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PH: Kierkegaard changed my life, he made me fall in love with philosophy and he did so against tremendous odds. I had been brought up as a Catholic and when I was undergoing a passionate intense rejection of religion I first read Kierkegaard. Now it must be remembered that Kierkegaard is fundamentally the most devoted Christian one could imagine. So I was drawn in spite of myself to this religious thinker. I hated religion and yet I fell in love with a writer who was primarily religious. I was drawn to Kierkegaard because of his passion, because of his wit, because of his biting sarcasm but primarily I was drawn to him because he was un-hypocritical.

Now often the life of a philosopher is irrelevant to considering his ideas or to understanding his ideas because ideas have a life of their own and often they can be understood without a single reference to the life of a philosopher and therefore these three examples are given on the handout are Aristotle's four causes, Descartes methodical doubt and Kant's Categorical Imperative. Each of those ideas can be understood bracketing off totally the personal life of philosopher. But with Kierkegaard that's impossible.

It's impossible because Kierkegaard believed in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, that you are nothing else but what you live. You are nothing else but what you live. Kierkegaard didn't just say this he meant it. So in order to appreciate his

ideas you must consider his life because the two are intimately interwoven.

So on the first page is sort of an outline of this life. His father, to give some of his background, came from the Jutland Teak lands and he was a peasant stock. He was born in dire poverty but he managed by hard work and thrift to become a prosperous merchant in Copenhagen and it was Copenhagen in which Kierkegaard was born. He was a very stern God-fearing man, he belonged to the Lutheran State Church and he ruled his family with an iron rod and believed in absolute patriarchal authority.

Once when he was a young boy and he was holding flocks on his land in Jutland Kierkegaard's father in hunger and loneliness and desperation cursed God. Which at the time was considered a terrible thing to do and this plagued him for the rest of his life, even up to the age of eighty-two it stayed with him. And this curse that Kierkegaard's father placed on God was to influence Kierkegaard quite dramatically.

Kierkegaard was born then in Copenhagen eighteen thirteen and up in Denmark and he liked Copenhagen very much and was very tied to it. He left for only two significant periods, once to make a pilgrimage to the Jutland Heathlands to see his father's home and the second time to go to Berlin, where he was for six months to hear a philosopher shelling lecture on Hegel.

Kierkegaard was the last of seven children and he was the son of his father's second wife, whom Kierkegaard's father married after she was about four months pregnant and his first wife had died and she was the household servant. Kierkegaard was a very sensitive, intense, introspective and enigmatic figure and he had a sense of physical inferiority. Kierkegaard has a pension for telling us a secret without actually revealing it, so we're not quite sure what this physical inferiority resulted from, but it's generally believed that he had a slight hunchback.

His brother bore the same first name, Soren, and Kierkegaard as a result of this hunchback and as a result of his personality was a rather bizarre eccentric figure

and it's said that in Denmark, Soren, the last of the seven children. Soren Kierkegaard was the last Danish person to bear the name Soren.

Because he was so bizarre and eccentrically and so passionately intense he got ridiculed and this saying became very common in Copenhagen, "Don't be a Soren, come on don't be a Soren". So Walter Lowry who's written a short life of Kierkegaard says that Kierkegaard ruined the name for future generations, nobody wants to be called a Soren.

Kierkegaard wrote some journals which he called the 'Gilt Edge Document' and in his journals he makes tremendous number of references to his father but not a single reference to his mother which is interesting. When you read his journals you get the impression that Kierkegaard is very aware of himself. I have a quote on the last page of a Freudian who tried to read Kierkegaard to psychoanalyse him, and the Freudian came up with conclusion in that however well one may think one has managed to say a thing about Kierkegaard, he will always discover that Kierkegaard has said it better. So that any opinion that you have of Kierkegaard or that I have of Kierkegaard that most authors have of Kierkegaard can be found in Kierkegaard himself, so he was very aware of his limitations and of his strengths. He says at one point that he feels like he hasn't drunk from the chalice of wisdom, he feels like he's fallen into it.

So he is well in touch with himself and some say that he's not entirely sane. Kierkegaard himself said this about himself and he confesses that in a large part of his youth he was really on the verge of insanity but then as if to console himself he quotes Seneca, who says; "that there is never some genius without a little madness".

