

Kierkegaard and the Passions of Hellenistic Philosophy

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Underlying the diverse terrain of Kierkegaard's many works, both those he attributed to pseudonymous "authors" and those to which he signed his real name, is a common knowledge of ancient philosophy. As a recent Danish scholar has noted, "Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are just as well acquainted with Greek thought as is Kierkegaard himself."¹ Long after finishing his dissertation on Socrates and irony to the satisfaction of his principal reader, the classicist and philosopher F. C. Sibbern, Kierkegaard continued to possess great respect for the Greek mentality, which he saw not merely as a historical mode of thought, but as a disposition that could be adopted in any era by a person with the right attitudes and beliefs. In the modern age, according to Kierkegaard, what people need is to become "a little more Greek in the good sense of the term, that is, more human, and not fantastically inordinate with systematic babble, which no *human being* cares about."² The implied contrast is with the Germanic style of philosophy that surrounded Kierkegaard in Copenhagen, and according to which philosophical truth does not lie in edifying insights, but in a system of conceptual knowledge.³ By opposing himself to this "systematic babble," which he considers irrelevant to the urgent concerns of existing human beings, Kierkegaard is trying to revive a conception of philosophy based upon the care of the self and the cultivation of practical wisdom. "In the old days people loved wisdom," he laments, "now they love the name of philosopher."⁴ According to "Vigilius Haufniensis," pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, the Greek motto γνωθι σεαυτον [know yourself] has become debased in modern philosophy (*KW* 8, 78-79; *SKS* 4, 381-382); as "Johannes Climacus" adds, thought has become detached from life in a way that it was not among the Greeks, for whom a thinker was always "an ardent existing person impassioned by his thinking" (*KW* 12, 308; *SV* 3 10, 15).

But even if this notion of philosophy has become unfashionable, it may be what is needed for the redemption of the present age.

This conviction lies behind the repeated allusions to Greek philosophy throughout Kierkegaard's writings. In the midst of their own predominant topics, his works continually incorporate references to ancient thinkers: not only Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, but also Chrysippus, Plotinus, Diogenes the Cynic and Zeno the Stoic, Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius, Aristophanes, and Xenophon, among others.⁵ Although he successfully petitioned to write his dissertation in Danish instead of scholarly Latin, Kierkegaard also studied a number of Latin authors – especially those who stayed close in spirit to Greek thought, such as Cicero and Seneca. He often invites comparison with ancient philosophy in less direct ways, as when he opens the first set of papers by “A” in *Either/Or* with an epigraph that echoes the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius (*KW* 3, 17; *SKS* 2, 25), or when he avows in *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* that every one of us must face the ascetic task of paying attention to himself (*KW* 15, 125; *SV* 3 11, 115). To those who try to explain all of existence without understanding themselves, he says “go hang,” repeating what Epictetus is reported to have said to a person wanting to learn philosophy only in order to solve a logical paradox.⁶

The reason why such a dabbler would be laughed to scorn in the Hellenistic world, Kierkegaard suggests, is that he lacks subjective concern. Believing that philosophy ought to live up to its name and represent the love of wisdom, he does not accept the popular assumption that science is higher than existence.⁷ What is needed by situated human beings is not systematic abstraction but practical wisdom – “cognition that is poetic, cognition that displays how the world is *seen*, known by *this* self, and moved by *these* emotions.”⁸ Socrates is therefore praised above Plato for pursuing his unscientific inquiry in the mundane world of human concern, setting the tone for Hellenistic philosophy.⁹ Like Seneca, who upbraids philosophers who occupy themselves with questions of no real importance, Kierkegaard says that an earnest person will refrain from wasting time in guessing riddles.¹⁰ In the same spirit, his pseudonym “Anti-Climacus” suggests that the doctor of the soul must always think of himself as standing at the bedside of a sick person (*KW* 19, 5; *SV* 3 15, 67) – repeating an image so common in Hellenistic thought that Cicero at one point remarks that he is “tired” of hearing it.¹¹ To engage with Kierkegaard's writings is to be intimately shaken, to be challenged as a person. He would agree with the Stoics that those who give nominal assent to existentially relevant propositions but

“are not at all changed in their hearts”¹² are in a condition of untruth, no matter what beliefs they may nominally endorse:

Don't ever believe it, my friend; they have not understood it, for if they had in truth understood it, their lives would have expressed it also, then they would have done what they had understood (*KW* 19, 90; *SV3* 15, 143).

To know the truth means to let it register completely, to allow it to permeate one's being.¹³ By contrast, it is ridiculous to construct an abstract castle of “understanding” that one does not inhabit:

A thinker erects a huge building, a system, a system embracing the whole of existence, world history, etc., and if his personal life is considered, to our amazement the appalling and ludicrous discovery is made that he himself does not personally live in this huge, domed palace but in a shed alongside it, or in a doghouse, or at best in the janitor's quarters (*KW* 19, 43-44; *SV3* 15, 100).

