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Title: Repetition Repeated: Reconstructing a Lacanian Subjectivity through Kierkegaardian Repetition

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ABSTRACT

When Descartes declared “Cogito ergo sum,” he triggered a fundamental shift in the trajectory and scope of the philosophical discourse. Hegel called this the beginning of modern philosophy, but the Cartesian *cogito* elevated human reason, ushered the Enlightenment, and led to scientific and political revolutions. But as Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, almost from the moment Descartes posited the mind-body problem, there was an anxiety about what it meant to be “one who thinks.”¹ This anxiety presents itself as a continuous questioning of the ontology of the subject, and ultimately, whether there is a subject at all. By the time post-structuralism trains its eyes on subjectivity, the subject is thoroughly dismantled. Jacques Lacan inaugurates this dismantling by positing a subject rooted in desire and borne out of a constitutive lack, a subject created by a linguistic and symbolic structure that is completely inaccessible to the one who is. In short, Lacan defines the subject for a post-structuralist generation of philosophy that is more interested in dismantling what remains of the Cartesian *cogito*, rather than attempting to rebuild the subject.

For his part, Soren Kierkegaard anticipated this post-structuralist idea of subjectivity, and in a trio of texts written in 1843, he posits the self as a movement of becoming, freedom, and transcendence. Perhaps the most obscure text in his oeuvre, *Repetition*, embodies this idea through what Lacan calls a text that is “...dazzling in its lightness and ironic play...”² *Repetition* is often

¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (New York, Verso Books, 2000), 1-2.

² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: WW Norton, 1998), 61.

considered one of the more difficult texts in Kierkegaard, with the text spawning numerous interpretations about his views on metaphysics, subjectivity, and whether it has a meaning to it at all. However, Lacan read *Repetition* carefully and, aside from mentioning it in his seminars, the themes heavily influence his own writing on repetition. The goal of this project, then, is to revisit the work of Kierkegaard's trio of 1843 texts — *Repetition*, *Either/Or*, and the Job Discourse — and situate their importance for Lacanian repetition. By re-reading Lacanian repetition through a Kierkegaardian framework, we can liberate it from a Freudian determinism that situates the subject as a only suffering from alienation and lack, and find a post-structuralist subject with agency to make a choice for its own freedom and becoming