In one of his books one character writes that mental derangement is simply being awake at all times and never dreaming and subjecting every piece of information to cold reflection. That's one of characters, one of Kierkegaard's characters definitions of insanity.

He was a melancholic person and he says of himself "that I was already an old man when I was born".

In spite of his melancholia he spent a relatively happy childhood and in nineteen thirty one he entered the University of Copenhagen, where he was for ten years. On his twenty second birthday Kierkegaard underwent what he called 'The Great Earthquake', that's one of the titles of the chapters, in the Gilt Edged Document: The Journals of Kierkegaard.

And as I said Kierkegaard had a talent for telling a secret without revealing it, and we're not exactly sure what caused the great earthquake but we're quite sure that what it was that Kierkegaard's father revealed to him that he had cursed God in his youth.

For Kierkegaard this is very significant, bearing in mind his background, bearing in mind the time, and he really thought it was a great earthquake, it made everything topsy turvy it made him seem that his father's prosperity was a curse of Gods rather than a blessing of Gods and as a result Kierkegaard embarked on what he calls the path of tradition. Where he had a grand old time, he calls it sinning with a high hand, I'm not sure we'd today use the word sinning we probably just having a good time.

Anyway he carried on a life of dissipation he contracted great debts and it was in reference to this phase of his life that Hans Christian Andersen, person who wrote about fairy tales, Character characterized him in one of his books as a conceited parrot who like flattery, who had a sharp beak and who delighted in praise plucking up its feathers. So he was known at this stage in his life as a dandy, he went to the opera regularly, he frequented the drawing rooms and other less reputable places. When he was twenty five he had a reunion with his father and shortly after that his father died. He inherited a great deal of money but at Kierkegaard's death, there was very little money left and in fact he died after he suffered a stroke on the way back from the bank after he'd drawn up the last miserable bit of money that was left in his account.

This isn't to say that that economic shock caused the stroke but never mind. Kierkegaard didn't squander it apart from that period in his life from the ages of twenty to twenty five when he did contract great debt but I think that he had no financial sense and he also gave a lot of it away. After this he continued with the

studies and they were devoted primarily to theological studies and he calls this period in his journals 'The Great Parentheses and he does so because it was so boring I mean nothing happened he studied theology for two years.

When he was twenty seven he fell hopelessly in love with a girl called Regina, Regina Olsen. She was eighteen he was twenty seven. After a period of courtship he came to the conclusion that it wasn't possible that he could make Regina happy, we're not sure why he have this conviction but this conviction was very strong in typical Kierkegaardian fashion. One possible possibility is, he says once in his journals she was too light, I was too heavy, and I think that could have got out of himself as to melancholic for someone like Regina. He also might have believed that his physical handicap would have injured her in some way. One explanation has been that Kierkegaard felt that his primary devotion was to God and not to another person. But this probably isn't accurate because Kierkegaard in another place in his journal says if I had faith I would have remained with Regina. Anyway for whatever reason we're not sure as I say, Kierkegaard is enatic, he decided that he couldn't make Regina happy and that it was in her own best interest if they curtailed the relationship, so he sent back the engagement ring. Well Regina as a result of this, her passion became more and more inflamed because she saw this returning of the ring as a symptom of the very melancholia that she was going to cure. So Kierkegaard was really in a bind. He didn't falter and like Hamlet he feigned, remember Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia, on he didn't find madness, he posed as a scoundrel. He posed as a seducer who wasn't really interested in any binding relationship, he pretended that he don't even playing with her affections.

In an interview when she comes to his house, she asked him, "Will you never married" and he says "Oh yeah well in about ten years when I sowed my wild oats, then I must have a pretty little laugh to rejuvenate me" anyway he posed as that and Regina couldn't really, uh not believe it. She was quite desperate because the relationship had been curtailed, but within several months she was engaged to a very well set up man whom she married a year later and Kierkegaard says "she chose the cry I chose the pain". Now it is true that Kierkegaard must have suffered as a result of this decision because he was very devoted to Regina in an abstract sense anyway for the rest of his life, he

dedicated several works to her, he left to his will, not that there was much left, there wasn't, and she denied it anyway.

