly to himself as a poet in his later years (all but one of over ninety references to himself as a poet in his journals date from after 1847). Kierkegaard never claimed to write with religious authority, as an apostle. His works represent both less religiously enlightened and more religiously enlightened positions than he thought he had attained in his own existence. Such representations were only possible in an aesthetic medium of imagined possibilities like poetry.

Kierkegaard's Ethics

Like the terms "aesthetic" and "religious", the term "ethics" in Kierkegaard' s work has more than one meaning. It is used to denote both: (i) a limited existential sphere, or stage, which is superseded by the higher stage of the religious life; and (ii) an aspect of life which is retained even within the religious life. In the first sense "ethics" is synonymous with the Hegelian notion of *Sittlichkeit*, or customary mores. In this sense "ethics" represents "the universal", or more accurately the prevailing social norms. The social norms are seen to be the highest court of appeal for judging human affairs -- nothing outranks them for this sort of ethicist. Even human sacrifice is justified in terms of how it serves the community, so that when Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia he is regarded as a tragic hero since the sacrifice is required for the success of the Greek expedition to Troy (*Fear and Trembling*).

Kierkegaard, however, does recognize duties to a power higher than social norms. Much of *Fear and Trembling* turns on the notion that Abraham's would-be sacrifice of his son Isaac is not for the sake of social norms, but is the result of a "teleological suspension of the ethical". That is, Abraham recognizes a duty to something higher than both his social duty not to kill an innocent person and his personal commitment to his beloved son, viz. his duty to obey God's commands.

But in order to arrive at a position of religious faith, which might entail a "teleological suspension of the ethical", the individual must first embrace the ethical (in the first sense). In order to raise oneself beyond the merely aesthetic life, which is a life of drifting in imagination, possibility and sensation, one needs to make a commitment. That is, the aesthete needs to choose the ethical, which entails a commitment to communication and decision procedures.

The ethical position advocated by Judge Wilhelm in "Equilibrium Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality" (*Either-Or* II) is a peculiar mix of cognitivism and noncognitivism. The metaethics or normative ethics are cognitivist, laying down various necessary conditions for ethically correct action. These conditions include: the necessity of choosing seriously and inwardly; commitment to the belief that predications of good and evil of our actions have a truth-value; the necessity of choosing what one is actually doing, rather than just responding to a situation; actions are to be in accordance with rules; and these rules are universally applicable to moral agents.

The choice of metaethics, however, is noncognitive. There is no adequate proof of the truth of metaethics. The choice of normative ethics is motivated, but in a noncognitive way. The Judge seeks to motivate the choice of his normative ethics through the avoidance of despair. Here despair (*Fortvivlelse*) is to let one's life depend on conditions outside one's control (and later, more radically, despair is the very possibility of despair in this first sense). For Judge Wilhelm, the choice of normative ethics is a noncognitive choice of cognitivism, and thereby an acceptance of the applicability of the conceptual distinction between good and evil.

From Kierkegaard's religious perspective, however, the conceptual distinction between good and evil is ultimately dependent not on social norms but on God. Therefore it is possible, as Johannes de Silentio argues was the case for Abraham (the father of faith), that God demand a suspension of the ethical (in the sense of the socially prescribed norms). This is still ethical in the second sense, since ultimately God's definition of the distinction between good and evil outranks any human society's definition. The requirement of communicability and clear decision procedures can also be suspended by God's fiat. This renders cases such as Abraham's extremely problematic, since we have no recourse to public reason to decide whether he is legitimately obeying God's command or whether he is a deluded would-be murderer. Since public reason cannot decide the issue for us, we must decide for ourselves as a matter of religious faith.

Kierkegaard's Religion

Kierkegaard styled himself above all as a religious poet. The religion to which he sought to relate his readers is Christianity. The type of Christianity that underlies his writings is a very serious strain of Lutheran pietism informed by the dour values of sin, guilt, suffering, and individual responsibility. Kierkegaard was immersed in these values in the family home through his father, whose own childhood was lived in

the shadow of the severe *Indre Mission* (Inner Mission) -- a pietistic cult from Jutland. Kierkegaard's father subsequently became a member of the Moravian Brethren congregation in Copenhagen.

