

A Kierkegaard Anthology Study Guide

A Kierkegaard Anthology by Robert W. Bretall

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Plot Summary

Soren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813 - 1855) was one of the most important philosophers of the 19th century. A Danish author, he wrote on a variety of topics including theology, literature, psychology and philosophy. He is first and foremost a committed Christian theologian and philosopher who aimed to resurrect a true and radical conception of the Christian life within a Christian society and who went out of his way to criticize Christian practices and Christian churches of his day. Kierkegaard is widely seen as the founder of existentialism and one of the great critics of the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel and German Romantics. He helped create modernist philosophy and literature and his powerful portrayal of Biblical figures continues to be influential to this day. He is most well-known for his conception of the "leap of faith."

The Kierkegaard Anthology includes these and many other details about Kierkegaard's life, but it also focuses on reproductions of Kierkegaard's personal, philosophical, theological and polemic writings. A vast number of Kierkegaard's writings are presented in this large book and each general compilation from a particular work is introduced by the editor, Robert Bretall, with a variety of historical information on the writing of the piece and the important aspects of the work. He also often cites the most influential Kierkegaard commentators of his day, although it should be recognized that the original version of the book was written in 1946 and Kierkegaard scholarship has moved forward substantially since then.

The book does not intend to be a biography and deliberately does not address any of the controversial details of Kierkegaard's life. Instead, it aims to give the reader selections of Kierkegaard's work, which are arranged chronologically in the order of publication. The passages chosen are fairly self-contained and an effort is made not to take them out of context.

The book contains eighteen excerpts from Kierkegaard's major works which cover too many topics to be generally summarized here. Instead, the anthology aims to reproduce Kierkegaard's body of work as a whole, leading the reader to the various important parts of Kierkegaard's major works. The anthology excerpts his early journals, his famous first book *Either/OR*, *Two Edifying Discourses*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Repetition*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Stages on Life's Way*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *The Present Age*, *Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits*, *The Works of Love*, *The Point of View For My Work as an Author*, *The Sickness unto Death*, *Training in Christianity*, *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, Kierkegaard's later Journals, *The Attack on "Christendom,"* and *The Unchangeableness of God*.

The most prominent themes in these works are understanding the radical nature of the Christian life, how only through faith can Truth be grasped, the nature of sin and original sin, how to be a Christian and practice Christianity and the profound failings of the Christian Church in Denmark and Europe generally, along with a profound emphasis on the individual psyche, soul and experience of meaning and purpose, along with the absurd and meaningless, in life.



Chapter 1, The Journals

Chapter 1, The Journals Summary and Analysis

The first chapter contains a number of passages from Kierkegaard's journals, the first few of which predate his conversion to Christianity and eventually we come upon the time relating to his conversion. Later Kierkegaard will speak of his one and only love.

On July 29, 1835, Kierkegaard finds himself in Gilbjerg, the highest point in his district. He stands there one quiet evening and feels a profound sense of contentment, letting himself pass out of his body. He turns away from the busy world without forgetting blessed moments. He is stunned by his own nothingness yet is aware of Christ's words that not a sparrow shall fall on the ground without the Father. He knows that he is both great and small.

At age twenty-five, Kierkegaard converts and finds himself undergoing a "terrible revolution" forced upon him with a new and infallible interpretation of all the facts. He feels that the gifts God gives his family must be some sort of punishment from God but that it will disappear. He feels torn apart, between wonder and desperate despair.

A later entry discusses Kierkegaard's relation to Regina Olsen, the woman he loves and is engaged to but later breaks up with for no apparent reason. He describes courting her and eventually she falls madly in love with him but he feels that there is much about himself he cannot share with her. He ultimately sends her back the ring. She fights hard to hold onto him and eventually they both despair.



Chapter 2, Either/Or, A Fragment of Life

Chapter 2, Either/Or, A Fragment of Life Summary and Analysis

Kierkegaard leaves for Berlin after splitting with Regina Olsen. During this time, he loses himself in philosophy and attends the philosopher Schelling's lectures opposing Hegel. Along with this, he works on a strange book that he publishes under the pseudonym Victor Eremita. The book will make him famous and he writes most of the book between Berlin and Copenhagen. The book's title, *Either/Or* is arguably more important than the entire book, because it is the phrase that is mostly closely associated with Kierkegaard after its publication. It represents him well because he stands for decisive choices between the practical alternatives of life.

Either/Or is written to oppose the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel's idea that the historical process works out distinctions between ideas, movements and historical periods only to resolve them in syntheses. Hegel is an enormous influence on German philosophy in the 19th century and many intellectuals agree with him that distinctions are illusory and that the true nature of the universe is as a pure unity. Hegel's view is a form of pantheism, seeing the entire universe as internally a single thing, and this thing is God.

Kierkegaard has a radical hatred for this idea and argues at one point that "Either/or is the word at which the folding doors fly open and the ideals appear—O blessed sight! Either/or is the pass which admits to the absolute—God be praised! Yea, either/or is the key to heaven. ... Both—and is the way to hell." For Kierkegaard, life is a series of stark choices. One can choose a life of simple social pleasures and the avoidance of pain on the one hand or force one's self to take the path of self-realization through making profound moral decisions. The philosophy of Hegel obscures this, and cannot account for the power of life and achievement given to each human that only comes to light when he makes these radical choices over who he wants to be, what he is to do, and what he will become.

In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard distinguishes between direct and indirect communication. Indirect communication is that form of communication where a person is asked a question but the answer is refused to him. In this form of communication, the ethicist is at a loss, for he cannot figure out the answer through his routine, albeit sharp forms of reasoning. Kierkegaard maintains that in this case, the aestheticist or the student of beauty's talents become more important. He has more calm and assurance regarding life's problems. The major choices in life are not choices of the intellect, but rather the choices of character. These are not the sorts of choices that can be made on a rational basis.

The essays of *Either/Or* are many and varied. Volume I, *The Rotation Method*, contains papers of one called "A" who studies aesthetics. The volume begins with a series of aphorisms that focus on the idea of despair and then it reviews several of Kierkegaard's



essays on the erotic, sexual and musical. He discusses his views on Mozart, for instance. In "Shadowgraphs," he makes a study of the psychologies of heroines during periods of grief. There is an oration, a review of a comedy known as "The First Love" and "The Rotation Method" focuses in great detail on how to apply a hedonistic philosophy to life.

A lengthy portion of the Seducer's Diary is reproduced as well. However, this is not an autobiographical series of entries. It relates to his affair with Regina, but instead it is an extensive, bizarre and distorted elaboration of his plotting to make her fall madly in love with her. It is written under a pseudonym and within the story, it is claimed, the diary is written only that the heroine, Cordelia, will find it and fall out of love with the protagonist, Johannes, because he manipulates her into loving him. In the Diary he shows an extraordinary understanding of women.

