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Soren Kierkegaard's Concept of Duty

Robert Andrew Whyte

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Philosophy

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 1993

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ABSTRACT

Soren Kierkegaard's Concept of Duty

Robert Andrew Whyte

The focus of this thesis will be on Kierkegaard's concept of duty (in relation to three separate realms): the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. In the aesthetic realm, there is no sense of duty. In the ethical realm, the seriousness with which we approach our duties is determined by our relations to other persons, and to universal laws. Finally, in the religious realm, duty to God takes priority over all other duties.

The intent of this thesis is to show that there is no overlap which exists between these three realms; in other words, they are all mutually exclusive of each other. Even though the aesthetic realm is the precursor of the ethical, and the ethical that of the religious, there is no common ground which exists between these three realms of existence. Furthermore, there will be an attempt to demonstrate why Kierkegaard considered himself to be a religious author (even though his pseudonymous works would be classified as representing a view which was not strictly religious).

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INTRODUCTION

When writing on the place of duty in Kierkegaard's philosophy we have the difficulty of finding a starting point. He speaks a great deal of duty, and on different occasions. A question arises: is there a yardstick that would measure the relative value of each of these duties? We think that since duty is always related to man's way of life, we should inquire what Kierkegaard thinks of man in general.

According to Soren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855), in The Sickness Unto Death, "Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis."¹ It is the gap which exists between these polarities which provides the framework for Kierkegaard's concept(s) of duty. A man who has not yet discovered his true self, is the man who has not yet recognized that he has a duty to move beyond the temporal. And such an action is only performed by discovering that which is eternal within himself.

In Soren Kierkegaard's conception of man, there are stages which must be lived through in order to arrive at the point where every man is eventually supposed to arrive. Man,

¹
Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 146.

in Kierkegaard's estimation, only becomes himself when he reaches the highest stage, of the three stages of existence, which is the religious. Reaching this stage is supposed to be the goal of all men. In other words, a man only becomes who he is supposed to be when he recognizes that he was meant to be his higher self, and that the aesthetic and ethical stages are designed solely to be passed through (as stages which merely precede the religious). However, each stage presents different duties. And, in each stage there is a measure: the self.

A man becomes what he should be when the self becomes 'itself,' and this happens by way of a relation, whereby the self, which is a composite of the finite and the infinite, becomes related to itself. This final stage of man's journey to find himself, is accomplished only through God's assistance. A man can not become that which Kierkegaard defines as 'itself,' without God's assistance, because man is a limited being. Man does not have the capacity to reach the highest stage of existence, which is the religious, without God's aid, for man is limited (due to his being an entity which is created). All men are created for the purpose of becoming what they were intended to be; that is, we were not created to be identical selves, but to become our own selves, or what Kierkegaard terms 'itself.' Only God has the capacity to make a self, itself.

At the aesthetic stage, a man has not yet recognized that he has a duty to become himself, or even that he has

duties to others. At this stage, a man is only concerned with temporal matters. Since this is the case, he has yet to recognize his duty to God. And this duty consists in becoming himself.

Instead, the aesthete lives only his own finiteness. The ethicist is similar to the aesthete, in so far as the former, like the latter, can not see beyond his own finiteness. However, the ethicist exists on a higher plane of existence than the aesthete due to the fact that the former recognizes that he has duties to others.

By contrast, the aesthete only cares about his own needs. It is this selfishness which places him furthest away from the religious stage. Thus, The Sickness Unto Death is the proper point to commence these reflections on Kierkegaard's concept of duty which for man is to become himself. This self is not to be confused with the self which has been created by externality, or worldly influences. Instead, man's true self -- which Kierkegaard refers to as 'itself' -- is only found when a man is able to separate himself from others. This separation frees a man from his earthly bondage, and allows him to discover his true self.

The aesthete is most susceptible to becoming swayed by earthly distractions, which prevent him from discovering his religious duty. The ethicist, like the aesthete, has not recognized that he has a religious duty to become himself. However, the ethicist recognizes that there are ethical duties. While he is still not himself, the ethicist has made

the movement away from the aesthetic stage, and, as such, is in a better position to become himself.

The ethicist recognizes that ethical duties are duties to others. Such a recognition allows him to make a movement away from his temporal self, or the self which has been constructed by those other than himself. The aesthete, who does not recognize that there are duties to others, is completely susceptible to external influences. By contrast, the ethicist chooses to perform ethical duties. It is the power of choice which makes the ethicist more of a self than the aesthete. Given that the ethicist chooses to perform duties to others, it may then be assumed that such a person has the intention of becoming himself.

This is why the ethical stage is already a step towards the true self, because it is the first look outside the self. By looking outside oneself, one recognizes that there are duties to be performed. Then, by performing ethical duties (to others), or religious duties (to God), one is able to make the movement from the self, to that which is outside the self, and back to the self. It is the movement back to the self in which a man discovers his true self; in other words, until a man recognizes that there are duties, he can not make the initial movement away from himself, in order to free himself to perform ethical, or religious duties, thereby proving that is willing to find himself. The aesthete never makes the initial movement away from himself, and, since this is the case, becomes susceptible to external

influences. The ethicist does make the movement away from himself, but he does not know how to return to himself. Only the religious individual can find the path back to himself.

A man discovers himself when he recognizes that duty to God has primacy, for a man's self is not his constructed self, but the self which God intended him to be. As such, a man's first duty consists in looking outside himself. By performing such an action, a man is then in a position to discover himself. However, if a man never makes the movement away from himself, he will never be able to discover his true self.

At this point, it becomes necessary to compare, and to contrast, Kierkegaard's concept of duty -- and its foundation in the nature of man as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite -- with the doctrines of other thinkers whose ethical theories deal directly, and indirectly, with the concept of duty. For the sake of clarity, we have to turn to specific examples. Here are the philosophers whose ethical doctrines may help us to better understand how to gap the distance between the descriptive, or the "what is," and the normative, or the "what should be," which is another way of speaking about duty.

In the Phaedo, of Plato (428 B.C.-348 B.C.), Socrates informs his friends, Simmias and Cebes, that it is the soul in man which is the unchanging, and, as such, does not need to be attuned (to the passions); in other words, the soul is the part of man which accounts for his perfection -- there

is no hierarchy of souls amongst men -- and, for this reason, need not be rearranged.² Meanwhile, it is the physical passions which need to be attuned to a fixed regiment. Without the power of the soul to discern right from wrong actions, the passions would be a corrupting influence on man. In other words, if man was solely influenced by that which is not higher than the earthly, it would have to be assumed that his passions would lead him away from the path of that which would merit moral plaudits.

If we acted solely according to whim(s), it would be expected that there would be no order. The attunement to which Socrates makes reference to is performed by the soul. It is the soul which leads us to the morally appropriate action, by placing restrictions on the physical passions. It is the soul which makes the separation between the noble and the base. And that which is noble in man is his soul. One is able to distinguish the noble man (who attunes his passions to the soul), from the base (who acts according to his passions), by way of their actions. And the actions of the man who is directed by his soul are limited to what is valuable due to his willingness to submit to his higher self. So, at this point, it will be claimed that every man is composed of that which is deemed noble, and that which is deemed base.

Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.), in his Ethics, states

²

Plato, Phaedo 94C-95A.

that a man becomes virtuous by consciously choosing to perform actions which are deemed to be virtuous.³ However, a man is not deemed to be virtuous because he unconsciously performs actions which are virtuous. A virtuous man consciously chooses to perform virtuous actions for the sake of performing virtuous actions. Thus, a man becomes virtuous by consciously choosing to be that type of a man.

Hence, Aristotle would not claim that a man performs a certain action because he lacks the power of choice and, subsequently, is disposed to acting in that manner; instead, he holds that a man becomes who he is through habitually -- as well as consciously -- choosing to perform certain actions, which conform to 'the good.' In his Ethics, Aristotle says that

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.⁴

Thus Aristotle is proposing that a man chooses who he is, or who is to be, by way of the actions which he chooses to perform. So, the man who does not consistently choose to perform actions which are virtuous can not be deemed a virtuous man, which also means that he must be deemed less than a man.

This is possible, because, every man, according to the Aristotelian doctrine, has the potential to become virtuous.

³

Aristotle Ethics 2.1.1103b1-1103b2.

⁴

Ibid, 1.1.1094a1-1094a3.

No man is condemned to performing actions which are not virtuous because no man is naturally inclined to acting in a fixed way. A man proves that he is virtuous by consciously choosing to perform virtuous actions; actions which have moral worth, for Aristotle, are those actions which were chosen by the moral agent.⁵ Furthermore, Aristotle says that "it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good."⁶ Moral actions, abstracted from the agent who chooses to perform them, have no worth, for it is the act of choosing which makes the action(s) moral.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) thinks that the happiness of the whole should always take precedence over the happiness of the one. He notes that the actions which promote happiness, for the most part, will involve a limited amount of participants; in other words, most noble deeds are performed with the goal of benefiting only a small group of people. Furthermore, if the majority of humankind also chooses to act in like fashion, the aggregate total of happiness should fulfill, what could be conceived of as, the intended utilitarian goal. It should be noted that Mill contends that happiness does not come about as a result of the recognition that there are duties to be performed.

5

Ibid, 2.4.1105a27-1105b4.

6

Ibid, 2.4.1105b9-1105b11.

One of Mill's main contentions is that most actions are not prompted by a sense of duty, because they lack particularity; furthermore, since duties are based on principles, duties do not pertain to real life situations, because they do not take extenuating circumstances into account.⁷ For example, lying, from a deontological, or Kantian, perspective, is never permissible, for it is an action which can not be universalized; however, within the framework of utilitarianism, or the teleological perspective, if lying will promote more happiness, than unhappiness, it is considered to be the appropriate action. That is, happiness is promoted by judging as to which action would be most appropriate in a given situation, and then performing that action. However, as Mill notes, most actions which are performed, as a result of acting in a moral manner, are not based on any precept of duty. One need not perform a moral act for the reason that it is binding on the moral agent; instead, one performs the action which is deemed to be most appropriate (in order to create the most happiness).

If promoting the happiness of others is the morally correct action in any case, could it not also be assumed that one has a duty to create happiness in others? If the goal of any utilitarian action is to promote happiness, it

7

John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," in Ethical Theory, ed. Louis J. Pojman (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989), p. 168.

could be assumed that such an undertaking is based on a sense of duty. In other words, if one is cognizant of what action(s) should be performed, in any given situation, one must also be performing this action, or actions, out of a sense of duty, and to create a maximal level of happiness.

The ethical system which is usually contrasted with that of Mill's, is that of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). According to Kant, every man has a duty to act in accordance with the 'categorical imperative.' This particular rule states that "I should never act in such a way that I could not also will that my maxim should be a universal law."⁸ Given that I must act in a way which would conform to 'universal law,' I must also ensure that I do not transgress the realm of ethics. Hence, the morally permissible, from a Kantian standpoint, is the universalizable.

In his ethical theory, Kant makes a distinction between duty and inclination:

Out of love for humanity I am willing to admit that most of our actions are in accordance with duty; but, if we look more closely at our thoughts and aspirations, we everywhere come upon the dear self, which is always there, and it is this instead of the stern command of duty (which would often require self-denial) which supports our plans.⁹

Thus, Kant seems to be suggesting that if one had a choice, one would choose to act in accordance with inclination, and

8

Immanuel Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1959), p. 18.

9

Ibid, pp. 23-24.

not duty. However, Kant contends, in his ethical theory, that by way of rationality, one chooses to act in accordance with those actions which should be approved by all (in order to avoid a state of chaos). That is, actions which are deemed 'rational' are those which should coincide with universal interests. The performance of dutiful actions places one's interests beyond the self; in other words, duties are directed towards others, and, as such, are held to be universal. While an amoral person would act out of a sense of inclination, the moral person, whose actions are guided by the precepts of rationality will, accordingly, choose to perform those actions which arise out of the categorical imperative. However, Kant's theory assumes that all persons are rational, and, given that this is the case, would act from a sense of duty.

Hence, Kant is making a distinction between the lower, and the higher, self. It is the lower self who does not recognize that one has a duty to act in accordance with rationality (for the common good of humankind). In other words, it is the rational man, the one who acknowledges his higher self, who determines that it is in his best interest to act rationally. In fact, such a man, in arriving at this realization, admits that he has a duty to himself (to act rationally), and to others (as a rational being, a man should recognize that he has a duty to others, and this calls for his acting rationally). Thus, rationality provides the incentive for each man to act rationally: every man has

a duty towards every other man, in so far as every man has a duty to act in accordance with his higher self, and this, in turn, calls for every man acting in accordance with reason.

Now that the ethical doctrines of some other philosophers have been presented, they will now be analyzed in relation to Kierkegaard's concept of duty. For Plato, man is composed of that which changes (the body) and that which is unchanging (the soul). It is the unchanging part which accounts for man's higher self. In like manner, Kierkegaard holds that man's higher self is a composite of the finite and the infinite. However, since man's religious duty is to be himself, he must discover that which is infinite within himself in order to make the movement away from his constructed self, or the self which is not the true self. While every man is familiar with the finite part of his self, only the man who recognizes his duty to God becomes acquainted with his higher self, or the infinite part (in conjunction with the finite part).

According to Aristotle's position, a man either chooses to act in a virtuous manner, or he does not make such a choice, and, given that this is the case, does not become a virtuous man. Within Aristotle's ethical spectrum, a man must make those choices which prove that he is virtuous. In like manner, Kierkegaard maintains that at the ethical stage, a man must choose to perform those duties which are deemed ethical. By contrast, the aesthete does not choose to perform any duties. Hence, the ethicist, by showing the

willingness to perform ethical duties, also proves, by way of this willingness, that he has the motivation to seek his higher self, thereby making the movement towards the religious stage.

