The theme of the study is religious ethics and its subject Søren Kierkegaard's (1813-55) conception of ethics. The idea is to expound the specific character of religious ethics by investigating Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical.

On the one hand, Kierkegaard occupied himself a lot with the ethical; on the other, he characterised himself as a religious, a Christian author, distinguishing himself thereby from philosophers. According to Kierkegaard, philosophy is incapable to seize the concrete ethical actuality of the individual. The purpose of this study is to bring forth from the margins of moral philosophy this sphere of personal ethical striving and to show how the ethical is intertwined with the religious in this sphere. At the same time, it is pointed out that Kierkegaard was occupied precisely with this ethical actuality that belongs essentially to human existence and precedes all theoretical activity.

The method of the study is the close reading and interpretation of the first phase of Kierkegaard's authorship. The view into the ethical actuality gained through the close reading is then clarified. First, the results of the interpretation are compared with those produced by other interpreters of Kierkegaard's early works. Second, an attempt is made to determine the relationship between ethical striving and reflection.

After the introduction, there is a brief survey of the research done on Kierkegaard's ethics. Then, in chapter 3, follows the main part of the study, an exegesis of Kierkegaard's dissertation The Concept of Irony (Om Begrebet Ironi, 1841) and the Second Part of Either/Or (Enten-Eller, 1843). These works present Kierkegaard's view on ethical striving. The individual strives to realise the universal ethical ideal in his concrete existence and, at the same time, to bring his life into harmony with the actual order of things. The prerequisite for this is that the individual assumes full responsibility for himself, appropriates his self ethically: he has to choose himself absolutely, choose himself as free. However, as a historical, concrete creature who is bound to the finite, a human being is not his own master. Therefore freedom and ethics turn out to be impossible without God. In this way the ethical leads to the religious.

In chapter 4, the views of George J. Stack and Pia Søltoft on Kierkegaard's ethics, and their interpretations of The Concept of Irony and Either/Or are examined. Attention is paid to the problems involved in placing Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical into a scientific frame of reference, that is, in founding it on a phenomenological theory of subjectivity, on a theory of human existence.

In chapter 5, an inquiry is made into the prospects of constructing an ethical science on the basis of Kierkegaard's conception of ethics. A thesis is put forward: ethics cannot be based on critical reflection, on the contrary, it is the ethical that is the basis for critical reflection - at least it should be.