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Soren Kierkegaard, who was born in Denmark and died there at the age of forty-two, is regarded by many as the father of existentialist thinking. During his lifetime the Hegelian theologian he reacted against the Hegelian theologians in Denmark, denounced organized religion and held that the act of choice by an individual was all-important.

The Diary covers the important elements in Kierkegaard's life, including his childhood, his relations with his father, the influence of other writers on him, his broken engagement (which had a far-reaching effect on the rest of his life), and his celebrated quarrel with the Church.

Kierkegaard's writings are important because he is almost the first European writer to take a modern, analytical, psychological approach to religion. Proust, Joyce, and Aldous Huxley were only a few of the modern writers influenced by the Dane; and Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism is based on his thinking.

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### A MARVELOUS COLLECTION OF EXCERPTS FROM HIS DIARIES

By Steven H Propp

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic, and religious author, who was the first existentialist philosopher. He wrote many other books, including *Philosophical Fragments*, *Fear & Trembling*; *The Sickness Unto Death*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Attack upon Christendom*, *The Concept of Irony*, *The Concept of Dread*, *Training in Christianity*, *Christian Discourses*, *Either/Or*, etc.

He wrote in 1837, "Each person takes his revenge on the world. Mine consists in carrying my grief and anguish deeply embedded within myself, while my laughter entertains all. If I see somebody suffer I sympathize with him, console him to the best of my ability, and listen to him quietly when he assures me that

I am fortunate. If I can keep this up to the day of my death I shall have had my revenge." (#15, Pg. 17-18)

He observes sardonically, "In former days a man derived self-importance by being born noble, rich, etc.; today we have grown more liberal, more `world-historical,' now all of us derive self-importance from being born in the 19th century---Oh, Thou marvelous 19th century! Oh, enviable lot!" (#23, pg. 20-21)

He points out, "It is an awful satire, and an epigram on the materialism of our modern age, that nowadays the only use that can be made of solitude is imposing it as a penalty, as jail. What a difference there is between those times when, no matter how secular materialism always was, man believed in the solitude of the convent, when, in other words, solitude was revered as the highest, as the destiny of Eternity---and the present when it is detested as a curse and is used only for the punishment of criminals. Alas, what a change." (#27, pg. 23)

He reveals, "Torn to pieces as I was inside, without any prospect of leading a humanly happy life here below... without any hope of a happy, cosy future---as most naturally results from and rests in the historical continuity of domestic family-life---what wonder that in despairing desperation I seized upon the intellectual side of man only and clung to it so closely that the thought of my considerable mental talents was my only consolation, ideas my only joy, human beings objects of indifference." (#39, pg. 31)

He contends, "If Hegel had written his entire Logic and said in the Preface that it was merely an idea-experiment for the sake of argument, wherein even in many places he had shirked something, he might well have been the greatest thinker that ever lived. As it is, he is comical." (#99, pg. 89)

He states, "If by means of research in the natural sciences something could be found that would help to define the concept of mind and spirit, I would be the first to acquire a microscope, and I hope I should be as persevering as anyone. However, as I easily perceive by qualitative dialectic that... the world will not have advanced another step in 100,000 years, I will do precisely the opposite: preserve my soul and not waste one second of my life on curiosity." (#116, pg. 96)

He explains, "I am accused of causing young people to acquiesce in subjectivity. Maybe, for a moment. But how would it be possible to eliminate all the phantoms of objectivity that act as an audience, etc., except by stressing the category of the separate individual. Under the pretext of objectivity the aim has been to sacrifice individualities entirely. That is the crux of the matter." (#121, pg. 101-102)

He argues, "Actually, a Reformation for the purpose of abolishing the Bible now would have a good deal more validity than Luther's abolition of the Pope. This thing about the Bible has developed religiosity in scholarly and legalistic circles, but merely as entertainment. A sort of `learning' in that field has gradually seeped down to the very lowest class, and no one any longer reads the Bible merely as an individual human being. But this way of reading it causes irreparable harm; it then comes to be a stronghold for apologies and evasions etc. in relation to LIVING, for there is constantly some reference one must look up, and always this sham that one must make sure the doctrine is in perfect shape before one can begin to live in accordance with it---which means that one never gets around to it. The Bible Societies, this insipid caricature of the Missions, a company which, just like any other business-company, works with money ... in just as worldly a way as other enterprises their wares: the Bible Societies have done irreparable harm." (#135, pg. 110-111)

He suggests, "Oh Socrates, Thou Noble Sage! Amid the crowd, surrounded by these thousands upon thousands, thou workest to split up `the herd' and seek out `the individual' that represents man's spiritual destiny. And Bernard [of Clairvaux] was a Christian, and it was in Christendom that it happened---and Socrates was a pagan---and yet there is more Christianity in the Socratic method than in the method of Saint

Bernard." (#161, pg. 127)

He confesses, "It is true that I believe in forgiveness for our sins, but I understand it in this way: that I must bear my penalty as heretofore, which means that I must remain in the painful prison of my reserve to the end of my days, remote, in a deeper sense, from community with others---yet feeling my penalty attenuated by the thought that God has forgiven me. I cannot, at least not yet, rise so high in faith... that I can eliminate this painful memory by faith. By clinging to faith I ward off despair, bear the pain and penalty of my reserve---and am so indescribably happy or blissful in that activity of mind and spirit which God so plentifully and mercifully has vouchsafed me. (#167, pg. 132-133)

He laments, "My task is new in this sense that in the 1800th year of Christianity there is literally no one from whom I can learn how to go about it." (#179, pg. 147)

He asserts, "There is only one proof of the truth of Christianity: the inner proof... In the Epistle of St. John (1, 5, 9) this is hinted... It is not the reasons that motivate belief in the Son of God, but the other way round, belief in the Son of God constitutes the evidence." (#201, pg.164-165) He adds, "A dogmatic system should not be built on the basis of understanding faith, but on the basis of understanding that one cannot understand faith." (#202, pg. 165)

He proposes, "No, I would be tempted to make Christianity another proposition: Let us gather in every single copy of the New Testament, let us cart the whole collection out to an open place, or up a mountain top, and then, while all of us kneel down, let someone speak to God, saying: Take it back, this book; we humans, the way we are, should not get involved with such a book; it only makes us unhappy. Now, I suggest that... we ask Christ to take another road. That would be talking honestly and humanly---something else than this disgusting, hypocritical parson's twaddle about life being of no value to us without the invaluable boon of Christianity." (#216, pg. 177)

He adds, "Thus with the worship of God in Christianity. Man too has wings; he has imagination. It is meant to help him really to soar---but all we do is play, we let imagination entertain us in a quiet hour, in a Sunday reverie, and for the rest we stay as we were; then on Monday we regard it as God's grace that we grow plump, fat, tasty and put on an extra layer of yellow fat, save money, acquire prestige in the world, beget many children and are successful---all this we regard as proof of God's grace. But those who really get involved with God... suffer and look worried, have trouble, toil and affliction---of those we say: There, it is quite obvious that they don't enjoy the grace of God." (#217, pg. 178-179)

He concludes, "Christianity can be communicated only by witnesses, i.e. by men who existentially express what they proclaim, realize it in their lives." (#219, pg. 180)

This is a fascinating collection of excerpts from Kierkegaard's diaries, that will be "must reading" for anyone seriously studying Kierkegaard.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

An excellent introduction to the life and thought of Kierkegaard

By Shalom Freedman

This Diary is an excellent introduction to the life and thought of Kierkegaard. Selections are made from Kierkegaard's ten- thousand page diary and placed in a rough chronological order. Interspersed are separate sections devoted to his Writing his view of Christianity and Christendom. Kierkegaard in the great share of his books used indirect methods of communication, in part because he did not want to preach to the reader. He rather wanted the reader to by thinking for himself come to the right conclusion.

In his diaries Kierkegaard was able to express his feelings and opinions more directly. He also in them wrote down his major ideas and worked them out. The Journals are the great mine from which he takes the materials for the books.

This Diary opens with a section on his Moods in Life. It has sections on his Childhood and his relation to his Father, on his reading of Paul Moller. The Corsair Affair also has a section of its own. The great turning point of Kierkegaard's life was his breaking of his engagement with Regine Olsen, of which he later said "Had I had faith I would have married Regine". Its relation to his 'thorn in the flesh' is one of the most speculated upon questions in regard to a philosopher's life.

Kierkegaard was not only a writer of immense spiritual depth but also one of great irony and hidden humor.

These Diaries do give a sense of the real Kierkegaard.

They are accompanied by excellent explanatory notes.

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

what a great diary

By Beth

Well it isn't really a diary. It's more like reading his philosophy, but more intimate. Even though I like his philosophy, I preferred this the most. In this, he doesn't make subtle hints about his father and Regine. He completely bares his relationship with them and it's rather heartbreaking. Also Kierkegaard has a fresh sarcastic wit that I wasn't expecting.

See all 5 customer reviews...



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