In spiritual matters, Kierkegaard argues, this is always a decisive objection: if our thoughts are not the building in which we live, then something is wrong (*JP* 3308; *Pap.* VII 1 A 82). This idea, unorthodox as it might be in modern philosophy, is entirely in accordance with the ancient way of thinking which sees arguments not as entities which interact with one another in logical space, but as guides to concrete belief and practice.¹⁴ Kierkegaard does have a polemical campaign against Hegelian philosophy, but it is not at the level of a critique of particular conceptual arguments; his opposition is not to any paragraph of the system, but to the spirit of the entire enterprise, which represents a kind of abstraction that is impertinent to the life of the individual.¹⁵ As Kierkegaard sees it, modern philosophy is wrong in its very conception – that is, even before it takes its first step.

Here we might hear echoes of Epictetus telling us never to look for our work in one place and our moral progress in another, as if it would help to memorize a philosophical treatise without being affected by what it says.¹⁶ Kierkegaard's attention to the entire person in his or her particular situation, his impatience with abstraction that has nothing to do with significant issues, and his belief that we can attain the truth only as embodied human beings, all bring him close to ancient philosophy – especially to Socrates and to Hellenistic schools such as Stoicism. He also resembles the Stoics in laying heavy emphasis on the category of passion: but, unlike them,

Kierkegaard aligns himself with the speech of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* which says that the greatest gifts come to us from madness, when it is heaven-sent (*KW* 2, 441; *Pap.* III B 3).¹⁷ The unsettling question, then, is: when is a person fit to receive the influence of “madness” or passion without perverting it from a blessing into a curse?

In moving from one period to another, and from one language to another, one must always be cautious about forcing correspondences between words that are far from synonymous. In this case, however, it does not appear that there will be much difficulty in bringing the classical scholar Kierkegaard to terms with the Stoics: in his research notes and his writings, he often quotes a word or passage in Greek, for the sake of incorporating it into his own Danish. Sometimes this is done explicitly, as when he notes that Zeno’s organization of the passions is a way to distinguish among what in Danish are called *Lidenskaberne* (*JP* 3126; *Pap.* IV C 57). This word for παθος has strongly intentional connotations in Danish, and it is noteworthy that Kierkegaard’s direct quotations of the Greek word for passion often occur in the context of discussions that are comprehensible only in light of a neo-classical conception of emotion. For instance, in *Two Ages* he speaks of a literary character as being supported “by the impetus of passion” and then aided in making a crucial decision by her πληροφορια εις παθος, or passionate assurance (*KW* 14, 66; *SV3* 14, 62). And it is in the midst of a discussion of Skepticism that “Climacus” claims that someone who abstracted from his deepest beliefs would be left with μετριως παθειν, or moderate affect (*KW* 12, 399; *SV3* 10, 93). Plainly, cognition and emotion are at least interconnected in Kierkegaard’s writings. We know that he learned the phrase ευκαταφορια εις παθος (disposition toward passion) from Tennemann’s history of philosophy, where it is rightly ascribed to Chrysippus (*KW* 7, 187; *Pap.* V B 3:4). The account of Stoicism he would have learned from this source is reasonably accurate: Tennemann states that, according to the Stoics, emotions are a kind of false perception, “always founded on some belief” about their objects which “ought to be . . . eradicated.”¹⁸ For Kierkegaard, by contrast, the emotions ought to be acknowledged as a valuable kind of cognitive phenomena.

Although it “can give birth to pain,” Kierkegaard believes that love’s initial coming-into-existence is a “wonderful” and “enigmatic” outgrowth (*KW* 10, 47; *SKS* 5, 423). He uses the term “passion” to refer to both aspects of this dynamic: the primary care that we identify by saying that I “have a passion” for something, and the other “passions” which this initial care may dispose me toward experiencing.¹⁹ The word can be used, that is,

to refer to my abiding interest in the success of my favorite baseball team, and (on the other hand) to my happy and sad responses to its wins and losses. One commentator illustrates the two aspects of passion with the example of someone who owns a bookshop:

We can know she is passionate about her shop without knowing how she is feeling. If the shop is flourishing, then on the basis of her concern for it, she will be glad (happy, joyful). If it is not quite thriving but she notes signs of its beginning to do so, she will be hopeful. If business is going badly and she is aware of the prospect of having to close the shop, she will be anxious. If the shop fails and irrevocably closes, but she continues to care about it as before, she will experience grief. If a friend of hers takes difficult or heroic action to keep the shop solvent in time of need, she will feel grateful to him.²⁰

And so on. At the end of this narrative, Roberts concludes that “virtually any concern (passion, interest, enthusiasm, attachment, involvement) can give rise to any or all of the whole range of emotions.” Of course, that’s exactly why the Stoics anticipate the whole range of suffering by extirpating concern for anything beyond their control: consider what this person could have saved herself, if she had never had a passion for her shop in the first place! As another scholar remarks, in Kierkegaard’s writings the best measure of how much one cares about something, of how significant it is, is the severity of the grief one would feel if it were lost: “the more grief at the loss of the particular, the more its reality and value in one’s life.”²¹