Either/Or also contains a series of "Judge William's letters" written to his "young friend." The Judge has a sense of humor but is ethically sound. He tries to show "A" his errors. In the first letter, the Judge analyzes romantic love and assaults the view that love is wonderful but marriage is hell. The character "A" and Johannes represent this idea to some extent. The next letter analyzes the problem of ethics from the point of view of choices or decisions. The letters prefigure a common Kierkegaardian theme that ultimately one must be reconciled to one's self and that the will, not the intellect, is ethically primary.



Chapter 3, Two Edifying Discourses

Chapter 3, Two Edifying Discourses Summary and Analysis

For Kierkegaard, only the truth that teaches and builds up the human person is the truth worth having. He writes on these matters towards the end of *Either/Or* and so sets up a theme for much of his later work. Some of the later works are "aesthetic" and are written under fantastic pseudonyms. However, the two of these "edifying discourses" that comprise the third chapter are published under Kierkegaard's own name. This indicates that the details of these discourses indicate the most truth he is aware of when he writes them.

Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writing only tells of part of his thoughts of aspects of his philosophy. Often discerning which aspects of Kierkegaard's views are contained in these writings is difficult. He is much more a poet in these works than a philosopher or theologian. In fact, Kierkegaard often thinks of himself as a poet.

Kierkegaard sees himself as a poem because he believes that everything cannot be stated at once and work its way into a person effectively. Truth instead is discovered in dialectic and so is constituted by parts that may initially appear at odds. However, the appearance is illusory because we are only at one point in the path of our lives and existence. Our standpoint cannot be escaped by us.

The only way that these distinct dialectical truths can be tied together is in a relationship to Truth or God along. The relationship is not one of the relationship between the mind and true propositions, that of knowing. However, instead, the relationship is one between persons and takes the form of trust or faith.

Kierkegaard wants to invite others into such a relationship and it is for this reason that the Edifying Discourses are composed. They are meant to go with his larger "aesthetic" literature. The Discourses seek to create and strengthen the faith of the individual. They are truly sermons of a high degree of art, but Kierkegaard does not name them in this way because he believes that he has no authority to deliver sermons.

In general, the Discourses present Kierkegaard's idea of an "immanent" religiosity, not the religiosity of paradox which he believes lies at the center of Christianity. Instead, the Discourses are not Kierkegaard's mature reflections on religion, although he will not give up what he says here later. The point of the Discourses is that the individual Christian must see that God is literally present within men and nature before God can be understood as an "absolute paradox."

The first discourses are published three months after *Either/Or*. Kierkegaard wants them to come out on the same day as his pseudonymous works. The first Discourse is his favorite and he will reflect on it in later work.



Chapter 4, Fear and Trembling

Chapter 4, Fear and Trembling Summary and Analysis

All of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings are produced for Regina but are so dedicated for many different reasons. Fear and Trembling is perhaps the most direct and Kierkegaard believes that it represents his entire life. In it, Kierkegaard famously meditates on Abraham's call to kill his only son Isaac. In the same way, Kierkegaard sees himself as forced to give up Regina, which is "immoral" in the same sense. However, no one can understand the parallel from outside of Kierkegaard's life. This somewhat illustrates Kierkegaard's love for mystery. In Kierkegaard's view, Regina is more likely than anyone else to comprehend the ideas in the book.

However, Fear and Trembling has an importance beyond its peculiar circumstances. Instead, the work ranks among the great works of philosophical history. Its theme is the encounter between the individual and the universal. Scientific truth is inverted; instead of appealing to sense-data, the truth or art reaches to the inside of the individual in relation to his individual features, including his personality and unique life. The scientist struggles to avoid bias, but the truth or art requires an acquaintance with the subject.

Fear and Trembling is another one of Kierkegaard's favorite works and is aware that it will be translated into many languages and terrify the reader. However terrible Kierkegaard intends it, he engages in humor when he compares the Knight of Faith with the Knight of Infinite Resignation. The Knight of Infinite Resignation represents the ancient Stoic and the Romantic hero who gives up all and never hopes for its return.

However, the Knight of Faith renounces everything and absurdly holds that he shall get it back and then some. He thereby lives in line with this belief. He both gives up the limited and lives within it. The Knight of Infinite Resignation cannot commensurate his aims with the tasks of each day but the Knight of Faith is ordinary and appears that way. Kierkegaard's pseudonymous character, Johannes de Silentio sees himself as the first sort of knight but admires the Knight of Faith best represented by Abraham and he cannot understand such a being.

Fear and Trembling is composed in less than sixty days while Kierkegaard is on his second holiday in Berlin. He wants the finite to return, Regina, and he wants to marry her but when he returns to Copenhagen he finds that she is engaged to another man. So his goal of helping her to marry someone else both pleases and depresses him, creating a psychological "thunderstorm" that opens his mind.



Chapter 5, Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology

Chapter 5, Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology Summary and Analysis

After Kierkegaard leaves for Berlin, he attempts to act as honestly as possible, but discovers that this is impossible. For Kierkegaard finds that he had to fight against subconscious aspects of the self. He gives up the idea of marrying Regina but wants to repeat the possibility. The idea of repetition forms *Repetition*, which the editor argues is his best work of literature, though not philosophy.

The idea of "repetition" derives from Kierkegaard's own life, as does the "plot" (and so, unlike many of his other works, *Repetition* has a plot). The young hero of the story has an experience similar to Kierkegaard's, finding himself increasingly in love with a woman that he cannot find a true union with. It is his depression and introspective personality that prevents this. His pseudonym is Constantine Constantius.

In the piece, he endures the excruciating combination of romantic love and depression. He finds that the latter thwarts the former. In fact, the young hero realizes that his suffering cannot be worse, since if his love dies the next day, nothing will change. The prophecy comes to pass and the hero becomes more depressed with each passing day. Sometimes the hero pretends to have a mistress and when everything is ready for him to proceed recapturing his love, he vanishes. Later, Constantine receives letters from the hero, who is about to become religious. Constantine, however, remains an aesthete who wants repetition based on the aesthetic. Unfortunately, Kierkegaard implicitly argues, one cannot repeat aesthetic experience by attempting it and pursuing it.

Kierkegaard writes *Repetition* while on his second stay in Berlin in 1843. We know that he actually goes to his old house and discovers that his landlord has married. He also clearly mocks his conversion experience.



