

## The Humble Existence: Kierkegaard and Cynicism

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This paper clarifies Kierkegaard's perspective on humble existence by comparing it with that of the Cynics. Kierkegaard considered Christ, who is described in the Gospels as having lived a poor and humble life, as the Christian model. However, he did not expect all Christians to conform to this model; rather, Kierkegaard spoke of the importance of the failure to do so, since such failure makes human sin manifest. For Kierkegaard, God's grace could not be meaningful without this realization of sin. On the other hand, the Cynics had appreciated humble existence hundreds of years before Christianity. Diogenes, in particular, lived on meager means. For him, an ascetic existence conformed to the demands of his philosophical views. Diogenes did not mind living in poverty and begging, since he thought that everything was God's property and that philosophers, who were close to God, deserved their share of it. Throughout his life, he embodied his belief that we could live happily not by fitting into a social or moral norm but conforming to nature.

Both Kierkegaard and the Cynics understood the humble existence as a social activity. Their polemics were designed to appeal to society. They argued for the merit of living according to truth, from which the majority of society was detached.

Compared with the Cynics, Kierkegaard's view of the humble existence is complex; it is founded on faith in God, in the other world, and in Christ, God incarnate. Kierkegaard emphasized that Christ was hated and killed by the powers of this world that did not know God's love, which animated his mission. The humble existence for Kierkegaard implies not just poverty but also persecution and martyrdom. We see in Kierkegaard the radicalization of the concept of humble existence, first discussed by the Cynics. When he set up the humble Christ as a model, Kierkegaard, as a religious being, snuggles up to incurable wounds, and this incurability differentiated him from secularized modern thought that aimed to heal wounds and make society better.