Just as this grief could be more or less appropriate to the actual state of the world, other emotions are susceptible to being veridical or groundless for Kierkegaard as for the Stoics. This is why he and his authors continually speak of passion in mental, often specifically epistemological, language. For example, the discussion of ancient and modern drama in *Either/Or* introduces a character with an “almost untrue” passion, explicitly assigning a truth-functional adjective to an affective state (*KW* 3, 163; *SKS* 2, 161).²² Kierkegaard makes it clear that a certain mood may be necessary for a certain understanding: no one lost in tranquil speculation, for instance, could understand the concept of guilt (*KW* 16, 407; *Pap.* VII 1 A 192). His authors speak of the “conclusions of passion” and the “passion of the understanding”;²³ and he himself admits the risk of emotional misunderstanding and the possibility that the experience of gaining insight into the truth could resemble the bodily shock of being struck by lightning.²⁴ At one point, he

even coins a word that means “suffering-through” [*gjennemlide*], to signify the process of undergoing and working through an ongoing emotion (*KW* 3, 31–32; *SKS* 2, 40–41). Kierkegaard’s commentators have not always made the connection between his theory of passion and the classical sources that stand behind it, but it is only because he understands emotions as cognitive phenomena in the Hellenistic sense that he can be accurately described as an advocate of passionate rationality.

The normative arguments of the Stoics tend to be framed in epistemological terms. Here again, with Kierkegaard, we are confronted with a philosopher who can accurately be called a “moral epistemologist” and commended for treating certain moral and epistemological issues together.²⁵ Prominent among these is the question of what attitude we should have toward those states of mind in which we respond to the perceived significance of things beyond our control. And Kierkegaard’s writings do endorse a limited amount of philosophical distrust toward the emotions. He denounces those who are “susceptible to every transient emotional flu” (*JP* 221; *Pap.* II A 130) and, in response to a friend’s ill-conceived attempt to offer him romantic advice, claims to “know nothing of these sentimental palpitations.”²⁶ He laments that we human beings are often troubled by unworthy concerns and vexed by “these trifling annoyances that so often spoil life” (*JP* 5187; *Pap.* I A 335). In true Socratic fashion, he implores his audience not to care for the wrong things – for instance, not to worry about superficial concerns to the detriment of the soul (*KW* 17, 7; *SV3* 13, 15). What is hallowed is not always holy; as Climacus says, we often go wrong by putting “the accent of pathos in the wrong place” (*KW* 12, 100; *SV3* 9, 86).²⁷

It is because of the “untrustworthiness of human feelings left to their own devices” that Kierkegaard recommends a limited degree of stoical distrust (*KW* 16, 348; *SV3* 12, 332). The one confessed Stoic among his authors, “Constantin Contantius” in *Repetition*, admits to having “always strongly mistrusted all upheavals” (*KW* 6, 171; *SKS* 4, 45), and Kierkegaard himself claims to have met the disdain of his critics with a stoical attitude that prevents him from becoming upset (*JP* 6611; *Pap.* X 3 A 13). He accepts the distinction drawn by Epictetus between what is within our power and what is not (*JP* 4514; *Pap.* X 3 A 643),²⁸ but rejects the coldness with which the Stoic detaches himself from everything in the latter category. We should be wary of what we care about, Kierkegaard thinks, but it would be deplorable to care about *nothing* outside of oneself. Even without a stoical distrust toward the source of emotion, however, he recognizes that

emotions can sometimes be unreliable – as in the case of the hypochondriac’s somatic apprehensiveness, or the “sorrow” of depression that does not yield to any reason.²⁹ As insightful as Kierkegaard was in his psychological observations, he did not fail to observe the possibility that a strictly physical phenomenon could make quasi-emotional noise. He also saw that emotions cannot always be taken at face value: he criticizes Sibbern for failing to acknowledge disguised passions in which one emotion can take the form of another.³⁰ But many of his misgivings about the passions have grounds that are familiar to any student of Hellenistic philosophy. He repeats the Stoic complaint about the triviality of emotion: passion, he says, ought to be linked with significance, yet we often get passionate about insignificant trivialities (*KW* 17, 124; *SV3* 13, 121). And, in line with the Stoics’ charge that emotions reveal a weakness in us, he recognizes that we are liable to be “buffeted by the storms of life,” suffering all kinds of pain at the hands of fate, as long as we are living in the world (*KW* 20, 75; *SV3* 16, 81). In the *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus points out that the goal of ancient Skepticism was to avert the risk of being deceived by not drawing any conclusions; likewise, Stoicism prevents against “spurious emotionality and sentimentality” by not having any concerns and, hence, no emotions whatsoever (*KW* 7, 82; *SKS* 4, 282).³¹

But admitting the need for caution in the affective realm is different from being comprehensively distrustful of the emotions. Kierkegaard’s limited affinity with Stoicism does not make him a member of that sect, and his vision of human life at its highest is quite unlike the stoical paradigm. Instead, he thinks that accurate passion can be a uniquely valuable mode of perception. He does not share the bias against the passions that has pervaded Western philosophy for so long, and in a provocative epigraph he invites his reader to question it as well:

Is reason then alone baptized,
are the passions pagans?

