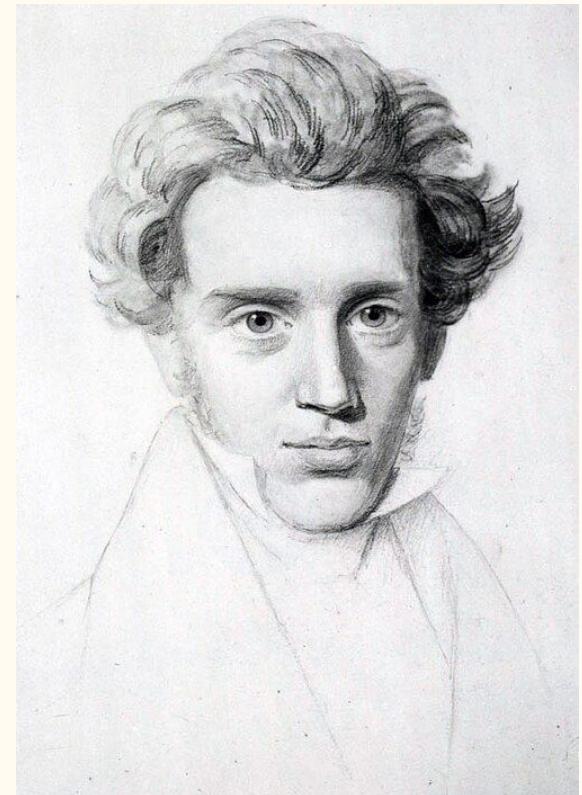


THE
FATHER
OF
EXISTENTIALISM



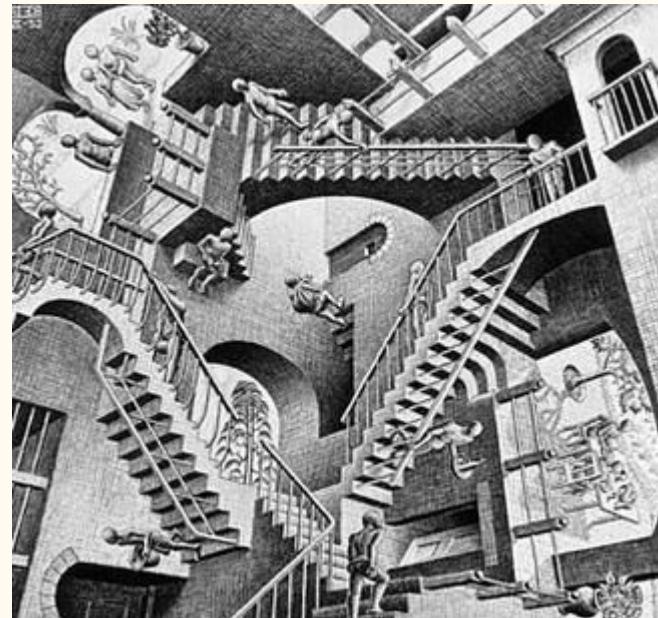
Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

- Danish philosopher and poet → also focused on theology and religious writing
- Widely considered the first existentialist philosopher → focus on subjective rather than objective
- Pioneered a focus on the concrete individual existence rather than abstract objective systems
- Can see the influence of Romanticism on his thinking



Against abstract thinking

“If Hegel had written the whole of his logic and then said, in the preface or some other place, that it was merely an experiment in thought in which he had even begged the question in many places, then he would certainly have been the greatest thinker who had ever lived. As it is, he is merely comic.”



Against Hegelian Abstraction

- Reacted against the abstract philosophical systems of Hegel □ they are a mansion in which the owner does not actually live

"In relation to their systems most systematizers are like a man who builds an enormous castle and lives in a shack close by; they do not live in their own enormous systematic buildings".