Chapter 6, Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy

Chapter 6, Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 begins the works of the mature Kierkegaard which will hit their peak in two years when he publishes the *Unscientific Postscript*. The *Fragments* simply set the stage for this work. However, the work is still centered and helps to bring out the question Kierkegaard writes the *Postscript* to answer. He simply asks the question crucial for Christianity to survive modernity and gives no answer to it.

The question is this: "Is an historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure have any other than a mere historical interest; is it possible to base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge?" A simpler expression of these is the question of how much the Truth can be learned in this life. The Truth is outside the self, but we appear to be always biased by our own perspective. We always place our consciousness in experience. Perhaps all we can do is bring to consciousness what was subconscious and realize our true selves. Truth might be in the soul as well, and perhaps it can be brought out. Certainly the Idealistic philosophy of Kierkegaard's day thinks such a thing.

Kierkegaard, however, thinks that the truth is not within ourselves. Instead, the only way to know truth is to import it in relations with the world. The truth is not in the human. Instead, the human is in error, not only due to his ignorance but because he is not progressing towards Light. Instead, he hides from truth with all his energy. Humanity needs a teacher, someone who has within himself what mankind lacks. When we see that this is possible, we see that the idea is at the heart of Christianity. In this way, Christians harmonize the doctrines of salvation and original sin in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ is Teacher because only He lacks error. The pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, then illustrates this possibility through the narrative of the King and the Humble Maiden which takes the Incarnation and represents it in parable form. However, Johannes refrains from committing himself to it. Instead, he stays on the outside and instead admires the people who can embrace the assumption and who himself is more comfortable with the life of the immanent. So he resists the discipleship of Jesus.

The resistance is not due to the fact that being a disciple is harder for those who live two millennia after Jesus. Instead, both those who walked with Jesus and the modern has trouble believing. They must both struggle to accept the Truth that Christ invites them to accept. It is a pure Paradox, the paradox of the Eternal God within Temporal Reality. To believe the paradox, God must act upon one's soul and give him a "new organ" of understanding—Faith.



Chapter 7, Stages on Life's Way, Studies by Sundry Persons

Chapter 7, Stages on Life's Way, Studies by Sundry Persons Summary and Analysis

In 1845, only two years following *Either/Or* and ten months prior to the publication of *Fragments*, came the last of the aesthetic writings, *Stages on Life's Way*, that Kierkegaard composed. It relates to *Either/Or* because it divides "spheres of existence." But *Either/Or* focused on the aesthetic and the ethical (the religious is merely foreshadowed). However, *Stages* discuss three realms explicitly: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. These are all concrete forms of existence, to which Kierkegaard ties pleasure—perdition, action-victory, and suffering. *Either/Or* had the defect of ending with the ethical, but in *Stages* Kierkegaard's thought is more mature and the religious, in Kierkegaard's worse, "is given its rights."

One might worry that the religious is featured too prominently. The first piece, *Guilty/Not Guilty*, covers his love and touches on the aesthetic. Next is the *Epistle to the Reader*, written by Frater Tactiturnus, and reflections on the religious significance of *Quidam's Diary*, which is also included. Frater concludes by making explicitly his doubt that no one is reading. The *Diary* brings the theme of Kierkegaard's introspective pursuits to climax and the reader of the book will probably find *Quidam's Diary* insufferable in comparison with the rest of his work as a result.

The best known section of *Stages* is "The Banquet" which is not unlike Plato's *Symposium* and aims to characterize a true "aesthetic moment" made as extreme as possible. After the participants give speeches, all at the banquet go to the country in the early morning and find Judge William and his wife having sex in their garden. The *Banquet Story* is recounted by William Afham and refers to a banquet Kierkegaard hosts while he was in college. Apparently, however, Kierkegaard's taste for the aesthetic is not confined to his college days, but follows him his entire life.

However, Kierkegaard never rejects the aesthetic but only thinks that it must stop being the ultimate goal and motivation for life. Instead, we must go beyond the aesthetic. The spheres of the ethical, aesthetic and religious are not entirely sealed from one another in any event.



Chapter 8, Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the

Chapter 8, Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Summary and Analysis

Kierkegaard is famous for his total repudiation of the ideas of German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel thinks that the truth is a whole, no matter what sphere contains a piece of it. Art, science, history—they are all part of one thing. However, Kierkegaard denies that he is a part of any whole and believes he is neither included nor integrated. However, including him in a whole, Kierkegaard argues, he is negated. Kierkegaard believes that Hegel's world of reason annihilates the idea of possibility and action is only comprehensible when there is possibility. Individuality must be separated from society and reason, and possibility must be distinguished from reality as well.

Kierkegaard's greatest work is the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. It is published in 1846 and declares revolutionary secession from the dominate philosophy of Hegelianism in Kierkegaard's day. He also splits himself from all excessively reason-based and systematized thinking which dominates Europe for the two hundred years before him. Some have done this before, but the *Postscript* is the beginning of a major change in philosophy's history.

Hegel and his followers are savages in every way, with discussion, rhetoric, satire and insult. Against Hegel, Kierkegaard believes, anything is legitimate, for Hegel is a ridiculous thinker for Kierkegaard. He is one who contradicts himself constantly, not only in what he says but in what he does and what he is. Kierkegaard surely admires Hegel's intellect and his achievements and in fact, Kierkegaard claims that if Hegel produces his whole system of philosophy and then adds a small note indicating that the entire system is a mere thought-experiment, Kierkegaard will declare him history's greatest philosopher.

The *Philosophical Fragments* includes a thought-experiment of its own and concludes that there is a possibility beyond the internal Socratic one which claims to unveil the idea of "historical costume," which is the equivalent of Christianity. This raises the question of whether Christianity is true, and Kierkegaard struggles with the question in both "The Historical Point of View" and "The Speculative Point of View." Kierkegaard argues that the history of the church, in terms of the Scriptures or testimony or philosophically through Hegel's system or any other, can generate true knowledge of Christianity's validity. Otherwise, there is only agnosticism to struggle with. He believes that one can generate logical systems, but existential systems, like Christianity, cannot be constructed.

Philosophers search for truth in what they comprehend, the content of thinking. What we might instead do is find truth in the relationship between individual consciousness



and how he conceives of his consciousness. When we look at things in this way we discover that we are in a mental state that is in the truth. Men without knowing worship false gods and do so sincerely with his entire being. In this way, however, he is closer to true knowledge than those who know true facts about God but who take this information and are not moved by it. Kierkegaard then declares the Truth is subjective.