This passage, adapted from Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, stands at the front of *Either/Or* and, therefore, at the beginning of Kierkegaard’s entire pseudonymous authorship (*KW* 3, 1; *SKS* 2, 9). It makes a query that cuts to the heart of normative Stoicism: why couldn’t passion be as legitimate as dispassionate rationality?

That Kierkegaard parts company with the Stoics on this point is unmistakable: when he condemns sentimentality, it is in order to contrast it with

“true and genuine feeling” (*JP* 3125; *Pap.* I A 117); the “sentimental palpitations” which he accuses his friend of glorifying are set, to their discredit, beside a “far more exalted” class of “healthy and powerful” emotions.³² His critique of false emotion, then, could be described as a step toward distinguishing what is authentic in this realm of experience. Alongside the criticism of fearing what we should not fear is the statement that we are equally wrong not to fear what is fearful (*KW* 15, 45–46; *SV3* 11, 48).³³ Even anger, which admittedly can be “a dark passion,” may also take the noble form of “righteous indignation” that is fully justified by circumstances (*KW* 11, 135; *SKS* 6, 127). At one point, Kierkegaard even goes so far as to claim that “only great souls are exposed to passions” (*JP* 3070; *Pap.* II A 755). With this idea, we are far from the stoical notion that wisdom is consummated in apathy: Kierkegaard in fact explicitly sets himself against the Stoics, saying that what he wishes to see in a person is exactly the disposition to passion that a Stoic must oppose (*JP* 4512; *Pap.* IV A 44).

Repeatedly, Kierkegaard’s writings encourage us to regard passion as “the main thing . . . the real dynamometer” for human beings (*JP* 888; *Pap.* III A 185); at the same time, they promise us a way of achieving an integrity that would exclude any faulty emotion. Balancing these two desiderata cannot be easy: Kierkegaard cautions his reader not to misunderstand all his talk about pathos to mean that he gives his approval to *every* emotion (*JP* 3127; *Pap.* V A 44). Yet, if we strive to attain the goal of “integrated passion” or “sharpened pathos,” we might succeed at rooting out the passions that weigh us down with their stupidity without becoming totally apathetic.³⁴ The Stoic ideal of a soul that cannot be touched is thereby replaced with a very different paradigm, of a person who is open to perceiving value in the world.³⁵ In spite of the passionate suffering that follows from affirming love, Kierkegaard encourages us to believe that authentic passion will be out of our reach unless we are able “to love and not want to hide secret resentment as if one suffered an injustice, to love and not want to stop seeking the sacred source of this pain!”³⁶

The idea that loving is a spontaneous activity which affirms beyond reason the worth of the beloved – rather than simply responding to the lovable qualities of the object – might lead us to identify Kierkegaard as an advocate of *ἀγάπη* (*agapē*) as opposed to *ἔρως* (*erōs*). And it is true that he distinguishes a right way of loving, which is difficult to achieve, from a wrong way, which is closer to our natural tendencies. But although he does not prefer *erōs* over *agapē* as a name for divine love, as some early Neoplatonist Christians do (e.g., Dionysius the Areopagite), Kierkegaard is also far

from the neo-Manichaean view introduced by Anders Nygren, according to which the two forms of love are incompatible and engaged in “a life-and-death struggle.”³⁷ Like the Greek authors, Kierkegaard uses multiple words to refer to love: *Elskov* and *Kjærlighed* in Danish could be roughly aligned with *erôs* and *agapê*, since *Elskov* indicates a love between two human beings and *Kjærlighed* tends to have broader connotations (which do not exclude intense, personal affections).³⁸ The latter term is used by Kierkegaard to indicate an unselfish, neighborly love; the former has more of a romantic tone. But these different shades of meaning do not amount to a technical separation of the two terms: Kierkegaard uses *Kjærlighed* in reference to a Platonic speech in praise of *erôs*, and *Elskov* not only as a specification of *Kjærlighed* but even in speaking of “agapic” love-of-neighbor.³⁹ Although he distinguishes between *erôs* and *agapê* – and also uses a third term, *Venskab*, which is closest to $\phi\iota\lambda\iota\alpha$ (*philia*) – this lexical range is used in order to point out different aspects or manifestations of love, not to form discrete categories which can only be locked in violent conflict. On the contrary, it is one of Kierkegaard’s most important points that diverse forms of love can be traced to a common origin, so that Christian love does not need to abolish drives and inclinations but only to refine these crude expressions of the one “fundamental universal love” into a more unselfish kind (*KW* 16, 139–143; *SV* 3 12, 137–141).⁴⁰

