



The Essential Kierkegaard

Søren Kierkegaard , *Edna Hatlestad Hong (Editor)* , *Howard Vincent Hong (Editor)*

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This is the most comprehensive anthology of Søren Kierkegaard's works ever assembled in English. Drawn from the volumes of Princeton's authoritative *Kierkegaard's Writings* series by editors Howard and Edna Hong, the selections represent every major aspect of Kierkegaard's extraordinary career. They reveal the powerful mix of philosophy, psychology, theology, and literary criticism that made Kierkegaard one of the most compelling writers of the nineteenth century and a shaping force in the twentieth. With an introduction to Kierkegaard's writings as a whole and explanatory notes for each selection, this is the essential one-volume guide to a thinker who changed the course of modern intellectual history.

The anthology begins with Kierkegaard's early journal entries and traces the development of his work chronologically to the final *The Changelessness of God*. The book presents generous selections from all of Kierkegaard's landmark works, including *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Works of Love*, and *The Sickness unto Death*, and draws new attention to a host of such lesser-known writings as *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* and *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*. The selections are carefully chosen to reflect the unique character of Kierkegaard's work, with its shifting pseudonyms, its complex dialogues, and its potent combination of irony, satire, sermon, polemic, humor, and fiction. We see the esthetic, ethical, and ethical-religious ways of life initially presented as dialogue in two parallel series of pseudonymous and signed works and later in the "second authorship" as direct address. And we see the themes that bind the whole together, in particular Kierkegaard's overarching concern with, in his own words, "What it means to exist; . . . what it means to be a human being.?"

Together, the selections provide the best available introduction to Kierkegaard's writings and show more completely than any other book why his work, in all its creativity, variety, and power, continues to speak so directly today to so many readers around the world.

The Essential Kierkegaard Details

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From Reader Review The Essential Kierkegaard for online ebook

Rachel Wagner says

There is so much more to Kierkegaard than the text books give him credit for. He is often painted as a relativist, but I find that description too simplistic. He encourages people to actually think about what they are doing, so that when they act, it is with their entire being. He describes it as a "perfect leap of faith". He tells us to do things because we actually believe in them-not just out of duty, tradition or community pressure. This is the point of the essay on walking the dog at Deer Park on Sunday. He is fine with not walking the dog on Sunday if the person is abstaining out of reasoned belief. I found this and many of his other ideas empowering in college and still do today.

Donna Kirk says

What can I say? I need another cat, because I would like to name something of note in my life Soren. I finished this yesterday, 09/10/09, and I immediately picked up Chekov's stories.

Christopher says

I had heard about the philosopher Kierkegaard some time ago and had this book on my list of things to read for some time. Now that I have finally finished reading it, I can say that his works are very interesting, but also very difficult to grasp at times. Since this book is made with philosophy students in mind, this is not a book for the uninitiated to tread lightly into. Some of the excerpted works are excellent and I will definitely be looking to read them in their entirety in the future (Fear and Trembling, The Sickness Unto Death, and his more religious works written in his later years come to mind), but not all of his works are interesting. In fact, one of my biggest problems with this book is that the least interesting works of Kierkegaard seemed to get more pages than the more interesting works. It's frustrating to read 10 pages of something really good only to have to plod through 20-50 pages of something incredibly boring afterwards. The other problem I had with this book was the editors' notes at the beginning of each excerpted work. They are interesting for those who want a little biography and background information on Kierkegaard, but they do almost nothing to help the reader to understand what they are reading. Some more in-depth notes to explain the works' main ideas either at the beginning of the excerpts or interspersed as editors' footnotes throughout would have done much to aid my understanding and enjoyment of this book. I will definitely be looking for that in the next book of Kierkegaard I find the time to read.

Jamestohal says

This is a great tool, put together by reputable people, for anyone looking to grasp the K man.

