

This is from "the Kierkegaard Corner" submitted by Brian Coatney

Kierkegaard, Soren. *Sickness unto Death. A Kierkegaard Anthology*. Ed. Robert Bretall. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1946. 343-345. Print.

[Here's Kierkegaard on independent self:](#)

"A despairing man wants despairingly to be himself. But if he despairingly wants to be himself, he will not want to get rid of himself. Yet, so it seems; but if one inspects more closely, one perceives that after all the contradiction is the same. That self which he despairingly wills to be is a self which he is not (for to will to be that self which one truly is indeed the opposite of despair); what he really wills is to tear his self away from the Power which constituted it. But notwithstanding all his despair, that Power is the stronger, and it compels him to be the self he does not will to be. But for all that he wills to be rid of himself, to be rid of the self which he is, in order to be the self he himself has chanced to choose. To be the *self* as he wills to be would be his delight (though in another sense it would be equally despair), but to be compelled to be *self* as he does not will to be is his torment, namely, that he cannot get rid of himself" (343-344).

[Here's Kierkegaard on consciousness and the devil:](#)

"With every increase in the degree of consciousness, and in proportion to that increase, the intensity of despair increases; the more consciousness, the more intense the despair. This is everywhere to be seen, most clearly in the maximum and minimum of despair. The devil's despair is the most intense despair, for the devil is sheer spirit, and therefore absolute consciousness and transparency; in the devil there is no obscurity which might serve as a mitigating excuse, his despair is therefore absolute defiance. This is the maximum of despair" (345).

[Here's Kierkegaard on why people don't let themselves be conscious:](#)

The reason is that the sensuous nature and the psycho-sensuous completely dominate him; the reason is that he lives in the sensuous categories agreeable/disagreeable, and says goodbye to truth, etc.; the reason is that he is too sensuous to have the courage to venture to be spirit or to endure it. However vain and conceited men may be, they have nevertheless for the most part a very lowly conception of themselves, that is to say, they have no conception of being spirit, the absolute of all that a man can be" (345).

Soren Kierkegaard # 1



by Brian Coatney

As some of you know, Sharon Roy gave me the book *Kierkegaard for Beginners* by Donald D. Palmer, a book that to my surprise immediately swallowed me in the most fantastic way, with all suspicion surprisingly set aside that once might have prevented me from an attraction to Kierkegaard, since none less than Francis Schafer wrote about Kierkegaard as dangerous and even heretical it seemed.

Yet that ever dangerous Norman Grubb loved Kierkegaard, as he loved Walter Lanyon, Walter Russell and other writers that singed my evangelical hair. But if I would question whether one should read such and such an author, Norman would say, "I see him in the sea of God." I remember Norman sitting in Page Prewitt's den reading a thick red volume of Kierkegaard and humming in ecstasy, while I wondered, "What is that all about?" And how often did we hear Norman quote Kierkegaard: "Truth is subjective," which had a lure to it, along with the follow-up statement, "We walk on 20, 000 fathoms." Why it takes so many fathoms I do not know: one or two would be miraculous to me. Yet I grasped that somehow faith always bases certainty on something that appears not certain, leaving the question of how far one can go with certainties or even what they are. This is why it always bothered me as well that Norman would say that he could not prove his message.

From Donald Palmer's book, with its quotes of Kierkegaard and Palmer's own commentary, I picked up immediately that Kierkegaard is a writer of great irony, which is to say, wit. For years, books of information, especially on theology, bored me for the lack of literary style, warmth of

character, and humor; C.S. Lewis seemed one of a kind for his ability to marry truth and style; and I think that if we are called to suffer in this life, we should be allowed to suffer with enough jokes to keep us from becoming bores and outliners of systematic thought? So I wondered, when I went to the library on campus, "Will I find myself disappointed with an actual volume of Kierkegaard himself; will I have really enjoyed Donald Palmer, but find Kierkegaard too complex, unapproachable, or beyond my ken?"

