

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

EITHER/OR

VOLUME ONE

TRANSLATED BY
DAVID F. SWENSON AND LILLIAN MARVIN SWENSON
WITH REVISIONS AND A FOREWORD BY
HOWARD A. JOHNSON

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FOREWORD BY THE REVISER

Either/Or is a two-volume work, of which the present book is Volume I, the "Either." The companion volume—the "Or"—is also available in Princeton Paperbacks. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that Volume I, for all its intrinsic merit, makes no sense without Volume II. For what use is an "either" without an "or"—and *vice versa*?

To read the one volume without the other is to miss altogether Kierkegaard's fundamental intention with the work; it is to miss the *aut-aut*, the absolute disjunction, the summons to decide between alternative philosophies of life with which Kierkegaard here confronts us. Ideally and conceptually, the two parts belong together; it is only the accident of their size which, in English as in Danish, has caused them to be bound separately. Different as each volume is—in style, content, mood, and philosophical orientation—Kierkegaard means us to see them together, side by side, so that we may see the differences—and decide between them.

Neither volume represents fully or finally what Kierkegaard himself believes. Each volume is written by a pseudonym, yet each of the respective authors is something more than a *nom de plume*. Behind each pen name lies "a subjectively actual personality" created by Kierkegaard, to be sure, but created not to be simply a mouthpiece for Kierkegaard's own convictions, but rather to represent the convictions of a young romanticist, in Part I, and those of a mature ethical idealist, in Part II. That is to say, Kierkegaard employs the "mimic-method" of teaching. Instead of *lecturing* about romanticism and ethical idealism from the supposedly neutral standpoint of a professor's chair—showing first the good points and then the weak points of each—he impersonates two different individuals who are passionately committed to these divergent outlooks on life. Each man is "sold" on his own position, and each is out to "sell" the other—and you! Obviously Kierkegaard has sym-

pathies with both, but it is equally obvious—when the whole of Kierkegaard is known—that he personally is critical of both. With this book he intends only that we shall be sharply observant of two contrasted philosophies of life, the aesthetic and the ethical, and then choose between them—or else, perhaps, find ourselves impelled to seek a solution elsewhere. True to his method, Kierkegaard will not dictate the answer. What he does do, relentlessly, is compel us to take note of the question and of the need for decision.

Incomparably the best introduction to *Either/Or* has already been written by the man best qualified to write it—that is, by Kierkegaard himself, but it is a Kierkegaard hiding under the pseudonym of Victor Eremita, the purported editor of *Either/Or*. The Preface written by Victor in his capacity as editor stands at the forefront of the present volume. Reading this is *conditio sine qua non* if one is to be oriented in the several hundred pages which follow. Since Victor has said what he has to say with all desirable clarity, there is no need for me to go over the ground covered there. Nor is there any need to touch upon the points made in the prefatory material supplied by the translators of the first English edition, for all of this has been preserved intact in the present edition.

In this foreword of mine it remains only to explain that what is here offered is not a new translation but rather a revision of a previous translation, published in 1944 by Princeton University Press, Volume I being the work of the Swensons and Volume II the work of Walter Lowrie.

The untimely death in 1940 of that pioneer expositor and impeccable translator of Kierkegaard, Professor David F. Swenson, cut short his work, scarcely begun, of translating the first volume of *Either/Or*. As a labor of love, in tribute to his memory, Mrs. Swenson undertook to complete the work he had left unfinished, and at the same time she appealed to Dr. Lowrie to translate the second volume. In many instances it would be impossible to admire sufficiently the felicity of the words and phrases Mrs. Swenson has found to turn into English many of Kierkegaard's best passages—as well as his worst. It must be said that it is not altogether easy to make Kierkegaard speak English, which

is due in part to the differences between the two languages, but is due in larger part to the eccentricities of Kierkegaard's diction. Some of his sentences defy even the Danes. Strange that the Kierkegaard whose artistry with words places him in the first rank of Danish prose writers is also the Kierkegaard who at other times could turn out shockingly bad sentences which not even Danish grammarians and philologists can fathom. In the light of these difficulties, Mrs. Swenson showed great resourcefulness. Yet it was a knowledge of her own limitations which prompted Mrs. Swenson (in her Preface to the earlier Princeton edition) to express regret "that the reader of this first volume will find a certain unevenness of style due to my inability as a translator to attain the high standard demanded by my husband of himself." In addition, since Mrs. Swenson picked up the job of translation *in medias res*, certain errors in translation were inevitable. Most of these have, I hope, been corrected in the present edition.