Pishowi says

This is the most comprehensive anthology of Søren Kierkegaard's works ever assembled in English. Drawn from the volumes of Princeton's authoritative Kierkegaard's Writings series by editors Howard and Edna Hong, the selections represent every major aspect of Kierkegaard's extraordinary career. They reveal the powerful mix of philosophy, psychology, theology, and literary criticism that made Kierkegaard one of the most compelling writers of the nineteenth century and a shaping force in the twentieth. With an introduction to Kierkegaard's writings as a whole and explanatory notes for each selection, this is the essential one-volume guide to a thinker who changed the course of modern intellectual history.

knig says

The case of Kierkegaard (as opposed to Kierkegaard's case, which does not exist) is a conundrum. His polemy has been appropriated as mascot to the causes of existentialism, phenomenology, theology, philosophy and(fill in the blank. As long as it ends in 'gy'. Go on), each drawing parasitically from his cornucopia (of groszartig gibberish) to substantiate their cause celebre.

This can be easily done. Because Kierkegaard is a virtuoso of the verbose, spinning square (linguistic) pegs into circles. But ultimately, he has NO platform. Which is not to say he has no purpose. He does: the justification of God (to be fair, God not deity), and to that end he labours from every conceivable direction, almost as if though not to miss a single base, even if means building his house on paradox: his own.

For the longest time, I didn't want to believe that it was as simple as that: as many after him, (I suppose), I searched for cohesion, consistency, universality (of thought), for a narrative: after all, this man speaks like a philosopher (admittedly he denied it), and so he managed my expectations accordingly. Which does not signify I expect to find myself in accordance with him, but rather to find him in accordance with himself.

Kierkegaard's enduring relevance emanates from the ubiquitous nature of his linguistic framework., is that he dispenses with the universal meaning of language. Its actually quite a cool concept. Why invent Esperanto, Ebonics or even Klingon when you can redefine whats right under your nose. To the rest of humanity a table is a table, but when K sits at it, this tabula rasa it becomes, say, a tarantula. In the very next sentence it might mean turnip. So, let the fun begin.

Subjectivity is truth, Kierkegaard proclaims from the mountaintops. The frenzied pack of hungry intellectuals in 20 c Europe descends and the free for all begins in earnest. In France, the existentialists are having a wank fest. Never mind that the first full Kierkegaard translation doesn't appear until 1933 to obscure reception: why fry your brain with undecipherable anachronisms when you can have when you can rely on Jean Wahl and Lev Sholev's, interpretation or Heidegger's provision of his own hermentical framework for interpreting Kierkegaarde.

Did Sartre read the full monty? Camus? De Bouvier?

Subjectivity is truth, right? Let existentialism begin.

Kierkegaard DID say it, but he didn't mean it. Like the March Hare, he says what means but doesn't mean what he says. Essential Kierkegaardian categories (the moment, paradox, truth, subjectivity) are used in a

double, namely Christian sense, although there is a constant linguistic crossover between theology and philosophy. 'Subjectivity is truth' actually means the following (and I take a deep breath) Each individual is capable of faith, which faith God bestows. At 'the moment' faith is bestowed (which in itself is an objective category), concrete, individual existence begins, because otherwise the individual would not be aware that he had faith, as he would be living in untruth.

That this is so (and admittedly by implication) can be traced to Kierkegaard's, not our own 21 c interpretation of truth and subjectivity. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard plainly states that truth is faith. Subjectivity is a looser concept, tied in to inwardness, but this under no circumstances presupposes a modern interpretation of subjective free will.

Kierkegaard's starting point (in Thought Project) is Socrates 'Doctrine of Recollection', according to which all truth is within the individual, so that self knowledge implies a knowledge of god. Kierkegaard accepts this only as an initial state of inwardness, so to speak, but his objection to its sustainability is that under these circumstances we can't be aware of what we know because we lack self perception:

'The temporal point of departure is nothing; for as soon as I discover that I have known the Truth from eternity without being aware of it, the same instant this moment of occasion is hidden in the Eternal, and so incorporated with it that I cannot even find it so to speak, even if I sought it; because in my eternal consciousness there is neither here nor there, but only an *ubique et nusquam*'.

