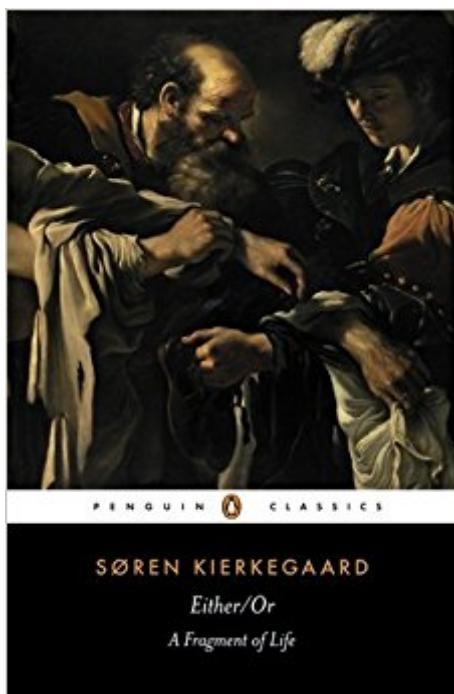


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Either/Or: A Fragment Of Life (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

In Either/Or, using the voices of two characters—the aesthetic young man of part one, called simply "A," and the ethical Judge Vilhelm of the second section—Kierkegaard reflects upon the search for a meaningful existence, contemplating subjects as diverse as Mozart, drama, boredom, and, in the famous Seducer's Diary, the cynical seduction and ultimate rejection of a young, beautiful woman. A masterpiece of duality, Either/Or is a brilliant exploration of the conflict between the aesthetic and the ethical - both meditating ironically and seductively upon Epicurean pleasures, and eloquently expounding the noble virtues of a morally upstanding life. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Danish

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) was born in Copenhagen, the youngest of seven children. His childhood was unhappy, clouded by the religious fervour of his father, and the death of his mother,

his sisters and two brothers. Educated at the School of Civic Virtue, he went on to study theology, liberal arts and science at university, gaining a reputation for his academic brilliance and extravagant social life. He began to criticize Christianity, and in 1841 broke off his engagement to concentrate on his writing. Over the next ten years he produced a flood of works, in particular twelve major philosophical essays, many written under noms de plume. By the end of his life he had become an object of public ridicule, but he is now enjoying increasing acclaim. Alastair Hannay was educated at the Edinburgh Academy, the University of Edinburgh and University College London. In 1961 he became a resident of Norway and is now Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oslo.

one of the great literary philosophical poetical psychological works of our time - of any time a magnificent study of the human condition

Note: This review concerns the abridged Penguin paperback edition translated by Alastair Hannay. Now, a prefatory note to every reviewer who described this book as a "difficult" or "challenging" or "dense" read: You are all guilty of scaring me away from this book (and Kierkegaard in general) for over ten years. Sometimes I think there exists a very widely represented personality so jealous, stuffy, covetous, and academic that they sort of enjoy making a book appear too difficult for a general audience just so they can feel superior to everyone around them. I hate these little scholastic gremlins and I hope you suffer all the fates eternal of Prometheus, Tantalus, and Sisyphus combined.*A note to anyone worried this book is too hard to read: IT IS NOT DIFFICULT! It is all those adjectives I used in my review's title: "Lucid, Pithy, Wise, Engrossing, Accessible, Universal, Witty, Beautiful, Immediate, Personal, and Important." (That list comprises my definition of real art; therefore, Either/Or is real art.) I think Either/Or has been misfiled in bookstores and libraries: This is a work of literature, not philosophy. Like all great literature (and music and paintings and sculpture) Either/Or is innately philosophical but it is written in a kind of lyric, poetical narration that sets it far away from, say, Hegel or Kant. It reads a lot more like a Platonic dialogue or a classical invective. Kierkegaard is both Proust and Aurelius; Either/Or is both A Search for Lost Time and The Meditations. The book is also very clever and variegated: It's at times cynical, at times sorrowful, at times nihilistic, at times optimistic, and very often it is comedic to the degree that I burst out laughing (we laugh because a mirror has been held up to our eyes). Either/Or seems to be a book about everything, like Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy or Hugo's Les Misérables: it is what Allan Bloom would have called "a total book." Kierkegaard has a talent for packing the