For Kierkegaard Christian faith is not a matter of regurgitating church dogma. It is a matter of individual subjective passion, which cannot be mediated by the clergy or by human artefacts. Faith is the most important task to be achieved by a human being, because only on the basis of faith does an individual have a chance to become a true self. This self is the life-work which God judges for eternity.

The individual is thereby subject to an enormous burden of responsibility, for upon h/er existential choices hangs h/er eternal salvation or damnation. Anxiety or dread (*Angest*) is the presentiment of this terrible responsibility when the individual stands at the threshold of momentous existential choice. Anxiety is a two-sided emotion: on one side is the dread burden of choosing for eternity; on the other side is the exhilaration of freedom in choosing oneself. Choice occurs in the instant (*Øjeblikket*), which is the point at which time and eternity intersect -- for the individual creates through temporal choice a self which will be judged for eternity.

But the choice of faith is not made once and for all. It is essential that faith be constantly renewed by means of repeated avowals of faith. One's very selfhood depends upon this repetition, for according to Ant Climacus, the self "is a relation which relates itself to itself" (*The Sickness Unto Death*). But unless this self acknowledges a "power which constituted it," it falls into a despair which undoes its selfhood. Therefore, in order to maintain itself as a relation which relates itself to itself, the self must constantly renew its faith in "the power which posited it." There is no *mediation* between the individual self and God by priest or by logical system (*contra* Catholicism and Hegelianism respectively). There is only the individual's own *repetition* of faith. This repetition of faith is the way the self relates itself to itself and to the power which constituted it, i.e. the repetition of faith *is* the self.

Christian dogma, according to Kierkegaard, embodies paradoxes which are offensive to reason. The central paradox is the assertion that the eternal, infinite, transcendent God simultaneously became incarnated as a temporal, finite, human being (Jesus). There are two possible attitudes we can adopt to this assertion, viz. we can have faith, or we can take offense. What we cannot do, according to Kierkegaard, is believe by virtue of reason. If we choose faith we must suspend our reason in order to believe in something higher than reason. In fact we must believe *by virtue of the absurd*.

Much of Kierkegaard's authorship explores the notion of the absurd: Job gets everything back again by virtue of the absurd (*Repetition*); Abraham gets a reprieve from having to sacrifice Isaac, by virtue of the absurd (*Fear and Trembling*); Kierkegaard hoped to get Regine back again after breaking off their engagement, by virtue of the absurd (*Journals*); Climacus hopes to deceive readers into the truth of Christianity by virtue of an absurd representation of Christianity's ineffability; the Christian God is represented as absolutely transcendent of human categories yet is absurdly presented as a personal God with the human capacities to love, judge, forgive, teach, etc. Kierkegaard's notion of the absurd subsequently became an important category for twentieth century existentialists, though usually devoid of its religious associations.

According to Johannes Climacus, faith is a miracle, a gift from God whereby eternal truth enters time in the instant. This Christian conception of the relation between (eternal) truth and time is distinct from the Socratic notion that (eternal) truth is always already within us -- it just

needs to be recovered by means of recollection (*anamnesis*). The condition for realizing (eternal) truth for the Christian is a gift (*Gave*) from God, but its realization is a task (*Opgave*) which must be repeatedly performed by the individual believer. Whereas Socratic recollection is a recuperation of the past, Christian repetition is a "recollection forwards" -- so that the eternal (future) truth is captured in time.

Crucial to the miracle of Christian faith is the realization that over against God we are always in the wrong. That is, we must realize that we are always in sin. This is the condition for faith, and must be given by God. The idea of sin cannot evolve from purely human origins. Rather, it must have been introduced into the world from a transcendent source. Once we understand that we are in sin, we can understand that there is some being over against which we are always in the wrong. On this basis we can have faith that, by virtue of the absurd, we can ultimately be atoned with this being.

