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KIERKEGAARD

C. Stephen Evans provides a clear, readable introduction to Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) as a philosopher and thinker. His book is organized around Kierkegaard's concept of the three "stages" or "spheres" of human existence, which provide both a developmental account of the human self and an understanding of three rival views of human life and its meaning. Evans also discusses such important Kierkegaardian concepts as "indirect communication," "truth as subjectivity," and the Incarnation understood as "the Absolute Paradox." Although his discussion emphasizes the importance of Christianity for understanding Kierkegaard, it shows him to be a writer of great interest to a secular as well as a religious audience. Evans' book brings Kierkegaard into conversation with western philosophers past and present, presenting him as one who gives powerful answers to the questions which philosophers ask.

C. STEPHEN EVANS is University Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Baylor University. His most recent published works include *Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling* (2006), co-edited with Sylvia Walsh, and *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (2004).

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To Jan Evans

Fellow Kierkegaard Scholar and So Much More

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Preface

It is customary for scholars who write about Kierkegaard to apologize for doing so. Kierkegaard made constant fun of the “professor” and predicted, with some bitterness, that after his death, his literary corpus would be picked over by the scholars for their own purposes. And so it has been.

Nevertheless, I offer no apologies for this effort to introduce Kierkegaard as a philosopher to those who are interested in reading him. Those of us who love Kierkegaard and who regularly teach Kierkegaard know how stimulating and provocative an encounter with his works can be. Nevertheless, for the contemporary student, and even for the professor, there are cultural and philosophical differences between Kierkegaard’s world and our own that make it difficult to understand his writings. The current work is by no means an attempt to “summarize” Kierkegaard’s thought as a substitute for reading him. It is rather an attempt to remove some of the barriers to a genuine reading of Kierkegaard.

Obviously, there are many ways one might organize an introduction to Kierkegaard’s thought. One would be to discuss and explain some of Kierkegaard’s major works, such as *Fear and Trembling*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and *The Sickness Unto Death*. I have chosen not to follow this route, for several reasons. One is that I feared it would encourage a kind of “Cliff’s Notes” approach involving summaries of these works. A second is that the important works are many, and their complexity is such that any adequate account of them would make this a lengthy book. Hence, I have chosen instead to introduce Kierkegaard thematically, focusing on important concepts in his works.

The major organizing structure is provided by the Kierkegaardian notion of the three “stages of existence” or “spheres of existence,” a key set of concepts in Kierkegaard’s writings. When understood as “stages” these provide an account of a path to authentic selfhood; understood as “spheres” these concepts provide a description of three rival views of

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human existence and its meaning. It is thus well-suited to serve as a basis for understanding Kierkegaard's thought. After two introductory chapters discussing Kierkegaard's life and works, including his distinctive views on communication, the book therefore takes its readers through the aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres of existence, culminating with an analysis of Kierkegaard's understanding of Christian thought and its relevance to the contemporary world. Since many courses on Kierkegaard use this same trio of concepts as an organizing tool, my hope is that the book will be useful as a supplementary text for students who are reading the primary sources.

In going through the three stages of existence, the book takes Kierkegaard seriously as a philosopher, giving full treatments of what I take to be his epistemological, ethical, and metaphysical views. On my reading, Kierkegaard poses a sharp challenge to the dominant tradition of modern philosophy. However, in several important respects he also does not fit well into the categories of "existentialist" or "postmodernist" which some have attempted to apply to him. In looking at Kierkegaard as a philosopher, I have also tried to do justice to Kierkegaard's uniqueness as a thinker, the ways in which his work does not fit the standard philosophical mold.

Naturally, I do discuss specific works of Kierkegaard at specific places in the book. Therefore, those who are looking particularly for introductions to specific works may profit from looking closely at those sections. Chapter 2, for example, discusses *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* and several sections of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that deal with "indirect communication." Chapter 3 has an extensive discussion of the view of the self found in *The Sickness Unto Death*, and returns to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to treat the themes of "truth as subjectivity" and the critique of the Hegelian idea that reality can be thought of as a "system." Chapter 4 focuses mainly on *Either/Or*, volume I, while Chapter 5 looks at the portrait of the ethical life given in *Either/Or*, volume II, as well as the picture given in *Fear and Trembling*, where the ethical life is contrasted with the life of faith. Chapter 6 returns to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* for yet another account of the ethical life, one that sees the ethical as the starting point for a religious life shaped by resignation, suffering, and guilt. Chapter 7 examines a number of philosophical issues raised by Kierkegaard's understanding of Christian faith, especially the relation of faith to reason, the Incarnation understood as the "Absolute Paradox," and the relation between faith in Christ and historical evidence. To accomplish these tasks, this chapter discusses

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mainly *Philosophical Fragments*, but also *The Book on Adler* to shed light on Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity as a revealed religion. Finally, Chapter 8 returns to *The Sickness Unto Death* for a concrete picture of human existence as it relates to faith, but it also includes a discussion of *Works of Love*, where Kierkegaard as a Christian thinker presents his mature understanding of ethics as summarized in the great commandments to love God and the neighbor.