Mill's utilitarian theory suggests that there is a distinction between a higher, and a lower, self. The man who has recognized his higher self does not seek to promote happiness merely for the sake of promoting his own happiness. The follower of utilitarianism seeks to promote happiness in order to benefit the whole (of humankind). In other words, the utilitarian acknowledges his higher self by performing actions which benefit others. Thus, the utilitarian shows a sense of duty by performing actions which emanate out of his higher self, and, as such, promote the happiness of the whole. By contrast, a man who merely performs actions for the sake of promoting his own happiness, has not recognized his duty to others, and has not discovered his higher self.

For Kant, man is composed of two opposing forces: inclination and rationality. While inclination leads us away from duty, rationality prevents our inclinations from ruling our actions. According to Kant's ethical theory, we choose to act in accordance with the categorical imperative because we recognize that we have a duty to do so; it is the rational course of action. Similarly, in The Sickness Unto Death, a man will eventually seek to discover himself after he realizes that this is his ultimate duty. However, such a

movement calls for a man to acquire faith in God. Such a movement goes beyond reason, but paradoxically, the only rational way for a man to discover himself, and that which is infinite within himself, is to make the movement away from rationality, or that which can only be explained by making reference to that which is temporal.

So, according to these ethical theories -- which preceded the writings of Kierkegaard -- man has a duty to discover his higher self, and, by doing so, makes the movement away from the lower self, which is the self who has no recognition of duty. A man shows a willingness to become his higher self when he makes a conscious choice not to heed his passions, or inclinations. Acting in accordance with one's passions shows that one is united too strongly to that which is not part of his true self. And this is the earthly. A man shows a recognition of his higher self when he admits of his duty to others, or to God, as a path to discovering his own self.

Chapter I

ON AESTHETICS/ETHICAL DUTY IN KIERKEGAARD

Concealment and Intensity

For the aesthete, actions revolve around the maintenance of dramatic tension. This type of person remains interesting as long as his motives are concealed. However, this type of person lacks a sense of duty. The aesthete exists solely within the finite realm. Unlike the ethicist who acknowledges that we have duties to others, the aesthete is not looking past his own needs. The ethicist also exists in the finite realm, but, by recognizing that there are duties to others, is closer to discovering his true self. The aesthete does not admit of the tension which exists between the lower and higher selves, for the aesthete, who has not yet made a commitment to the ethical lifestyle, is unaware -- while existing within the aesthetic realm -- that he has the capacity to become a dutiful person.

Concealment is crucial to the aesthetic realm because in this realm, interest is maintained through dramatic tension. In contrast, concealment is not permissible within the ethical realm, for, in this realm, all must be revealed. A problem to be resolved is the following: can Kierkegaard bridge this particular gap between the two realms?

Kierkegaard -- by way of his pseudonyms -- describes three realms of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical and

the religious. The aesthetic is the lowest, the ethical the middle (i.e., it is placed between the aesthetic and the religious) and the religious the highest. Later on I will explain why there is no concept of duty in the aesthetic realm. Furthermore, I will elaborate on the relation between aesthetic concealment and the duty of ethical revelation.

According to Kierkegaard, the dramatic tension which exists due to aesthetic concealment can only be resolved by chance (the aesthete maintains silence in order to prolong this type of tension).¹ Since aesthetics insists on silence, any person involved in this category can not reveal any intentions to another. For if this type of person communicates with another, the tension which exists will be relaxed, and, as a result, the aesthetic code will be violated. By contrast, an ethical duty requires that the ethicist -- while acting within the ethical realm -- constantly reveals the actions that are to be carried out. On the other hand, the actions of the aesthete do not admit of ethical duty because these particular actions are not constantly revealed. Thus, maintaining aesthetic silence can not be deemed an ethical duty.

In the ethical realm, one has a duty to constantly be revealed, for in this realm, there are ethical duties which must be performed. Ethical duties arise out of lived

¹
Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 94-97.

experiences, and our relations to others, for these type of duties arise out of the expectations of others. However, as I will discuss later, one must ultimately **choose** to perform an ethical duty; in other words, this type of duty will arise out of another's expectations, but the person performing the duty must choose to perform the duty in order for the duty to be deemed ethical. Accordingly, while one exists in the ethical realm, one must constantly be revealed in order to prove that the duty which should be performed, is being performed.

Aesthetics requires silence (in so far as dramatic tension ceases when the concealed becomes revealed). As a result, the aesthete can not communicate problems verbally to other people (while acting within the aesthetic realm). By contrast, the tragic hero has a duty to reveal all. For example, in Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard refers to Euripides' play Iphigenia in Aulis (in which Agamemnon is required to sacrifice his daughter, in order to save the lives of his fellow countrymen²).

One reason why Kierkegaard claims that the ethical is a higher realm than the aesthetic is that by performing

²
Ibid, p. 96. Kierkegaard summarizes the plot of Euripides' play in the following manner. Agamemnon must sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia; aesthetics requires him to conceal this information from all others; this would place him, ethically, in a state of temptation; an old servant -- who is the 'chance' element -- reveals Agamemnon's horrible duty to his wife, Clytemnestra; lastly he, acting as a tragic hero, reveals his intentions to Clytemnestra and Iphigenia. By revealing himself, Agamemnon shows that he is acting within the ethical realm.

duties, which are ethical, one demonstrates that one has responsibilities towards others. By contrast, the aesthete does not acknowledge duties towards others because this type of person lacks a connectedness towards existence, thus demonstrating no sense of ethical duty. So, from an existential point of view, the ethicist functions on a higher plane than the aesthete. However, becoming revealed does not necessarily place a person within a higher realm of existence. I will try to prove this later when I discuss the case of Abraham. Furthermore, the ethical realm is separate from the religious. The ethicist, while existing in a revealed state, can not reach the religious realm, for this particular realm can only be reached through a tendency to perform religious duties (which are duties to God). And, as will be shown later, a complete focus on others tends to lead us away from our duty to God (for duty to God is absolute, and, as such, supersedes our duties to others).

While existing in the ethical realm, the tragic hero has a duty to constantly be revealed. Kierkegaard states that Agamemnon, in performing his ethical duty, keeps nothing concealed for, given that he is "a tragic hero . . . he constantly expresses the universal."³ In the terminology of Fear and Trembling, the term 'universal' is used interchangeably with the term 'ethical.' By contrast, the aesthete can only become revealed by chance. In the

³
Ibid, pp. 96-97.

aesthetic realm, there is no universality because the aesthete's primary concern is to the self. But such a self is fragmented and superficial, for this type of person does not recognize the ethical duties which arise out of existing. Therefore, the aesthete, while existing in the aesthetic realm, has no ethical duty to become revealed, for an aesthete does not recognize that there are duties to others. Thus, in not recognizing ethical duties, the aesthete only becomes revealed by chance.

There is a distinction which must be made between aesthetic and ethical intensity. In the aesthetic realm, intensity is created by way of concealment. And the element of the unknown plays a crucial role in creating dramatic tension. By contrast, ethical intensity revolves around ethical duty. In other words, since the ethicist must make all revealed, the intensity which operates in this realm is greater than the intensity of the aesthetic realm. Furthermore, the intensity of the ethicist is present due to an engagement in difficult tasks. The aesthete has low intensity, for this type of person's realm of concern extends no further than the fragmented self.

The aesthete, while existing in the aesthetic realm, has low intensity because this type of person shows no recognition of ethical duty. In order for a person to become ethically dutiful, that person must reveal a willingness to perform ethical duties, which is only achieved by way of choosing to perform ethical duties. It is the act of freely

choosing to perform ethical duties which makes ethical duties intense.

According to Kierkegaard, the gap which exists between the aesthetic and ethical realms cannot be bridged, for aesthetics requires concealment while ethics requires that all be revealed. While aesthetics requires that Agamemnon remain silent, ethics demands that his reasons for sacrificing Iphigenia be revealed. Agamemnon revealed himself; however, if he had remained silent, and Iphigenia had found out from another person, Agamemnon would have been an aesthetic, not a tragic, hero.

In Ralph McInerny's analysis of Kierkegaard, Agamemnon performs his ethical duty by offering his daughter Iphigenia as a sacrifice in order to be successful in battle, thereby saving his fellow countrymen. Furthermore, he (i.e., McInerny) states that unlike Agamemnon, Abraham, as the knight of faith, has no ethical duties, and as such, is immoral. The duty of Abraham -- the protagonist in Fear and Trembling, who must sacrifice his son Isaac in order to please God -- consists in obliterating the boundaries of ethical duty.⁴ McInerny has a valid point, in so far as he acknowledges that Abraham's and Agamemnon's duties differ in relation to ethics; however, Abraham's religious motives can not be evaluated by the standards of the ethical. His duty has no relevance in an ethical context. Furthermore,

⁴
Ralph McInerny, "The Teleological Suspension of the Ethical," The Thomist, 20 (July 1957): 295-310.

Abraham's **momentary** movement outside the ethical realm does not make him an immoral person (i.e., his brief religious duty does not nullify his entire ethical history).

In Fear and Trembling, it is noted that existing within the category of the interesting is "a fateful privilege, which like every privilege in the world of spirit is bought only by deep pain."⁵ The intensity of the aesthetic realm provides tension as long as there is concealment, while the intensity which belongs to ethics is of a different type. My question becomes: can there be interest without concealment? Of course this depends on what meaning is attributed to the term 'interest.' In Kierkegaard's context it is being used as an adjective, not a noun. Of course this difference is crucial in making a distinction between aesthetics and ethics. The aesthete has no duties towards other persons, for this type of person is only concerned with the present, since it is the 'moment' in which the aesthete exists. Concealment is a type of aesthetic state, for it is an extended moment; that is, as long as the aesthete remains concealed, there is tension (which makes the aesthete's situation 'interesting'). By contrast, the term 'interest,' which does not apply to aesthetics, can apply to the realm of ethics, for this term, used as a noun, can also be interpreted as meaning 'concern.' And as such, the term 'interest' belongs in an ethical context because one can be

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Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., p. 92.

concerned without having to be simultaneously engaged in dramatic intensity. It can also be suggested that it is everyone's ethical duty to be concerned (for others). Later on I will discuss how ethical 'interest' becomes more interesting than that which is considered 'interesting' in the aesthetic realm (i.e., dramatic intensity).

Since ethical duties pertain to the universal, it can be suggested that the ethicist is affected by all matters of interest. Assuming that all matters of interest are of an ethical nature -- as opposed to an aesthetic or religious nature -- it can also be assumed that a state of concern for the welfare of others, is the norm in the ethical realm, and as such makes us ethically responsible towards other beings. In other words, in the temporal realm, the ethicist has duties towards others. By contrast, concealment does not place the aesthete outside aesthetics because in this particular realm one must remain concealed. Without concealment the aesthetic realm would no longer be interesting, for there would be no dramatic intensity. Even though Abraham -- the main character in Fear and Trembling -- has a "fateful privilege" (which requires his sacrificing his own son, while maintaining silence), his particular duty is not aesthetic. According to Kierkegaard, "aesthetics can well understand that I sacrifice myself, but not that I sacrifice another for my own sake."⁶

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Ibid, p. 122.

Unlike Agamemnon, Jephtha -- a tragic hero who is mentioned in Fear and Trembling -- had a duty to God, and his countrymen, which required his sacrificing the first thing he encountered when he returned home from a successful victory.⁷ To further implicate himself, he had made a public vow to carry out this particular action. However, like Agamemnon, it turned out that Jephtha would have to sacrifice his daughter. Is it more important to sacrifice the life of one being in order to save others, or to place more importance on the life of one's offspring, instead of one's vow before one's countrymen? From an ethical standpoint, it would appear -- in Kierkegaard's examples -- that the ethicist must always keep public promises. By contrast, Abraham's duty to Isaac, as his father, is superseded by his duty to God.

Ethical duties pertain to others, and, as such, supersede duties to family members (as in the cases of Jephtha and Agamemnon); that is, one has an ethical duty -- from a utilitarian standpoint -- to place more importance on the lives of the majority, than on the life of one person. Such an ethical duty is understood by others. By contrast, the duty of Abraham is not ethically comprehensible. However, the complex issues surrounding religious duties will be considered at a later point.

In the second book of Either/Or, Kierkegaard offers the

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Judges 11:30-40.

following commentary on ethical duty:

in the matter of ethics it is not a question of the multifariousness of duty but of its intensity. When with all his energy a person has felt the intensity of duty he is then ethically mature, and in him duty will emerge of itself. The chief thing is, not whether one can count on one's fingers how many duties one has, but that a man has once felt the intensity of duty in such a way that the consciousness of it is for him the assurance of the eternal validity of his being.⁸

Thus, while the intensity level in the aesthetic realm is more evident on the surface, than in the ethical realm, the sense of duty in any particular person from a comparative standpoint, is more pronounced at the ethical level. Why is the aesthete more dramatically intense, but less dutiful? In the aesthetic realm one has a commitment to remain concealed, for this provides dramatic intensity; however, this type of commitment cannot be equated with ethical duty. In the ethical realm, one's intensity is measured with respect to the level of seriousness with which one approaches a particular task, or duty.

In the example cited above from Kierkegaard's Either/Or, mention was made of the task which was presented to the young William. In this instance it was his task to memorize a passage from a book. The question which arises

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According to Kierkegaard, when his ethical magistrate -- Judge William -- was a young lad, there was a task set before him: he had to memorize the first ten lines of Balle's "Lesson-Book." In this excerpt, Kierkegaard tells us of the way William was completely consumed by his task, thus demonstrating 'ethical intensity.' See, Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 222-226.

is: how is this particular example representative of ethical duty? The ethical must always be typical of that which would be considered universal, and as such, be practiced by humankind, in general. Memorization, in relation to academics, is a universal task, for without this skill, success, at even the most basic level, would not be likely. The question which follows from the previous one is: how is this particular example representative of ethical intensity? Ethical intensity must arise out of one's duties; that is, it is how one approaches a particular task that determines the level of one's (ethical) intensity. The ethicist's duties are clearly defined, and, as a result, this type of person's intensity is more pronounced (than the aesthete's).