The translation of the second volume, which is the achievement of Walter Lowrie, stands virtually unchallenged, although occasionally—in order to justify my existence—I have permitted myself a minor alteration or two, always with Lowrie's consent and usually at his insistence.

In short, as editor of this new edition, I have limited myself to the task of correcting what I deemed to be errors in translation. Almost nowhere have I yielded to the recurrent temptation of trying to improve the *style*—a task which still remains to be done, if the English-speaking world is to have in *Either/Or* what the Danish-speaking world has in *Enten-Eller*: a virtuoso performance with words, a premier example of prose poetry. Meanwhile, however, I have good hopes that the revised translation here offered, if oftentimes too literal to be good English, is nonetheless close enough to the Danish to make eminent good sense—by which I mean only that the text has become sufficiently intelligible to give sense to one's agreeing with it or taking issue with it.

To whatever degree intelligibility has been attained, it is due, in no small part, to the six members of the Family Schack of Copenhagen and to Niels and Majka Thulstrup

of Søborg who, with incredible patience, taught me Danish and answered ten thousand questions about the text of this maddening and strangely compelling book.

Howard A. Johnson

Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine

New York

May 5, 1958

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

This first English printing of Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* by the Princeton University Press in 1943, is noteworthy in that it marks the centennial anniversary of its first Danish publication in 1843. It was also the first of Kierkegaard's important contributions to Danish literature, and established his fame as a writer. The occasion for its production lay in the unhappy circumstance of his engagement to Regina Olsen and its subsequent breach, and this experience constituted the determining factor which placed Kierkegaard, almost at a stroke, in full possession of his aesthetic and literary powers. During the next twelve years he was responsible for a tremendous output of aesthetic and religious literature, the former, as in the case of *Either/Or*, being published not under his own name, but under the names of various pseudonyms. As he later explained, he was responsible for the creation of the pseudonymous authors, but not for their thoughts which were their own. Space forbids going into the subject of the pseudonyms in detail, but the interested reader is referred to Dr. Walter Lowrie's *Kierkegaard*, where the subject is discussed at some length. His religious productions were for the most part published in his own name.

Since I am not a Kierkegaard scholar it would be presumptuous for me in my own person to try to speak of the character and significance of *Either/Or*. As some degree of orientation is, however, necessary, or at least helpful to the reader for a proper understanding of the form and purpose of this work, I shall take the liberty of reproducing certain passages from my husband's writings, and also some quotations from Kierkegaard himself which have a particular bearing upon this first volume of *Either/Or*.

An ethical view of life is here contrasted with a purely aesthetic attitude. The aestheticist is the author of the papers that constitute the first volume, and is here designated as A; the ethicist B is responsible for the second volume,

consisting of letters written to A, couched in terms of friendly admonition. The title of the work suggests that the reader is confronted with a decisive alternative; he is invited to weigh and choose for himself.

A consciously non-ethical philosophy inspires the varied contents of the first volume. These consist of a group of lyrical aphorisms (*Diapsalmata*); a study of the spirit of modern tragedy contrasted with the ancient, together with a poetized sketch of a modernized *Antigone*; a psychological analysis of certain heroines of reflective grief (*Shadow-graphs*), with a poetic rendering of their inner self-communion; an oration on the subject of who may be regarded as the unhappiest of mortals; a review of Scribe's comedy, *The First Love*, sparkling with wit and buoyed up by an aesthetic enthusiasm which puffs its subject up into a masterpiece; a study of the sensuous-erotic in human nature, in so far as it is present in an unconsciously immediate manner, described through the medium of Mozart's music, particularly of his opera *Don Juan*; and a parallel study of a reflective seducer, who is not so much a personality with a consciousness, as he is the abstract embodiment of a force of nature. This seducer is presented through a section of his diary, copied surreptitiously—a diary which besides sketching brilliantly minor episodes, tells the story of a diabolically clever seduction, so managed that the outward appearance leaves it doubtful who is the seducer and who the seduced. In addition there is a bit of pure theorizing in the essay called the Rotation Method, in which a thoroughly sophisticated enjoyment-philosophy explains by means of what artistry its goal may best be realized, and the devil of boredom be exorcised.