So I marched in and checked out the huge volume, *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by David F. Swenson. Immediately, I found a syntax to match Milton or Emerson--one that many readers would find unsuitable for drive-through efficiency; I found a literary style that excites me, not for sophistication that breeds the wrong kind of pride, but one that excites me for the elevation and momentum I feel from the beginning. I do not have to travel far with Don Quixote to enjoy him; each adventure leaves me with hunger to know where the road leads, but each adventure also satisfies for that day's pleasure, like when we say, "Do you remember the time when...?"

Kierkegaard also brings up in his introduction that unsettling issue disturbing to us when we want to lean primarily into a historical faith; for after all, didn't Dr. Luke, for example, write out a carefully documented, eye witness account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? And yet, the likes of Jacob Boehme and William Law frequently ATTACK worshippers knowing only a historical Christ: merely historical practitioners prove predictable, comfortable, complacent, and perhaps not even born again (it might seem frightful to question that, but questioning cannot hurt anyone; it may irritate, and we may choose to finally ignore the confronter, but questions assist us. Hm, a taste of dialectic).

So when, in italics, Kierkegaard says, "*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?*" I recognized the voices of the past again: Jacob Boehme, William Law, and our own Norman Grubb. Along with this question, Kierkegaard brings up the parable of the ten virgins, five of whom let their lamps die out; and he says of those that they lost infinite passion, meaning that those lacking infinite passion will

not be infinitely interested in truth, therefore also implying that facts of history can do such a person no good.

Platinum! Now we are on a different ground, not one that needs to discredit a Dr. Luke, but a ground that demands something from within the observer, namely the subjective, namely that which is heated to a continuously hotter flame, never diminishing. This person will know what to do with a fact, for that fact will not be separate from a condition of passion in the observer. And even observer sounds too objective, for as Norman said, "What you take, takes you," and what is taking but the passion of the taker to the degree of the desire in the taker?

This reminds me of Mississippian Pat Downs who, at a conference in 1988, in her drawl, speaking of our message, said, "This message is for the desperate." But some heard her speak of Father Desperate and later asked her about this man of whom she spoke, confusing her, until a translator of Mississippian made the point clear between Pat and her listeners. But my point is really that only desperation opens us up to the subjective. Amazingly, our ears open when we hurt badly enough, and hell is never hurting badly enough, contradictory as that sounds.

So I find myself already immersed in that mystery of freedom and desire, via Kierkegaard and will give an account again to those of you interested as I anticipate but already enjoy what I already know will be a journey further into the kept life. I don't mean kept as only a defensive posture, meaning just the willingness to be kept from sin; but I mean kept in a discovery sense, like that of a Columbus or Magellan. This is not now the prevention from evil, from Satan and his lie of independent self--a necessary keeping as we know from having hung helplessly over the flames of hell and over the torments of the devil, and having to, in our freedom, find our desire to be kept, and then find the Keeper, and then find a steady walk in the keeper.

I mean keeping now in the sense of keeping over the abyss of the good, over the abyss of freedom that hovers over all potentiality in Christ Jesus. I mean the freedom to walk with appetite in the light, with an eternal hunger for one thing: "God is love," and He is love, therefore in my form. I desire the keeping, not only to avoid Satan and evil in my consciousness, but to eat abundantly to full satisfaction of all that He is in a human consciousness. This is to know God, both wholly and in part:

wholly, because His love is One and cannot be divided, and love in part because we can never arrive at the infinite point.

However, I don't even wish to do that anymore;, for acceptance of my humanity as the vessel and as the branch on the vine of Christ means that I eternally glory in finding more; whereas when I had to be a god myself, or rather had to be God myself, to not minimize here, but acknowledge the full depth of pride, I found continual frustration at the prospect of something new to learn. So now I can have the whole and enjoy the whole in the part, and continue forever in the quest of what, or rather, Whom I know.

For those interested, I will send the next installment of the best thing since I listened to the Lone Ranger on the radio as a gradeschooler.

Soren Kierkegaard #2



Quotes from 1946 Random House *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, edited by Robert Bretall

1840 Journal entry

"And just as the individual, however freely he may develop, can never reach the point at which he becomes absolutely independent, since true freedom on the contrary consists rather in freely appropriating that which is given, and consequently in being absolutely dependent through freedom, so too with language, and moreover we sometimes find the mistaken tendency of not wishing to accept language as the freely appropriated 'given,' but of giving it to oneself, whether this shows itself in the very highest regions, where it easily ends in silence (the negation of language), or in personal isolation in complete gibberish" (12).