This is not to say that Truth is relative, but rather that it is found in the relationship between the subject and its object. Truth still consists in a correct tie between what is thought and what is real. Instead it focuses on the self, aiming at something higher than focusing on the sensible world. He tries to change philosophy entirely to start with the person to those matters beyond the person, not from the person to the nature of things.

Once the Postscript defines Truth as subjective, it starts on a relaxing course which is trying to explain how the fuller trust can be achieved by humans. The answer is that the truth is found within a relationship where the subjective, the passion of holding the object, becomes its most intense. This is the beginning of how one becomes a Christian.

In the Conclusion, "How to Become a Christian," Kierkegaard claims that there are four ways to become a Christian. The answers of Protestants and Catholics (1) and (3) are quickly rejected. The second answer is the answer given by his Edifying Discourses. That said, it is incomplete because it does not understand the absurdity of God becoming man, the Christian religion's central idea. The very idea of this teaching produces profound passion and increases faith to its greatest intensity, for it is ridiculous and disgusts believers.

The selections from the Postscript also explain how Johannes Climacus starts to write and explains why existential systems cannot be known by man or created by him. Various other discussions are contained here as well, including a satire of the average Church sermon and the typical parishioner. Kierkegaard also tries to illustrate how the truly religious will apply the faith to the everyday problems of existence.



Chapter 9, The Present Age, A Literary Review

Chapter 9, The Present Age, A Literary Review Summary and Analysis

Just after the Postscript is published, Kierkegaard reviews a novel, today unknown, called *The Two Ages*. Kierkegaard mostly uses the review to discuss his own ideas about how separated antiquity and modernity are, specifically in the 19th century. In the modern age, men are equal and the public rules, but this contrasts with a society that is ruled by individuals, by those not like one another. He then divides history between antiquity which is ruled by leadership, and Christendom, which is ruled by representation, and the present, which focuses on equality.

Kierkegaard is always apolitical but an individual's value is supreme and cannot be improved or hurt by social organization. He sees the move towards equality as general progress but only because it shows how desperate the individual is. When all men are equals, the individual's work can begin, for each person must work for himself. Individuals will no longer be able to get help from the great. Instead, he is either lost in abstraction or saved by religion.

The heart of the public is the press but it appeals to the worst in humanity. Thus, Kierkegaard does not have the most unbiased view of the press. The press often mock him, and sometimes physically abuse him. Kierkegaard loves the common people, but they are alienated from him and regard him as friendly but insane.

Kierkegaard is among the first to expose the hazards in newspapers, but it is not clear what the significance of Kierkegaard's ideas are for his own philosophy. Kierkegaard focuses on the idea of "reflection," which refers not to the intellect but a disposition to see the reality of one's self in something external, a group or institution.



Chapter 10, Purity of Heart, Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits, Chapter 11, Works of Love, Chapter 12, The Point of View For My Work as an Author

Chapter 10, Purity of Heart, Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits, Chapter 11, Works of Love, Chapter 12, The Point of View For My Work as an Author Summary and Analysis

Kierkegaard routinely publishes small groups of writings concerning Biblical texts that came out under his name. They are direct communications. The pseudonymous works aim to capture Kierkegaard the man, but in direct communication he aims at persuasion and wants the works read aloud. However, the discourses have a great deal of thoughtful content. Purity of Heart is a good case because it outlines a value theory and religious psychology. Yet the aim of the work is concrete. Kierkegaard tries to outline how the human heart makes excuses for itself and avoids embracing loving God above all things. Pleasure becomes both a trap and illusion. So Kierkegaard attacks the mere "aesthetic way of life."

Chapter 11 we begin by reflecting that Kierkegaard, despite being Protestant, strongly rejects and critiques many of the central Protestant ideas. He resonates somewhat with Catholic monastic life and opposes modern spirituality that focuses too much on inwardness and thereby neglects the expression of faith in action. The Danish State Church is too worldly and afraid, unlike Catholicism at times in history. He will grow completely disillusioned with Christianity the year before he dies.

Many Catholics claim that Kierkegaard, had he lived, would have converted but Kierkegaard's thinking is deeply and unavoidably Protestant, and he does not reject the great Protestant principles but wants to reverse a certain overemphasis on some principles over others. He sees the truth as what moves toward unity or the complete, rather than complete in itself. A proposition's truth is relative to the speaker's intent and relies on what the proposition negates.

Martin Luther is still famous for maintaining the doctrine of Justification by Faith against Catholic view of merit and indulgence. However, the 19th century misrepresents it and overemphasizes it. Kierkegaard believes that those who do not do good works in the present resist because they are concerned about self-righteousness. Instead, he does so because it is easy.



The Protestantism of Kierkegaard's day requires supplement by focusing on Christianity's practice element, not to reject dogmatics but to avoid Christianity decaying into simple intellectual belief. Kierkegaard's favorite piece of Scripture is the Epistle of James, which is very practical.

Christian works, though, are unique because they come from a certain form of love, the love of all people. This duty generates a paradox and is among Christianity's most difficult teachings. Kierkegaard's concept of the neighbor is the man who needs help right now. The Works of Love suggests a kind of social gospel and outlines a Kierkegaardian Christian practical ethic. Despite believing that humans are deeply corrupt, he still believes in the practice of pure love.

Pure love might still be impracticable. It seems likely that sometimes prudence has to compromise absolute ethical ideals. Sometimes we must engage in bad actions to bring about good. Kierkegaard is aware of the problem and is no pacifist. Instead, he distinguishes between the morality of the individual and of society.

The Works of Love is large and has many divisions, including "Thou Shalt Love," "Thou Shalt Love Thy *Neighbor*," "*Thou* Shalt Love They Neighbor," "Love is the fulfillment of the Law," "Love is a matter of Conscience," and "Love Covereth a Multitude of Sins."

Chapter 12, The Point of View, is incredibly direct and exposes the unified aim of Kierkegaard's works. The piece is very intimate and so is published after he dies. The book is published in 1848 in a subdued and abridged form. He is constantly publishing that year, but this is very expensive and leads him to consider getting a job in theology at the University. Further, his new works probably offend members of the Church and threaten his ability to get a job. This causes him difficulty.

Kierkegaard does not publish the book because he is not sure if a person has the authority to show others that he is good. The Point of View perhaps accomplishes this despite its final paragraph where he argues that his books and articles represent his attempts to educate himself in Christianity. He refuses to attribute this achievement to himself, but only to God.



Chapter 13, The Sickness Unto Death

Chapter 13, The Sickness Unto Death Summary and Analysis

1848 is the height of Kierkegaard's productivity and *The Sickness Unto Death* is the first of the pieces written in 1848 to be published. It is among the greatest of Kierkegaard's works, although Kierkegaard thinks it is weak because it involves too much discussion to effectively use rhetoric. The book focuses on the ubiquitous despair present in human life and tries to produce an "anatomy" of it. The Anthology reproduces more of this work than any other of Kierkegaard's works.