Four years after the appearance of *Either/Or* Kierkegaard published his greatest philosophical work, the mammoth *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and in that he took occasion to review and evaluate the entire pseudonymous output. Of *Either/Or* he says in part: "It is an indirect polemic against speculative philosophy, which is indifferent to the existential. The fact that there is no result, and no finite decision, is an indirect expression for the truth as inwardness, and thus perhaps a polemic against the truth as knowl-

edge. . . . The *first* part represents an existential probability which cannot win through to existence, a melancholy that needs to be ethically worked up. Melancholy is its essential character, and this so deep that though autopathic, it deceptively occupies itself with the sufferings of others (Shadowgraphs), and for the rest deceives by concealing itself under the cloak of pleasure, rationality, demoralization, the deception and the concealment being at one and the same time its strength and its weakness, its strength in imagination, and its weakness in winning through to existence. It is an imagination-existence in aesthetic passion, and therefore paradoxical, colliding with time; it is in its maximum despair; it is therefore not existence but an existential possibility tending toward existence, and brought so close to it that you feel how every moment is wasted as long as it has not come to a decision. But the existential possibility in the existing 'A' refuses to become aware of this, and keeps existence away by the most subtle of all deceptions, by thinking; he has thought everything possible, and yet he has not existed at all. The consequence of this is that only the Diapsalmata are pure lyrical effusions; the rest has abundant thought-content, which may easily deceive, as if having thought about something were identical with existing. . . . The relation is not to be conceived as that between an immature and a mature thought, but between not existing and existing. 'A' is therefore a developed thinker, he is far superior to 'B' as a dialectician, he has been endowed with all the seductive gifts of soul and understanding; thereby it becomes clearer by what characteristic it is that 'B' differs from him. . . . If the book has any merit, this will essentially consist in not giving any result, but in transforming everything into inwardness: in the first part, an imaginative inwardness which evokes the possibilities with intensified passion, with sufficient dialectical power to transform all into nothing in despair; in the second part, an ethical pathos, which with a quiet, incorruptible, and yet infinite passion of resolve embraces the modest ethical task, and edified thereby stands self-revealed before God and man.

"There is no didacticism in the book, but from this it does

not follow that there is no thought-content; thus it is one thing to think, and another thing to exist in what has been thought. Existence is in its relation to thought just as little something following of itself as it is something thoughtless. . . . We have here presented to us an existence in thought, and the book or the work has no finite relation to anybody." —*Unscientific Postscript*, 226-228.

I regret very much that the reader of this first volume will find a certain unevenness of style due to my inability as a translator to attain the high standard demanded by my husband of himself. [Note by the reviser: *In a brief passage here omitted, Mrs. Swenson explained that "for greater readability," since "there are at the present time so relatively few students of Greek," she had supplied translations of all quotations from the Greek in the body of the text and had relegated the original Greek to the Notes. In this new edition, it must be explained that, for reasons of economy, the Greek has had to be suppressed altogether.*]

I am indebted to the partial translation of the "Diary of the Seducer" by Knud Fick for light on the translation of certain idiomatic expressions. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Paul T. Martinsen for careful reading of the manuscript with me. I also desire to express my sincere appreciation to Princeton University Press for unfailing courtesy and consideration in the face of the tremendous difficulties and delays incident to wartime shortages and restrictions.

Lillian Marvin Swenson

March 17, 1943

CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY THE REVISER	v
TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE	ix
PREFACE	3
DIAPSALMATA	17
THE IMMEDIATE STAGES OF THE EROTIC OR THE MUSICAL EROTIC	43
THE ANCIENT TRAGICAL MOTIF AS REFLECTED IN THE MODERN	135
SHADOWGRAPHS	163
THE UNHAPPIEST MAN	215
THE FIRST LOVE	229
THE ROTATION METHOD	279
DIARY OF THE SEDUCER	297
NOTES	443
INDEX	461

EITHER / OR

A Fragment of Life

EDITED BY
VICTOR EREMITA

PART I

Containing the papers of A

*Are passions, then, the pagans of the soul?
Reason alone baptized?*

YOUNG¹

Copenhagen, 1843

Can be purchased from the
University Bookseller C. A. Reitzel
Printed at Bianco Luno's Press

[Translation of the original title page]



PREFACE

[by Victor Eremita]

Dear Reader: I wonder if you may not sometimes have felt inclined to doubt a little the correctness of the familiar philosophic maxim that the external is the internal, and the internal the external.² Perhaps you have cherished in your heart a secret which you felt in all its joy or pain was too precious for you to share with another. Perhaps your life has brought you in contact with some person of whom you suspected something of the kind was true, although you were never able to wrest his secret from him either by force or cunning. Perhaps neither of these presuppositions applies to you and your life, and yet you are not a stranger to this doubt; it flits across your mind now and then like a passing shadow. Such a doubt comes and goes, and no one knows whence it comes, nor whither it goes. For my part I have always been heretically-minded on this point in philosophy, and have therefore early accustomed myself, as far as possible, to institute observations and inquiries concerning it. I have sought guidance from those authors whose views I shared on this matter; in short, I have done everything in my power to remedy the deficiency in the philosophical works.

