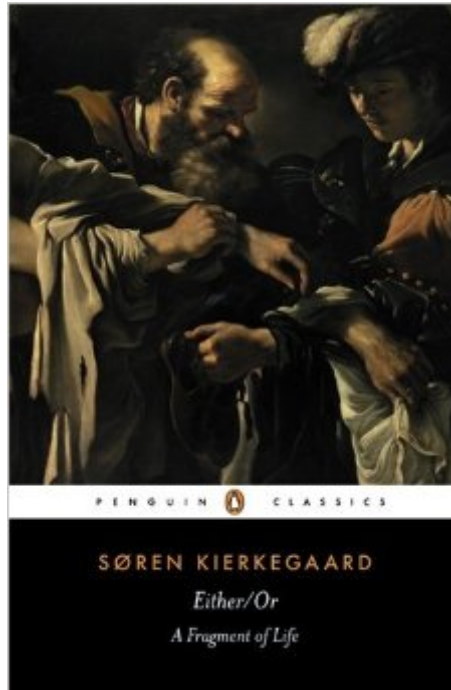


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Either/Or: A Fragment Of Life (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

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

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Customer Reviews

This was Kierkegaard's first major work. It consists of two "parts": the first written by an aesthetic fellow named A and the second by an ethical fellow named Judge Vilhelm. The two parts are meant to show us the difference between the aesthetic and ethical modes of life. The first half, written by the aesthete A, reveals the importance of the interesting to the aesthete. The aesthete is someone

who has no higher purpose, but who simply seeks enjoyment. For them the interesting is the highest good, as it is the best road to enjoyment. The worst evil is boredom, so there is an entire chapter about how to avoid boredom by practicing the art of forgetting. There are a few essays about sorrow and the erotic, in which Don Giovanni is held up as the supreme example of the "immediate erotic" (immediate meaning in this case that his enjoyment is entirely in the moment, not in any sort of reflection). A reflects on differing types of sorrow, seeking to find the interesting in them. For the aesthete everything is fair game for finding enjoyment. The section concludes with the famous (or infamous) Diary of a Seducer, in which Johannes the Seducer keeps a diary as he seduces an innocent young woman, whose love he sacrifices at the altar of the interesting. The second half is by Judge Vilhelm, who is attempting to convert A to the ethical mode of life. Just as A's half focused on the preference of seduction and the erotic to marriage, Vilhelm seeks to justify marriage. Surprisingly, he tries to justify marriage on aesthetic grounds before moving on to discuss the virtues of marriage from the ethical view of life. While A's writing style is witty and sarcastic, Vilhelm's style can be described as nothing short of boring.

Either/or is two parts in which Kierkegaard used different false names or pseudonyms. The first part discusses the aesthetic or personal experience, where imagination is the most powerful factor of aesthetic pleasure. For the aesthetic, imagination is the only way to break the boredom barrier just as Don Juan avoided repetition of the love act with the same woman in order to break the dullness of repetition. In that way, the aesthetic hunger for pleasure leads to the same void of repetition by seeking a way out of it. Not to spoil the book for readers, but the last section of the first part of either/or "the diary of the seducer" is a very interesting diary in which the character tries to avoid the climax of a relationship with a woman he desires because of the fear of emptiness in relationships. Imagination to the seducer is the only way to maximize his aesthetic pleasure, while the success of the seduction will definitely end the adventure and the prey should be replaced by a more difficult one. The second part, which deals with the ethical, or supposedly a higher form of existence, takes the form of letters written by different characters as a response to the first part where reason not seduction is used to defend values, relationships, and the pleasure of having a monogamous soul mate. The argument in this section promises greater fulfillment from devotion to higher morals which ultimately lead to a deeper aesthetic pleasure. It's widely thought that the discussion of the aesthetic and the ethical is a reflection of Kierkegaard's own confusion, especially after ending his engagement with the love of his life Regine Olsen, just as the seducer of either/or did.

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