According to Regis Jolivet, "the ethicist reckons upon and obtains, on the one hand, inner coherence and clarity, while the aesthete is given up to anarchy and instability."⁹ So, while the aesthete can not accurately determine what should be done, the ethicist's duties are always known. Furthermore, Jolivet, in reference to Kierkegaard, states that:

Ethical repetition, he says, is not mechanical. For the individual, the force of the moral life consists in the repetition with ever renewed spontaneity of gestures which from the outside appear uniform and impersonal.¹⁰

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Regis Jolivet, Introduction to Kierkegaard, trans. W.H. Barber (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1952), p. 134.

¹⁰
Ibid, p. 135.

So, while the ethical life has "force," the aesthetic life "is given up to anarchy and instability." Thus the intensity within the ethical realm is more pronounced because the joy of doing what is ethical revolves around what Kierkegaard refers to as "repetition;" that is, ethical intensity is realized through the repeated performance of certain duties. In other words, a person can be said to belong within the ethical realm by showing others, through the repeated performance of ethical duties, that that person belongs within the ethical realm; on the other hand, the aesthete can not possibly have ethical intensity, while showing a tendency to perform those actions which would place that person in the aesthetic realm, for this type of person lacks the dutifulness of the ethicist.

Jolivet's appraisal of Kierkegaard's position seems sound because ethical intensity does arise out of the performance of one's (ethical) duties. In performing ethical duties repeatedly, one gains a stronger sense of self. And, when this happens, one gains a greater sense of ethical duty thereby becoming more attuned to one's own ethical potential, thus surpassing the lower realm of existence known as the 'aesthetic,' and placing oneself in the ethical realm.

It is not possible for Kierkegaard to bridge the gap between aesthetics and ethics (in relation to the notion of concealment), as it is never permissible for one existing within the ethical realm to be concealed at any time. Such a

choice would place one in the aesthetic, or the religious, realm. Likewise, an aesthete who chooses to become revealed will then be choosing to exist in the ethical realm. However, such a move, on behalf of the aesthete, will place this particular person in a higher realm of existence, for this denotes a movement made from the hedonistic, egocentric world of the aesthete to the universal world of the ethicist, and this type of movement demonstrates a recognition of one's (ethical) duties.

The Abstract and the Concrete

For Kierkegaard, the ethical realm of existence is placed higher than the aesthetic. One main reason for this is that the person who chooses to exist in the ethical realm shows a recognition that there are certain ethical duties which must be performed. In order to exist in the ethical realm, one must make a movement towards doing one's (ethical) duties. By contrast, the aesthete, in not choosing to do what is required by ethical duty, remains in the aesthetic realm. So the aesthetic choice is not to act from a duty, while the ethical choice, which arises out of lived experiences, is to act from a duty.

By doing one's (ethical) duties, one becomes concrete. In other words, the person who chooses to be ethical, by way of performing ethical duties, is also choosing to be concrete. Kierkegaard makes the following observation:

the individual chooses himself as a concretion determined in manifold ways, and he chooses himself therefore in accord with his continuity. This concretion is the reality of the individual, but as he chooses it in accord with his freedom one can also say that it is his possibility, or (to avoid an expression so aesthetical) that it is his task. For he who lives aesthetically sees only possibilities everywhere, they constitute for him the content of the future, whereas he who lives ethically sees tasks everywhere. The individual therefore sees this actual concretion of his as his task, his goal, his aim.¹¹

So, any person has the freedom to choose to be concrete. By making the movement towards living in accordance with the universal, the aesthete freely chooses to acknowledge the concrete nature of existence (as opposed to the abstract nature of the aesthetic realm). However, the aesthete has the capacity to become concrete.

In this section, the discussion will revolve around why Kierkegaard held the position that the ethical is a higher realm of existence than the aesthetic. According to James J. Valone, the ethicist is satisfied with life as it is presented to us, and, as this is the case, this type of person accepts those duties which are interconnected with human existence.¹² In other words, the ethicist chooses to exist in concretion because this type of person does not mind the responsibilities that fall within the ethical realm. On the other hand, the aesthete lacks this same

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Kierkegaard, Either/Or, op.cit., p. 211.

¹²

James J. Valone, The Ethics and Existentialism of Kierkegaard (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 1983), p. 183.

connectedness to existence, and, as a result, has no sense of ethical duty. Given the definitions which Kierkegaard has presented the reader with, Valone's description of the aesthete and the ethicist appear to be accurate. Only the ethicist can be reconciled with ethical existence, for only this type of person performs those duties which are connected with the ethical realm.

It was stated in the previous section that the intensity of the ethical realm is greater than that of the aesthetic realm, for in the ethical realm, one has duties that extend beyond a brief moment in time. It is the ethicist who has recognized that we attain our freedom by way of responsibility; that is, by doing what we are required to do, we gain our freedom from despair (i.e., a type of hopelessness which arises out of a lack of connectedness to existence). The aesthete is condemned to ethical despair, for this type of person is trapped in irresoluteness, within a series of unconnected moments. The aesthete never becomes committed to existence. By contrast, the ethicist makes the movement away from ethical despair by recognizing, and choosing to do those duties which must be performed in the realm of the universal.

Furthermore, when placed on a scale of existence, the ethical would occupy a higher position than the aesthetic. The ethicist chooses to perform duties which arise out of lived experiences. By contrast, the aesthete functions on the level of abstractions, and, as such, does not recognize

duties to others. The aesthete alters a duty in such a way that it no longer admits of difficulty, whereas, the ethicist chooses to perform the duty as is.

"The ethicist has **despaired**," according to Kierkegaard, and "in this despair he has **chosen himself**; in and by this choice he **reveals himself**." ¹³ Therefore, the ethicist makes the movement away from the aesthetic realm by **choosing** to become **revealed**. A person becomes ethical by making the choice to no longer be an aesthete (i.e., a person who does not recognize ethical duty). The movement from the aesthetic realm of existence, to the ethical, comes as a result of recognizing that life consists of more than momentary pleasures, and that the majority of one's actions should be performed within the ethical, and not the aesthetic, realm. In order to get a deeper sense of existence, one must make a movement, or conscious choice, towards a more significant level of reality.

Kierkegaard's claim is that the aesthete can only become an ethicist by way of a recognition that the aesthetic realm can never provide fulfillment, only despair. And fulfillment is only arrived at when one recognizes that

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Kierkegaard makes mention of how the ethicist transcends ethical despair by becoming revealed. Through involvement in the matters of the world, or as I referred to these matters earlier, as matters of interest, one moves away from the realm of the aesthete, and subsequently, from ethical despair. But the initial step is to become revealed. See, Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 227.

there are ethical duties to be performed. It would appear that an aesthete can only become ethical through an abrupt change in perspective, for there is no common ground between the two realms. The aesthete exists outside of the ethical realm for this type of person does not make dutiful choices, but merely lives in irresoluteness. By contrast, the ethicist makes choices, based on existence, which translate into the performance of duty. Therefore, in order for an aesthete, to become ethical, requires a complete revision of priorities.

In order for the aesthete to overcome ethical despair, there must be a drastic movement made from concealment to disclosure. But Kierkegaard holds that such a movement is not an abolition of the aesthetic realm, it is simply an amelioration of what already is; otherwise stated, the ethical realm is merely the transformation of the aesthetic realm, whereby the aesthetic now takes on a deeper level of meaning within a higher level of existence. But, if this is so, why is the aesthetic realm considered to be an 'abstraction' from existence?

One's actions can only be deemed concrete when one is not abstracting that which is from one's life; in other words, one's ethical duties arise solely out of lived experiences. While existing within the aesthetic realm, one can not be said to be existing in concreteness, for the aesthete avoids those situations which provide difficulty. According to Kierkegaard,

To abstract from existence is to remove the difficulty. To remain in existence so as to understand one thing in one moment and another thing in another moment, is not to understand oneself. But to understand the greatest oppositions together, and to understand oneself existing in them, is very difficult.¹⁴

Hence, he is claiming that in order to understand one's self, a person must attempt to make this understanding within the scope of existence. This scope must encompass the complete range of existence, for when a person tries to understand existence outside of lived experiences, this person is merely left with abstractions. 'Abstractions' are usually defined as pieces of information which have been removed, or selected, from the complete picture. As a result, engaging in abstractions removes the difficulty, or intensity, from existence. Thus, while the aesthete has similarities to the ethicist, but on a more superficial level, none the less it can be held that the aesthete is guilty of abstracting the difficulties from existence. In contrast the ethicist is more engaged in existence, for this type of person recognizes that there are ethical duties to be performed.

In the words of Warren Thompson, ethical duty is based on the precept that because we exist, we concurrently have

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Ibid, p. 316. In this section of the work (i.e., "Subjectivity") Kierkegaard discusses the subjective thinker. A subjective thinker does not think in terms of abstractions, instead this type of individual thinks about existence without removing the difficulties (thus creating intensity). Existence is more intense in the ethical, than the aesthetic, realm. However, the highest level of intensity occurs within the religious realm.

responsibilities in relation to our existence; and, if we ignore our ethical duties, we are said to be abstracting from existence, and approaching life in an 'objective' way, hence, we must try to be more 'subjective,' and consequently, make choices (which we will act on).¹⁵ This requires much deliberation on the part of the ethicist; that is, in choosing to act a certain way, one must also consider the consequences of such an action. The religious individual is subjective too, but in a more pronounced manner (which will be dealt with after). Furthermore, the aesthete, in performing actions which revolve around the aesthetic sense of self, has no sense of ethical duty, thereby engaging in abstractions (from existence). Given that the aesthete only views a situation from an egocentric viewpoint, displaying a true lack of concern for others, it could be said that such a person lacks subjectivity.

The subjective standpoint reveals one's connectedness to the external world. Since the ethicist does become engaged in subjectivity, one can also assume that there are (ethical) duties which are associated with this particular realm of existence. Kierkegaard has a valid evaluation of the ethical lifestyle. It would be impossible to exist (ethically) and remain detached from others. In other words, since the ethicist is affected by the external world, it

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Warren Thompson, "A Brief Evaluation of Kierkegaard as Ethical Critic," British Society for Phenomenology Journal, 5 (October 1974): 219-232.

must also be expected that this type of person would develop a more subjective approach to existence (than the aesthete). Out of this subjectivity come duties which are deemed to be important, and, as a result, the ethicist chooses to act in accordance with this subjectivity, for the ethicist, unlike the aesthete, has the freedom to make such a choice.

What the aesthete lacks is the freedom of choice. This type of person never chooses to perform ethical duties. Instead the aesthete gets trapped in ethical despair due to a lack of freedom. The aesthete is not free because this type of person does not recognize what ethical duty requires. The aesthete does not recognize that we have duties to others, for this type of person mainly exists outside the realm of the ethical. The aesthete is selfish. The concerns of this type of person usually go no further than the aesthetic realm. Hence, the aesthetic type of 'self' is not to be confused with the subjective self which Kierkegaard makes mention of in Concluding Unscientific Postscript. The ethical self is a person who acts in relation to subjectivity, and accordingly exists outside the aesthetic realm. By contrast, the aesthetic self does not usually choose to act subjectively.

As a result, it can not be claimed that the aesthetic self is an authentic self, for the aesthete has little recognition of the need to be subjective; whereas, the ethicist is an authentic self, for this type of person acknowledges that there are duties to others. And, as this

is the case, the subjective person accepts life's inconveniencies, without engaging in aesthetic abstractions. Kierkegaard's notion of subjectivity is pertinent to the realm of ethics because those who choose to act ethically have the freedom to exist in subjectivity; in other words, the ethicist accepts life and its inconveniencies.

Freedom occurs while one exists in the ethical, not the aesthetic, realm. Hence, the ethicist, unlike the aesthete does not experience ethical despair. The aesthete only becomes ethical by choosing to exist in the ethical realm, where duty is incorporated with existence. Since the ethicist recognizes that there are duties which must be performed, this type of person has also chosen, as a result of this recognition, to be free from ethical despair. And, according to Kierkegaard, we recognize our duty when we take the vow of marriage.

Marriage and Duty

Kierkegaard makes the following observation regarding marriage, and the choice that the ethicist must make:

So when he himself has chosen, the ethical will consecrate the choice and ennoble his love; and to a certain degree it will also be helpful in choosing, since it will save him from a superstitious faith in the accidental, for a merely aesthetic choice is really an indefinite choice. . .16

Unless the ethicist makes ethical choices, there will be no sign of ethical duty in the decision made. This is what separates the ethicist from the aesthete. For example, the ethicist, in choosing to marry, recognizes that there is a duty to the universal, for in making such a choice, the ethicist makes the movement away from the aesthetic realm; that is, marriage is proof that the ethicist is concerned for someone other than the 'I.'

Why is the aesthete not capable of making this ethical movement? As mentioned in the previous section, Kierkegaard holds that one becomes truly free when that person recognizes that there are duties which must be performed. One of these duties is to take the vow of marriage. In marriage, one makes a movement from the realm of the aesthetic to the ethical, for by uniting with another human being, the ethicist proves that an ethical choice has been made. By contrast, the aesthete does not make any kind of choice which admits of resoluteness, thus leaving this type of person in a state of ethical despair. Furthermore, the aesthete does not usually make ethical choices because this type of person is mainly interested in the pleasures of the moment; in other words, the aesthete does not think that there is pleasure to be found in conjugal love, due to its lasting nature.

The aesthete does not desire marriage, for this type of person has not recognized that marriage can lead to ethical freedom; that is, only the married person recognizes that

freedom is chosen. It is the ethicist who chooses to marry, for this type of person recognizes that the performance of one's ethical duties leads one out of ethical despair. According to Kierkegaard, aesthetic beauty becomes "true beauty" by way of marriage.¹⁷ In other words, the aesthete, in not recognizing that marriage is a duty, is trapped in the realm of the aesthetic; that is, while the beauty inherent in marriage revolves around permanence, the relationships of the aesthete are purposeless and ephemeral. Kierkegaard seems correct in his estimation of this particular situation. Romance, by itself, can not provide lasting happiness because it is usually based on mere (physical) attraction; whereas, in the ethical realm, marriage can provide something longer lasting because this type of relationship is usually based on a deeper type of attraction, which extends beyond the physical.