1841 Journal entry

“It requires more courage to suffer than to act, more courage to forget than to remember, and perhaps the most wonderful thing about God is that he can forget man’s sins” (13).

1841 Journal entry

How beautiful, how true and how heartfelt are the words of J. Boehme where he says: in the moment of temptation the thing is not to have many thoughts, but to hold fast to *one* thought. God give me strength.

From *Either/Or*

“Boredom is the root of all evil.”

“In the case of children, the ruinous character of boredom is universally acknowledged. Children are always well-behaved as long as they are enjoying themselves. This is true in the strictest sense; for they are already beginning to be bored—boredom is already approaching, though from a different direction. In choosing a governess, one therefore takes into account not only her sobriety, her faithfulness, and her competence, but also her aesthetic qualifications for amusing the children {...}” (22).

“Adam was bored alone; then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*; then the population of the world increased, and the peoples were bored *en masse*. To divert themselves they conceived the idea of constructing a tower high enough to reach the heavens. This idea is itself as boring as the tower was high, and constitutes a terrible proof of how boredom gained the upper hand” (23). (My comment: this reminds me too of church building programs at times).

Translators note on *Either/ Or*

“Either/Or was S.K.’s answer to Hegel’s concept of ‘mediation,” i.e. the preservation of contradictory ideas—‘thesis’ and ‘antithesis’—in a ‘synthesis which includes and somehow reconciles them both. For the principle of ‘both—and’ Kierkegaard had already acquired an unyielding hatred. In a rhetorical moment, he exclaims, ‘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” (19)

Faith is Against Understanding

Soren Kierkegaard

“Faith is against understanding; faith is on the other side of death. And when you died or die to yourself, to the world, then you also died to all immediacy to yourself, also to your understanding. It is when all confidence in yourself or in human support, and also in God in an immediate way, is extinct, when every probability is extinct, when it is as on a dark night—it is indeed death we are describing—then comes the life-giving Spirit and brings faith. This faith is stronger than the whole world; it has the power of eternity; it is the Spirit’s gift from God, it is your victory over the world in which you more than conquer.”

--Source: For Self-examination: Recommended to the Present Age (1851).

Love

By Soren Kierkegaard

"What is it that makes a person great, admired by creation, well pleasing in the eyes of God? What is it that makes a person strong, stronger than the whole world; what is it that makes him weak, weaker than a child? What is it that makes a person unwavering, more unwavering than a rock; what is it that makes him soft, softer than wax? -- it is love! What is it that is older than everything? It is love. What is it that outlives everything? It is love. What is it that cannot be taken but itself takes all? It is love. What is it that cannot be given but itself gives all? It is love. What is it that perseveres when everything falls away? It is love. What is it that comforts when all comfort fails? It is love. What is it that endures when everything is changed? It is love. What is it that remains when the imperfect is abolished? It is love. What is it that witnesses when prophecy is silent? It is love. What is it that does not cease when the vision ends? It is love. What is it that sheds light when the dark saying ends? It is love. What is it that gives blessing to the abundance of the gift? It is love. What is it that gives pith to the angel's words? It is love. What is it that makes the widow's gift an abundance? It is love. What is it that turns the words of the simple person into wisdom? It is love. What is it that is never changed even though everything is changed? It is love; and that alone is love, that which never becomes something else."



"First comes despair over the earthly or something earthly, then despair over oneself about the eternal. Then comes defiance, which really is despair by the aid of the eternal, the despairing abuse of the eternal in the self to the point of being despairingly determined to be oneself. But just because it is despair by the aid of the eternal it lies in a sense very close to the true, and just because it lies very close to the true it is infinitely remote. The despair which is the passageway to faith is also by the aid of the eternal: by the aid of the eternal the self has courage to lose itself in order to gain itself. Here on the contrary it is not willing to begin by losing itself, but wills to be itself."