To resolve this issue, Kierkegaard terms this state untruth or nonexistence. At this point, it would be fallacious to argue that untruth is subjective: I think we can safely presume that all who reside in untruth which is uniform and therefore objective. A shared collective experience. Then comes 'the moment' when truth is thrust upon us by God. This again is a uniform, non negotiable external truth (later identified as faith), which is transferred during the 'moment' (the integration of the eternal into the temporal) upon each individual. At NO point here (or anywhere) does Kierkegaard make a case that each individual now becomes free to personally (or what we would call subjectively in today's vocabulary) define 'truth' or faith: so, first, we did not subjectively come upon truth/faith, it is not anthropomorphic, it was given us, as an objective category, and further we are not allowed to reject faith, or misplace it:

'Therefore if the object of faith is a human being, the whole thing is a prank by a foolish person who has not even grasped the esthetic and the intellectual. The object of faith is therefore the god's actuality in the sense of existence.'

What then is one to make of his reference to subjectivity and individuality?. Kierkegaard's application of subjectivity provides for the existential, but not as a blanket *carte blanche* for self expression in general (as Sartre say would have it). Existentialism in Kierkegaard's speak is nothing more than a restricted fund: you know the ones I mean: you have physical possession of the money. You can touch the money (if you want), but you CAN'T use the money except for a specific purpose. There might be infinite possibilities for realisation, but only one actuality. (And stealing is not possible either.) This is how subjectivity in Kierkegaard's vision becomes almost a necessary evil, a prerequisite condition granted with the obligation to apply it objectively to, well, an objective God. (how free is that?!).

If god is an objective category according to Kierkegaard, it becomes an interesting puzzle to decipher why he encumbers himself in such vigorous debate with Hegelian speculative thought in Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Lets be clear, on the issue of God (God's existence as an objective category), the two men are in agreement. Why then, is it so important for Kierkegaard to take the 'other' road to Rome? What does it matter for Christ sakes (pun intended) how we get there once we're there?

For Hegel, of course, objective religion suffers itself to be arranged in one's mind, organized into a system, Though he sees this aspect of religion as essential to a living faith, his interest lies in the tendency of objective religion to become divorced from the subjective life of believers. When the objective aspects of religion are reified and repressively maintained by a coercive authority, living faith becomes spiritless; or "superstitious adherence to purely external formalities", what Hegel calls "fetishism".

As with Hegel, Kierkegaard saw the religious life of his culture as feeding the "disease of spiritlessness," which is the dissipation of the individual, of concrete human existence. For Kierkegaard, the main problem is the objectification of the individual. He sees Hegelianism as relegating the individual to a Borg in the Hive and, with a complacent orthodoxy, hopelessly lost in abstractions. He saw both as abrogating concrete existence by retreat into otherworldly speculation, by absolutizing ethical ideality. Kierkegaard's first target was Hegelianism—what he thought to be the fullest expression of the problem of spiritlessness.

This is not to say that Kierkegaard's is championing free will, subjectivity and the Human Rights Convention 1998. He is not morally outraged on behalf of existentialists inc. Rather, the main problem here is one of (Kierkegaardian) logic.

Kierkegaard can not accept a human pool retreating into abstraction as the way to God: if this were the case, then that would lead right back into Socratic 'gaia' consciousness of untruth: a state of collective objectification where the knowledge of God is simply not possible. Kierkegaard therefore needs to assert the subjective nature (but only in the limited sense I described above) of truth/faith order to rescue his Pizza tower.

Ultimately Kierkegaard seeks to address the issue of and to what extent the Christian truth can be communicated, contradictions catered for fully, no corkage fees apply. And ironically, when one gets past all his torturous perambulations of language, his recontextualizing of qualifications, his theological labour pains, Kierkegaard does little more than paraphrase Pascal

Barry says

This was a challenging read. Occasionally interesting, often tedious, sometimes bewildering. He attempts to understand and explain how Christianity can remain philosophically justifiable within a Hegelian framework. I admit I found many portions confusing. I'd like to think that I only found it difficult to follow his thinking because the book is a collection sampling from many of his books, thus interfering with the logical flow. Maybe I just wasn't patient enough to work through all his dialectical reasoning because it seemed so arcane. Perhaps I could better appreciate one of his complete books, but after reading this I'm not sure I could work up the interest. I'm going to try Backhouse's book about Kierkegaard instead.