The Sickness unto Death defines the spirit and the self. The person is a spirit, and the spirit is the self. The self, however, is a relation that relates to itself; in fact, it is the relation that accounts for that relation. In another way, the self is not the relation but is comprised by the relation relating itself to its own self. In this way, the self is capable of infinite self-reference, relating itself to itself, relating its relation of itself to itself to itself, and so on. This is Kierkegaard's way of saying that man contains the infinite and the finite, the temporal and the eternal, that he is free and determined. The self is essentially a synthesis. Thus, Kierkegaard famously claims, if this is what man is, "man is not yet a self."

Kierkegaard here sharply distinguishes himself from the Hegelian philosophy of his day. The Hegelian Idealists define the self as a relation that relates to himself, and believe that man, as he is, is such a relation. Kierkegaard believes that this is in fact what it is to be a self, but that no human being fits the bill, so to speak. He insists that man is not what he is in principle. The existence of man contradicts his ideal nature. Man is dis-unified and so is not a self at all. *The Sickness Unto Death* tries to understand the corruption within each human. Christians call this sin but Kierkegaard describes this in psychological terms, as despair.

Kierkegaard here prefigures the idea of the "death instinct" which comes out distinctly in Freud. In fact, Kierkegaard here has a proto-concept of the subconscious. The pseudonym "Anti-Climacus" is significant. Johannes Climacus in earlier work explained Christianity but did not argue for it or acknowledge that it could even be lived. However, Anti-Climacus is a convert and sees it as the only possible solution to the disease that lives within every soul, whether they know it or not. Each person either does not want to be himself or desperately wants to be his self and cannot find his way or is completely unaware that he has an eternal self. In doing so, they are tearing themselves away from God that makes all selves in the first place. This tearing away is sin, and the opposite is faith, not virtue.

When we relate to our true selves, Kierkegaard claims, when we are willing to be ourselves, then the self starts to be obviously rooted in the God who created it. The

Christian concept of the hero is the one who aims to be entirely his self, an individual, a defined individual alone before God through his intense work and sense of duty.



Chapter 14, Training in Christianity

Chapter 14, Training in Christianity Summary and Analysis

Kierkegaard's own choice for his favorite work is Training in Christianity. All of Kierkegaard's work focuses on what it means to be a Christian in a Christian society and the Training answers the question. The central concept of the piece is the idea of being "contemporaneous with Christ." The theme pervades the Training. If you are a Christian, you are not simply holding a particular view about how Christ is, nor believing that Christianity is a force for good (or even the greatest force for good).

Instead, to be a Christian is to be Christ's contemporary with respect to His humiliation and pain, to be an Apostle, following Jesus despite His being rejected by the world. This is quite distinct from the actual history of Christianity, but instead, when someone converts to Christianity for a "glorious result," he has no real grasp of what the Apostles believed, and instead is their opposite. This person converts for the benefits of belief, but Christ's contemporary accepts Christ despite its radical costs. The content of the belief may be the same but the quality of belief will be totally different.

To be Christ's contemporary, in Kierkegaard's view, requires the change to offend others. Christ and his doctrines truly attract no one and many are offended by these teachings. The offense is an intensified version of the Christian paradox in the postscript. Christianity offends the intellectual, his sense of beauty, mob mentality, prudence, and anything else immanent about a person. So in the piece, Kierkegaard illustrates his point with the reactions to Christianity of different archetypes, showing their unique offenses.

Being a Christian requires finding a place between offense and rejecting the possibility of offense. Christianity requires offense and a rejection that one will be offended for one's self. When all are Christians, Christians forget that they are offended and this must be avoided. Kierkegaard believes that the problem with modern Christianity is that it removes the possibility of offense despite how offensive it is.



Chapter 15, Two Discourses at the Communion of Fridays, Chapter 16, The Journals (1850-1854)

Chapter 15, Two Discourses at the Communion of Fridays, Chapter 16, The Journals (1850-1854) Summary and Analysis

The Two Discourses is very short but complements the Works of Love and analyzes the same text. Kierkegaard focuses here on "the divine initiative" but in the Works he focuses on the human response to this initiative. Kierkegaard is interested in the relationship between both parts, and so aims to reduce the gap between the orthodox and the modern. In the Preface, Kierkegaard says that this piece is a reflection of his movement from Either/Or to "rest at the foot of the alter" where he realizes that he teaches without authority.

The Journals cover the period from 1851 to 1854, when Kierkegaard writes nothing at all. He is running out of funds and wants to wait until Bishop Mynster dies to publish again. These three years of thinking found in the Journals grow in their degree of polemic to prepare to attack the very idea of Christendom. The anthology editor has brings together a sporadic group of these that contain many important Kierkegaardian aphorisms. He also expresses his hatred here of science, negative freedom, newspaper owners, pastors and professors.



Chapter 17, The Attack Upon Christendom

Chapter 17, The Attack Upon Christendom Summary and Analysis

Kierkegaard's life and the effects of his life do not really fit together; this is also true of the piece published in the final period of his writing, which is a hostile and ferocious assault on Denmark's state church. Bishop Mynster, Denmark's head bishop, dies in early 1854 and later he is eulogized as a true defender of the truth and as following in line with the apostles. However, Kierkegaard finds the sermon outrageous. It is not clear why Kierkegaard is upset, however, because the Bishop is actually fairly reasonable and effective, and possesses some intellect and spiritual sophistication. Kierkegaard even likes many of his sermons and the Bishop influences his father.

Kierkegaard does not hate Mynster, but thinks he was not a witness of the Truth. In *The Attack upon "Christendom,"* Kierkegaard is concerned to defend the Christian Ideal and argue that we all fall dramatically short of it. Kierkegaard appears to be a perfectionist in the work but is only defending the ideal unapologetically. Self-denial must not be reduced to something easy, despite the fact that it cannot be totally followed. He does not think he follows it well. Instead, he wants the Christian Church to confess that it is mild in its defense of Christ and thereby realize that it needs more grace to move forward.

Kierkegaard's criticism is really against the entire Christian world, although much of what he says is not relevant to American political institutions. The article still seems severe but it may have been intended this way to make its point. The Attack is particularly severe when Kierkegaard portrays priests as cannibals or in *"Confirmation and the Wedding."* Kierkegaard criticizes how the practice of taking the sacraments has become rote. Protestantism has ceased to understand the point of Paul's ideal of celibacy and that Catholic and Lutheran rites turn Christian practice into mere ceremony.