But I think that he was quite genuine in his regard for her and I'd like to believe that it was that regard for her that motivated him to curtail the relationship. Anyway the upshot is that Kierkegaard was intense to the point of being accenture, there was no secure, comfortable, via media or middle way for Kierkegaard. As a result of his rejection of Regina there was a terrific scandal in Copenhagen because Regina was the daughter of a man who was fairly high up in the Ministry of Finance and life became very unpleasant for Kierkegaard and it was at this stage that Kierkegaard went to Berlin for six months to hear Shelling lecture on Hegel. He had hoped that Shelling would demolish the Galleon system but he says that he was deluded and he quoted, I give a quote, "Shelling drivels inordinately I'm leaving Berlin".

Now, throughout all his university studies, Kierkegaard had had one dominant interest and that was in philosophy and he read Hegel quite intensively but he became disillusioned because he thought that the Hegelian philosophy had not furnished him with reality. Now he thought that Hegel was fine as a great thought experiment but Hegel went further than saying it was a thought experiment, Hegel according to Kierkegaard claimed that he was dealing with reality. And Kierkegaard thought this was preposterous. He says reading Hagel is like reading out of a cookbook to a man who is hungry, you've got the menus but you don't have the nourishment. Kierkegaard systematize in an abstract way and leaves out a very important thing, not only does Hegel systematizing leave out reality and concrete existence, but according to Kierkegaard, Hagel's philosophizing leaves out the individual and a thought out Kierkegaard, [Behind Out Kierkegaard- 17.09] a quotation by Kierkegaard, but "the individuals the category through which this age, all history, the human race, as a whole must pass" for Kierkegaard the most important philosophical category is the individual, the unique person.

Now personally I think Kierkegaard didn't understand Hegel and misinterpreted Hegel but that's more or less irrelevant. Kierkegaard than pronounced that we must get away from systematize thinking abstract thinking and get back to the

individual and with this declaration Kierkegaard became the first of the modern existentialist, because this is the point from which modern existentialism begins. Kierkegaard's first book came out in eighteen forty three and it was called 'Either Or' and Kierkegaard said that it wasn't called Either Or, it was either or, that you had to make a choice and accept the consequences and you were kidding yourself if you didn't think that you, if you were kidding yourself if you think you can compromise. Again Kierkegaard's intensity shows up, it was an appropriate title for him because Kierkegaard was not a compromiser, he was not a both-and-man he was an either-or-man.

The book created a great sensation in Copenhagen but it was published under a pseudonym and Kierkegaard during this period of his writings used a great variety of pseudonyms; Victor Eremita, Johannes de Silentio, Johannes the Seducer, Judge Williams, all kinds of names.

Also at this stage of his life which he calls a period of indirect communication whereby he was communicating to his public indirectly through the personae of his various characters, during this period of his life Kierkegaard also posed and he posed as an idle man about town who had nothing better to do than do things like attend the opera and he did so because you consider the spirit of his writings to be the aesthetic period and he felt that it was a convenient cost him to adopt he was going to be a genuine aesthetic writer he may as well behave like aesthetician. He underwent a metamorphosis, and began to communicate directly, significantly enough the first thing that he published under his own name was a work called 'The Edifying Discourses which were primarily religious meditation.

Now, Kierkegaard, remember I said Kierkegaard at the bottom was a religious thinker, he was a religious things in an unorthodox sense because he was against institutionalized religion. He rarely speaks of being Christian, he constantly speaks of becoming a Christian and he thought that it was very easy to know what Christianity was, it was very difficult to practice it, and it was irrelevant Kierkegaard the theory of Christianity what was important was being a Christian. So with this Kierkegaard underscores existential truth, lived truth, as

opposed to abstract theory, that's what counts for Kierkegaard. So it's not doctrinal, not doctrinal knowledge for Kierkegaard, its actual practice.

The last thing I found, a direct communication is that he thought institutionalized religion relieved people of the burden of being Christian and at the same time left them the peace of believing they are Christian. That idea comes from one of the commentators of Kierkegaard, I can't remember which one. But Kierkegaard believed that very firmly.