Kierkegaard's Politics

Kierkegaard is sometimes regarded as an apolitical thinker, but in fact he intervened stridently in church politics, cultural politics, and in the turbulent social changes of his time. His earliest published essay, for example, was a polemic against women' s liberation. It is a reactionary apologetic for the prevailing patriarchal values, and was motivated largely by Kierkegaard' s desire to ingratiate himself with factions within Copenhagen' s intellectual circles. This latter desire gradually left him, but his relation to women remained highly questionable.

One of Kierkegaard' s main interventions in cultural politics was his sustained attack on Hegelianism. Hegel' s philosophy had been introduced into Denmark with religious zeal by J.L. Heiberg, and was taken up enthusiastically within the theology faculty of Copenhagen University and by Copenhagen' s literati. Kierkegaard, too, was induced to make a serious study of Hegel' s work. While Kierkegaard greatly admired Hegel, he had grave reservations about Hegelianism and its bombastic promises. Hegel would have been the greatest thinker who ever lived, said Kierkegaard, if only he had regarded his system as a thought-experiment. Instead he took himself seriously to have reached the truth, and so rendered himself comical.

Kierkegaard' s tactic in undermining Hegelianism was to produce an elaborate parody of Hegel' s entire system. The pseudonymous authorship from *Either-Or* to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, presents an inverted Hegelian dialectic which is designed to lead readers away from knowledge rather than towards it. This authorship simultaneously snipes at German romanticism and contemporary Danish literati (with J.L. Heiberg receiving much acerbic comment).

This intriguing pseudonymous authorship received little popular attention, aimed as it was at the literary elite. So it had little immediate effect as discursive action. Kierkegaard sought to remedy this by provoking an attack on himself in the popular satirical review *The Corsair*. Kierkegaard succeeded in having himself mercilessly lampooned in this publication, largely on personal grounds rather than in terms of the substance of his writings. The suffering incurred by these attacks sparked Kierkegaard into another highly productive phase of authorship, but this time his focus was the creation of positive Christian discourses rather than satire or parody.

Eventually Kierkegaard became more and more worried about the direction taken by the Danish People' s Church, especially after the death o

the Bishop Primate J.P. Mynster. He realized he could no longer indulge himself in the painstakingly erudite and poetically meticulous writing he had practised hitherto. He had to intervene decisively in a popular medium, so he published his own pamphlet under the title *The Instant*. This addressed church politics directly and increasingly shrilly.

There were two main foci of Kierkegaard' s concern in church politics. One was the influence of Hegel, largely through the teachings of H.L. Martensen; the other was the popularity of N.F.S. Grundtvig, a theologian, educator and poet who composed most of the pieces in the Danish hymn book. Grundtvig' s theology was diametrically opposed to Kierkegaard' s in tone. Grundtvig emphasized the light, joyous, celebratory and communal aspects of Christianity, whereas Kierkegaard emphasized seriousness, suffering, sin, guilt, and individual isolation. Kierkegaard' s intervention failed miserably with respect to the Danish People' s Church, which became predominantly Grundtvigian. His intervention with respect to Hegelianism also failed, with Martensen succeeding Mynster as Bishop Primate. Hegelianism in the church went on to die of natural causes.

Kierkegaard also provided critical commentary on social change. He was an untiring champion of "the single individual" as opposed to "the crowd". He feared that the opportunity of achieving genuine selfhood was diminished by the social production of stereotypes. He lived in an age when mass society was emerging from a highly stratified feudal order and was contemptuous of the mediocrity the new social order generated. One symptom of the change was that mass society substitutes detached reflection for engaged passionate commitment. Yet the latter is crucial for Christian faith and for authentic selfhood according to Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard' s real value as a social and political thinker was not realized until after his death. His pamphleteering achieved little immediate impact, but his substantial philosophical, literary, psychological and theological writings have had a lasting effect. Much of Heidegger' s very influential work, *Being And Time*, is indebted to Kierkegaard' s writings (though this goes unacknowledged by Heidegger). Kierkegaard' s social realism, his deep psychological and philosophical analyses of contemporary problems, and his concern to address "the present age" were taken up by fellow Scandinavians Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. Ibsen and Strindberg, together with Friedrich Nietzsche, became central icons of the modernism movement in Berlin in the 1890s. The Danish literary critic Georg Brandes was instrumental in conjoining these intellectual figures: he had given the first university lectures on Kierkegaard and on Nietzsche; he had promoted Kierkegaard' s work to Nietzsche and to Strindberg; and he had put Strindberg in correspondence with Nietzsche. Taking his cue from Brandes, the Swedish literary critic Ola Hansson subsequently promoted this conjunction of writers in Berlin itself. Berlin modernism self-consciously sought to use art as a means of political and social change. It continued Kierkegaard' s concern to use discursive action for social transformation.