contents of ten books into the clause of a single sentence. And when he is not being utterly concise Kierkegaard can do as good a job as Proust in teasing a whole universe out of fleeting and otherwise commonplace moments: He can slow the camera down to a halt and, to borrow a modern simile, like Morpheus pausing the Agent Training simulation in "The Matrix", walk about the scene commenting with nuance, grace, and an often wholly refreshing acerbity. I promise you will be rereading and quoting paragraph after paragraph--it's that good. To those worried readers I comfort you with this: You will fall in love with this book on page 43. That's the first page of the Diapsalmata section (the book is divided in two parts; this is the first). The Diapsalmata starts with a series of concise observations in a style similar to the Maxims of La Rochefoucauld, the Analects of Confucious, or the Pensees of Pascal; however, Kierkegaard renders his lines with a style eclipsing, at times, any other writer. This quality alone proves Kierkegaard a genius. (It also proves, one should add, the genius of the translator Alastair Hannay.) All Kierkegaard's more obscure allusions and metaphors are explained in a very complete notes section at the back of the book. To conclude: Either/Or is one of the best books I've ever read, full stop. Good luck! *Prometheus was tied to the side of a cliff and had his liver eaten every day; Tantalus was doomed to stand in a pool just out of reach of both water and food; Sisyphus was made to roll a boulder up a hill every day only to have it kicked back down the hill once it reached the top. Those Greeks sure knew how to punish didn't they?

Great!

Dude this book is awesome. "Either" is an easy fun read. "Or" is a little tougher but will give you a lot to think about. Even though Kierkegaard wrote this so long ago, it's the most relatable philosophical book I've ever read! He's like eloquently describing things that I've experienced but never was able to understand or put into words. Real good! Read this!

This review is of the Kindle version of the Hannay translation of Either/Or, a pioneering work of phenomenology and religious existentialism. It appears that the full edition (Hong translation) is about 800 pages (the main text) whereas the Hannay is about 600 pages. Even this abridged version was extremely taxing and took an enormous amount of time and concentration. For example, readers need to have at least - or quickly acquire! - the necessary background, such as the aesthetic theories of Aristotle and Hegel, Antigone and other Greek tragedies, the ethical theories of Kant and Descartes philosophy. Without these and others, which Kierkegaard doesn't

always identify I certainly, and I'm sure others, would be unable to follow what's going on. I have found Stephen Evans introduction to Kierkegaard useful to this difficult work. I think a somewhat more expanded explanatory notes would have been useful. Part II has an entire section which appears to be a commentary on Kantian ethics without mentioning any sources so some more help would have guided the reader better, without having to go to the secondary literature. The Kindle table of contents had a few bad links but generally no problems. A word about reading a difficult "philosophical" text on Kindle. This was one the first times I tried it. For me, in retrospect, the costs outweighed the benefits. Unlike a work of fiction or an easier work which can be read more or less straight through, I found that a work that requires going back to previous sections and comparing passages and so on, difficult on kindle.

Soren Kierkegaard sometimes sounds like he is writing "philosophy", in the sense of stringing together words with a plausible simulacrum of meaning in a style that was accepted by a certain circle in the 18th and 19th centuries as indicating some deep intellectual process. And for all I know it did but since what they understood seemed to defy translation into human language they had better kept quiet than writing remove all doubt, if you catch my meaning. And sometimes Kierkegaard comes through with some laser like and very modern insight that gives you a real aha experience. But that's not why I am giving this edition three stars. I am giving this edition three stars because it is an abridgment and at least when I purchased it direct from Kindle there was no warning of this fact in the description - yeah, it was probably a harmless abridgment but that's not the point because it is up to me to decide if I want to read an abridgment and not some hidden cabal of editors and worse electronic booksellers who decide they can sell me an abridgment without mentioning it because they know better! Make that two stars. Three is too much.

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