Now, well his ideas, I say that Kierkegaard stood for existential truth not abstract knowledge but active practice. It's easier to know what Christianity is, it's difficult to be a Christian. Now existentialism makes a mark distinction between existence and essence, in traditional philosophy you have the problem being what the essence of man, what's the kernel of man, what's the strands that's common between all people that marks them off as a species different from animals and remember that Aristotle came up with a definition that man's a rational animal. Well this doesn't interest existentialist, they're not interested in trying to decide of man is homo sapiens homo ludens or [homo favour- 22.28] because they're not interested in something that's static like a definition of manners or something that's given and complete, nor are they interested in what's shared between people, what existentialists are interested in is what's unique to the individual. They're also interested in man creating his own essence through his action and therefore they see any definition as too static as they see man or a person as an ongoing process rather than as something given, this is why for Kierkegaard it's not being Christian but it's becoming a Christian, you can't be a Christian.

The word existence, to exist, comes from 'existere' the Latin the German which is which means literally to stand out from, and this means for their existentialist that you stand out from the crowd. Unless you stand out from the crowd, unless you're genuinely yourself, you're not authentic. So you must be an individual, you must stand out you must exist say the existentialists. So for Kierkegaard truth must be made subjective and rules, objective rules that apply to everybody aren't valid unless they're internalized.

In his own context, religious context, he thought this applied to Christianity because he thought that Christianity isn't a thing that you can take and put in your pocket and go away with like a church or creed or an organization, that didn't interest Kierkegaard at all and he suffered very much in his life because he didn't because he was ridiculed by the established church in Copenhagen.

He thought the Christianity was an activity and likewise faith is in the possession, it's a constant struggle. Now if one were to categorise Kierkegaard's writings for convenience sake this really doesn't represent Kierkegaard, because he felt that he couldn't be categorized but if one were to categorize him, you could say that Kierkegaard thought there were three levels of its existence. On the first level of resistance was the aesthetic. The aesthete lives for the moment has no sense of time beyond the present interest but beyond the present instant and he seeks something that's immediate and something pleasurable and that's the only thing he's interested in, an example in Kierkegaard's writing is in the first volume of 'Either Or' and that's Johannes the seducer and he wrote a book called The Diary of a seducer. Now the Diary of a Seducer isn't so much a tale of an actual seduction it's, what it deals with is the very prolonged very devious set up for the sexual seduction because what Joanna's wants isn't sex, he wants power and he takes a girl by the name of Cordelia and moulds her he thinks like a sculptor moulds a piece of wood, he gets her to the point where she gives himself to her entirely and then he rejects her. It's a good story anyway it's in the first volume of 'Either Or'.

It's an example of the ascetic period because Johannes living for the moment, living for himself and his own pleasure and is completely insensitive to other people's feelings. According to Kierkegaard this period in one's life or this level of existence ends in despair because you're so keen to find pleasure and you're so keen to avoid boredom that you begin to go about seeking it in a frenzied state. You're very afraid of boredom, you're very afraid of something that's not pleasurable and for Kierkegaard you end up in a very depressed panicky state of the fact that you have a choice. And if you're conscious of the fact that you have a choice, you're also conscious of the fact that your choices influence your future, the aesthete is living for the moment he doesn't care, he is in the basement of life having a great old time and he doesn't care what the

consequences are but as soon as you begin to realize that there are consequences to what your action is you have a sense of a time span and you have a sense of other people involved in that time span. The ethical period then for Kierkegaard represents consciousness of having a choice and being committed and taking the consequences of that choice.

The example is in the second volume of 'Either Or', Judge Williams writes on the aesthetic validity of marriage and he writes it to Joanne's the seducer who doesn't believe in marriage and Judge Williams's tries to justify that it's got ascetic validity not just ethical validity, because you commit your love through marriage to the future according to Judge William, you don't just love somebody for today you think you might love them tomorrow and perhaps even the next day, so the ethical period is really constituted by choice and the aesthete evades choice at all costs.

According to Kierkegaard this ethical period ends in a feeling of incompleteness because you really haven't faced yourself as a unique individual, you're more or less going along with the crowd, you are going along with the crowd because you're trying to follow universal or intersubjective rules that are laid down by the society and for Kierkegaard this wasn't good enough, so for Kierkegaard a confrontation with the spirit propelled you into the third level of existence which for Kierkegaard was the highest namely the religious. And he thought the religious realm was the realm of a unique individual and he thought that you realized that you are unique individual not an arrogance but in fear and trembling and he wrote a book called 'Fear and Trembling'. He felt that most people need universal rules, need to be relieved of a task of choosing for themselves and Kierkegaard thought it was very difficult to internalize rules, it was very difficult to be an individual.