Kierkegaard is quite serious about his attack, so much so that he struggles to finish it throughout a severe illness and while in the hospital before his death, he will only receive communion from a layman, not a priest. Consequently, at his funeral, a riot nearly erupts. Kierkegaard's followers do not want the hypocritical Church to use him for their purposes.

The Unchangeableness of God is a discourse written in 1851 and given as a homily in that year. However, it is never released to the public until a few months before Kierkegaard dies, right as he assaults the church. He is increasingly moving towards provoking a fight between conventional Christianity from a religious perspective. He believes in "severity first—then mildness" and so is not permanently hostile. Instead, he

seeks to humble the church and then to forgive. It is also worth nothing that the piece is written for his father.



Characters

Soren Kierkegaard

Without a doubt, the most important person in Soren Kierkegaard's writings is himself. One might initially think that if a writer's main subject is himself that he must be deeply conceited, selfish and the like. However, this seems not to be the case with Kierkegaard. Instead, Kierkegaard is focused on the analysis of his own experience in part as a method of reaching out to find something universal in human experience and in part to make sense of the fact that men are, of themselves, trapped inside of themselves and unable to know the world and truly love others.

Kierkegaard, in his journals, will often speak of his "melancholy" and is clearly often depressed. For Kierkegaard, agony and despair are the fruit of his depression. His mood is not merely reduced to a negative state, but his dark emotions dwell on crucial aspects of reality. In particular, he feels agony over his sin and his total inability to escape it, over his failure to do works of love and of his deliberate loss of his one, true love, Regina Olsen.

Kierkegaard is also concerned that every person fails to have any knowledge of the world as it truly is, and instead only knows about their own desperation. For men to know the Truth, they must have a teacher and that person is God in the form of Jesus Christ.

In a more ordinary sense, Kierkegaard is the book's most important character because he is the author of all the works and many of the works are his journals.

God/Jesus Christ

Kierkegaard ranks among history's greatest philosophers and ranks even higher among history's greatest Christian philosophers. While Kierkegaard has some writing that predates his conversion, even it is concerned with finding true religion and with the possibility of Christian conversion in particular. As a result, Kierkegaard's focus throughout his writing is on the nature of the Christian life, on the nature of human sin, and on how God in the form of Jesus Christ teaches men real Truth and how to become their true selves.

Kierkegaard is intensely focused on waking up his fellow Christians to the radical call of the Christian life. Being raised as a Christian in a Christian country, Christians often forget how unusual their faith is and the extraordinary demands that God makes of all people. Kierkegaard also wants to impress upon Christians how profound their depravity is, how they have a "sickness unto death" that will totally destroy the soul without the grace of God.



Many of Kierkegaard's writings concern the analysis of Biblical passages. Some are focused entirely on such analysis, while others use particular Scripture verses in order to make a particular point. Kierkegaard's most famous discussion of God's role in the life of a Biblical figure is his analysis of the story of Abraham and Isaac. In this story, God engages in a "teleological suspension of the ethical," where the demands of faith exceed the demands of morality.

Regina Olsen

Kierkegaard's partner for some time and his only serious love interest, over whom he obsesses in many of his writings.

Johannes Climacus

One of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, which he uses to describe Christianity without recommending conversion. Johannes Climacus is the pure aesthete and represents Kierkegaard's aesthetic perspective.

G.W.F. Hegel

The 19th century philosopher whose ideas are completely dominant in Europe in Kierkegaard's day. Hegel believes that stark choices and distinctions are ultimately illusory, an idea at which Kierkegaard revolts. Sometimes in life, one must make stark choices in order to become what one is supposed to be. Sometimes God places before us an Either/Or.

Johannes de Silentio

The author of *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes is "silentio" here because only Regina will understand the true nature of the book.

Abraham, The Knight of Faith

The Biblical figure Abraham is the Knight of Faith, the man who grows in faith and trusts God in every way.

The Christian

The Christian is a person whose life is utterly revolutionized by Christ and who becomes Christ's "contemporary."



The Denmark State Church

The Lutheran Church of the State of Denmark and often an object of ferocious criticism from Kierkegaard.

Anti-Climacus

The author of *The Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus is the opposite of Johannes Climacus. He is not outside of Christianity looking in, but inside of Christianity inviting others in.



Objects/Places

Denmark

Kierkegaard's homeland

Copenhagen

The capital city of Denmark and the city of Kierkegaard's birth, where he spends practically his entire life

Berlin

The capital of Germany, the only other major city where Kierkegaard spends any significant period of time

Christianity

The religion that is the object of Kierkegaard's obsessions and that he thinks many contemporary Christians do not understand

Either/Or

Kierkegaard vehemently denies the Hegelian view that stark choices are illusory. Instead, sometimes personal growth requires one to make a stark choice, and so God places before us an Either/Or.

The Bible

The Bible is the central sacred text of Christianity, which Kierkegaard famously analyzes parts of in unusual and famous ways.

The Knight of Faith and the Knight of Infinite Resignation

Two personality archetypes, the latter who gives up everything in his life for what he believes is right and the former who gives up everything in order to have it all returned



God as Teacher

For Kierkegaard, objective knowledge is only possible if God is our Teacher.

Existentialism

Kierkegaard is often regarded as the father of the philosophy of existentialism.

The Aesthetic, Ethical and Religious Spheres of Life

Kierkegaard thinks that a human life can be lived from three different perspectives: the aesthetic, which focuses on passion and emotion, the ethical, which focuses on doing one's duty and living according to an ethical ideal, and the religious, which requires a revolutionary faith.

Faith

Trusting God and the only path towards true selfhood

Love

Faith will die if it is not engaged in the works of love. Kierkegaard is also intent on arguing that love is not foremost an emotional state but a disposition to action.

The Works of Love

The Christian works that demonstrate love for the other.

The Sickness unto Death/Despair

The Sickness unto Death is sin in the human heart that will destroy the soul if God does not cure it. The Sickness unto Death manifests itself psychologically as despair.

Training in Christianity

Kierkegaard thinks that the Christian life places unique demands on the individual and so individuals need a special training in Christianity.

Christendom

The sum of the Christian nations, and the lands that Kierkegaard attacks for making the Christian life ordinary and mundane.



Themes

How is Knowledge Possible?

The Philosophical Fragments were written in order to set-up the question that is answered by the Concluding Unscientific Postscript. However, the question may in some ways be the more important task. Kierkegaard's question is "How far does the Truth admit of being learned?" It may initially seem that man cannot have real knowledge. He is concerned too much with his present circumstances and is shaped too much by historical factors to have any real mental contact with the world of things as they are, or with "eternal consciousness." How can consciousness reach outside of itself? After all, are not we always taking our own perspective? How can an objective perspective even be possible?

