

## Kierkegaard's Top Ten Hits

### #1 Fear and Trembling

Do you remember the Biblical story of Abraham taking his son Isaac to be sacrificed to God? Isn't it shocking to think that God commanded his most faithful servant to commit filicide? And have you ever wondered why Abraham never let Sarah in on his intention to kill their son or why he even obeyed God in the first place? According to Johannes de silentio (John of Silence), the pseudonym under which the book was published, Abraham can be seen either as a delusional murderer or the father of faith. This text extrapolates on the ethical issues of the story, tackling whether Abraham's actions can be justified and whether there is an Absolute Duty to God.

### #2 Concept of Anxiety

Every human being has experienced what is commonly referred to as anxiety. The word *anxiety* acts as an umbrella term, referring to a certain state of being. Whether one is experiencing PTSD, a panic attack, or insomnia, these are all anxious states. In this book, Kierkegaard does not go into the specific forms of anxiety, but rather tackles the concept as a whole. He defines it as the actualization of freedom as the possibility for possibility. Although it is treated as a mental illness in modern medicine, the Danish philosopher believed that "pills and powders" cannot erase this fundamental aspect of the human condition. "Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom," he writes. "Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate."

### #3 The Sickness Unto Death

Death can be defined, in biological terms, as the moment in which the electrical activity of the brain ceases. There is, however, another kind of death that Kierkegaard concerns himself with - despair, the death of the spirit. He identifies three different kinds of despair: (1) being unconscious in despair of having a self, (2) not wanting in despair to be oneself, and (3) wanting in despair to be oneself. These states of delusion are the true death, as they prevent one from living authentically. This gripping book dissects both the sickness and the cure afflicting humankind.

### #4 Repetition

Drawing from his own life, Kierkegaard writes about a young man who breaks off his engagement after having changed his mind. As time passes, one can say that time moves forward, yet our existence consists of repetitions and recollections. The difference between these two is that the former moves forward and the latter backwards. The protagonist travels to Berlin, a place which he once visited, with the hopes of repeating his experiences. Upon arriving there, he finds his old landlord is married, the theatre he visited has changed, etc. This simple experiment is but a microcosm of the greater questions concerning life, happiness, love, and God.

#### #5 Three Discourse on Imagined Occasions

Life is nothing but choices. Love, Death, and God are all parts of life. Kierkegaard delves into the choices that one has to make regarding these themes by imagining various occasions. In this philosophical experiment, he engages in *discourses* and contemplates these important, yet often overlooked, subjects.

#### #6 Either/Or

This is a philosophical novel representing two different views of life. One is the ethical view of life, while the other is that of the aesthetical. This two-volume work consists of a staggering 800 pages and explores the dilemmas one faces - the forks in the road. Its structure is unique and pleasing to read, varying from aphorisms to passionate letters, *Either/Or* is definitely considered to be one of Kierkegaard's greatest selections of his corpus.

#### #7 Works of Love

The word 'love' is perhaps one of the most vague and grossly overused term in our modern society. Thus, making this book an essential read. Unlike the English language which has only one word for love, this text focuses on the Christian *agape* love, as opposed to *eros* (erotic love) and *phileo* (preferential love towards family and friends). Love is not only one of the most central topics of Christ's teachings, it is also a vital concept in our society - the force that unites humans. Kierkegaard's insight into this topic establishes this book as an essential read for both Christian and non-Christian alike.

#### #8 On the Concept of Irony

This particular text was Kierkegaard's doctoral thesis and first major philosophical text. Although it is an academic dissertation, it is unique nonetheless all his other works. Like most philosophers of the past, he was fluent in many languages, including Ancient Greek. In this work he argues while Plato and Xenophon portray Socrates as a serious figure, it was Aristophanes who most accurately depicted Socrates in '*The Clouds*,' displaying great knowledge of the intricacies of Socratic irony. In the latter part of the dissertation, Kierkegaard analysis modern interpretations of irony, turning towards Fichte, Schlegel, and Hegel. Although knowledge of Ancient Greek and German Post-Kantian philosophy may be necessary, it is not a dreary and dry read as one might expect, thus a treasure for academician and layperson.

#### #9 Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments

In an age where Hegel's work was heiled and Hegelianism prevailed, Kierkegaard wrote an entire book attacking Hegel's system outlined in the *Science of Logic*. He opposes what he sees as Hegel's deterministic philosophy. In this work, he tackles the concepts objectivity, subjectivity, and communication. He argues that objective truth is the end goal of philosophy, history, and science, but is, nevertheless, subject to doubt. Subjective truth, on the other hand,

deals not with the external world but rather with one's experiences and relation to God. He relates this to forms of communication: direct communication is something that does not need to be experienced in order to be understood, whereas indirect is the polar opposite. These distinctions are of increasing importance in an age where communication becomes an indispensable tool for success and stability in life.

#### #10 The Corsair Affair

This book recounts the events of what is also known as "the most renowned controversy in all of Danish literary history." The Corsair was a Danish newspaper famous for gossip and caricatures. After one of Kierkegaard's old acquaintances and admirers of his earlier works humiliated him, the philosopher retaliated with wit and anger against not only the culprits but the newspaper as a whole. This text consists of all the relevant documents and exchanges of the incident, a historical introduction, and the sequence of events that led up to the infamous controversy.