Just like Dostoevsky's 'Grand Inquisitor', Kierkegaard thought that religion was set up to relieve people from the fear of having to choose for themselves. Sartre uses the phrase "guard rails against anguish" that I've mentioned, and that's precisely what universal rules and regulations are for Kierkegaard, they are guard rails against anguish, the anguish of making a choice in your own terms

for yourself. The example is Abraham in 'Fear and Trembling', some of you know the story of Abraham and Isaac?

Yeah well anyway Abraham's asked by God to sacrifice his son and Abraham and Sarah have for a very long time been childless and have given birth to a most beloved son at the very late age Isaac and Abraham was asked in a dream I believe to sacrifice Isaac and he carries him up a mountainside undergoing a great deal of we must imagine anguish and at the very last minute just as is about to slaughter, Isaac, an angel of God Here is and tells him that it's no longer God's wish to be sacrifice Isaac and it was taken I believe to represent God's disapproval of human sacrifice and from that time no more humans were sacrificed and animals were in its place, where put in its place. Well Kierkegaard uses this to illustrate how going against universal rules and making an individualized choice, standing outside the universe realm, how much anguish or angst is involved, how much anxiety and dread is involved, because what Abraham has to do is he has to suspend the ethical for Abraham to make that decision to sacrifice Isaac he has to go against the whole ethical steer which indicates that he shouldn't kill another human being without just cause. So Abraham is in a real bind because he can't speak, he can't tell Sarah "look I had this dream and god told me if..." and that's why I'm taking our only beloved son to kill him, because Kierkegaard thought that he couldn't speak because speech was by its very nature universal every word that you use can be applied to any number of things. All right. Chair can be applied to every chair in this room plus many million other chairs. And likewise with any word, any word in any language has a very strong universal connection and as a result according to you regard Kierkegaard, Abraham couldn't speak couldn't relieve himself of the anxiety and dread connected with this decision because to do so would be to translate his personal experience into the realm of the universal. So, one point to be made about the three level of the three levels of existence is that for Kierkegaard they're not completely done away with, they are simply dethroned, because in the religious sphere you have the element of choice predominant in the ethical sphere plus you have the immediacy that characterized the ascetic sphere. So...the seers are dethroned in the sense of Hegel's of Haven, which means not only to council but to preserve something and to uplift it.

Now, Kierkegaard was the first then of the modern existentialists, now existentialism can be found anywhere you look. Existentialism as found in the plays of Samuel Beckett, it's found in the paintings of Picasso and it's found before Kierkegaard, found in writers like Socrates why he wasn't a writer but found in people like Socrates or writers like Plato or Augustine or Pascoe. But it's very typical of our time and existentialism knows no boundaries, Kierkegaard was a religious thinker, Jean-Paul Sartre, who are going to be doing next week was an atheist. It knows no boundaries because it's got a central ethic and the central ethic of existentialism is this and I quote Sartre; "the existentialists there is no love apart from the deeds of love, so don't say you love me and unless you bring me flowers.

As a trivial example to illustrate something that Kierkegaard believed and he believed that truth must be made subjective, truth is subjectivity. Some may believe that you can have a systematic set of statements that are all true in a book and that's truth, but for Kierkegaard that wasn't truth at all because truth had to be made subjective, truth had to be internalized, truth had to be lived, otherwise it was meaningless.

Kierkegaard wrote a book called 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript' and he deliberately called it unscientific, because he thought that science was committed to the belief that truth could be served up in a cut and dry way. But Kierkegaard believed that truth must be personally appropriated and as a result Christianity was the ideal case to illustrate his point. Why? Because for Kierkegaard it was almost absurd to think that there was this guy who lived so long ago, who died for all of us and he was a Son of God, and it had an element in it of objective uncertainty. We weren't compelled to believe in this figure, we had to make the leap of faith, Kierkegaard speaks of the leap of faith, there was no rational logical proof of Christianity and the whole point of departure for Christianity wasn't certain. And as a result this for Kierkegaard was a profound illustration of existential truth, something that you committed yourself to that wasn't objectively certain. Now Kierkegaard wasn't a Christian in the ordinary sense believe me he was a Christian in the sense of being a Catholic in the true sense of the word being a universal thinker.