Brainarchy says

It took me some time to read this book but it was worth it.
Here are some of my favourite lines:

"But he who becomes guilty through anxiety is indeed innocent, for it was not he himself but anxiety, a foreign power, that laid hold of him, a power that he did not love but about which he was anxious."

"Anxiety is neither a category of necessity nor a category of freedom; it is entangled freedom, where freedom is not free in itself but entangled, not by necessity, but in itself."

"... only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured."

"Spontaneous love can be changed within itself; by spontaneous combustion it can become the sickness of jealousy; from the greatest happiness it can become the greatest torment."

"When the danger is so great that death becomes the hope, then despair is the hopelessness of not even being able to die. It is in this last sense that despair is the sickness unto death, this tormenting contradiction, this sickness of the self, perpetually to be dying, to die and yet not die, to die death."

Thank you Stefan Bolea! :)

David says

After learning about Kierkegaard in philosophy class way back when, and reading about his thought and ideas in numerous books, I finally got around to reading his own words. I've long wanted to read Kierkegaard and I did read *Fear and Trembling* a while back. But like many greats of the past, his writing is so voluminous that the amateur reader such as myself has no idea where to start. If only there was some compilation of his "essential" work...

(haha, I crack myself up!)

This book includes entries from the entirety of Kierkegaard's career. It definitely gives you a feel for his thought and how he matured and developed his thought over the years. While I appreciate these sort of compilation works, this one suffers in the same way they all do. That is, for all the good in giving a taste of his work, it also feels fragmented and incomplete. Would it be better just to dive in and work through Kierkegaard's great works, from *Either/Or* to *The Sickness Unto Death*? Perhaps. But though this work is fragmented, it does what it is supposed to in giving the reader a good entry point into Kierkegaard's world.

I like to be reading one book at a time from someone I consider a spiritual master. This is part of my own devotional reading, where I read a few pages a day in the hopes of being challenged and enriched by someone who has made this life journey before me. Kierkegaard, though he is a philosopher, can also be considered a spiritual master. That said, I found the first half or so of this book very difficult as it seemed heavier on the philosophy. The latter half, where he consistently challenges Christendom and reflects on Christian life, was much more up my alley. I suspect there may be some readers more interested in the philosophy side. It makes me wonder if there is a sort of "Essential Kierkegaard - the Spiritual Writings" or something. Don't get me wrong, the spiritual themes run through Kierkegaard's entire work, it just seemed more practical or personally challenging in his later works.

Overall though, if you want an introduction to Kierkegaard, this is the book for you. It is not easy, but it is

worth it. And there is so much, especially in the second half, that is challenging.

As a sort of postscript: While I was finishing this up, I read Jacques Ellul's *The Presence of the Kingdom* and these two books made me...I'm not sure if "despair" is the right word. Kierkegaard talks at length on how many admire Jesus but few imitate him. Ellul is very critical of Christendom too. Together, it makes me wonder - are there just things built into Western Culture that inoculate us against actually being Christians? I don't mean that we're not sincere in our faith or that we're in danger of hellfire or anything. I just mean, when it comes to imitating Jesus (or in more contemporary parlance, being "radical") is just the fact we live in the culture we live in make this more difficult, if not impossible? I could point to all the failures I see in others. But I write this from my relatively comfortable house while my kids watch Netflix. Self denial? Suffering? I like the idea, but I also like my life. Or to put it another way, I can compare myself to many people to make myself feel like I am doing okay on the self-denial front...but I still recognize I am rather selfish and lazy. I suppose this is where grace reminds us that we are loved just as we are, though we are encouraged to continue to improve.

Anyway, tangent over. Read Kierkegaard...and Ellul.

Szplug says

In the high stakes game of life, bringing Kierkegaard to the table gives a player the equivalent of a flush - the essentials are all here to assemble the various suits of humanity with the requisite five cards: passion, sincerity, reflection, curiosity, and humour. Whether you are Christian or not, his spiritual tetherhooks provide vitally needed support in stabilizing the platform for a probing of oneself and one's placement in this infinitely vast material mystery. This expertly edited book contains judiciously assembled parts from nigh on the entirety of the prodigious output of the Danish seeker - and perhaps the greatest strength and benefit this compendium provides is enabling the reader to decide upon which of Kierkegaard's works to seek out in full.