“I have now read so much by Plato on love,” Kierkegaard says in a letter to his fiancée, and this would prove to be more than merely a youthful infatuation: even his latest religious writings contain blatant allusions to Plato’s erotic dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*.⁴¹ It is not without justification that one commentator calls *Works of Love* “a courageous effort to re-introduce eros into philosophy.”⁴² Although Platonic Eros is not Kierkegaard’s ultimate concern, it would be false to say that it is not at all what his writings are concerned about. He praises the *Symposium* for its “indescribably wonderful presentation” of love’s ennobling influence (*JP* 2387; *Pap.* III A 61), the *Phaedrus* for its “great picture” of “the madness of love” (*JP* 3323; *Pap.* III B 26). And his own works do share with these Platonic dialogues an interest in the role of love in the moral development of the self. Kierkegaard’s main criticism of Plato’s notion of love is that it is not sufficiently a love of the individual. Writing about the progress of speeches in the *Symposium*, he observes that “Love is continually disengaged more and more from the accidental concretion in which it appeared” (*KW* 2, 45–46; *SV* 3 1, 100–101); the abstract reflection “mounts higher and higher above the atmospheric air until breathing almost stops in the pure ether of

the abstract” (*KW* 2, 41; *SV3* 1, 97). Unfortunately, this is what happens when love is defined as a yearning for the eternal which is mistakenly focused on a specific finite “other.” Kierkegaard insists upon the unique individuality of the person who is loved, as opposed to a flight toward “that great sea of beauty” and away from the love of the particular individual in his or her singularity.⁴³ A loving person should not need to guide himself by an abstract conception of “the lovable” in seeking an object that suits him: this would not be an example of the love that believes all things.

Because he considers it “a sad but all too common inversion to go on talking continually about how the object of love must be so that it can be lovable” (*KW* 16, 159; *SV3* 12, 154), Kierkegaard is even more strongly opposed to the Stoics in his vision of love. Whether it is defined as a rationalistic version of *erôs*, or as a form of *philia* which excludes *erôs*, Stoic “love” is necessarily meted out selectively, and with a strict preservation of apathy.⁴⁴ When its authority is too potent, the Stoics argue, love is untrustworthy; besides, it is illusory in any case, because if there were any object that truly warranted such a strong response, then it would in fact be loved by everyone.⁴⁵ With its guarded self-sufficiency and its love based in reason alone, the Stoic’s self “is the most isolated self” of all (*JP* 3898; *Pap.* IX A 383).⁴⁶ For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, divinity “may in no way be considered a-pathetic,” since God “is such pure passion and pathos” that he is known only in the form of love (*JP* 2447; *Pap.* XI 1 A 411).⁴⁷ This is not what Epictetus has in mind when he talks about the sacred principle in the human psyche.

Still, the emotion which can be a threat to other-regarding love may also serve as a motive toward the development of genuine intersubjectivity; and the Hellenistic philosophers who believe that *erôs* can lead to *philia* are somewhat closer to the Kierkegaardian conception of love.⁴⁸ This is because Christian love, as he sees it, is not a vague “love of humanity” in general; it is a love of the human being nearest to me, each person I see, as a distinct individual.⁴⁹ To love the neighbor means “essentially to will to exist equally for unconditionally every human being” (*KW* 16, 83–84; *SV3* 12, 85–86). In other words, to say that I love you is to say that I want you to be. And nothing else in “pagan” Greek thought approaches this idea so closely as Aristotle’s conception of the friendship which consists “more in loving than in being loved,” since it involves affirming the existence of the friend and wishing him good things for his own sake.⁵⁰ “Love,” as Vlastos points out, is the only English word “robust and versatile enough” to cover the range of emotions denoted by *philia* in Aristotle, which refers to many

affective relationships beyond “friendship,” including some of the most intense loves that human beings are capable of forming.⁵¹ There are elements of Aristotle’s notion of love which are not compatible with Kierkegaard’s, such as its affective exclusiveness and its concern for whether the beloved happens to instantiate qualities which are independently admirable.⁵² Still, it does introduce the crucial idea of loving another person for his or her own sake, as well as the corollary notion that such a love can only be directed toward a being which has a distinct principle of individuality: I cannot wish good for the sake of the other herself unless it means something for her to *be* herself.⁵³

Anyone who “seeks his own” with a selfish love is never happy, since he is always worried about losing whatever good he may “possess.”⁵⁴ To love in this “pagan” way is to be capable of great anger, to respond with violent rage whenever one does not get what one wants. Christianity, on the other hand, commands us to love in such a way that we do not enviously begrudge what others have been given. Kierkegaard moves away from classical thought altogether when he affirms this ideal of an unconditional love that asks for nothing in return:⁵⁵ against the measure of Greek reasonableness, he takes a stand in favor of a radically passionate trust in the source of emotion. The process of cultivating the passions of the soul is, as Bernard McGinn has written, an “aspect of the Greek contemplative tradition beginning with Plato that greatly influenced later Christian spirituality.”⁵⁶ Like Augustine, Kierkegaard disagrees with certain Greek ideas about what this process ought to involve; yet, he never ceases to be influenced by the Hellenistic tradition. Whether he is using it as a background against which to develop his own ideas, or as a model of what philosophy ought to be, Kierkegaard always remains close to the spirit of ancient thought.⁵⁷