Kierkegaard argues that Socrates thinks that we find the truth in ourselves. In the Socratic Dialogue known as the Meno, Socrates tries to show Meno that he has certain truths innate within him. In other words, he knows about the world through an innate knowledge of reality that he acquired as a soul and only recollects now that his soul is in a body. Socrates also generally denies that he has truth to give others and simply wants others to realize what they already know inside. Kierkegaard sees this as the reigning assumption of the Idealism of his day, that all the world is composed of ideas that come from inside of us.

Kierkegaard's problem with this view is not only that men are ignorant of many true things, but that he also engages in erroneous activity, in other words, that he moves away from the Light as fast as he can. Thus, to have Truth, men must stop running and have a teacher who himself knows what mankind does not (not a teacher like Socrates, who simply brings out what is already known by the pupil). Kierkegaard believes that when we make ourselves alive to this possibility, we will understand the Christian ideas of original sin and salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Teacher and is not in error like we are. Only through Christ can we grasp the Truth and have real knowledge.

Either/Or

The dominant philosophy of Kierkegaard's day is that of G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel teaches that the universe is God, i.e. that pantheism is true. God is by nature the unity of all things. As such, no individual things truly exist save in relation to all other things within the person and mind of God. However, since God is a unity, then there can be no distinctions between the things within God that make them opposed to one another. Everything in the world is already in harmony but in ways that humans cannot grasp. As such, conflict is merely apparent conflict that will ultimately be resolved. Hegel consequently holds that selves come to be selves as they achieve internal unity within



themselves and unity within the external world because they come to realize that disharmony is illusory.

In Kierkegaard's view, this philosophy is wicked. Not only is it a bizarre and elaborate metaphysical system that is almost a joke, but, and more importantly, it eliminates from the world true possibility. Instead, everything that has happened and will happen is determined to follow a path towards unity and as such there are no stark choices in the world between irreconcilable extremes. Instead, we must find a synthesis between "thesis" and "antithesis."

The point of Kierkegaard's early work, *Either/Or*, is to vehemently deny this Hegelian view. For we not only have stark choices but we have stark choices with respect to our characters, to our very selves. For Kierkegaard the will is often primary because there is no other determining factor in who and what we are. He believes as a result that the Hegelian philosophy obscures one of the most profound human truths. Sometimes life (and God) presents us with an *Either/Or*.

What It Means to Be a Christian

Kierkegaard's favorite writing is the *Training in Christianity*. He explains this by arguing that his entire life has been about understanding what it means to be a Christian and to be a Christian within a Christian Society. The *Training in Christianity* directly addresses this question. The core idea of the *Training in Christianity* is that we only understand Christianity when we are "contemporaneous with Christ." In other words, to be a Christian we must be Christ's contemporary.

The individual cannot be a Christian simply by holding correct beliefs about Christ, although this is necessary. He also cannot be a Christian simply by holding that Christianity is the world's greatest force for good, although Kierkegaard thinks that this too is true. Instead, to be a Christian is to share in His suffering and humiliation, to be an Apostle of Christ and to do what they did for him. The Christian must follow Christ despite the fact that the world rejects Christ. The true Christian cannot embrace Christianity for its result but must do so to be Christ's contemporary.

The Christian must be willing to embrace the possibility of offending others for Christ's sake because Christianity is offensive. However, he must also not forget how offensive Christianity is by being a Christian easily. The danger of Christendom is that it makes people forget how radical it is to be Christ's contemporary.



Style

Perspective

The Kierkegaard Anthology has three general perspectives: the editor's, Kierkegaard's, and the perspectives of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors. The editor, Robert Bretall, composes the anthology and publishes it in 1946. His interpretive stamp pervades the text because he selects which parts of Kierkegaard's work are most important and must be reprinted in the text. The editor admits that his choices are somewhat subjective but realizes that any choices made would be equally subjective. He also places commentaries at the beginning of each series of book excerpts.

The main perspective is that of Soren Kierkegaard's, of course. It is hard to describe one overarching aim of Kierkegaard's work except to say that the vast majority of his corpus is concerned with the nature of Christianity, the Christian life and being a Christian in Christian society. Various themes pervade his writings, but generally speaking Kierkegaard is a radical Lutheran Christian with some Catholic emphases; he is bitterly critical of the complacent Christianity of his day. Kierkegaard is also someone with extreme depressive states and a strong sense for the aesthetic, both of which are found throughout his writing. He is particularly hostile to Hegelian philosophy and believes that life is full of clear, stark choices.

Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are intended to express various aspects of his personality. For instance, Johannes Climacus expresses his aesthetic side, which looks into Christianity from outside and makes observations about it. However, Anti-Climacus is a Christian who invites the reader into Christianity from the inside.

Tone

The tone of the Kierkegaard Anthology is almost exclusively set by Soren Kierkegaard's unique personality. The tone is best described as having four aspects: (i) melancholy, (ii) passion, (iii) piety, and (iv) humor. First, as is widely known, Kierkegaard battles depression his entire life. While his life in Copenhagen appears to outsiders as largely uneventful, his internal life is full of emotional turmoil. His struggles with Regina are a major source of pain, while his struggle to be a Christian and understand the Christian life is another. He is often deeply saddened by what Christendom has done to Christianity, how complacent Christians have become and how completely they have forgotten the radical nature of their creed. Thus, the tone of the Kierkegaard Anthology is often full of dark imagery, intensely brooding claims, and a bitterness characteristic of the depressed.

The tone, however, is also full of passion. Before his conversion, Kierkegaard describes himself as an aesthete, as one who enjoys the life of passion and feeling and emotional highs and lows. Conversion brings him beyond the aesthetic but does not eliminate it



and so the tone of the Kierkegaard Anthology courses with passion and animation. Kierkegaard's language is almost always intense and extreme; his arguments are made with an earnestness and sense of urgency indicative of a deeply passionate man.

The Kierkegaard Anthology also has a pious tone. Kierkegaard believes that the only way to true self-understanding and self-hood comes through discipleship to the person of Jesus Christ and a full internal and external affirmation of the power of Christ's atoning death and victorious resurrection. The anthology is full of Biblical analysis, discussions of the nature of salvation, conversion, original sin and atonement, and powerful descriptions of Biblical figures.

Finally, the tone has an element of humor. Kierkegaard is something of a satirist and often mocks those he thinks are deserving of derision, such as the Denmark State Church. However, his most absurd side comes alive in his critiques of Hegel.