Kierkegaard's literary output was vast, even though he died at age 42. I am only too conscious that there are many themes in Kierkegaard as well as whole works that this book barely touches on or omits entirely. Some readers will certainly object that I have focused mainly on the pseudonymous writings and have not given adequate attention to the *Upbuilding Discourses*. The reason for this slant is simply that I wanted to treat Kierkegaard primarily as a philosopher, albeit a Christian thinker, and therefore I decided to focus mainly on the works that are taught in philosophy departments and that treat issues recognizable as philosophical. In any case, since my goal was not to summarize Kierkegaard's thought, but to motivate readers to encounter him for themselves, I chose to keep this work relatively short and accessible. For the same reason, references to the secondary literature are relatively few, although I have included a very personal guide to further reading about Kierkegaard in place of a traditional bibliography or list of works cited.

I have supplied almost all the translations for quotations from Kierkegaard's published works, working from the first Danish edition of the *Samlede Værker* (Copenhagen: Gyldendals, 1901–1907). However, for the convenience of English-speaking readers I have cited the pagination for the Princeton University Press *Kierkegaard's Writings* editions, edited by Howard V. Hong. This English edition contains the pagination of the Danish edition I have used in the margins for any reader who wishes to consult the Danish.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the hundreds of students who have studied Kierkegaard with me since 1972, for all you have taught me. In many ways this is a book that you helped me write, and I have written it for you. Special thanks must go to Merold Westphal, who has taught me so much about Kierkegaard over the years, and was kind enough to read this work for Cambridge University Press, and give me a large number of helpful comments and suggestions. I must also thank my friend and colleague Robert Roberts for detailed comments on several chapters. I also thank the other members of the Baylor Philosophy Department, the members of the Philosophy Department of the University of St. Andrews,

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and the participants in the Theology Research Seminar at the University of St. Andrews, for helpful discussion of chapters read to these groups. The final work on this book was done while I was in residence at the University of St. Andrews, and the staff and community of St. Mary's College there provided a wonderful place to work. My doctoral student Mike Cantrell, who was back in Waco, Texas, and had access to my library, provided me with some crucial research help during this period. Another doctoral student, Andrew Nam, is owed my gratitude for doing the index.

Chronology

- 1813 Søren Kierkegaard is born in Copenhagen
- 1830 Enters the University of Copenhagen as a theology student
- 1838 Publishes his first book, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, a critique of Hans Christian Andersen as a novelist
- 1840 Becomes engaged to Regine Olsen but breaks the engagement the next year
- 1841 Successfully defends his doctoral thesis, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*, and goes to Berlin to hear Schelling lecture, returning the following year
- 1843 Publishes the pseudonymous *Either/Or* in two volumes, the first book in what he will later call his “authorship,” and also begins to publish a series of *Upbuilding Discourses* under his own name. *Either/Or* is followed by *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling*
- 1844 Publishes *Philosophical Fragments*, *The Concept of Anxiety*, and *Prefaces*
- 1845 Publishes *Stages on Life’s Way* pseudonymously and *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* under his own name
- 1846 Publishes *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, with the thought that he would complete his authorship and take a pastorate, and also *Two Ages: A Literary Review*. He also becomes embroiled in a controversy with a satirical magazine, *The Corsair*, and decides that he must remain at his literary “post” rather than become a pastor. He also works on *The Book on Adler*, a work that reflects on the case of a Danish pastor deposed for claiming to have received a revelation from God, but Kierkegaard never publishes his work, though sections are later incorporated into *Two Ethical-Religious Essays*

| xiv | <i>Chronology</i> |
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| 1847 | Publishes <i>Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits</i> and <i>Works of Love</i> |
| 1848 | Publishes <i>Christian Discourses</i> and <i>The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress</i> . He completes <i>The Point of View for My Work as an Author</i> , but the work is only published posthumously |
| 1849 | Publishes <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i> , <i>Two Ethical-Religious Essays</i> , and two books of religious discourses: <i>The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air</i> and <i>Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays</i> |
| 1850 | Publishes <i>Practice in Christianity</i> and <i>An Upbuilding Discourse</i> |
| 1851 | Publishes <i>Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays</i> , <i>On My Work as an Author</i> , and <i>For Self-Examination</i> . <i>Judge for Yourself!</i> is written but not published until after his death |
| 1854 | Begins a public, polemical attack on the Danish Lutheran Church as a state church, first waged in <i>The Fatherland</i> , and later, in a periodical Kierkegaard himself published, <i>The Moment</i> |
| 1855 | Publishes <i>What Christ Judges of Official Christianity</i> and <i>The Changelessness of God</i> . In the midst of his controversial attack on the Church, collapses on the street and dies in a hospital a few weeks later on November 11 |

Sigla used for Kierkegaard's published writings

- BA *The Book on Adler*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998)
- CA *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980)
- CD *Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995)
- CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vols. I and II, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) [Vol. I contains complete text of work, and hence all quotations are from it; II contains index, scholarly notes, and related materials.]
- EO I and II *Either/Or, Vols. I and II*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987)
- EUD *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992)
- FT *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983)
- JY *For Self-Examination* and *Judge for Yourself*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990)

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| PF | <i>Philosophical Fragments</i> , ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985) |
| PV | <i>The Point of View</i> (includes <i>On My Work as an Author</i> as well as <i>The Point of View for My Work as an Author</i>), ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998) |
| SUD | <i>The Sickness Unto Death</i> , ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) |
| TA | <i>Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review</i> , ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978) |
| UDVS | <i>Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits</i> , trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) |
| WL | <i>Works of Love</i> , ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995) |