~Source: The Sickness Unto Death (1849)

Author: Søren Kierkegaard using the pseudonym Anti-Climacus

The Antidote for Despair

Taken from: *Sickness unto Death*

Soren Kierkegaard

The antidote that Kierkegaard offers for despair is Christianity, that is, to be the beloved of God - His adopted child, His bride - which is what every human being made in the image of God is meant to become. (p.85) "That the self in being itself and in willing to be itself rests transparently in God." (p.83) This was famously confessed by St. Augustine centuries earlier: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, oh Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."

So when the achiever believes he can be a child of God, he never has to worry about proving his worth to society, his family, or his friends ever again. Anxieties over keeping his esteemed position are swallowed up by his security in the highest position possible. His being is no longer tied with his status, his job, his car, or his wife's looks or background. His worth comes solely from being a child of God, a position that he does not have to earn, or ever have to worry about losing. Consequently, he has the confidence and freedom to do what others look down on. Moreover, he no longer feels like boasting about infinitely lesser achievements. For unlike non-God relationships, the achiever's worth is measured not by what he does or has but by what God alone has done for him in Christ. Therefore the achiever can just be because his value is no longer determined by what he does or owns. He can do his best without having to be the best. He can take into account criticism of his work or rebuke of his behavior without taking it personally. He can just work without the oppressive feeling that his life depends on it. Suicide is no longer a real option when he has lost his job or his loved one. For Christ is his life.

A selection of quotes from:

Soren Kierkegaard

offered by Jim Fowler

...the man-pleaser, the one who manages successfully with everyone - he who possesses no sharp edges. God never uses such people. The true individual, anyone who is going to be directly involved with God, will not and cannot avoid the human bite. He will be thoroughly misunderstood. God is no friend of cozy human gathering.

Everyone who will genuinely serve the truth is by that very fact a martyr.

He who walks the narrow path of faith no one can advise, no one can understand.

The majority of people are not so afraid of holding a wrong opinion, as they are of holding an opinion alone.

If it is hard to bear the world's persecution, it is harder still to bear the responsibility for not having acted, to stand ashamed in eternity because you did not win the bold confidence that transforms shame into honor.

Most people think, speak, and write the way they sleep, eat and drink, without any question ever arising as to their relationship to the eternal.

Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backward. But then it forgets the other side -- that it must be lived forwards.

Without some kind of situational tension, there is no real opportunity of becoming...."

Every call from God is always addressed to the single individual. Precisely in this lies the difficulty and the examination, that the one who is called must stand alone, walk alone, alone with God.

Authentic religion has to do with passion...

If I could only have the experience of meeting a passionate thinker, that is, someone who honestly and honorably expressed in his life what he has understood.

The person who is neither cold or hot is an abomination, to God. God is no more served by dud individualities that a marksman is served by a rifle that, in the moment of decision, clicks instead of firing.

Life very much depends upon being alert to catch one's cue.

Adversities do not make a person weak, they reveal what strength he has.

He who himself does not wish to suffer cannot love him who has.

In order to swim you must take off all your clothes. In order to aspire to the truth you must undress in a far more inward sense, divest yourself of all your inward clothes, of thoughts, conceptions, selfishness. Only then are you sufficiently naked.

That Christ makes something big out of something small, as at the feeding of the five thousand, is usually referred to as a miracle. But Christ also works a miracle inversely -- makes something big (everything that wants to be something) into something little. He makes it infinitely nothing in humility.

It is dangerous business to arrive in eternity with possibilities that you have prevented from becoming actualities. Possibility is a hint from God. A person must follow it.

We delude ourselves into thinking that to refrain from venturing is modesty, and that it must please God as humility. No, no! Not to venture means to make a fool of God -- because all he is waiting for is that you go forth.

Act just once in such a manner that your action expresses that you fear God alone -- you will in some measure or other, instantly cause a scandal.

A human being is only an instrument and never knows when the moment will come when he will be put aside. If he himself does not at times evoke this thought, he is a hireling, an unfaithful servant, who is trying to free himself and to cheat the Lord of the uncertainty in which he comprehends his own nothingness. Even the highest mission in the spiritual world is only an errand.