Gradually the sense of hearing came to be my favorite sense; for just as the voice is the revelation of an inwardness incommensurable with the outer, so the ear is the instrument by which this inwardness is apprehended, hearing the sense by which it is appropriated. Whenever, then, I found a contradiction between what I saw and what I heard, then I found my doubt confirmed, and my enthusiasm for the investigation stimulated. In the confessional the priest is separated from the penitent by a screen; he does not see, he only hears. Gradually as he listens, he constructs an outward appearance which corresponds to the voice he hears. Consequently, he experiences no contradic-

tion. It is otherwise, however, when you hear and see at the same time, and yet perceive a screen between yourself and the speaker. My researches in this direction have met with varying degrees of success. Sometimes I have been favored by fortune, sometimes not, and one needs good fortune to win results along this road. However, I have never lost my desire to continue my investigations. Whenever I have been at the point of regretting my perseverance, an unexpected success has crowned my efforts. It was such an unexpected bit of luck which in a very curious manner put me in possession of the papers which I now have the honor of offering to the reading public. These papers have afforded me an insight into the lives of two men, which has confirmed my hunch that the external is not the internal. This was especially true about one of them. His external mode of life has been in complete contradiction to his inner life. The same was true to a certain extent with the other also, inasmuch as he concealed a more significant inwardness under a somewhat commonplace exterior.

Still, I had best proceed in order and explain how I came into possession of these papers. It is now about seven years since I first noticed at a merchant's shop here in town a secretary which from the very first moment I saw it attracted my attention. It was not of modern workmanship, had been used a good deal, and yet it fascinated me. It is impossible for me to explain the reason for this impression, but most people in the course of their lives have had some similar experience. My daily path took me by this shop, and I never failed a single day to pause and feast my eyes upon it. I gradually made up a history about it; it became a daily necessity for me to see it, and so I did not hesitate to go out of my way for the sake of seeing it, when an unaccustomed route made this necessary. And the more I looked at it, the more I wanted to own it. I realized very well that it was a peculiar desire, since I had no use for such a piece of furniture, and it would be an extravagance for me to buy it. But desire is a very sophisticated passion. I made an excuse for going into the shop, asked about other things, and as I was leaving, I casually made the shopkeeper a very low offer for the secretary. I thought

possibly he might accept it; then chance would have played into my hands. It was certainly not for the sake of the money I behaved thus, but to salve my conscience. The plan miscarried, the dealer was uncommonly firm. I continued to pass the place daily, and to look at the secretary with loving eyes. "You must make up your mind," I thought, "for suppose it is sold, then it will be too late. Even if you were lucky enough to get hold of it again, you would never have the same feeling about it." My heart beat violently; then I went into the shop. I bought it and paid for it. "This must be the last time," thought I, "that you are so extravagant; it is really lucky that you bought it, for now every time you look at it, you will reflect on how extravagant you were; a new period of your life must begin with the acquisition of the secretary." Alas, desire is very eloquent, and good resolutions are always at hand.

The secretary was duly set up in my apartment, and as in the first period of my enamourment I had taken pleasure in gazing at it from the street, so now I walked back and forth in front of it at home. Little by little I familiarized myself with its rich economy, its many drawers and recesses, and I was thoroughly pleased with my secretary. Still, things could not continue thus. In the summer of 1836 I arranged my affairs so that I could take a week's trip to the country. The postilion was engaged for five o'clock in the morning. The necessary baggage had been packed the evening before, and everything was in readiness. I awakened at four, but the vision of the beautiful country I was to visit so enchanted me that I again fell asleep, or into a dream. My servant evidently thought he would let me sleep as long as possible, for he did not call me until half-past six. The postilion was already blowing his horn, and although I am not usually inclined to obey the mandates of others, I have always made an exception in the case of the postboy and his musical theme. I was speedily dressed and already at the door, when it occurred to me, Have you enough money in your pocket? There was not much there. I opened the secretary to get at the money drawer to take what money there was. Of course the drawer would not move. Every attempt to open it failed. It was all as bad