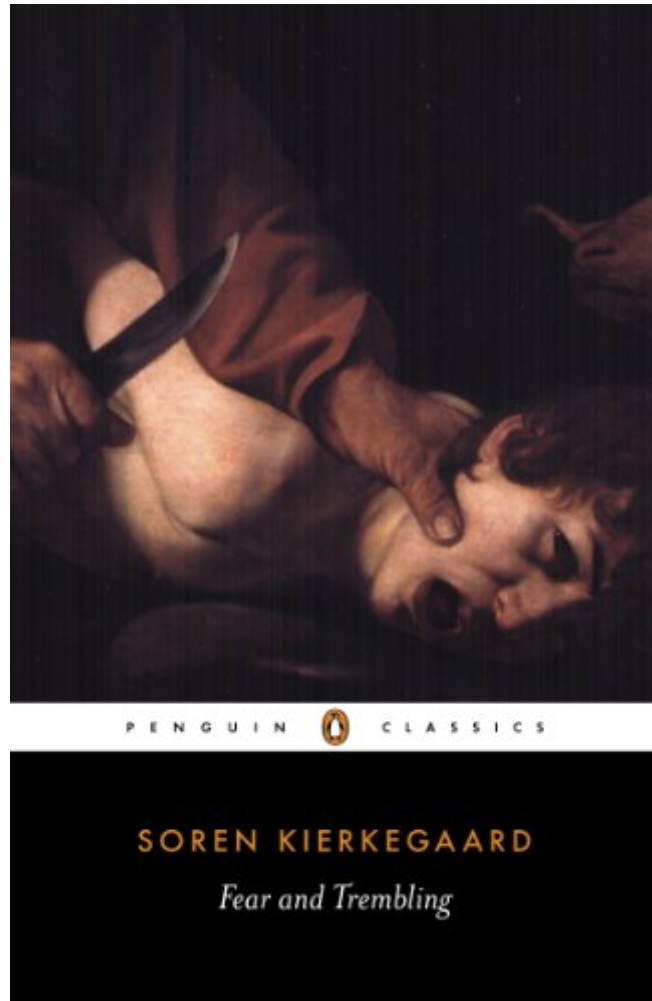


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Fear And Trembling: Dialectical Lyric By Johannes De Silentio (Classics)



Synopsis

Writing under the pseudonym of Johannes de silentio, Kierkegaard uses the form of a dialectical lyric to present his conception of faith. Abraham is portrayed as a great man, who chose to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in the face of conflicting expectations and in defiance of any conceivable ethical standard. The infamous and controversial 'teleological suspension of the ethical' challenged the contemporary views of Hegel's universal moral system, and the suffering individual must alone make a choice 'on the strength of the absurd'. Kierkegaard's writings have inspired both modern Protestant theology and existentialism.

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Customer Reviews

Good translations and helpful notes

Kierkegaard is a necessary reading for 20th and 21st century theology. He laid the tracks that theology has been riding for some time. And "Fear and Trembling" is at the center of it all. His goal

was to take Christianity beyond mere morality, a goodness we might do but which does not find its way into the heart and the affections. In the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac he finds the biblical story that par excellence takes true faith beyond mere obedience to a rule but a leap of faith into the arms of God in a radical embrace of the bare, naked and unsupported Word of God. True Christianity is standing face to face before God, naked and trembling. There are a host of philosophical issues that Kierkegaard explores in his writings, primarily as a response to the philosophy of Hegel and the concept of religion as the rational and the group as the nexus for meaning.

Some great thoughts in here, but Kierkegaard doesn't really explain himself very well, and he frequently gets into the (of the time period) habit of throwing in other language words arbitrarily. The book would probably be better with a companion book, I just wish Kierkegaard had made himself clear in the first place. BTW this is supposed to be his easy book.

Excellent introduction and notes to help the less learned. Kierkegaard's original work is written for a renaissance man and not the average reader from the 20th and 21st centuries. The concepts are hard, but conceivable and the philosophy is well grounded. It's not about Abraham but really about Hegel and Hegel's beliefs about faith. In modern times we'd call this a rant, but it is a cut above.

