

KIERKEGAARD ON SELF, ETHICS, AND RELIGION

Many of Søren Kierkegaard's most controversial and influential ideas are more relevant than ever to contemporary debates on ethics, philosophy of religion, and selfhood. Kierkegaard develops an original argument according to which wholeheartedness requires both moral and religious commitment. In this book, Roe Fremstedal provides a compelling reconstruction of how Kierkegaard develops wholeheartedness in the context of his views on moral psychology, metaethics, and the ethics of religious belief. He shows that Kierkegaard's influential account of despair, selfhood, ethics, and religion belong to a larger intellectual context in which German philosophers such as Kant and Fichte play crucial roles. Moreover, Fremstedal makes a solid case for the controversial claim that religion supports ethics, instead of contradicting it. His book offers a novel and comprehensive reading of Kierkegaard, drawing on important sources that are little known.

ROE FREMSTEDAL is Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at NTNU, Trondheim. He is the author of *Kierkegaard and Kant on Radical Evil and the Highest Good* (2014), and has published extensively on German philosophy, existentialism, ethics, and religion.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51376-7 — Kierkegaard on Self, Ethics, and Religion
Roe Fremstedal
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

KIERKEGAARD ON SELF,
ETHICS, AND RELIGION

Purity or Despair

ROE FREMSTEDAL

Norwegian University of Science and Technology



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-51376-7 — Kierkegaard on Self, Ethics, and Religion
 Roe Fremstedal
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
 New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316513767
 DOI: 10.1017/9781009076005

© Roe Fremstedal 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Fremstedal, Roe, 1977– author.

TITLE: Kierkegaard on self, ethics, and religion : purity or despair / Roe Fremstedal, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA : Cambridge University Press, 2022. | Includes index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2021042054 (print) | LCCN 2021042055 (ebook) | ISBN 9781316513767 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009074735 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009076005 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Kierkegaard, Søren, 1813–1855. | BISAC: PHILOSOPHY / History & Surveys / Modern

CLASSIFICATION: LCC B4377 .F74 2022 (print) | LCC B4377 (ebook) | DDC 198/.9–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021042054>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021042055>

ISBN 978-1-316-51376-7 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51376-7 — Kierkegaard on Self, Ethics, and Religion
Roe Fremstedal
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

To Johan and Oskar

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51376-7 — Kierkegaard on Self, Ethics, and Religion
Roe Fremstedal
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xii
Introduction	I
PART I SELF, DESPAIR, AND WHOLEHEARTEDNESS	
1 Selfhood and Anthropology	15
2 Why Be Moral? The Critique of Amoralism	34
3 Moral Inescapability: Moral Agency and Metaethics	54
PART II MORALITY, PRUDENCE, AND RELIGION	
4 The Critique of Eudaimonism: Virtue Ethics, Kantianism, and Beyond	75
5 Noneudaimonistic Ethics and Religion: Happiness and Salvation	93
6 The “Teleological Suspension of the Ethical” and Abraham’s Sacrifice of Isaac	105
7 Moralized Religion: The Identity of the Good and the Divine	121
PART III “SUBJECTIVITY, INWARDNESS, IS TRUTH”	
8 “Hidden Inwardness” and Humor: Kantian Ethics and Religion	141
9 Subjective Truth: “Kierkegaard’s Most Notorious . . . Claim”	158

PART IV FAITH AND REASON

10	A Leap of Faith? The Use of Lessing, Jacobi, and Kant	173
11	Faith Neither Absurd Nor Irrational: The Neglected Reply to Eiríksson	193
12	Faith Beyond Reason: Suprarationalism and Antirationalism	212
13	The Ethics of Belief: Fideism and Pragmatism	236
	Conclusion	251
	<i>References</i>	256
	<i>Index</i>	276

Figures and Tables

Figure

- 1.1 The self and alterity *page 24*

Table

- 1.1 Types of despair 26

Acknowledgments

Parts of the present book have been presented to audiences in Antwerp, Bergen, Bologna, Clermont-Ferrand, Copenhagen, Frankfurt am Main, Oslo, Tromsø, and Trondheim. I am grateful to the audiences at these locations for comments on earlier versions of different book chapters. In addition, I want to thank the following persons in particular: the anonymous reviewers who contributed greatly to this book as well as Anthony Aumann, Adam Buben, Rob Compaijen, Jörg Disse, Kristine Farstad, Rick Anthony Furtak, Hilary Gaskin, Erik Hanson, Eleanor Helms, Beatrix Himmelmann, Timothy P. Jackson, Robert Loudon, Melissa Fox-Muraton, Rene Rosfort, Gerhard Schreiber, Heiko Schulz, Jon Stewart, and Patrick Stokes. Thanks are also due to the following institutions and groups: The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim; the Ethics Research Group and the Department of Philosophy, University of Tromsø – the Arctic University of Norway; the Faculty of Protestant Theology and the Institute of Philosophy, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main; NordForsk.

Chapters 1–3 and 8–11 of the present work are partially based on earlier articles that have been heavily reworked and developed specifically for this book. In more detail:

Chapter 1 draws on Roe Fremstedal (2019a) “Kierkegaard’s Post-Kantian Approach to Anthropology and Selfhood,” in Patrick Stokes, Eleanor Helms, and Adam Buben (eds.), *The Kierkegaardian Mind*, London: Routledge (Routledge Philosophical Minds), 319–30.