Chronology of Kierkegaard's Life and Works

1813 born May 5 in Copenhagen (Denmark)

1830 matriculated to the university of Copenhagen

1834 mother died

1837 met Regine Olsen

1838 father died

- *From the Papers of One Still Living. Published against his Will by S. Kierkegaard (Af en endnu Levendes Papirer -- Udgivet mod hans Villie af S. Kierkegaard)*

1840 passed final theological examination

- proposed to Regine Olsen, who accepted him

1841 broke off his engagement to Regine Olsen

- defended his dissertation *On the Concept of Irony with constant reference to Socrates (Om Begrebet Ironi med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates)*
- trip to Berlin, where he attended lectures by Schelling

1842 returned from Berlin

1843 *Either-Or: A Fragment of Life* edited by Victor Eremita (*Enten-Eller. Et Livs-Fragment, udgivet af Victor Eremita*)

- second trip to Berlin
- *Two Edifying Discourses by S. Kierkegaard (To opbyggelige Taler)*
- *Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de Silentio (Frygt og Bæven. Dialektisk Lyrik af Johannes de Silentio)*
- *Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology by Constantin Constantius (Gjentagelsen. Et Forsøg i den experimenterende Psychologi af Constantin Constantius)* (published the same day as *Fear and Trembling*)
- *Three Edifying Discourses by S. Kierkegaard (Tre opbyggelige Taler)*
- *Four Edifying Discourses by S. Kierkegaard (Fire opbyggelige Taler)*

1844 *Two Edifying Discourses by S. Kierkegaard (To opbyggelige Taler)*

- *Three Edifying Discourses by S. Kierkegaard (Tre opbyggelige Taler)*
- *Philosophical Fragments or a Fragment of Philosophy by Johannes Climacus, published by S. Kierkegaard (Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smule Philosophie. Af Johannes Climacus. Udgivet af S. Kierkegaard)*
- *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically-Oriented Reflection on the Dogmatic Problem of Original Sin by Vigilius Haufniensis (Begrebet Angest. En simpel psykologisk-paapegende Overveielse i Retning of det dogmatiske Problem om Arvesynden af Vigilius Haufniensis)*
- *Prefaces: Light Reading for Certain Classes as the Occasion may Require by Nicolaus Notabene (Forord. Morskabslæsning for enkelte Stænder efter Tid og Lejlighed, af Nicolaus Notabene)* (published on the same day as *The Concept of Anxiety*)
- *Four Edifying Discourses by S. Kierkegaard (Fire opbyggelige Taler)*

1845 *Three Addresses on Imagined Occasions by S. Kierkegaard (Tre Taler ved tænkte Leiligheder)*

- *Stages On Life's Way: Studies by Various Persons, compiled, forwarded to the press, and published by Hilarious Bookbinder (Stadier paa Livets Vej. Studier af Forskjellige. Sammenbragte, befordrede til Trykken og udgivne af Hilarius Bogbinder)*
- third trip to Berlin