It is near impossible to understand this text without having gone through the movement of heartache or be in the state of lovesick. This is the jumping off point for Kierkegaard and the begging ins of his existential crisis.

S.K. has worthy devotional works, but this book gives religion a bad name. Tedious variations on a single theme: We should all have the faith of Abraham who thought God was calling him to murder ["sacrifice"] his son, believing that God would restore the dead son to life. You can have your cake and eat it too. This, of course, is ABSURD [S.K.'s pervading word]! But faith is precisely embracing the absurd. This is the sum and substance of the book. Biographical explanations of a work are suspect, but when the work is patent non-sense, one is tempted to believe those who say that S. K. may have been struggling with his divided self, wishing to marry Regine but breaking their engagement. Guilt over the hurt he has caused her, and unresolved problems of relations with his father.

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's explanation of the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac is not easy reading. This short book is definitely not philosophy light or theology for the masses, but a very serious philosophico-theological attempt to understand what it means to have the kind of faith attributed to Abraham, without dismissing him as a madman for being willing to kill his favored son when God asks him to. It is complex, detailed, imaginative, expansive, and difficult (unless you read this sort of thing all the time, which I don't). Kierkegaard may not go down easily with anyone who prefers to think of faith as a warm feeling that gets you through the hard times. By his reading of things, neither faith nor doubt, properly understood, comes easily or cheaply, without effort and a considerable amount of time. Indeed, for a book about faith, Kierkegaard writes quite a bit about doubt, leading to the interesting question: Can faith and doubt co-exist? (Hint: The answer is yes.) In justifying or explaining Abraham's actions, however, the primary tension at issue in Kierkegaard's study is not between faith and doubt, with faith triumphant, but between ethics (what is publicly acceptable and, even more important, done for the good of all) and aesthetics (human sensory experience). It is not possible to find any rationale or justification for Abraham's willingness to kill his son in the realm of ethics. It goes against every norm of human society, parental responsibility, and fatherly love. And it is not good enough to say, "Well, Abraham knew that in the end God would spare Isaac and not really require his blood at Abraham's hand." That kind of justification undermines the whole story. The only way to understand Abraham as a hero of faith is if he knew that God's requirement meant that he would, in fact and in deed, kill his son., but also that God would restore Isaac (another Isaac?) to him, since it was through that genealogical line that God's promises to Abraham had meaning. Not spare him, but restore him. It's a paradox, and is explainable only by reference to the absurd. By the absurd, Kierkegaard does not mean strange or weird or ridiculous. He means that which is beyond the ability of human agency and the grasp of human reason. The only way Abraham could act was by reliance on the absurd—the so-called "leap of faith" often referred to. The only way he could regain Isaac was via the absurd, but in order for his faith to have any effect, he had to believe that he was indeed going to sacrifice his son. That's the paradox, but it is the paradox that is at the heart of any attempt to understand Abraham, in Kierkegaard's view, because while he argues that the ethical is higher than the aesthetic, the religious stage of life is higher still. This stage puts one in a relationship with God that is personal, absolute, transcendent, and ineffable. For me, the whole thing began to become understandable (to the extent that it ever did), in the third of the three "problema" that

form the core of the book, and especially the last major section. (‘‘But now Abraham. How did he act?’’) In the end Kierkegaard denies that he is actually trying to explain Abraham, since he claims that ‘‘I cannot understand Abraham, I can only admire him.’’ Possibly he is just being clever in saying so, though after his discussion of the absurd and of the demands of the religious life, maybe not. The story of Abraham challenges us at the heart of both our private lives (the aesthetic) and our public lives (the ethical), demanding that we at least imagine, even if we cannot live, a life beyond both (the religious). This is not easy going, certainly not a book to pick up when you’re tired or to try to rush through. In the end I’m glad I read it, though I’m not sure I’m ready just yet to rush out and read everything of Kierkegaard’s. But I did find it eye-opening, at times invigorating, at times nearly impenetrable.

A great quality Penguin classics binding and a good book to have in the house. Thoughtful and sober reading.

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