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Notes

1. Karsten Friis Johansen, "Kierkegaard on 'The Tragic,'" 105.
2. Undated fragment from 1844 (*KW* 8, 191; *Pap.* V B 53:29). Modified translation. Abbreviated references marked *KW* are to the English edition of *Kierkegaard's Writings*, edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978–2000. *Pap.* refers to *Søren Kierkegaard's Papirer*, 2nd edition, ed., Niels Thulstrup, Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 1968–78. *SKS* refers to *Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter*, 4th edition, ed., N. J. Cappelørn et al., Copenhagen, Gads Forlag, 1997–present. *SV3* refers to *Samlede Værker*, 3rd edition, ed., P.P. Rhode, Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 1962–64. *JP* refers to the English edition of *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967–78. When I cite the "Hannay translation" of a journal entry, it is from *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, translated by Alastair Hannay, New York, Penguin, 1996. *Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard*, ed., Niels Thulstrup, Copenhagen, Munksgaard, 1953–54, is cited with the abbreviated title: *Breve og Aktstykker*. All references to classical texts use standard numbering, and all quotations from Greek and Latin are my own unless otherwise indicated.
3. In one typical journal entry, he writes that the Greeks "still remain my consolation," as opposed to "the confounded mendacity that entered into philosophy with Hegel" (*JP* 3300; *Pap.* V A 98). For Hegel, the "role of the philosopher, in ethics as elsewhere, was very much a spectator's role." – W. H. Walsh, *Hegelian Ethics*, 7.
4. In this passage, Kierkegaard cites the Greek word for philosophy (φιλοσοφία) and plays upon its etymological meaning, "love of wisdom" (*JP* 3314; *Pap.* IX A 148). Hannay translation.
5. The *Cumulative Index to Kierkegaard's Writings* (*KW* 26) lists multiple references to Zeno of Citium and Plotinus; 10–15 apiece to Chrysippus, Diogenes of Sinope, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Sextus Empiricus; and over 30 each to Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, Aristophanes, and Xenophon. His references to Stoicism even mention such figures as Aristo of Chios and Stilpo.
6. Compare, e.g., (*KW* 11, 645; *Pap.* V B 150:26) and Epictetus, *Discourses* II.17.34. Pierre Hadot points out that "attention to oneself" is regarded as the fundamental attitude of the philosopher by a tradition that stretches back beyond Anthony of Egypt to the Hellenistic practices he inherited when, as his biographer Athanasius says, he "began to pay attention to himself." – *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 131–135.
7. See, for example, *JP* 1057 & 1059; *Pap.* X 2 A 328 & X 2 A 439.
8. Edward Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve*, 18.
9. Sophia Scopetea, *Kierkegaard og græciteteten*, 465.
10. Cf. Seneca, *Epistles* 45 & 48, and Kierkegaard, *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (*KW* 10, 82–83; *SKS* 5, 452–453).
11. This medical image is found throughout Stoic writings – for instance, in Epictetus, *Discourses* III.23.27–30. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.23.
12. Cicero, *De Finibus* 4.7.
13. See *The Concept of Anxiety* (*KW* 8, 138; *SKS* 4, 439).
14. As Jon Stewart admits, "Modern philosophy is objective thought that offers a specific model of reality and does not regard the life of the individual as worthy of consideration. Much of Kierkegaard's own project can be regarded as an attempt to return to the Greek concept of philosophy in which one's life is the embodiment of one's thought." – *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel*