According to James J. Valone,

A personality like Judge William will censure sensual love not for its own sake and not because it is sensual love but only because it is selfishly expressed in the romantic sphere. Sensual desire and its fulfillment must be given a legitimate context.¹⁸

When sensual love is placed in the aesthetic realm, it merely represents the superficial attraction which exists

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Ronald Grimsley, Kierkegaard: A Biographical Introduction (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 37.

18

Valone, The Ethics and Existentialism of Kierkegaard, op.cit., p. 131.

between two persons whose intentions towards each other revolve around romance. By contrast, sensual love, placed in the ethical realm, represents the meaningful love which two people who are devoted to each other experience. And it is this devotion which transforms sensual love into duty. Since the aesthete is not devoted to any one person, this type of person (i.e., the aesthete) does not recognize that marriage is an ethical duty. As a result, it is not likely that the aesthete will find fulfillment, for there is no resolution, such as marriage, in the aesthetic realm. On the other hand, marriage provides contentment for those who are willing to commit themselves to another person, for through commitment there is intensity, due to the nature of ethical duty; in other words, by way of recognizing one's ethical duty, marriage will continuously renew itself.

In contradistinction to the realm of aesthetics, and its emphasis on the moment, ethics emphasizes the eternal (especially in relation to conjugal love). Otherwise stated, conjugal love is more fulfilling than romantic love, for the joy which exists in the former state arises as a result of repetition. Hence, ethical love will never be as empty as aesthetic love. While the aesthete and ethicist both exhibit similar patterns in relation to love, the difference is the following: the aesthete finds no resolution in romance, while the ethicist's happiness can come about as a result of marrying. By continuously living in honor of one's marriage vows, the ethicist finds a purpose attached to existence.

By contrast, the aesthete lacks this purpose for there is no duty inherent in romantic love. According to Kierkegaard,

The marriage pledge is indeed like a garland of everlasting, but love weaves it, and duty says it must be woven, and it is love's happiness to weave it, and duty says it must be woven -- each day from the blossoms of the moment.¹⁹

Why does Kierkegaard claim that ethical love becomes renewed? It is his contention that ethical love renews itself by way of repetition. In other words, ethical love is less likely to become empty for the ethicist recognizes the duty inherent in conjugal love. By contrast, the aesthete, in not recognizing any type of ethical duty, is restricted to romantic love, which is susceptible to emptiness. Is Kierkegaard justified in claiming that ethical duty, via conjugal love, is less susceptible to emptiness? He has a valid claim. Aesthetic love is empty because there is no commitment. It is duty that provides conjugal love with its momentum. When two people are committed to each other, they must continually prove that they are dutiful to each other. And it is by way of duty that conjugal love keeps fulfilling itself. By contrast, aesthetic love revolves around romance, and, as such, remains empty. Thus, the ethicist, by way of marriage, is saved from ethical despair. On the other hand, the aesthete, who has no sense of duty, will remain in ethical despair (until a commitment is made).

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Soren Kierkegaard, Edifying Discourses (a selection), trans. David F. and Lillian Marvin Swenson (London and Glasgow: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1958), p. 174.

Soren and Regine

In Mark C. Taylor's estimation, Johannes the Seducer -- a pseudonym that Kierkegaard uses in the first volume of Either/Or -- is an "ambiguous" type of person who refuses to pledge himself to anyone, and in being so elusive, he (i.e., Johannes) coerces a young woman, Cordelia, into making all the choices; in other words, Johannes "wants to possess Cordelia, but he does not want to make any personal commitment to her that would limit him." ²⁰ Johannes, in his opting not to commit himself to a relationship in which he would have duties to another person (i.e., Cordelia) is choosing to exist outside of the ethical realm.

In Soren Kierkegaard's own relationship to Regine Olsen, it could be suggested that he transgressed the ethical realm in the following way: he became romantically involved with Regine, but he concealed his intentions, in so far as he never actually planned on wedding her, for he knew that the difference in their ages would always give him the sense of being a seducer (since he was twenty seven years old, when she was seventeen). In so far as he (i.e., Kierkegaard) does not reveal himself fully to Regine, it could be suggested that his intentions towards her are disguised through the character of Johannes the Seducer.

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Mark C. Taylor, Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 169.

Neither Johannes, nor Kierkegaard, made an ethical choice (in relation to their romantic involvements). Thus, there is no way that he (i.e., Kierkegaard) could have reconciled himself in the ethical realm, for ethics only recognizes duty. And, in relation to romance, it is one's duty to eventually conclude this brief, aesthetic state in a higher plane of existence, known as marriage. But, given the material contained in his 'aesthetic works,' it would seem as though Kierkegaard never had the intention of marrying Regine. But does this indiscretion place him completely outside of the ethical realm, or does he still -- in some way -- exist partly in the ethical and the religious realms?

Why did Soren ask Regine to marry him in the first place? Given that his duty was to God, why did he even consider marriage? Kierkegaard was trying to do both his ethical and religious duties concurrently. But, as will be shown in a later chapter, it is not possible for an individual to exist in both the ethical and religious realms at the same time. As Kierkegaard states in his Journals:

It was a time of terrible suffering: to have to be so cruel and at the same time to love as I did. She fought like a tigress. If I had not believed that God had lodged a veto she would have been victorious.²¹

In other words, Soren, felt guilty about falling in love with Regine; accordingly, he determined that he had a duty

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Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Kierkegaard (1834-1854), trans. Alexander Dru (London and Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1967), p. 73.

to marry her in recognition of his ethical duty; however, he later realized that his all-consuming duty was to God, being a religious man, and, as a result, he had to end his romance with her. So, in response to an earlier query, Kierkegaard belongs in the religious category because he made a movement based on his faith in God; that is, he sacrificed his ethical happiness, which would have allowed him to marry Regine, in order to perform his religious duty. Of course, Kierkegaard's movement of faith differs from that of Abraham, but he did make a movement based on faith.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard does not belong within the realm of the aesthetic because he recognized that his duty was to God. It can not be denied that he transgressed his ethical duty to Regine when he returned the ring, but he did not do this for aesthetic reasons. If he would have been a true aesthete, he would never have proposed to Regine in the first place. Instead he would have treated her as a mere conquest, like Don Juan, and moved on to the next victim. Don Juan is not a "seducer," but merely a person who constantly looks for a new conquest without engaging in any thoughtful process; that is, he (i.e., Don Juan) merely "desires," for he lacks "cunning and intrigues and crafty plans" ("To be a seducer," in the words of A, "requires a certain amount of reflection and consciousness").²² However,

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Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, trans. David F. and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 97.

it can not be denied that Kierkegaard had a strong sense of duty, thus separating himself from the aesthetic realm.

According to Walter Lowrie:

S. K. did in fact present to Regina an either/or: he may have intended more expressly to repel her, but he loved her too much to be able to play faultlessly the part of the scoundrel. . .23

In other words, he may have written aesthetic works, and portrayed himself as a "scoundrel," but he does not fit within the aesthetic realm. Furthermore, he does not belong within the ethical realm because his duty was to God (he may have proposed to Regine, but this was a temporary lapse).

Lastly, it is important to consider why Kierkegaard decided on using pseudonyms, as opposed to signing his own name to his aesthetic works. Since Kierkegaard wanted to be known as a "religious author," he decided to compose his aesthetic works under different names because he did not want his own personal views confused with his other views. Thus, he offers the reader the following explanation from The Point of View for my Work as an Author:

One will perceive the significance of the pseudonyms and why I must be pseudonymous in relation to all aesthetic productions, because I led my own life in entirely different categories and understood from the beginning that this productivity was of an interim nature, a deceit, a necessary process of elimination.24

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Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, 2 vols. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1938; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1970), vol. I, p. 240.

24

Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View for my Work as an Author, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 85-86.

Even though he refers to his aesthetic works as "a deceit," it can not be denied that his duty, as an author, was always directed towards clarifying the definition of what it means to be a Christian. In other words, he did not deny that he used pseudonyms, but by using these deceptive titles, he was able, indirectly, to communicate his true beliefs, and make it clear to his readers, as to what the qualities of a true Christian are. If one investigates Kierkegaard's aesthetic writings, one will find that his duty was always to reveal God's message, either directly, or indirectly (by way of his pseudonymous writings).

Summary

It is almost impossible to develop an accurate picture of what actually transpired between Soren and Regine, given that the principal account of their relationship/romance originates from Kierkegaard's printed word. One must question Kierkegaard's own objectivity regarding this matter, since he was i) directly involved, and ii) writing pseudonymously. Furthermore, it should be noted that Soren was hesitant about marrying Regine because he knew that by making that particular ethical movement he would simultaneously be imposing his familial melancholia on her. In this section, I have discussed Kierkegaard's

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Kierkegaard, The Journals of Kierkegaard (1834-1854), op.cit., p. 87.

position on: i) how the aesthete becomes lost in despair for this type of person does not make choices, with regard to duty, ii) how the ethicist becomes more intense by performing duties, while the aesthete lacks intensity, for this type of person does not recognize that there are duties to be performed, and iii) why the ethicist, or, more specifically, the tragic hero (i.e., Agamemnon) must become revealed, while the aesthete, on the other hand, remains concealed (in order to create dramatic tension). Hence, it has been shown that, for Kierkegaard, the ethical realm of existence supersedes that of the aesthetic. However, there is still one realm that remains.

Chapter II

KIERKEGAARD'S VIEWS ON RELIGIOUS DUTY

Overcoming Despair

The ethicist recognizes that there are duties to others, but the ethicist remains an ethicist, and can not make the last step, as long as this type of person does not admit that duties to God take precedence over all other types of duties. However, this last step is a difficult one. A man can only reach God by way of faith. A man becomes his true self when he acknowledges that he is a composite of that which is temporal, and that which is eternal. However, according to Kierkegaard, a man must free himself from all which is not part of his true self in order to reach the religious stage. When he reaches the religious stage, a man realizes that his duty is no longer to other men, but to God. Given that the religious individual is still a composite, there is a tension which exists within: how can a man perform his religious duty, and discover his true self, while contending with that part of himself which is earthly, or finite?

The highest realm, in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings, is the religious. It is by way of this realm that one is able to develop faith in God. Within this state, love of God takes precedence over all (including love of persons). However, those who have not 'found' God, according

to Kierkegaard, will become lost in a state of despair. In other words, as long as a person does not recognize the duty to love God, by way of faith, that person will remain in a state of despair. Thus, Kierkegaard argues that in order to overcome religious despair, one must become religious.

The religious individual does not experience religious despair because, unlike the ethicist, a person who has faith is able to acknowledge a kind of duty which goes beyond ethical concerns, for this type of individual seeks to worship, and serve, God. The religious individual, in not becoming lost in earthly concerns is less susceptible to religious despair. This type of individual develops hope by performing those duties which are intended to please God. By contrast, persons who choose to exist -- by way of their particular actions -- within the aesthetic and ethical realms are susceptible to religious despair, for they lack the faith which is requisite to their overcoming this type of despair. In other words, the person who does not recognize any duty to God becomes susceptible to religious despair. Despair, from a religious standpoint, must not be confused with the type of despair which was discussed earlier (in the section entitled "**The Abstract and the Concrete**"). In this section, it was pointed out how the aesthete despairs, from an ethical standpoint, for this type of person can not find reconciliation in the realm of the universal; in other words, concealment leads to despair. By contrast, the aesthete and the ethicist are in a state of

despair, from a religious standpoint, because they both lack faith. As a result of this lack of faith, both the aesthete and the ethicist experience an extreme type of despair, which is more pronounced than the despair which the aesthete experiences (due to concealment). The reason for this is that the religious type of despair is linked to a spiritual barrenness, while the aesthetic type merely stems from a lack of connectedness to the experienced world. So, can a reconciliation be made between one's ethical duties and one's religious duties (given that there is a wide gulf that separates the two realms)?

According to Kierkegaard -- in his Sickness Unto Death -- by performing one's religious duties, one is able to overcome religious despair, and find intelligibility for faith removes religious despair due to the fact that those who believe in God, also believe that anything is possible. By contrast, those who despair only see "contradictions." "Health consists," says Kierkegaard, "essentially in being able to resolve contradictions."¹ The person who lacks faith does not see any hope; that is, this type of person develops, to use Kierkegaard's term, a 'sickness unto death,' for the person who lacks a faith in God, is, in a sense, not a whole self, or synthesis (which will be described later). It is both the aesthete and the ethicist, from a religious perspective, who exist in a pervasiveness

¹
Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., p. 173.

of despair, due to their perspective(s) being convoluted by a lack of simplicity.

While the religious type of individual finds answers in simplicity -- for from a religious perspective, the only duty is to obey God -- the aesthete and the ethicist become lost in the multiplicity of the experienced world. According to Kierkegaard, 'simplicity' is what is found apart from temporality; it is discovered only by way of worshipping God. The actions which occur within the religious realm are motivated by the simplicity which arises as a result of fulfilling a duty to worship God, for all the actions of this type of individual are performed with one goal in mind: to serve God. By contrast, 'multiplicity' exists in the realm of the aesthete and the ethicist, for both types do not seek answers outside of lived experiences, and, as a result, they become lost in temporal, earthly concerns, and are subsequently prevented from discovering the simplicity of the religious realm.

In the religious realm, all duties are performed in order to serve God. Thus, it can be suggested that while one exists within the religious realm, one discovers simplicity. On the other hand, one can become susceptible to the multiplicity of the aesthetic and ethical realms. The aesthete lacks a sense of both ethical and religious duty, thereby becoming susceptible to the confusion of the experienced world, for the person who exists within this realm discovers no certitude (in relation to what is

expected from others). The ethicist knows what is expected from others, by way of performing ethical duties, but these duties can come into conflict with each other. Thus, while existing in either the aesthetic or ethical realms, one can not find simplicity.