- *Eighteen Edifying Discourses* by S. Kierkegaard (a collection of the remaindered *Edifying Discourses* from 1843 and 1844)
- in an article in *Fædrelandet* Frater Taciturnus (a character from *Stages on Life's Way*) asked to be lambasted in *The Corsair*
- 1846** Kierkegaard lampooned in *The Corsair*
 - *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments: A Mimetic-Pathetic-Dialectic Compilation, An Existential Plea*, by Johannes Climacus, published by S. Kierkegaard (*Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler. -- Mimisk-pathetisk-dialektisk Sammenskrift, Existentielt Indlæg, af Johannes Climacus. Udgiven af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - *A Literary Review: "Two Ages" -- novella by the author of "An Everyday Story" -- reviewed by S. Kierkegaard* (*En literair Anmeldelse af S. Kierkegaard*)
- 1847** *Edifying Discourses in Different Spirits* by S. Kierkegaard (*Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses* by S. Kierkegaard (*Kjerlighedens Gjerninger. Nogle christelige Overveielser i Talers Form, af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - Regine marries Fritz Schlegel
- 1848** *Christian Discourses* by S. Kierkegaard (*Christelige Taler, af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress by Inter et Inter* (*Krisen og en Krise i en Skuespillerindes Liv af Inter et Inter*)
 - *The Point of View for my Work as an Author: A Direct Communication, A Report to History* (*Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed. En ligefrem Meddelelse, Rapport til Historien, af S. Kierkegaard*) (unpublished)
- 1849** second edition of *Either-Or*
 - *The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air: Three devotional discourses* by S. Kierkegaard (*Lilien paa Marken og Fuglen under Himlen. Tre gudelige Taler af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - *Two Ethico-Religious Treatises* by H.H. (*Tvende ethisk-religieuse Smaa-Afhandlinger. Af H.H.*)
 - *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian psychological exposition for edification and awakening* by Anti-Climacus, edited by S. Kierkegaard (*Sygdommen til Døden. En christelig psykologisk Udvikling til Opvækkelse. Af Anticlimacus. Udgivet af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - *"The High Priest" -- "The Publican" -- and "The Woman taken in Sin": three addresses at Holy Communion on Fridays* by S. Kierkegaard (*„Ypperstepræsten" -- „Tolderen" -- „Synderinden", tre Taler ved Altergangen om Fredagen. Af S. Kierkegaard*)
- 1850** *Training in Christianity* by Anti-Climacus, Nos. I, II, III, edited by S. Kierkegaard (*Indøvelse i Christendom. Af Anti-Climacus -- Udgivet af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - *An Edifying Discourse* by S. Kierkegaard (*En opbyggelig Tale. Af S. Kierkegaard*)
- 1851** *On My Activity As A Writer* by S. Kierkegaard (*Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed. Af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - *Two Discourses at Holy Communion on Fridays* by S. Kierkegaard (*To Taler ved Altergangen om Fredagen*)
 - *For Self-Examination: Recommended to the Contemporary Age* by S. Kierkegaard (*Til Selvprøvelse, Samtiden anbefalet. Af S. Kierkegaard*)
 - *Judge For Yourselves! Recommended to the present time for Self-Examination. Second series*, by S. Kierkegaard (*Dømmer Selv! Til*

Selvprøvelse Samtiden anbefalet. Anden Række, af S. Kierkegaard (published posthumously 1876)

1854 Bishop Mynster died

- Martensen appointed bishop
- "Was Bishop Mynster 'a witness to the truth,' one of 'the true witnesses to the truth' -- *is this the truth?*" by S. Kierkegaard in *Fædrelandet* („Var Biskop Mynster et "Sandhedsvidne", et af "de rette Sandhedsvidner", *er dette Sandhed?*" Af S. Kierkegaard) (the first of 21 articles in *Fædrelandet*)

1855 *This Must Be Said, So Let It Be Said*, by S. Kierkegaard (*Dette skal siges; saa være det da sagt. Af S. Kierkegaard*)

- *The Instant* by S. Kierkegaard (*Øjeblikket. Af S. Kierkegaard*)
- *Christ's Judgement on Official Christianity* by S. Kierkegaard (*Hvad Christus dømmes om officiel Christendom. Af S. Kierkegaard*)
- *God's Unchangeability: A Discourse* by S. Kierkegaard (*Guds Uforanderlighed. En Tale -- Af S. Kierkegaard*)
- Kierkegaard died November 11.

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Other Internet Resources

- λ [Kierkegaard on the Internet](#)
- λ [Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret](#)
- λ [International Kierkegaard Information](#)
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