Chapters 1–3 and 10 contain excerpts from Roe Fremstedal (2015a) “Kierkegaard’s Use of German Philosophy: Leibniz to Fichte,” in Jon Stewart (ed.), *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, vol. LVIII), 36–49.

Acknowledgments

xi

- Chapters 1–3 contain excerpts from Roe Fremstedal (2015b) “Kierkegaard’s Views on Normative Ethics, Moral Agency, and Metaethics,” in Jon Stewart (ed.), *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, vol. LVIII), 113–25.
- Chapters 2–3 contain excerpts from Roe Fremstedal (2015c) “Why Be Moral? A Kierkegaardian Approach,” in Beatrix Himmelmann and Robert B. Loudon (eds.), *Why Be Moral?*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2015, 173–97.
- Chapter 3 contains excerpts from Roe Fremstedal (2019b) “Demonic Despair under the Guise of the Good? Kierkegaard and Anscombe vs. Velleman,” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 1–21, DOI:10.1080/0020174X.2019.1610047.
- Chapters 8–9 contain excerpts from Roe Fremstedal (2019c) “Hidden Inwardness and ‘Subjectivity Is Truth’: Kant and Kierkegaard on Moral Psychology and Religious Pragmatism,” in Lee C. Barrett and Peter Sajda (eds.), *Kierkegaard in Context: A Festschrift for Jon Stewart*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press (Mercer Kierkegaard Series), 112–29.
- Chapter 10 contains excerpts from Roe Fremstedal (2020a) “Kant and Existentialism: Inescapable Freedom and Self-Deception,” in Jon Stewart (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Existentialism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (Palgrave Handbooks in German Idealism), 51–75, reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chapter 11 contains excerpts from Roe Fremstedal (2017) “Eiríksson’s Critique of Kierkegaard and Kierkegaard’s (Drafted) Response: Religious Faith, Absurdity, and Rationality,” in Gerhard Schreiber and Jon Stewart (eds.), *Magnús Eiríksson: A Forgotten Contemporary of Kierkegaard*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press (Danish Golden Age Studies, vol. x), 145–66.

Abbreviations

Works by Kant

Except for *Critique of Pure Reason*, references to Kant use the pagination in the German Academy edition of Kant's works, specifying volume and page number (e.g., Ak 2:268). I quote the translations in the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (15 vols., ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992–2012). The following abbreviations are used:

- A *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. by Günter Zöllner and Robert Loudon, transl. by Mary Gregor, Paul Guyer, Robert Loudon, et al., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- A/B *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and transl. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 (references are to the A and B editions).
- Ak *Gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols., Berlin: Reimer, later de Gruyter, 1900–.
- CF *The Conflict of the Faculties*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and transl. by Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- CPR *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and transl. by Mary Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- G *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*.
- LE *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind, transl. by Peter Heath, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

List of Abbreviations

xiii

- LL *Lectures on Logic*, ed. and transl. by J. M. Young, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- LPDR *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*.
- MM *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*.
- O “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” in *Religion and Rational Theology*.
- R *Religion within the Boundaries of Bare Reason*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*.
- WE “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment,” in *Practical Philosophy*.

Works by Kierkegaard

References to *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* use volume and page number (e.g., SKS 1, 61). References to *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer* use volume and tome number, entry category and number, and page number where appropriate (e.g., Pap. X–6, B68, 73). When the relevant text is translated into English, I also refer to *Kierkegaard’s Writings* and *Journals and Papers* (both transl. by Howard Hong and Edna Hong), alternatively to *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks*.

I use the following standard abbreviations:

- BA *The Book on Adler*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- B&A *Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. by Niels Thulstrup, 2 vols., Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1953–54.
- CA *The Concept of Anxiety*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- CD *Christian Discourses*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- CI *The Concept of Irony*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- CUP1 *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, vol. 1.
- EO1 *Either/Or, Part I*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- EO2 *Either/Or, Part II*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- EUD *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

- FSE *For Self-Examination*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- FT *Fear and Trembling*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- JC *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- JFY *Judge for Yourself*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 7 vols., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–78 (references are to the numbering of the passages, unless otherwise stated).
- KJN *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, ed. by N. J. Cappelørn, A. Hannay, B. Kirmmse, et al., 11 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007–20.
- LD *Letters and Documents*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- M *The Moment and Late Writings*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Pap. *Søren Kierkegaard's Papirer*, 2nd expanded ed., ed. by Niels Thulstrup, 16 vols., Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909–48, 1968–78.
- PC *Practice in Christianity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- PF *Philosophical Fragments*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- PV *The Point of View*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- SKS *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter*, ed. by N. J. Cappelørn, J. Garff, J. Kondrup, et al., 55 vols. (SKS 1–28, K1–K28), Copenhagen: Gad, 1997–2013.
- SLW *Stages on Life's Way*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- SUD *The Sickness unto Death*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- TA *Two Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- TD *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- UD *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- WA *Without Authority*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- WL *Works of Love*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.