According to Kierkegaard, individuals have a religious duty to perform those actions which are required by God's will. Furthermore, the duty to God consists in not becoming victimized by religious despair (i.e., as a result of existing in temporality). Instead, our duty is to "endure . . . sufferings," and "bear them with resignation."² Thus, religious individuals have a duty to accept the tribulations of life, for this is part of religious duty; in other words, they must accept the fact that life has hardships which must be encountered in order to reach God. It is their duty to work through the hardships, and the multiplicity, for, as stated previously, the path to God is found through simplicity. If persons become lost in multiplicity, and by doing so move out of the religious realm, they become susceptible to the theological category of sin.

One sins when one performs an action that would not satisfy God's will. By existing in the experienced world, and by being an imperfect being, one is not immune to committing sins. According to Kierkegaard, when one attempts

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Soren Kierkegaard, Edifying Discourses, 4 vols., trans. David F. and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), vol. IV, p. 79.

to live according to God's dictums -- which are contained in sacred texts and in private revelations -- one is less likely to sin. In other words, the aesthete and the ethicist are more susceptible to committing sins, than the authentically religious individual, for the aesthete and the ethicist lack a focused spiritual direction.

According to John D. Glenn, Jr., a self that will not become itself defies God's will, and accordingly commits a sin by falling into a state of despair.³ It is one's religious duty to become a particular self; in other words, it is not acceptable to merely become a self, one has a duty to become oneself, or itself. In The Sickness Unto Death, Kierkegaard offers the following clarification of a 'religious self:'

The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, a task which can be performed only by means of a relationship to God. But to become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete means neither to become finite nor infinite, for that which is to become concrete is a synthesis.⁴

In Kierkegaard's estimation, finite beings are in a

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John D. Glenn, Jr., "The Definition of the Self and the Structure of Kierkegaard's Work," International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Sickness Unto Death, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 16.

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Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., pp. 162-163. In this section Kierkegaard also makes note that the self is always in process, for, unlike God, we are in a constant state of change; and as long as we are in this state, we will also be despairing, for in order to transcend despair, a self must become itself.

continual state of becoming, it can also be suggested that one is not oneself, or itself. The only way that a self makes the movement away from religious despair is by becoming itself, and such a movement only occurs within the religious realm (due to the fact that one can not develop a relation to God while existing in either the aesthetic or ethical realms). The religious individual, while existing within the religious realm, develops a relation to God, by way of faith. It is only through faith in God, that one can become a synthesis (of finitude/infinity). Thus, one's religious duty is to develop this type of relation to God (in order to become oneself).

Kierkegaard's position regarding religious despair in relation to the 'self,' will now be discussed. Given that he has three realms of existence, it can also be assumed that Kierkegaard would have three different notions of 'self.' Accordingly, the 'religious self' would be the paradigm. As mentioned in a previous paragraph, only the religious individual has the capacity for becoming itself, and, as this is the case, the religious self is the paradigmatic self. By contrast, neither the aesthetic nor the ethical 'selves' are able to transcend religious despair. The reason for this is: neither of these 'selves' are capable of becoming what Kierkegaard terms 'itself;' in other words, while the religious self becomes itself, by way of its relationship to God, neither the aesthetic nor the ethical selves become themselves because these selves have not yet

reached a point of (religious) concreteness. This point is only reached in the religious realm.

John D. Glenn, Jr. offers the following clarification of finitude/infinity in Kierkegaard. Glenn claims that one despairs -- in relation to infinity -- by engaging in objectivity; and -- in relation to finitude -- by becoming part of the multitude, the crowd.⁵ Of course, Glenn is using the term 'objective,' in the same way that Kierkegaard uses it in Concluding Unscientific Postscript (exclusively in its religious context). Kierkegaard has the following to say about subjectivity, from a religious perspective:

philosophy teaches that the way is to become objective, while Christianity teaches that the way is to become subjective, i.e. to become a subject in truth. Lest this should seem a mere dispute about words, let me say that Christianity wishes to intensify passion to its highest pitch; but passion is subjectivity, and does not exist objectively.⁶

Hence, according to Kierkegaard, it is the religious individual who exhibits the highest degree of subjectivity because this type of individual has the greatest amount of passion. The ethicist, to a lesser extent, has passion, by way of ethical subjectivity, but such a person (i.e., the ethicist) lacks infinity. In other words, the ethicist can not become a complete, concrete self -- like the religious individual -- because the ethicist lacks a relationship to

⁵ John D. Glenn, Jr., International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Sickness unto Death, op.cit., p. 7.

⁶ Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op.cit., p. 117.

God. As such, the ethicist is not a synthesis.

It is the religious individual who makes the movement away from religious despair, by recognizing what constitutes religious duty, and by subsequently choosing to make movements within the religious realm. Hence, it could be suggested that the ethicist despairs, for this type of person lacks religious intensity. An ethicist does not choose to be dutiful to God; whereas, the religious type of individual, by performing religious duties and maintaining faith in God's word, becomes more intense. By contrast, the ethicist lacks religious intensity, and by being less dutiful to God, this type of person will, accordingly, be less subjective, more objective, and less infinite. As a result, only the religious individual can claim to be a complete, concrete self (i.e., a synthesis of infinitude and finitude).

Even though any person has the capacity to exist concurrently in finitude/infinitude, only the religious individual chooses to exist in infinitude (while also existing in finitude) for, to exist in infinitude requires a movement of faith. According to Kierkegaard, in The Sickness Unto Death, one can only reach infinitude by way of the "imagination," by engaging in an act of "fantasy," which allows an individual to become "grounded transparently in God," thus providing a means to overcome despair. "To

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Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., p. 163.

repent," in the words of Brita K. Stendahl, "is to realize one's despair and to live in expectancy of God." ⁸ So, one is said to be existing in the religious realm when that individual chooses to become a synthesis (i.e., oneself, itself); in other words, one overcomes religious despair when one can become reconciled to both finitude and infinitude.

Given that human beings -- while engaged in existence -- are finite, it can not be expected that we, as limited creatures, have the ability to become a synthesis on our own volition. Therefore, one needs God's assistance; that is, in performing one's duty to God, by worshipping, and serving, Him (while existing within the limits of finitude), one makes a movement towards becoming a synthesis. However, as Kierkegaard notes, such an action can only be performed by way of the imagination. This claim appears to be valid, for the actions of worshipping, and serving, God must begin in the imagination (and not the experienced world, of the aesthete and the ethicist).

The Absolute Duty to God

Kierkegaard states that, like the lilies and the birds, we have an absolute duty to act in strict accordance with the dictums of God:

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Brita K. Stendahl, Soren Kierkegaard (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 191.

He demands obedience, unconditional obedience. If thou art not obedient in everything unconditionally, then thou lovest Him not, and if thou lovest Him not -- then thou dost hate Him...⁹

Unlike the aesthete and the ethicist, the religious individual's duties extend beyond the temporal world. The aesthete and the ethicist can not completely love God, for unlike the religious individual, they do not adhere to His will; but, given that this is the case, only the religious type of individual, by way of faith, truly loves God. Hence, there is a gulf which exists between ethical and religious duty: while existing in the ethical realm, the ethicist does not recognize that duty to God has primacy, whereas, in the religious realm, the religious individual complies completely with God's will.

According to Jolivet's interpretation of Kierkegaard, 'the crowd' exists in temporality (i.e., they do not recognize the absolute duty to God), thus compromising religious duty, for it is within the ethical realm that one becomes part of the crowd; therefore, every person must be an individual, and, as such, perform duties which are exclusive to that person, for this is what Jolivet refers to as "true Morality."¹⁰ Religious duty, which is based on "true Morality," from a Kierkegaardian standpoint, demands

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Soren Kierkegaard, Christian Discourses, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 335.

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Jolivet, Introduction to Kierkegaard, op.cit., p. 136.

complete obedience from each individual, and, in doing so, one transcends the temporal, ethical realm. In other words, the ethicist admits that duties to others have priority, while religious duty holds that duty to God is primary.

However, Jolivet's interpretation is not entirely accurate, for the ethicist is not necessarily part of the crowd. The person who primarily exists either within the aesthetic or ethical realms is **more likely** to become part of the crowd than the individual who exists in the religious realm (although there is no absolute proof for this claim). It is this 'individual' who has made the movement of faith, and chosen to perform those duties which adhere to God's will, who is most likely to remain separate from the crowd. One is not condemned to being part of the crowd, for everyone has the potential to reach the religious realm. Existing outside the religious realm does not place one within the crowd, but one becomes an individual, who exists in a higher realm of existence, by recognizing that there are duties to God. Duty to God is based on simplicity, but paradoxically, this type of duty is not simple, but difficult, for it is based on faith, which lacks the assurances of both the aesthetic and ethical realms. Hence, the uncertainties which are part of the religious realm, and the demands which are placed upon the religious individual, make this realm the highest. So, given that this realm places difficult demands on those individuals who exist within its limits, it can be surmised that the religious

individual has an immunity to becoming part of the crowd.

Kierkegaard seems to be justified in claiming that the individual is higher than the ethical. An individual can not find religious answers within the ethical, for these type of answers are only discovered through the self, and, as was noted earlier, by Kierkegaard, an individual can not discover itself outside of the religious realm. So, while the ethicist, or the aesthete may look for answers in the multiplicity, or the crowd, by contrast, the religious individual looks for answers in God's teachings (which are contained in sacred texts and in personal prayer).

The religious individual's duty is primarily directed towards one Being: God. And in order to prove that faith has primacy, one's duty to God must always nullify all other (ethical) duties. In other words, the religious individual's duties supersede those duties which would be classified as ethical, for one's duty to God is absolute. Hence, one's duty to others, who may exist within the crowd, is eliminated -- and the gap widens between the ethical and the religious -- when placed on a religious scale. Consequently, how can we show our love for God, and for our fellow human being, at the same time?

Kierkegaard notes that it is the duty of the religious individual -- in imitation of Jesus Christ -- to tolerate suffering, for in suffering, one proves that even though one is affected by the external world, one need only be concerned with performing duties which are pleasing to

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 God. The religious individual's duties lie within the temporal spectrum, but with a consciousness that extends beyond finite time; that is, the religious individual performs religious acts, within temporality, in order to please God. However, this type of individual can not find any solace in the ethical realm, for it is within this realm that the religious individual suffers. According to Gregor Malantschuk, an individual "must become silent in order that he may become sensitive and responsive to what God wants to say to him."¹² But how can an individual maintain silence, in order to be receptive to that which is required by religious duty, and, simultaneously exist in the ethical realm? An individual with such a religious dilemma is Abraham (whose situation will be described later).

According to Kierkegaard, in Works of Love, we have a duty to love all persons because every single person is our neighbour; in other words, Christian love does not show preference.¹³ This claim would seem to lead Kierkegaard into contradictions. Can one exist in the religious realm -- which can only be accomplished by separating one's self from

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Soren Kierkegaard, Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, 6 vols. trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1967), vol. I, p.198.

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Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1971), p. 331.

13

Soren Kierkegaard, Works of Love, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), pp. 64 - 65.

others -- and love every one (i.e., one's neighbour) at the same time? In some of Kierkegaard's other works, he speaks of an entity known as the 'crowd' (i.e., a random grouping where one becomes part of the whole, thereby losing any sense of individuality). Religious duty is to love God. But is love of God shown by loving the crowd? In The Point of View for my Work as an Author, Kierkegaard claims that this is not possible because love of the crowd is merely a means to "earthly advantages," and that the crowd is "untruth."¹⁴ Thus, the crowd can corrupt the religious individual, and, as a result, this type of person has a duty to remain separate from the crowd (while existing in temporality).

However, when one loves one's neighbour, one is not loving the crowd, for in loving a neighbour, one is able to separate that person from the crowd. Furthermore, in loving the other, who is the neighbour, Kierkegaard's claim is that one is, in actuality, loving one's own self:

The beloved and the friend are . . . called, remarkably and significantly enough, the **other-self**, the **other-I** -- for one's neighbour is the **other-you**, or more accurately, the third-man of equality. The other-self, the other-I. But wherein lies self-love? It lies in the I, in the self.¹⁵

Hence, the religious individual has a duty to love all persons, for everyone is similar to one's own self. Thus, when one is said to love one's neighbour, it can not

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Kierkegaard, The Point of View for my Work as an Author, op.cit., p. 118.

¹⁵

Kierkegaard, Works of Love, op.cit., p. 66.

concurrently be claimed that one is loving the crowd. A question arises: who is the crowd?

Kierkegaard offers the following definition (in a footnote): "'crowd' stands for number, the numerical, a number of noblemen, millionaires, high dignitaries, &c. -- as soon as the numerical is involved it is 'crowd,' 'the crowd.'" ¹⁶ Hence it is possible for one -- while existing within either the aesthetic or ethical realms -- to be considered as part of the crowd, for these type of persons, in not recognizing that duty to God is absolute, might have a tendency to become part of the crowd. By contrast, the religious individual, who remains separate from the multiplicity, can not become part of the crowd, while existing in the religious realm, because this type of individual is able to distinguish a neighbour from the multiplicity, or crowd. An aesthete or ethicist need not become part of the crowd. According to Kierkegaard, one becomes part of the crowd when one identifies one's self with the crowd (instead of separating one's self from the crowd).

The religious individual shows a recognition that duty to God is absolute through enduring hardships. In other words, there is no excuse, from a religious standpoint, which would allow an individual to look for acceptance from the crowd, since the crowd does not acknowledge religious

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Kierkegaard, The Point of View for my Work as an Author, op.cit., p. 112.

duties. Hence, the religious individual, who has a true faith would not despair from the misunderstanding(s) of the crowd, for belief in the eternal world removes all despair.

A question then arises: how can the ethicist transcend religious despair, if this person lacks the faith required to love God, and has a greater tendency, than the religious individual, to become part of the crowd? Since the ethicist does not recognize that, religiously, there is a duty to God, which requires that one be removed from the ethical realm, as religious duty revolves around one's relation to God, the ethicist can not transcend religious despair. As long as a person exists in the ethical realm, religious despair will be present.

According to the Arbaughs, for Kierkegaard, the religious individual, like the lilies and the birds, should not feel anxious, or ashamed about being "lowly," for it is God Who "levels all men."¹⁷ In other words, as long as one seeks simplicity, through the worship of God, one exists within the religious realm. Furthermore, Kierkegaard claims that the religious individual has the advantage over those who exist outside of the religious realm because this type of individual (i.e., the religious individual) knows that duty to God has primacy over all earthly affairs. If it can be assumed that God exists, happiness would then be illusory

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George B. and George E. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship, (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana College Library, 1967), p. 276.

in the finite world because it would lack a basis; that is, when a person links the self so intimately to earthly concerns, while existing in either the aesthetic, or the ethical realm, that person does not become fulfilled. As a result of this inability, both the aesthete and the ethicist exist in a state of religious despair. By contrast, the religious individual, who may suffer in the temporal world, recognizes that duty to God extends beyond finite existence, and, as a result, may enjoy everlasting happiness in the worship of God (assuming that existence does not cease when the body expires, and that life everlasting nullifies any type of despair).

Kierkegaard argues that if God does indeed exist, He is an absolute, and, as such, is the sole measure of truth:

He is in an infinite relationship to God when he recognizes that God is always in the right, in an infinitely free relationship to God when he recognizes that he himself is always in the wrong. In this way, therefore, doubt is checked, for the movement of doubt consists precisely in the fact that at one instant he might be in the right, at another in the wrong . . .18

Therefore, the religious individual, unlike the ethicist, does not become lost in the multiplicity. Since God is always considered to be right, the religious individual will not have any doubts (in relation to this individual's religious duties), for doubt only arises in the temporal realm. By contrast, the ethicist has doubts for this type of person does not recognize that there is an absolute duty to

God. The ethicist is primarily concerned with temporal matters. However, one can not find peace of mind in the ethical realm, for this realm of existence lacks simplicity. By contrast, the religious individual's faith in God allows this type of individual to find solace within the confusion of the temporal world. On the other hand, the ethicist lives with religious despair. According to Kierkegaard, one only attains religious freedom when one can admit that God, as a perfect Being, possesses absolute knowledge.

When Kierkegaard states that God is always right, he also implies that a person becomes 'annihilated' before God. He states that:

Religiously it is the task of the individual to understand that he is nothing before God, or to become wholly nothing and to exist thus before God; this consciousness of impotence he requires constantly to have before him, and when it vanishes the religiosity also vanishes.¹⁹

So, according to Kierkegaard, in admitting that a finite being is always wrong before God, it must also include that a person is nothing before God, for God is an absolute, and as such, is always right. Thus, in acknowledging that one is "nothing before God," one also admits that human knowledge does not extend beyond temporality, for a person can only 'reach' God through faith. By contrast, the aesthete and the ethicist do not recognize religious duty, for they do not completely obey God. Hence, the person who exists outside

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Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op.cit., p. 412.

of the religious realm, is not aware of what constitutes religious duty, for this type of irreligious person does not realize that in order to serve God, one must be completely obedient to Him.

Is Kierkegaard justified in making the claim that we are always wrong before God? Assuming that God exists, it is allowable to claim that He does not commit errors, for how could God be defined as a perfect, infinite being if He has the capacity to make mistakes? Even though human beings do not possess absolute truth, it is faulty to claim that they are **always** wrong, since God, by definition, would always be right. After all, human truth -- even in its imperfect form -- is still a kind of truth.

However, Brita K. Stendahl offers a clarifying interpretation of Kierkegaard's meaning by claiming that the term 'edifying' refers to that which

builds up the inner person. The statement "Before God we are always in the wrong" is not a philosophical dictum, not true or false. It is an edifying thought that speaks to our love. Before God it is edifying to be in the wrong.²⁰

She is stating that -- in relation to Kierkegaard's contention -- an individual is able to reach the religious realm, and prove love of God, by **believing** that God is always right. So, Kierkegaard's claim is not that God is always right, while we are always wrong, but that one acknowledges one's religious duty to place faith in God's

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Stendahl, Soren Kierkegaard, op.cit., p. 113.

ability to always be right (while not being able to prove such a thing, given that we have no certifiable evidence of God's capacity for perfection).

Christianity/Christendom

Kierkegaard tried to clarify the definition of 'Christianity;' that is, he took the initiative, and made it his duty to defend a distinction between Christianity and Christendom (such a distinction was necessary, for the two were often equated). According to John W. Elrod, Kierkegaard held that his duty was to "re-introduce" the notion of Christianity in order to eliminate the confusion which others had regarding this term; in other words, his task was to demonstrate that the Christendom of nineteenth century Denmark, was not identical to true Christianity.²¹

True Christianity, for Kierkegaard, must include hardship, for enduring hardship proves that an individual deserves to be referred to as a Christian. As mentioned earlier, it is the duty of the Christian to follow the example of Jesus Christ, and to live in an identical manner. Of course, such a task is extremely demanding. However, if

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In this passage, Elrod notes that Kierkegaard was opposed to the modernization of religion, for such a modernization would alter the traditional definition of Christianity, and such a change, in Kierkegaard's opinion, made the requirements for one's becoming a Christian less stringent, less 'religious.' See, John W. Elrod, Kierkegaard and Christendom, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 193.

this task was not demanding, it would be easy for one who exists outside of the religious realm to be referred to as a Christian. Otherwise stated, it is the Christian who has duties to God, while it is the adherent of Christendom who focuses on mortal concerns. As this was the case, Kierkegaard held that his duty was to educate his readers on what the requirements are for becoming a Christian.

However, Kierkegaard did not refer to himself as an exemplary Christian, but only as someone who knows what qualities are required for an individual to be referred to as a Christian. The reason for this is that he did not want to leave himself open to "any attack or persecution" from any of his opponents.²² The question arises: why did Kierkegaard not refer to himself as a model Christian, and only as someone who knows what the definition of a 'model Christian' is? The answer is partly contained within the title of the work from which I found this quotation. Kierkegaard, in his quest to make a distinction between Christianity and Christendom, must remain 'neutral,' in order to be uncommitted; that is, he can not claim to be

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Furthermore Kierkegaard notes that due to his particular childhood experiences, he deemed himself the one to inform the populace on what a true Christian is, and why the adherent of Christendom does not fall within the Christian realm. Since Kierkegaard had been raised in an atmosphere of 'religious rigor,' he held that he was the one whose duty it was to make the distinction between Christianity and Christendom. See, Soren Kierkegaard, Armed Neutrality and an Open Letter, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 42.

either a Christian, or an adherent of Christendom, for if he places himself in one of these two categories, he loses his appearance of neutrality. However, while appearing to remain neutral, Kierkegaard was still 'armed,' for he held that his duty was to inform others as to what makes a true Christian. "Wherein," pose George B. and George E. Arbaugh, "is Kierkegaard's position an 'armed neutrality?'"²³ Their response was that Kierkegaard was armed with the true definition of Christianity, but he was neutral in so far as he did not want to direct "attention away from the message and to himself."²⁴ So, according to the Arbaughs, Kierkegaard had to accept the role of a neutral observer in order to protect the clarity of his definition. By not conceptualizing himself as either 'Christian,' or 'adherent of Christendom,' Kierkegaard was able to criticize both sides without being accused of bias.

However, it is not difficult to determine that Kierkegaard supports the adherent of Christianity, and, accordingly, condemns the adherent of Christendom. He praised the true Christian, because he thought that this type of individual is willing to endure hardships in order to remain dutiful to God. By contrast, the simple adherent of Christendom can not be referred to as a true Christian, for this type of person lacks the faith which the Christian

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George B. and George E. Arbaugh, Kierkegaard's Authorship, op. cit., p. 314.

24

Ibid, p. 315.

possesses. The true Christian has a passion which supersedes duty to all others; this type of individual does not look for approval from the crowd, for the crowd is a mere distraction, and does not admit of absolute truth(s). On the other hand, the adherent of Christendom practices a pseudo type of Christianity among the multitude; that is, this type of person claims to be a Christian, while seeking comfort in others (apart from the pain and scorn which one must tolerate if one is going to be a true Christian).

Only a few individuals would qualify as true religious individuals under Kierkegaard's definition: apart from Jesus Christ, Socrates and Abraham would also be acceptable. Abraham will be the focus of my final chapter. Therefore, a few comments will be made here about Kierkegaard's relationship to Socrates. According to Kierkegaard, Socrates referred to himself as an unwise man. The Sophists would not be able to criticize Socrates on that point of contention. For if he had referred to himself as the wisest man in all of Greece, the Sophists' counterargument would have stated that such an egotistical man could not possibly be wise. Furthermore, Kierkegaard offers the following analogy:

These legions of priests and Christian docents are all Sophists, living . . . by making those who understand nothing believe something, then treating this human-numerical factor as the criterion of what truth, what Christianity is.²⁵

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Soren Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard's Attack Upon "Christendom", trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 283.

In a similar way, Socrates tried to be everything that the Sophists were not, i.e. "if they knew all things, he knew nothing at all; if they could speak without cessation, he could keep silent . . ."²⁶

So, while Socrates had to deal with the Sophists, and prove that he was dissimilar to them, Kierkegaard believed that his duty was identical (with the exception that he had to deal with the clergymen of Denmark). Socrates' proof of his wisdom was that he did not claim that he was, in fact, wise. Socrates merely searched for the truth; he did not claim to know the truth. By contrast, according to Kierkegaard's quotation, the Sophists claimed to know the truth, where, in fact, they did not. The difference between the Sophists and Socrates is that the former claimed to have wisdom, and possess truth, when they did not, while the latter claimed to be ignorant of the truth, thus partly proving his wisdom.

Socrates is not a religious individual, according to one aspect of Kierkegaard's definition: he (i.e., Socrates) does not recognize the simplicity inherent in religious duty (more specifically, that all religious duty is duty to God). However, his endless search for knowledge and truth certainly places Socrates in a higher realm of existence than the ethical and the aesthetic. Socrates existed as an

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Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony (With Constant Reference to Socrates), trans. Lee M. Capel (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 233.

individual, who, like the ethicist, recognized a duty to others (for he spent his time instructing others), but, concurrently, performing this particular action outside of the expectations of any other. In other words, Socrates imposed this duty on himself, thus making him an exceptional individual. By contrast, the ethical person's duties originate from a source, other than the self (however, by observing the actions of the ethicist, it becomes evident that this type of person acts freely by **choosing** to perform those duties which are ethical). Thus, it could be suggested that Socrates acted like a religious individual, without having religious inclinations. Also, like Jesus Christ, Socrates expected no monetary reward for his services.

Similarly, Kierkegaard was in opposition to the clergymen of Denmark, for he felt that they were overlooking the difficulty of being Christian. According to John W. Elrod, Kierkegaard had two main problems with the clergy: i) they undertook their positions in order to profit financially, and ii) they were more representative of the materialistic way of life than the spiritual (i.e., "the priests represent the nobility, dignity, and propriety of the way of life pursued by the parishioners"²⁷). Accordingly, Kierkegaard made constant comparisons between these clergymen and the Sophists who used to deceive others for the purpose of their own amelioration (both financially and

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Elrod, Kierkegaard and Christendom, op.cit., p. 79.

socially).²⁸ Thus Kierkegaard has one more reason for attempting to prevent his audience from becoming part of the crowd. The crowd are adherents of Christendom who masquerade as Christians. Furthermore, the pastors, who are supposed to be representatives of Christianity, do not try to prevent their parishioners from becoming adherents of Christendom, for they (i.e., the pastors) are mainly interested in promoting their own needs; that is, unlike Abraham, who was chosen to perform a unique religious duty, the clergy's duty does not revolve around God, but their own selves.

In what realm does the adherent of Christendom belong? According to Kierkegaard's line of argumentation, this type of person is susceptible to becoming part of the crowd. Hence, this type of person does not belong in the religious realm. The adherent of Christendom could be classified as an aesthete, or ethicist, since this type of person (i.e., the adherent of Christendom) is susceptible to becoming part of the crowd, as a result of not recognizing the duty to love others. It should be noted that the adherent of Christendom does not belong in the religious category, for this type of person does not exist as an individual who has recognized that duty to God, involves loving others. Kierkegaard's duty was to prevent his audience from becoming adherents of Christendom, for such a person is susceptible to becoming indistinguishable from those who comprise the crowd; and

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Ibid, p. 79.

when one is part of the crowd, one is not likely to recognize one's religious duties.

The adherent of Christendom is susceptible to becoming part of the crowd, for this type of person does not recognize the religious duty to love others. Furthermore, existing within a state of Christendom moves one further away from Christianity. In the words of John W. Elrod,

Kierkegaard believed that to live in Christendom involves nothing less than living in a religiously legitimated social order that cultivates and nurtures egotistical relations among its citizens.²⁹

In addition, Elrod states that Kierkegaard's position, regarding a solution, revolves around a precept that he put forward in Works of Love: love of the neighbour removes egotism, for one has a duty to love another in the same way that one loves one's own self.³⁰ So, while a Christian state would unite people, a state of Christendom would separate one person from another.

In Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard makes the distinction between the ethico-religious and Christianity, and, in doing so, refers to the former as religiousness A and to the latter as religiousness B. The difference between the former and the latter is that, in relation to the latter, everything happens as a result of "inward apprehension," and, as such, the individual who

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Ibid, p. xviii.

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Ibid, p. xviii.

exists in this realm makes movements on the strength of "the absurd," whereas the individual who can not make these movements "is *eo ipso* no longer a believing Christian."³¹

The adherent of Christendom can not make a movement on the strength of the absurd because this type of person lacks faith. In other words, the true Christian believes that anything can happen due to the absurd; that is, this type of individual puts all trust in God, as this is a Christian's duty. As mentioned in an earlier section, Kierkegaard suggested that we have a duty to admit that we are always wrong before God, for only God has infinite powers, and, as such, possesses absolute truth. By contrast, the adherent of Christendom does not recognize any duty to God, for this type of person places faith in the material world, and the so-called 'messengers' of God (i.e., the clergymen). The adherent of Christendom does not reach God, for this type of person has not found the path, which must begin from the inner world of faith, and not the outer world of egotism. In contrast to the adherent of Christendom, the person who exists within religiousness A -- while not having yet made a

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Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op.cit., pp. 494-496. In this section, Kierkegaard states that his task is to make it difficult for all persons (both clever and dull) to become Christians. Furthermore, the only individuals who can reach the highest realm -- the religious -- are those whom are willing to suffer hardships, and perform actions on the strength of the absurd. In other words, only the true Christian can reach the level of religiousness B, for this type of individual has the true faith, which is found by means of an inward movement. By contrast, the adherent of religiousness A is yet to reach the level of religiousness B.

movement, based on faith in God's word -- has more potential to exist within religiousness B. The adherent of Christendom 'moves' in the wrong direction, for this type of person does not tend to show any movement away from selfish interests.

Summary

Although Kierkegaard claimed that his duty was merely to inform others as to what requirements were needed in order for an individual to be referred to as a Christian, it can also be suggested that he was not only a messenger, but also an individual who existed in a higher category than the ethical. In other words, Kierkegaard himself could be referred to as a Christian. It can not be denied that Kierkegaard endured a life of hardships. In addition, in perusing his written works, one can suggest that he puts his faith in God, and not in humankind. Kierkegaard narrowly defines his duty as delivering God's message; that is, his sole purpose becomes -- after annulling his relationship to Regine -- clarifying the definition of Christianity, while pointing out what is not true Christianity (i.e., Christendom, the ethical, and so on).

In this chapter I have also discussed Kierkegaard's position about why it is necessary to have faith, and exist in the religious realm, in order to overcome religious despair, and ii) reviewed why he held that the religious individual has an absolute duty to God, and why, as a

result, duty to God supersedes all other duties. For an individual to exist in the religious realm, it is necessary for this individual to make a movement from the ethical to the religious realm. This is the next problem which will be considered.

Chapter III

THE TENSION BETWEEN ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS DUTY

On Silence

Duty to God is absolute, and, as such, supersedes all other duties (which includes our duties to other human beings). Given that this is the case, the implications of having an absolute duty to God can, or will, lead an individual, who is existing in the religious realm, into predicaments. For example, in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, the reader is presented with Abraham's horrific religious duty: he must attempt to sacrifice his son in order to prove his faith in God. Such a duty places Abraham in the position where he would have to make the movement from the ethical to the religious realm. This unique situation demonstrates the tension which exists between Abraham's ethical duty (as Isaac's father, he would be committing a murderous act), and his religious duty to God. As an ethical man, Abraham has not yet recognized his true self. However, when confronted with the religious duty of sacrificing Isaac, Abraham is subsequently confronted with his own self, or the self which exists separately from all others. That is, Abraham's religious duty, which is solely a demonstration of faith, can not be understood by others, for such a unique action defies any ethical explanation, hence the silence, that is face to face with God.

As stated previously, Kierkegaard argues that it is the religious individual, the one who recognizes that there is an absolute duty to God, who exists in the highest realm. As such, this type of duty can extend to the point where an individual can not be understood by others, for this type of individual, by way of faith, enters into private, direct communication with God. Kierkegaard argues that duty to God is absolute, and, accordingly, those who exist outside of this particular religious realm (i.e., the absolute) are incapable of comprehending the motives of the knight of faith, who acts within this highest realm of existence.

In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard introduces the reader to a Biblical character, Abraham, who, as the knight of faith, recognizes that there is an absolute duty to God. And, in recognition of this duty, Abraham has to i) maintain silence, and ii) show a willingness to sacrifice Isaac. But, Abraham -- in being asked by God to take his son to Mount Moriah in order to sacrifice him -- is placed in a state of temptation (from an ethical standpoint). Such a unique duty places Abraham in a most horrific dilemma: either he loses his son, or his faith in God. However, Abraham is told that he would regain his son, if he performs his duty, and sacrifices Isaac. It is evident that such a miracle is impossible in the temporal world, but Abraham makes this movement solely on the strength of his faith in God. Such a unique movement signifies a **complete** transition to another realm, and simultaneous break with the previous realm.

By doing his duty to God, Abraham makes himself separate from all others, and by performing such an action, he makes himself inexcusable, from an ethical standpoint. There is no justification for religious sacrifice in the ethical realm, for Abraham's particular action, as seen from this perspective, is regarded as murderous. From a religious standpoint, Abraham's action is a 'sacrifice' because he has the willingness to give up Isaac in order to prove his dutifulness to God. By contrast, in the ethical realm, such an action is termed 'murder,' for, acting in accordance with God's will can not be verified. How can one prove that one is acting in accordance with God's will? According to Kierkegaard,

Either there is an absolute duty toward God, and if so it is the paradox here described, that the individual as the individual is higher than the universal and as the individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute / or else faith never existed, because it has always existed, or, to put it differently, Abraham is lost . . .¹

So, by placing himself "in an absolute relation to the absolute," Abraham also places himself outside of the ethical realm, and in doing so, performs a 'teleological suspension of the ethical.' This particular concept will be considered in more detail in the next section. At this point it is important to note that by placing himself in the absolute realm, Abraham has no recourse to reconciliation.

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Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 123.

On the other hand, Kierkegaard's tragic heroes' actions -- those of Agamemnon and Jephtha -- can be understood by all, for these type of persons are constantly revealed.

Abraham's duty to sacrifice Isaac calls for his remaining silent. By being placed in the absolute realm, Abraham comes into direct communication with God, and, as this is the case, he no longer can be understood by other persons (who exist in the ethical realm). Abraham could not be understood, for the act of religious sacrifice could not possibly be understood by any person existing outside of the absolute realm:

. . . the distress and dread in this paradox is that, humanly speaking, he is entirely unable to make himself intelligible. Only at the moment when his act is in absolute contradiction to his feeling is his act a sacrifice, but the reality of his act is the factor by which he belongs to the universal, and in that aspect he is and remains a murderer.²

Thus, according to Kierkegaard, Abraham's unique action can only be considered as religiously motivated, when it is performed as a result of his having faith in God. Furthermore, by performing such an action, Abraham must not only sacrifice Isaac, he must also sacrifice all that he previously held to be morally right, for in committing such an act, he goes beyond the realm of the ethical. In addition, in transcending the ethical realm, Abraham also sacrifices the understanding of those around him. While the tragic hero's actions are understood (i.e., Agamemnon

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Ibid, p. 112.

had the sympathy of those around him, for it was understood by others why he had to sacrifice Iphigenia: he had a duty to sacrifice his daughter in order to save the lives of others, and, as this was the case, his actions were understood by all), Abraham's actions are beyond the understanding of the finite mind. By entering into an absolute relationship with God, Abraham moved out of the ethical realm, and became unintelligible to those existing in that realm.

According to James Collins, in relation to the teachings of St. Thomas, the religious state of an individual is a personal matter which involves only God, and the individual involved; in other words, no "other finite mind" can make a "judgment" on such a matter.³ In a similar way, Abraham had an absolute duty to maintain silence. Had he revealed his intentions to any person, then his action would no longer have been religiously motivated, but murderous; that is, as long as Abraham remains silent, he does not succumb to ethical temptation (i.e., the temptation to tell another of his private, religious duty). So, as soon as Abraham reveals his intentions to any other person, he no longer has an absolute relationship to God; by communicating his intentions to any other person, Abraham places himself in the ethical realm, and his action is no longer a sacrifice, but one of murder. Abraham's situation

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James Collins, "The Ethical View and its Limits," New Scholasticism, 23 (January 1949): 3-37.

presents an interesting study in interpretation. How can he claim to be acting in the name of God, when it is not permissible for him to reveal his intentions? How can anyone prove when they have an absolute relationship with God?

In Fear and Trembling, the tragic hero can be understood because he reveals all; by contrast, the knight of faith exists in a state of silence, "but silence is also the mutual understanding between the Deity and the individual."⁴ So, while the tragic hero has an ethical duty to become revealed, Abraham must remain silent, for in performing his unique religious duty, he is in direct communication with God, and, as such, must not violate this absolute duty by admitting his intentions to any other person. By contrast, the tragic hero, in becoming revealed is pitied, for this type of person's action(s) are performed in accordance with ethical guidelines; that is, the actions of this type of person are justifiable in accordance with ethical rules. Jephtha, a tragic hero in Kierkegaard's text, was pitied that his daughter had to be sacrificed so that he could fulfill his public vow. By contrast, absolute duty knows of no such ethical principles, and Abraham, being in an absolute relation to the absolute, has to act in accordance with God's dictum. However, as this is the case, Abraham has no means of proving that he has an absolute duty to God, for i) he must maintain silence, and ii) his

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Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death, op.cit., p. 97.

duty, from an ethical standpoint, can not be justified.

According to Ronald Grimsley, the knight of faith, who acts in accordance with "the absurd," can not justify his actions from an ethical standpoint. By contrast, the tragic hero can justify himself because his actions are understood ethically, and, as this is the case, his actions can be "rationally justified."⁵ The key term in this passage is 'rationally.' There is no means available to the knight of faith by which such an individual can rationally explain why it is necessary to transcend the ethical realm in order to perform a duty which is religiously motivated. The knight of faith makes movements outside of that which can be deemed 'rational.' On the other hand, the ethicist's actions are based on rationality, and are justified on the basis of what is considered to be universal. The ethicist, unlike the religious individual, makes no movement(s) of faith.

That which is deemed to be 'rational,' is that which can be justified from a universal standpoint. How can Abraham justify his action of faith on the basis of that which is rationally acceptable? He can not. Abraham's particular action places him outside the ethical realm, and, as such, his action can not be universally justified. The unique action, which Abraham has a religious duty to perform, makes him an exception (to that which is both rational and universal). Abraham's action can not be

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 Ronald Grimsley, Kierkegaard: A Biographical Introduction, op.cit., p. 47.

rationaly justified either, for there is no way that he can possibly explain why he has to attempt to sacrifice Isaac, in order to please God, to someone existing in the ethical realm. Hence, as will be explained later, Abraham's only recourse is to 'the absurd' -- a movement made in the realm of the absolute.

Abraham, in performing a duty that can not be justified from a universal standpoint, makes the movement away from the ethical. Furthermore, this particular movement that he makes also requires that he remain silent, and not reveal his intentions of sacrificing Isaac to any person, for if he does, he violates what is permissible by both ethics and religion. If he reveals himself, Abraham, morally speaking, is guilty of murder, for he lacks the motive of the tragic hero (i.e., sacrificing one in order to save the lives of many) and religiously speaking, is committing a sin. So he must remain silent. But his silence makes him guilty from an ethical standpoint, for concealment is always in opposition to the ethical code. Therefore, Abraham can not justify his actions ethically. But, from a religious standpoint, he must maintain is silence.

Abraham has an absolute duty to maintain silence. Furthermore, any person existing outside of this realm would not be able to understand the implications of Abraham's duties, for these type of duties go beyond the realm of ethics. In addition, the knight of faith, as the name implies, acts on the strength of faith. And since this type

of action requires that an individual enter into a direct relationship with God, this type of action also requires an individual to make a 'teleological suspension of the ethical.'

The 'Teleological Suspension of the Ethical'

Not only must the knight of faith act on the strength of faith, this individual must also act on the strength of the absurd. According to Kierkegaard, Abraham

acts by virtue of the absurd, for it is precisely absurd that he as the particular is higher than the universal. This paradox cannot be mediated; for as soon as he begins to do this he has to admit that he was in temptation (*Anfechtung*), and if such was the case, he never gets to the point of sacrificing Isaac, or, if he has sacrificed Isaac, he must turn back repentantly to the universal. By virtue of the absurd he gets Isaac again. Abraham is therefore at no instant a tragic hero but something quite different, either a murderer or a believer.⁶

This quotation requires some interpretation. By the standards of the ethical realm, someone who considers taking the life of another -- even if it is by way of religious sacrifice -- belongs outside this realm as a 'particular' being, who is lower than the universal. However, Abraham's action is not based on a murderous whim. His action is an act of faith, for by showing that he had the willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in order to appease God, Abraham's

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Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, op.cit., pp. 83-84.

action becomes religiously motivated. And by appeasing God, Abraham is not in jeopardy of losing Isaac. Furthermore, this action of faith places Abraham higher than the ethical (even though he is a mere murderer by ethical standards). By making a 'teleological suspension of the ethical,' Abraham is simultaneously acting on the strength of the absurd, for it is 'absurd' that a murderer -- from an ethical standpoint -- is said to be acting within a higher realm than the ethical.

After God ordered Abraham to sacrifice his only son, He also informed Abraham that he would get his son back if he showed the willingness to go through with the religious sacrifice. Within the realm of either aesthetics or ethics, this is not expected of anyone, but within the realm of the absolute, this can become a duty. As Abraham had faith in God, and in His word, he also believed that through his faith in God, he would not be expected to perform an action whereby he would lose Isaac. However, as it will be discussed later, Abraham's duty was not to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham's duty was to prove to God, that he had the **willingness** to perform such an action (thereby proving his faith in Him). In other words, Abraham had to engage in a 'teleological suspension of the ethical.'

According to Alastair Hannay's interpretation of Fear and Trembling, Abraham has recourse to the universal, due to his being "a good father to Isaac" and he (i.e., Abraham) does not think that he steps outside the boundaries of the

universal, when he decides to sacrifice Isaac on the strength of his faith in God's word (due to his faith in God, Abraham believes if he carries this act out, God will return Isaac to him).⁷ In other words, Hannay claims, this act of sacrifice is a higher realization of the ethical, for Abraham, by "showing God his faith means putting the possibility of his continuing to exercise his fatherly love into God's hands."⁸

Abraham not only has a duty to God, he also has a duty to his son, Isaac. However, by performing his duty to Isaac, he (i.e., Abraham) is also performing his duty to God. Abraham's sacrificial action can only be deemed as 'religious,' if it is being performed out of love (for both Isaac and God). Such an action shows a dutifulness towards, and a love of, God. However, does this action prove that Abraham loves Isaac?

In Works of Love, there is a section entitled "Our Duty to Love Those We See." In this section Kierkegaard says that in order to love someone, our duty is "to find lovable the object which has now been given or chosen."⁹ Not only was Abraham chosen to sacrifice Isaac, Isaac was **chosen** to be sacrificed. As such, according to the quotation, Abraham's duty is to sacrifice Isaac as a gesture of love; in other

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Alastair Hannay, Kierkegaard, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 80.

⁸
Ibid, p. 80.

⁹
Soren Kierkegaard, Works of Love, op.cit., p. 163

words, Abraham's duty is to see Isaac as his son, and not as a mere sacrificial object. By seeing Isaac this way, Abraham also proves his love of, and subsequently, performs his duty to God. As a result, God allowed Abraham to keep Isaac.

When an individual engages in an action, which is based on the strength of the absurd, it requires that all faith is placed in God. However, by placing all faith in God, an individual must also transgress the ethical realm, for it would be expected that the two opposing realms would come into conflict. Another question arises: is there an intermediate realm which provides a link between the ethical and the religious realms? According to Jennifer L. Rike, such a link does not exist, due to the fact that such a trial of faith (i.e., Abraham's) shows only one thing: "obedience." In other words, her claim is that God did not want Abraham to lose Isaac; He wanted to place Abraham "in such a position that He could return Isaac to him."¹⁰ So, she is saying that God wanted Abraham to attempt to sacrifice Isaac for one reason: to prove that he (i.e., Abraham) would obey God's commands. However, in the ethical realm, there is no way that one can prove one's faith to God, without moving outside the realm of the ethical. Thus, there is an irreconcilable gap which exists between ethical and religious duty.

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Jennifer L. Rike, "Faith Under Trial: Ethical and Christian Duty in the Thought of Soren Kierkegaard," Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie 44 (June 1982): 266-297.

Since the duty to God supersedes all other duties, it must also be noted that in order for one to perform one's duty to God, one must forsake any other duties which would interfere with this higher duty. Of course, in the case of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham must suspend his ethical duty to Isaac, and perform what is required by God's will. There is an ambiguity which arises in this particular case. In the ethical realm, one is considered to be in a state of ethical temptation when one contemplates the act of sacrificing another, for such an action, in this particular realm, is defined as 'murder.' Likewise, in the Bible, one of the ten commandments states that murder is never permissible (i.e., "Thou shalt not kill"¹¹). By contrast, in the absolute realm, the act of sacrificing another, for religious reasons, is not considered to place one in a state of temptation when the order to perform such an action comes directly from God; that is, when the act of sacrifice is performed as a duty to God, then such an action is said to be proof of one's faith. In addition, as mentioned in an earlier quote, Jennifer L. Rike points out that this action was designed solely to test Abraham's faith. In other words, there was no chance of his losing Isaac (but Abraham was not sure of this).

Abraham's unique situation places him within the absolute realm, and within this realm, he is in a direct

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Exodus 20:13.

relationship with God. It could be suggested that Abraham **chose** to perform his religious duty, for he did decide to adhere to God's will. In making such a difficult choice, Abraham's unique duty admits of religious intensity. Abraham's situation was intense since he was not given an **absolute** guarantee that there was no possibility of his losing Isaac. Thus, this movement of faith, on Abraham's behalf, is truly representative of religious intensity (which is more intense than the aforementioned ethical intensity).

In the ethical realm, there is very little risk associated with the performance of ethical duties, for these kind of duties are understood by all. On the other hand, the performance of a unique action, such as Abraham's, places one in a state of ethical temptation, for religious sacrifice is not coherent from an ethical perspective. Such an action is seen as murderous. Hence Abraham's unique religious duty places him in a position of risk (when judged from within the ethical realm).

Given that God exists, one's duty to Him would have to be 'absolute;' that is, the relationship is an either (you love Him), or an or (you hate Him). But this requires that the adherent to God is willing to perform any duty that is demanded by Him. However, from an ethical standpoint, such a duty puts Abraham in a state of ethical temptation; that is, as long as he is performing his required action as one of faith, he belongs in the religious realm; but if he has any

doubts while he is in the process of sacrificing Isaac, the act is no longer one of religious sacrifice, he is in a state of ethical temptation, and he will be guilty of murder. From an ethical standpoint, one is in a state of ethical temptation when one contemplates sacrificing another person (even if this sacrifice is being religiously motivated).

Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac based on his faith in God's word. And God promised Abraham that if he followed through on his duty, he would get Isaac back. In addition, God does not claim that Abraham **might** get Isaac back, He claimed that Abraham **would** get Isaac back. Of course such a claim lacks coherence when it is judged in relation to the ethical realm. Abraham, as the knight of faith, is able to make the movement of faith, and place all his trust in God's word. And this type of firm belief does not allow for any doubt. If, at any moment, Abraham doubts God's word, it can not be claimed that he does, indeed, have faith in God. Faith is based on the religious individual's willingness to do anything which God demands as a duty, and, as such, this type of individual must believe that God is capable of amending any situation, no matter how immoral it may appear to those existing outside of the religious realm. Furthermore, at the precise moment when he is to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham must place all faith in God.

The precepts of morality can be understood by finite beings, while acts of faith originate with duty to God.

Since this is the case, one may be required, by faith, to perform an act which goes beyond the understanding of those existing within the ethical realm. Brand Blanshard makes the following comment about faith: Abraham's duty, in relation to human rationality, is considered to be unfavourable, but according to the realm of faith, it is permissible because the dictum originated with God: "faith . . . takes precedence of any judgment of our merely human faculties."¹²

Thus, what is held to be rational is what is deemed to be universally acceptable. As this pertains to morality, a rational action would follow along the same lines as Kant's 'categorical imperative' (which is referred to in the introduction). By contrast, faith calls for a different type of duty, and given Abraham's unique task, his action would be deemed irrational (for it could not be universalized). Jennifer L. Rike's description of faith is not based on rationality, but obedience, and it seems cogent, in so far as any action which God requests must be performed, as a demonstration of faith. Thus, faith and reason necessarily diverge, for they both originate out of opposing realms of existence.

When one is acting solely on the basis of faith, one does not have the advantage of being able to question one's motifs. According to Kierkegaard,

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Brand Blanshard, "Kierkegaard on Faith," in Essays on Kierkegaard, ed. Jerry H. Gill (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Burgess Publishing Company, 1969), p.117.

. . . in the way the task was prescribed to Abraham he himself had to act, and at the decisive moment he must know what he himself would do, he must know that Isaac will be sacrificed. In case he did not know this definitely, then he has not made the infinite movement of resignation, then, though his word is not indeed an untruth, he is very far from being Abraham, he has less significance than the tragic hero, yea, he is an irresolute man who is unable to resolve either on one thing or another, and for this reason will always be uttering riddles. But such a hesitator is a sheer parody of a knight of faith.¹³

Abraham has both a religious duty to i) sacrifice Isaac, and ii) expect that he will not lose him (i.e., Isaac). This is the double movement of resignation. Not only does Abraham resign himself to the fact that he must sacrifice Isaac, he must also resign himself to the fact that since this action is performed out of love, he will love Isaac more when he gets him back. According to Kierkegaard, Abraham's act of sacrificing Isaac must be one of love, not of hate.¹⁴ If Abraham shows any doubt, or hesitation, his act is not a sacrifice, and, as this is the case, Abraham is no longer a knight of faith. Furthermore, if this action is performed out of hate, and not out of love, then Abraham places himself within the ethical realm, and he becomes a mere murderer. When Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, there

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Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, op.cit., p. 186.

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In this passage, from Fear and Trembling, it is noted that in order for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, he (i.e., Abraham) must perform this action as an act of love towards both God and Isaac, for if it is performed out of hate the act becomes murder, and Abraham is no longer a knight of faith. Ibid, pp. 111-112.

can be no doubt that he (i.e., Abraham) is in an absolute relation to God, and that he will not lose Isaac.

Summary

It has been determined that Abraham's 'teleological suspension of the ethical' can only be justified on religious grounds, for in the ethical realm, this action is referred to as murder. But Abraham was willing to perform this act out of love for both God, and his son, Isaac; in other words, Abraham's faith was put on trial, and he acted out of a sense of religious duty. Since God was only testing Abraham's faith, there should have been no doubt that Abraham was going to get Isaac back, but Abraham was unaware of this fact. According to the story in the Bible, Abraham took Isaac to Mount Moriah with the intention of sacrificing him, but God stopped Abraham at the moment he was going to slay Isaac.¹⁵

Abraham's movement can not be understood outside of the religious realm, for such a movement defies ethical explanation. As a result, Abraham, in performing his duty to God, had to remain silent, for if he had revealed what he was planning to do, to any other person, he would have placed himself outside of the religious realm, and subsequently, would have been guilty of murder. Of course,

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Genesis 22:1-13. Instead, God substituted a ram in Isaac's place, which Abraham used as a burnt offering.

such an awesome responsibility places Abraham in a frightening state, because as the knight of faith, who by way of the paradox, places himself above those existing in the ethical (and aesthetic) realms, does not have the luxury of making himself understood by others. Furthermore, he makes his movement of faith on the strength of the absurd. By performing his duty to God, he must also place complete faith in God's word that he will get Isaac back. However, if Abraham performs this action outside of a sense of religious duty, he is no longer a knight of faith, he does not get Isaac back, and he is a mere murderer.

CONCLUSION

The three stages of existence in Soren Kierkegaard's philosophy arises out of a tension. The basis of this tension is discovered by examining his conception of man. As was mentioned previously -- in the introduction -- man's true self, or the self whom he was intended to be, is a composite of the finite and the infinite. Accordingly, his duty is to become this true self. However, this self is not discovered in the aesthetic realm.

The aesthete does not know that it is the performance of duties which places a man higher than the aesthetic stage. The aesthete merely focuses on his own needs. On the surface it becomes apparent that there is a tension which exists between one's own needs, and the needs of other people. When one acknowledges that others have needs, that person then has the motivation to become a dutiful individual. By showing the willingness to place the needs of others, at least on an equal level as one's own needs, one proves that one is a dutiful person. However, the aesthete never recognizes the needs of others because this type of person is solely interested in his own needs. Hence, it can be claimed that the aesthete's level of tension, when placed within an existential context, is lower than that of the ethicist.

The ethicist recognizes that there are duties inherent in existence. This type of person is aware that the needs of

other people can be as important as his own needs. As such, the ethicist shows a recognition that he has duties to others through his willingness to perform those duties which are deemed to be ethical. Given that there is such a recognition, there is a tension which exists between one's duties to others, and the fulfillment of one's own needs. There can be a conflict between one's own needs, and the needs of others, if there is a divergence in the purpose, or end which is to be achieved. In other words, can a man's duties be deemed 'ethical' if he lets his own needs supersede the needs of others?

Thus, there is a tension which is inherent in the performance of ethical duties. The ethical person is not yet a composite of the finite and the infinite. The ethicist, like the aesthete, exists solely in the temporal realm; that is, the ethicist is not yet a true self because he has not yet recognized that which is held to be the infinite part of himself. However, the ethicist is unlike the aesthete for the former does have a willingness to perform duties for the benefit of others.

Ethical duties are duties to others. Therefore, in order for a duty to be deemed 'ethical,' one's own needs can not have priority. By placing one's own needs lower than the needs of others, one proves that one has a dutifulness towards others. Furthermore, such a recognition of duties towards others also proves that one is able to make the movement away from the aesthetic realm. In the aesthetic

realm one has no sense of duty, and, since this is the case, no sense of one's own self. One discovers one's own self when one is able to completely separate oneself from the self which was created by external influences. The ethicist is not capable of making such a discovery, but by recognizing that there are duties to be performed, the ethicist comes closer -- than the aesthete -- to finding his true self, for in acknowledging that there are duties, the ethicist is less susceptible to becoming an aesthete.

The religious individual recognizes that he has a duty to become himself. One becomes oneself by recognizing that duty to God annuls all other duties. In other words, it is one's faith in God that allows one to discover one's own self. At each stage -- in Kierkegaard's three stages of existence -- it can be claimed that a man either has a relationship, or a disrelationship to i) God, and/or ii) himself.

While existing in the aesthetic realm, the aesthete has both a disrelationship to God and to himself, for such a person can not conceptualize himself apart from that which is distracting; in other words, the aesthete does not seek himself, only pleasure. The ethicist recognizes that ethical duties are duties to others. However, even the ethicist has a disrelationship both to himself and to God, for such a person does not seek to discover his true self (or God). A man only has a relationship to God when he recognizes that duty to God supersedes all other duties. And, through the

performance of one's religious duty, one will, accordingly, become oneself. It is exclusively in the religious realm that one discovers one's true self. The religious individual acknowledges that he has a duty to be himself. Through developing faith in God, a man is able to bypass the aesthetic and ethical realms, and discover himself. As long as a man is acting in a manner that does not conform with God's will, he will not be free to discover himself.

Religious freedom occurs when one admits that duty to God has primacy over all earthly duties. Through this recognition, a man becomes free to discover his true self. While existing in the temporal -- the aesthetic and the ethical -- realms, a person can not find his true self because these realms merely distract one from the religious realm. The man who exists solely in finiteness is not free to discover his true self because this type of person does not acknowledge the infinite part of himself. On the other hand, the religious individual is able to exist as both a being who is finite and infinite; in other words, this type of individual recognizes that he is a created being, amongst other created beings, but, concurrently, through his faith in God, is set free from the bondage of being a false self.

In order for a man to discover himself, he must first know what his duties are. The aesthete is not aware of any duties, and, as a result, this type of person is not aware of his true self. The aesthete's self is a mere construct of external influences. The ethicist is a dutiful person, but

he lacks a true notion of himself; that is, he recognizes duties that arise out of lived experiences, but not duties that have religious import. It is the religious individual who eventually discovers himself, for it is he who recognizes that duty to God is absolute, and, as such, places a demand upon himself to find the infinite part of himself.

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