- Reconsidered*, 642. In favor of the ancient conception of philosophy, Pierre Hadot maintains that “philosophical discourses cannot be considered realities which exist in and for themselves, so that their structure could be studied independently of the philosopher who developed them. Can Socrates’ discourse be separated from the life and death of Socrates?” – *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 5–6.
15. Stewart recognizes that Kierkegaard takes issue with the Hegelian approach to philosophy; however, he strangely fails to see that this itself represents a significant movement in the history of philosophy: instead, he concludes from these differences in method that “Kierkegaard had no anti-Hegel campaign as such” and was simply doing a different kind of thing, which (although closer to the ancient practice of philosophy) ought to be left out of the history of 19th-century Continental philosophy altogether. See *Hegel’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 631 & 633–637.
 16. Epictetus, *Discourses* I.4.13–17.
 17. Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a.
 18. References to Tennemann, beyond the phrase that Kierkegaard copies down, are to the English translation of his *Manual of the History of Philosophy*, 147–150.
 19. As Roberts notes in “Passion and Reflection,” 88–89, the word *Lidenskab* is used in each of these two senses in Kierkegaard’s authorship. For an example of the former, see *For Self-Examination* (KW 21, 45; SV3 17, 86): of the latter, see *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (KW 12, 311; SV3 10, 18).
 20. Robert C. Roberts, “Existence, Emotion, and Virtue: Classical Themes in Kierkegaard,” 185–186.
 21. Ronald L. Hall, *The Human Embrace*, 71.
 22. Modified translation. David J. Gouwens agrees that Kierkegaard should not be accused of a “thoughtless denigration” of rationality, since “emotion and belief are closely intertwined for him.” – *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*, 52.
 23. “Johannes de Silentio” and “Anti-Climacus,” respectively: see *Fear and Trembling* (KW 6, 100; SKS 4, 189) and *The Sickness Unto Death* (KW 19, 39; SV3 15, 96).
 24. See *Two Ages* (KW 14, 25; SV3 14, 26) and *The Book on Adler* (KW 24, 53; Pap. VII 2 B 235:95).
 25. Robert L. Perkins, “Kierkegaard, a Kind of Epistemologist,” 7. See also Anthony Rudd, “‘Believing All Things’: Kierkegaard on Knowledge, Doubt, and Love,” 121.
 26. From an 1842 letter to Emil Boesen (KW 25, 123; *Breve og Aktstykker* 62).
 27. On the impressive versus the good, see *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (KW 15, 35; SV3 11, 39). See also Plato, *Apology* 30a–b.
 28. The passage by Epictetus to which Kierkegaard refers is *Encheiridion* 1. This is one Stoic text that he appears to have read in Danish translation: his library included *Epiktets Haandbog*, translated by E. Boye.
 29. See, on hypochondria, *The Concept of Anxiety* (KW 8, 162; SKS 4, 460): and, on depression, *Either/Or* (KW 4, 189; SKS 3, 184).
 30. See Nordentoft, *Kierkegaard’s Psychology*, 4.
 31. The phrase “spurious emotionality and sentimentality” occurs in an 1846 journal entry about the perversion of Christmas in modern culture (*JP* 566; Pap. VII 1 A 161).
 32. See KW 25, 123 & 25, 135; *Breve og Aktstykker* 62 & 68.
 33. Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1382a–1383a.
 34. These phrases come from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (KW 12, 584–585; SV3 10, 250) and *Two Ages* (KW 14, 69; SV3 14, 64). See also *Works of Love* (KW 16, 361; SV3 12, 344).
 35. See, e.g., Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* IV.3 and Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, 105. On this point it is worth noting that Johan Ludvig Heiberg, the leading advocate of Hegelian philosophy in

- Kierkegaard's Denmark, spoke of the human good as the satisfaction of our "striving for detachment from restraint" by external objects. See Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, 20.
36. *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (KW 10, 35; SKS 5, 413).
 37. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 6. Like Kierkegaard, the Christian mystic known as "Pseudo-Dionysius" speaks of love as what "holds all things together": see *Divine Names* 4.10-11 [708b-709d]. The "cause of the universe" is manifested in "the loving care it has for everything," he claims: see *Divine Names* 4.13 [712a]. Plotinus may have associated the One with Love (e.g., in *Enneads* 6.8.15 & 6.9.9), but it is Pseudo-Dionysius who develops a full account of love as an ontological force, as the creative basis of all things in their distinct individual qualities. Other Christian thinkers who do not view *erós* and *agapè* [or *caritas* and *amore*] as mutually exclusive terms include Augustine, Origen, Catherine of Siena, and Gregory of Nyssa. Unlike Nygren, who considers Augustine to be the arch-enemy of "Christian" love, Kierkegaard believes in the religious value of love, in both its metaphysical origin and its human works.
 38. A variant spelling is *Kjerlighed*; the contemporary Danish word is *Kærlighed*. In notes to *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* and to *Christian Discourses*, the Hongs draw this parallel between *Elskov* and *Kjerlighed* and *erós* and *agapè* (KW 10, 161 & 17, 444). Unfortunately, their translations often misrepresent the distinction, impertinently rendering *Elskov* as "erotic love" (as if it always meant something lewd or profane) although in many cases the single inclusive term "love" would be a more accurate translation – e.g., "If you yourself have never been in love, you do not know whether anyone has ever been loved in the world, although you do know how many have affirmed that they have loved, have affirmed that they have sacrificed their lives for erotic love [*Elskov*]." In this passage from *Christian Discourses* (KW 17, 237; SV3 13, 223), the Hongs give the misleading impression that Kierkegaard changes the subject all of a sudden, when in fact he has been using the verb *elske* all along. He does not mean to single out the erotic as *opposed* to other kinds of love at any point in this sentence, just as he does not intend to instigate an orgy by declaring "Du skal elske" (you shall love) throughout *Works of Love*.
 39. See *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (KW 10, 47; SKS 5, 423), where Kierkegaard alludes to the speech of "Phaedrus" at *Symposium* 178b. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard uses the word *Kjerlighed* repeatedly in reference to Plato's *Symposium* (KW 2, 41-52; SV3 1, 96-107). See also *Either/Or* (KW 4, 32; SKS 3, 40) and *Works of Love* (KW 16, 22-25 & 16, 112-114; SV3 12, 28-30 & 12, 112-114).
 40. In the opening chapter of *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard declares that love "flows" from a single hidden source "along many paths"; the varieties of "love in its manifestations" are to be the theme of his treatise (KW 16, 9; SV3 12, 14-15). His reason for paying attention to "the pre-Christian, Greek form of erotic love," as Nordentoft remarks, is to emphasize that "love may take a variety of forms." – "Erotic Love," 92. Cf. Guroian, *Incarnate Love*, 17-18: Christian love "does not negate but sublimates and transforms all so-called natural or human loves. This is why such Greek writers as John Chrysostom and Nicholas Cabasilas used [*philia*, *agapè*, and *erós*] interchangeably."
 41. Undated letter to Regine Olsen (KW 25, 66-67; *Breve og Aktstykker* 21). Kierkegaard alludes to *Phaedrus* 229d-230a and *Symposium* 220c-d, respectively, in *The Book on Adler* (KW 24.139; *Pap.* VII 2 B 235:226) and *For Self-Examination* (KW 21, 9; SV3 17, 55).
 42. Jørgensen, "Text and the Performative Act," 124.
 43. Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 219d. The portrait of the lover's soul in the speech of Socrates "is a totally empty abstraction," Kierkegaard writes; in the *Phaedo*, the soul is "understood just as abstractly as the pure essence of the things that are the object of its activity" (KW 2, 68; SV3 1, 120). Gregory