Structure

The Kierkegaard Anthology discusses many aspects of Kierkegaard's life and unfolds his writings in chronological order. However, it is centered on generating an ordered and appropriate group of all of his writings, including the philosophical, theological, polemic, and intimate. Nearly all of his writings are represented to some degree by the editor, Robert Bretall. Of course, not everything can be reproduced, but Bretall excerpts what, in his opinion as a Kierkegaard scholar, are the most important. He also includes a large amount of history of the composition and publication of each major work along with a discussion of key themes. Bretall includes commentary from some of the foremost Kierkegaard scholars of his time.

The book is not structured like a biography and has no intention of being such a work. Rather, Bretall wants only to introduce Kierkegaard's ideas to the reader. While the pieces are arranged in the order of their publication, the works are largely self-contained. The anthology as a whole is comprised of excerpts from eighteen of Kierkegaard's important writings, including his books and shorter essays, sermons, and even a book review.

The list of the chapters is as follows: Early Journals, Either/Or, Two Edifying Discourses, Fear and Trembling, Repetition, Philosophical Fragments, Stages on Life's Way, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, The Present Age, Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits, The Works of Love, The Point of View for My Work as an Author, The Sickness unto Death, Training in Christianity, Two Discourses at the Communion on Friday's, Later Journals, The Attack on "Christendom," and The Unchangeableness of God. Kierkegaard is most intent across these works to communicate and analyze the radical core of the Christian religion, the connection between faith and knowledge of the Truth, the nature of original sin, the practice of the Christian life and the failings of Christian institutions. He also focuses on philosophical psychology, the life of the soul, and the experience of meaning and the absurd.



Quotes

"... Then it was that the great earthquake occurred, the terrible revolution which suddenly forced upon me a new and infallible law of interpretation of all the facts." (Chapter 1, The Journals, 11)

"Either/or is the word at which the folding doors fly open and the ideals appear—O blessed sight! Either/or is the pass which admits to the absolute—God be praised! Yea, either/or is the key to heaven. ... Both—and is the way to hell." (Chapter 2, Either/Or, 19)

"If an Arab in the desert were suddenly to discover a spring in his tent, and so would always be able to have water in abundance, how fortunate he would consider himself—so too, when a man who qua physical being is always turned towards the outside, thinking that his happiness lies outside him, finally turns inward and discovers that the source is within him; not to mention his discovering that the source is his relation to God." (Chapter 3, Two Edifying Discourses, 108)

"Therefore faith hopes also in this life, but ... by virtue of the absurd, not by virtue of the human understanding. The paradox in Christian truth is invariably due to the fact that it is truth as it exists for God. The standard of measure and the end is superhuman; and there is only one relationship possible: faith." (Chapter 4, Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric, 116)

"If you wish to be and remain enthusiastic, then draw the silk curtains of facetiousness (irony's), and so hide your enthusiasm." (Chapter 5, Repetition, 134)

"It is the duty of the human understanding to understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are. ... The paradox is not a concession but a category, an ontological definition which expresses the relation between an existing cognitive spirit and eternal truth." (Chapter 6, Philosophical Fragments, 153)

"How far does the Truth admit of being learned? With this question let us begin." (Chapter 6, Philosophical Fragments, 154)

"I believe that my task lies precisely in always being able to produce what the vanity and worldliness of the world longs for and considers the highest of all things ... in always being able, but not always willing. The world is so weak that, when it thinks that a man who serves Christianity is one who is aesthetically incapable, they look down upon religion." (Chapter 7, Stages on Life's Way, 172)

"I am no part of a whole, I am not integrated, not included. To put me in this whole you imagine is to negate me." (Chapter 8, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 190)

"Had I to carve an inscription on my grave I would ask for none other than 'the individual.'" (Chapter 9, The Present Age, 258)



"What is the better part? It is God, and consequently everything, but it is called the better part because it must be chosen; one does not receive everything as everything, that is not how one begins: one begins by choosing the better part, which is, nevertheless, everything." (Chapter 10, Purity of Heart, 270)

"... To the Christian love is the works of love. To say that love is a feeling or anything of the kind is an unchristian conception of love. That is the aesthetic definition and therefore fits the erotic and everything of that nature. But to the Christian love is the works of love. Christ's love was not an inner feeling, a full heart and what not, it was the work of love which was his life." (Chapter 11, Works of Love, 281)

"There are some purely human lives in which religion comes first. They are those who from the beginning have suffered and are cut off from the universal by some particular suffering, to whom the enjoyment of life is denied and who therefore must either become purely demoniacal—or else essentially religious." (Chapter 12, The Point of View, 323)

"Unto you is born this day a Savior—and yet it was night when he was born. That is an eternal illustration: it must be night—and becomes day in the middle of the night when the Savior was born." (Chapter 13, The Sickness Unto Death, 339)

"Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation which accounts for it that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but consists in the fact that the relation relatives itself to its own self. Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded, man is not yet a self." (Chapter 13, The Sickness Unto Death, 340)

"By relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power which constituted it The Christian heroism ... is to venture wholly to be oneself, as an individual man, this definite individual man, alone before the face of God, alone in this tremendous exertion and this tremendous responsibility" (Chapter 13, The Sickness Unto Death, 341)

"God creates everything out of nothing—and everything which God is to use He first reduces to nothing." (Chapter 14, Training in Christianity, 372)

"When the thought of God does not remind him of his sin but that it is forgiven, and the past is no longer the memory of how much he did wrong, but of how much he was forgiven—then man rests in the forgiveness of sins." (Chapter 15, Two Discourses, 418)

"... The most terrible fight is not when there is one opinion against another, the most terrible is when two men say the same thing—and fight about the interpretation, and this interpretation involves a difference of quality." (Chapter 16, The Attack upon "Christendom," 434)



"This is all I have known for certain, that God is love. Even if I have been mistaken on this or that point: God is nevertheless love." (Chapter 17, The Unchangeableness of God, 467)



Topics for Discussion

What is Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel and Hegelianism? How is it embodied in the phrase "Either/Or"?

What is the contrast between the Knight of Faith and the Knight of Infinite Resignation?

How is knowledge of Truth possible for Kierkegaard?

When Kierkegaard claims that "Truth is Subjectivity," what does he mean?

What is "the Sickness unto Death"? How is despair related to it?

What is distinctive about Kierkegaard's conception of the Christian life? How does it contrast to what Kierkegaard perceives as the common conception of the Christian life of his day?

What is Kierkegaard's conception of Faith?

What is Existentialism? In what sense is Kierkegaard an Existentialist?

What is Kierkegaard's contrast between the realms of the aesthetic, ethical and religious?