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PENGUIN CLASSICS

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

Papers and Journals: A Selection



Synopsis

One of the greatest thinkers of the nineteenth century, Søren Kierkegaard (1814-55) often expressed himself through pseudonyms and disguises. Taken from his personal writings, these private reflections reveal the development of his own thought and personality, from his time as a young student to the deep later internal conflict that formed the basis for his masterpiece of duality *Either/Or* and beyond. Expressing his beliefs with a freedom not seen in works he published during his lifetime, Kierkegaard here rejects for the first time his father's conventional Christianity and forges the revolutionary idea of the 'leap of faith' required for true religious belief. A combination of theoretical argument, vivid natural description and sharply honed wit, the *Papers and Journals* reveal to the full the passionate integrity of his lifelong efforts 'to find a truth which is truth for me'.

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Customer Reviews

In his short life Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1814-1855) wrote over seven thousand pages of papers and journal entries, enough writing to fill an entire bookshelf. This Penguin collection organizes Kierkegaard's journals into eight major phases of the philosopher's life, from

Kierkegaard's early 20s to the last years of his life before he collapsed on the street at age 43. There is great insight and wisdom here. There is also wry humor and penetrating observations on 19th century European society and the ever-present existential challenges of human experience . To give a small taste of what a reader will find in the 600+ pages of this book, below are several of Kierkegaard's pithy entries along with my very brief comments: From the chapter: 1834-1836: THE FIRST JOURNAL ENTRIES "People understand me so little that they fail even to understand my complaints that they do not understand me." ----- Do you think you understand Kierkegaard? What do you think the Danish philosopher would think of your understanding? "Damn and hell, I can abstract from everything but not from myself. I can't even forget myself when I sleep." ----- With reflections (and curses) like this, it is no surprise Kierkegaard is considered the father of existentialism! From the chapter: 1848-1849: THE WIDENING OF THE RIFF "No wonder I am thought mad. All that supports my endeavor is what might recommend it in eternity but secularly gives it a bad name and deprives me of respect. I earn nothing from it, it is not my livelihood or my job. And I am alone in a little country - where nevertheless a thousand priests are paid into thinking they are Christians." ----- A pointed observation about established religion if there ever was one. And quite a statement of how the general public views a philosopher and original thinker. From the last 2 chapters: THE TRUTH IS NAKED "To go swimming one takes off one's clothes; to pursue the truth one must take one's time in a much more inward sense, divesting oneself of a much more inward attire of thoughts, ideas, selfishness and the like, before one is naked enough." ----- What do we in the 21st century have to unlearn to be better prepared to see the naked truth? Perhaps our first step would be to turn off our plasma screens and unplug our devices pumping in news or entertainment or music. ABOUT MYSELF "Slight, thin and delicate, denied practically all the physical conditions which, compared with others, could qualify me, too, as a whole human being; melancholy, sick in my mind, profoundly and inwardly a failure in many ways, I was given one thing: an eminently astute mind, presumably to keep me from being completely defenseless." ----- Starting from his earliest year in the schoolyard, Kierkegaard had to do battle shackled with his frail, prematurely old body and a childhood poisoned by his melancholic father. But his mind was so unbelievably sharp. Thus, young Søren was given the nickname 'The Fork'. Fortunately for lovers of literary philosophy, SK was also given a natural gift to write! PERSECUTION "In our times persecution just doesn't exist - because Christendom has been made so lacking in character that really there is nothing to persecute." ----- I recall a Kierkegaard quote where he observed the prime predictable fact of modern-day society is the abysmal lack of character. I have taken this quote as a challenge at every phase of my own life. SOCRATES - THE OTHER "Socrates always

talked exclusively of food and drink - but really he was talking and thinking all the time of the infinite. The others are always talking, and in the loudest voices, about the infinite, but really they are talking and thinking all the time about food and drink." ----- Two rhetorical questions: What is the prime topic of your conversation? What is the truth for which you are willing to live and die?INTROVERSION"We are warned against introversion; you might just as well warn against Christianity." ----- You don't have to be a follower of the Christian faith to see how we all must retain the integrity of our inner life.I do not read these journal entries the way I read a novel, from beginning to end; rather, I read and reread one entry at a time. There is enough literary philosophy contained in this book to keep me going until I'm at least a 100 years old.

This book is a must read in order to understand the very lifeblood of Kierkegaard's philosophy and existence!! Its powerful, very revealing of the character himself in ways that his published books don't portray as clearly. He is very open and definite in his philosophy here and completely reveals his heart and faith. Please get this book even though it may be a long read. It is so worth it. I love how deep Kierkegaard goes in his thinking and how real he is with himself and all of us. He is no thinker to tickle your ears but a master at pricking the very spirit and heart of a person and goes so deep and yet reveals the bigger picture in ways that almost no person has done before or after him. This is a great book to read to understand more fully who the man is and what he believes, which makes all his other works more lively, clear and captivating!!!

The 'Journals' of Kierkegaard are not simply the testing - ground for many of his ideas and projects, they are the life- record which indicates his mood and feeling. He began them in 1833 when he was twenty, and wrote them to the end of his life. They served in a way as his most important and trusted friend. In them he contemplated important life- decisions. They are an important supplement to his most important works, and contain many of his most original thoughts and aphorisms.To give a real feeling of the Journals I will quote one of the most famous passages at some length. It was written in 1843." . What I really need is to be clear about what I am to do, not what I must know, except in the way knowledge must precede all action. It is a question of understanding my destiny, of seeing what the Deity really wants me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die. And what use here would it be if I were to discover a so-called objective truth, or if I worked my way through the philosophers' systems and were able to call them all to account on request, point out inconsistencies in every single circle? And what use here would it be to be able to work out a theory of the state, and put all the pieces from so many

places into one whole, construct a world which, again, I myself did not inhabit but merely held up for others to see? What use would it be to be able to propound the meaning of Christianity, to explain many separate facts, if it had no deeper meaning for myself and for my life? "In this passage Kierkegaard contemplates and fleshes out his own life- mission. Note how rich the passage is in the figurative 'as if' language which so enriched his writing. Note too how the writing despite its somewhat awkward mode of motion makes definite progress towards a wise and turning- point life decision."

As of of the most influential of Western philosophers, this anthology of selected papers by Kierkegaard is a nice way to wade through the sea of his writing without drowning. One certainly gets a good feel for his zeitgeist, including his views on politics, religion and life in general. Only for the scholarly.

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