- Vlastos finds in the Platonic dialogues a neglect of the individual, not only “in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality,” but also as “a valuing subject” with his or her own emotions: see “The Individual as Object of Love in Plato,” 31–32.
44. On knowing what is worthy of love, see Epictetus, *Discourses* II.22.2–3; Diogenes Laertius 6.11 & 7.129–130; and Stobaeus 2.66 & 2.115. Epictetus opposes *erôs* and recommends a more reasonable affection, which he usually refers to as *philia*: see, e.g., *Discourses* I.11.16–19, II.21.7–8, II.22.34–37, III.13.10–12, & III.24.7–30. The early Stoics did speak well of *erôs*, although presumably “Zeno did not think of erotic love as what the Stoics called a passion,” as Schofield writes, and for this reason Plutarch takes issue with the Stoic use of the word – *The Stoic Idea of the City*, 29–30. A. W. Price has recently suggested that, if they counted as passions at all, then “the sage’s loves must have counted as *eupatheiai*,” or “good” emotions: see “Plato, Zeno, and the Object of Love,” 190.
 45. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.75–76.
 46. In this entry, Kierkegaard refers to Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* XI.3.
 47. For Kierkegaard, love “must open the self in the direction of the world,” creating “a passage through which things can enter.” – Søltoft, “Love and Continuity,” 222–224. For Epictetus, the world’s divine principle is an integral aspect of one’s mind, but for him this principle is nothing other than reason itself. See, e.g., *Discourses* I.6.40 & IV.12.10–12.
 48. Chrysippus argues in *On Love* that “love has friendship for its object,” according to Diogenes Laertius 7.130; compare Xenophon, *Symposium* 8.18. Schofield writes that, according to many early Stoics, “Friendship consummates love – and replaces it.” See *The Stoic Idea of the City*, 34: he cites Diogenes of Babylon, who is reported to have spoken of *philia* as the *telos* of *erôs*.
 49. Scheler laments that “the ideology of the later Stoics merged with the Christian conception of love” in the Hellenistic period: see *Ressentiment*, 103. In *Either/Or*, it is said in praise of Aristotle that he “bases the concept of justice on the idea of friendship”: the allusion is to *Nicomachean Ethics* 1159b–1161a. See (*KW* 4, 322; *SKS* 3, 304).
 50. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1159a. Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155b & 1166a; *Rhetoric* 1380b–1381a.
 51. Vlastos, “The Individual as Object of Love in Plato,” 4–6. See also Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 354. As Freud says, “language has carried out an entirely justifiable piece of unification in creating the word ‘love’ with its numerous uses”: see *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 30.
 52. Aristotle does sometimes talk about the worth of the beloved object as if my highest loyalty as a loving person is to the good which may be instantiated in someone’s character, not to the value of the unique individual as such: this is part of what Kierkegaard means when he says that *philia*, like *erôs*, has limits. See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1159b and compare *Works of Love* (*KW* 16, 273; *SV3* 12, 262).
 53. Only something with $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ is eligible for friendship, Aristotle says in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155b. See also 1159a: “If we have been right to say that a friend wishes good things to the other for the sake of the other himself, then the other must continue to be whatever he is.”
 54. See *Works of Love* (*KW* 16, 264–279; *SV3* 12, 254–268) and *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (*KW* 5, 56–58; *SKS* 5, 66–68).
 55. On the love which asks for nothing in return, see *Works of Love* (*KW* 16, 345–358; *SV3* 12, 329–341). In *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard adds that it is only when “you believe that God is love” that “all things serve you for good” (*KW* 17, 193; *SV3* 13, 185).
 56. *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 30. For Augustine’s critique of Stoicism, see *City of God* 14.7. On the Augustinian “understanding of all reality as sheer intelligibility and the whole cosmos as erotic,” see David Tracy, *On Naming the Present*, 38–39.

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