I prefer the translations contained herein by Howard and Edna Hong to those of Alastair Hannay, who's efforts at bringing the Dane into English are appreciated, but seem to flatten out the prose to the point of occasionally becoming tedious and arid. *The Essential Kierkegaard* has now joined *The Simone Weil Reader*, *Human, All Too Human*, and *The Gay Science* as the principal sources for my current forays into the bracing wisdom and delineatory guidance of brilliant minds.

Ade Bailey says

A wonderful collection of readings. A treasure for always, one of the best books I have ever owned. It's been a joy this first month of owning it to engage with new and favourite writings. Very restorative, not just as K., but as a serious centre, delightfully funny as it usually is!

Dustyn Hessie says

Kierkegaard is certainly one of the most versatile spiritualist's I've ever read: philosophy, aesthetics, beautiful writing - what more can one ask for?

This edition is a very good start, but be warned that his circumlocutions can be an eye-full to the inexperienced young thinker. But, if you're really bold just slam through the tome, consuming as much spirit as possible, in utter awe... and it might all just come to you in a FLASH! That's how It happens!

Also: it seems as though Kierkegaard's writings could have retained a lot more recognition if he had not deluded a bit in the whole Christianity-thing. But, his aesthetic writing style is what seals his destiny. He gives such a solemn and arduous account of subjectivity that it'd seem absurd that anyone should ever critique his work properly.

Not to mention the translation is luminous. One day - and I shall say this in utmost certainty - I am going read all of Kierkegaard's work. Hong & Hong are some of the most tactful translators in the history of mankind.

Have fun, valiant readers & thinkers!

daniel says

(unless one of you could suggest a better place to start with Kierkegaard)

William Schram says

This book is a collection of excerpts from the works of Søren Kierkegaard. One minute he's talking about Ladies fashion and how that allows his character to be in control of women, and the next minute he is talking about theological implications of philosophical thought. Kierkegaard was an interesting person through his writings. He preferred to use pseudonyms and just say that he was editing the works rather than providing them. I really enjoyed the book, it was quite interesting and thought provoking. I would probably read it again given the chance, but I think I would rather have all of Kierkegaard's works instead of a shortened version. Though I could understand if he was really prolific and the book would be the size of a dictionary.

Safae says

If time is correctly defined as an infinite succession, it most likely is also defined as the present, the past, and the future. This distinction, however, is incorrect if it is considered to be implicit in time itself, because the distinction appears only through the relation of time to eternity and through the reflection of eternity in time. If in the infinite succession of time a foothold could be found, i.e., a present, which was the dividing point, the division would be quite correct. However, precisely because every moment, as well as the sum of the moments, is a process (a passing by), no moment is a present, and accordingly there is in time neither present, nor past, nor future. If it is claimed that this division can be maintained, it is because the moment is spatialized, but thereby the infinite succession comes to a halt, it is because representation is introduced that allows time to be represented instead of being thought. Even so, this is not correct procedure, for even as representation, the infinite succession of time is an infinitely contentless present (this is the parody of the eternal).

The present, however, is not a concept of time, except precisely as something infinitely contentless, which again is the infinite vanishing. If this is not kept in mind, no matter how quickly it may disappear, the present is posited, and being posited it again appears in the categories: the past and the future.

The eternal, on the contrary, is the present. For thought, the eternal is the present in terms of an annulled succession (time is the succession that passes by). For representation, it is a going forth that nevertheless does not get off the spot, because the eternal is for representation the infinitely contentful present. So also in the eternal there is no division into the past and the future, because the present is posited as the annulled succession.

Time is, then, infinite succession; the life that is in time and is only of time has no present. In order to define the sensuous life, it is usually said that it is in the moment and only in the moment. By the moment, then, is understood that abstraction from the eternal that, if it is to be the present, is a parody of it. The present is the eternal, or rather, the eternal is the present, and the present is full.