When a minister came to administer him Holy Communion on his deathbed, he refused because of the hypocrisy of the Danish Lutheran state church.

While others spoke well of it, others spoke of it and clucked about it. Kierkegaard acted on it and he carried on a polemic in the papers and in his writings against the hypocrisy of the established Church and as a result he was scorned and ridiculed. To Kierkegaard the world had conquered Christianity, Kierkegaard says at one point; let's try thought experiment, let's pretend that it's established that there was no Christ and that there was no Son of God and that there is no God and he said it's remarkable because how many persons or how many ministers or how many priests would resign their posts. He said very few, because Christianity is like a machine it goes buzzing on regardless of what you know the truth of Christianity is supposed to mean, he says it's a bit like reading a book called the imminent destruction of the human race on a cosy Sunday afternoon in front of a fire sipping glass of sherry, it's got no relation to actual life. Let me just read you one quotation of Kierkegaard's on religion and established religion called 'The Domestic Goose' it's a bit long so bear with me; "I suppose it was a fact that geese could talk, they then would have arranged it they could have their religious worship, their divine service, every Sunday they came together and a gander preached the essential content of the sermon was what a lofty destiny the goose had, what a high goal the creator and every time his name was mentioned the geese curtsied and the ganders bowed about their heads, what a high goal the Creator had set before the goose, by the aid of wings it could fly way to distant regions blessed climes for a property it was at home where it was only a stranger here so it was every Sunday and as soon as the assembly broke up each Waddle home to its own affairs and again the next Sunday to divine worship and then again home and that was it, they rose and were well liking became plump and delicate and then were eaten on Martinous eve and that was the end of it. That was the end of it for though the assembly sounded, for though the address sounded so lofty on Sunday, the geese on Monday were ready to recount to one another what the fellow goose that had wished to make serious use of the wings the creator a given him, design for the high goal that was proposed to him what befell him? what a terrible death he encountered, this the geese could talk about knowingly among themselves but of course to speak of it of it on Sunday's would be unseemly for they said it would

then become evident that our Divine Worship is really only fooling God and ourselves. Among the geese however, there were some individuals which seem to be suffering grew thin about them it was currently said among the geese, there you see what it leads to when flying is taken seriously for because their hearts are occupied with the thought of wanting to fly therefore they become thin, do not thrive, do not have the grace of God, as we have through therefore become plump and delicate. And so the next Sunday they went again to divine worship and the old gander preached about the lofty goal of the Creator, here again the geese curtsied and the ganders bowed their heads, what a lofty goal the creator had set before the goose, where to the wings were designed so with the divine worship of Christendom, man too has wings, he has imagination. And then when someone reads this he says that's pretty and there it ends, he then waddles home to his affairs and becomes or at all events endeavours with all his might to become, plump, delicate, fat but on Sunday the parson preacher thus and he hearkens to it exactly like the geese". I wish I were very thin. Anyway, it's all variations on the Socratic Maxim or the Maxim adopted by Socrates "know yourself" and Kierkegaard had great personal regard for Socrates, there's a quote in the fourth page about his relationship to Socrates and he had a great personal regard for Socrates because Socrates exemplifies what he believed in his person, he had no set of doctrines, he had no systems, he simply hardened self and Socrates wanted to be the gadfly to all of Athens, spinning them into the awareness of their own ignorance, likewise Kierkegaard wanted to be the gadfly for Proust. Our generation at least, for his generation, Copenhagen which were very smug and had a very easy conscience so Kierkegaard wasn't interested in theory he wasn't interested in the printed menu he was interested in the practice he was interested in the nourishment and he thought that the danger was that people become intoxicated with theories and he sharpened up his knife and cut off his theories and was concerned only with the practice. So it's all summed up in this critics saying "truth is subjectivity" and let me just finish by reading the quote on the second page, top of the second page "the great thing is not to be this or that but to be one self and this is something which every man can be if he she will" thanks.

End of Transcription