Historical Context

- Copenhagen experienced a rapid increase of urbanization and industrialization in the 1830s and 1840s
- During this time, the number of people employed in these textile factories doubled
- Created new social arrangements and “crowds” → which would become a focus against which Kierkegaard would write



Conflict of Scientific and Religious Values

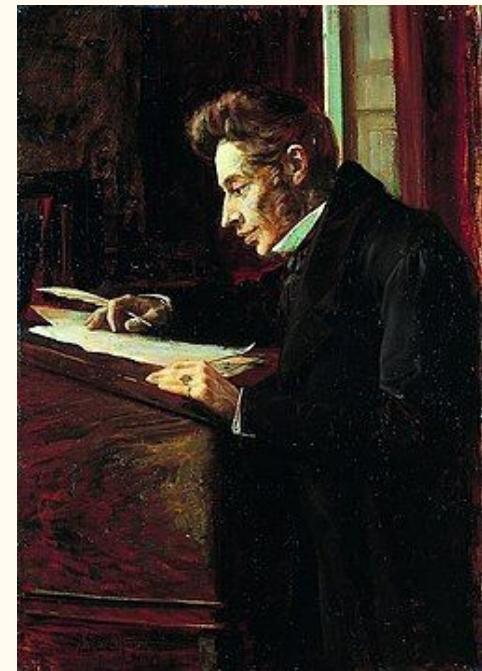
- Unlike Sartre's atheistic existentialism later on, Kierkegaard is deeply religious
- "Science and scholarship want to teach that becoming objective is the way. Christianity teaches that the way is to become subjective, to become a subject." (Works of Love, 1847)
- Science focuses too much on empiricism, and doesn't pay attention to the inner world of the spirit
- Wanted to focus on the inner, subjective relationship between individual and Christ
- Critical of Christianity as a state sponsored religion → believed it turned faith into a comfortable cultural conformity → it should be a personal and passionate relationship

On Hegel vs. Abraham

“It is supposed to be difficult to understand Hegel, but to understand Abraham is a trifle. To go beyond Hegel is a miracle, but to get beyond Abraham is the easiest thing of all. I for my part have devoted a good deal of time to the understanding of the Hegelian philosophy, I believe also that I understand it tolerably well, but when in spite of the trouble I have taken there are certain passages I cannot understand, I am foolhardy enough to think that he himself has not been quite clear. All this I do easily and naturally, my head does not suffer from it. But on the other hand when I have to think of Abraham, I am as though annihilated. I catch sight every moment of that enormous paradox which is the substance of Abraham's life, every moment I am repelled, and my thought in spite of all its passion cannot get a hairs-breadth further. I strain every muscle to get a view of it—that very instant I am paralyzed.”

The Leap of Faith

- Though this phrase in English does not appear exactly in Kierkegaard's writing, the words “leap” and “faith” often appear very near each other
- A conception about how one would act in love or how one would believe in God
- Neither is a decision based on evidence → both come with doubt, which is the rational part of the mind. Both are needed (faith and doubt)
- There is no perceptual access to God



Sickness Unto Death (1849)

- Written under pseudonym Anti-Climacus
- Title references Gospel of John 11:4: “This Sickness is not unto death” → when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead
- Human and materialist conception is that dead is the end of life → Christian conception of death is that is merely a shift or a stop along the journey of eternal life
- The true fear is not physical but spiritual death → this spiritual death comes from not living an authentic life and not embracing one’s self
- Individual is in despair if not aligned with God → because God is the true source of the self (the power that created the self)

Three Despairs relating the losing the self

1. **Not being conscious of having a self:** an inauthentic despair. Unaware of the self outside of finitude
2. **Not wanting to be oneself:** refusing to accept oneself outside of the immediacy of physical life and finitude → we realize we have a self, but rearrange our lives to make reflection on the self unnecessary (compare with Sartre's 'bad faith')
3. **Feeling like we are not ourselves:** we are aware of the self but refuse to acknowledge the dependence of that self on love → refusing to accept that the self is love

"In relating itself to itself, and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it."

“The greatest hazard of all, losing one’s self, can occur very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can occur so quietly; any other loss - an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc. - is sure to be noticed.”



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THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH