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The Ethics of Metamorphosis in Kierkegaard's Philosophy

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto práci zapracoval sám a že jsem uvekl všechny zdroje, které jsem pro tuto zpracování použil.

v Olomouci 24. 4. 2017 …….

autor

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Abstract

In Kierkegaard's philosophy, the movement from one stage to the next requires an alteration, a change, or a transformation that a person needs to undergo; a better name for this process of transformation is “metamorphosis.” The aim of this work is to show how metamorphosis and its implications connect various themes (such as irony, responsibility, paradox, love, faith, and reason) in Kierkegaard's philosophy; mainly, we will explore these themes in the ethical stage where metamorphosis plays a crucial role.

Keywords:
Søren Kierkegaard, metamorphosis, alteration, transformation, change, ethics, irony, responsibility, paradox, love, faith, reason, knowledge, the knight of faith, Adolph Peter Adler, externalisation, subjectivity, awareness, individuality, transgression, Abraham, isolation, truth, absurdity

Er verwandelt sich beständig.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung*

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Introduction

People who are not much familiar with Kierkegaard's philosophy tend to treat each of his three stages (the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious stages) separately. This treatment gives rise to the misconception that one can magically progress from one state or stage to the next by taking a discrete step or leap. Contrary to this misconception, not only do we find that the three stages are intricately interlinked, and that each stage reflects the other two stages, but also that those changes which take place in each stage are themselves parts of a continual process. The outcome of each change is the product of a metamorphosis: although the end result is distinguishable from what came before the change, certain elements of what we started with are preserved in the final product. In Kierkegaard's philosophy, no stage exists completely on its own; in his analysis of *Don Giovanni* and the immediate-erotic stages, Kierkegaard writes something that could be generalised to encompass his whole philosophy:

"When I use the term 'stage' as I did and continue to do, it must not be taken to mean that each stage exists independently, the one outside the other. I could perhaps more appropriately use the word 'metamorphosis.' […] The specific stages are more a disclosure of a predicate in such a way that all the predicates plunge down in the richness of the last stage, since this is the stage proper. The other stages have no independent existence; by themselves they are only for representation, and from that we also see their fortuitousness in relation to the last stage."[1]

Crucially, in the process of metamorphosis, the person who metamorphose from a lower stage to a higher stage does not forget the continual process of his change. Kierkegaard's ideal being, the knight of faith, is one such person who knows what it means to undergo a transformation:

"He [the knight of faith] feels no inclination to become another person, by no means regards that as something great. Only the lower natures forget themselves and become something new. The butterfly, for example, completely forgets that it was a caterpillar, and may in turn so completely forget that it was a butterfly that it may become a fish. The deeper natures never forget themselves and never become anything other than what they were. The knight, then, will recollect everything, but this recollection is precisely the pain, and yet in infinite resignation he is reconciled with existence."[2]

[1] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, III: Either/Or, Part I,* edited by Victor Eremita. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 74.

[2] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VI: Fear and Trembling,* by Johannes de Silentio, and *Repetition,* by Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 43.

All technicalities aside—biologically speaking, the butterfly is genetically the same as the caterpillar, and its genes do not "forget" what it was initially—this poetic depiction emphasises the importance of continual change.

The concept of metamorphosis is a recurring theme in Kierkegaard's philosophy. The aim of this thesis is to show what role metamorphosis plays in Kierkegaard's philosophy and what implications it has. Many of these implications concern Kierkegaardian ethics, and for this reason, Kierkegaardian ethics will be the focus of the present work. With that aim in mind, I have divided the present work into three sections and various subsections. In the first section, by examining the roles of paradox, responsibility, subjectivity, etc. in Kierkegaardian ethics, we will show how irrationality and faith are related to ethics; the overall concern of the second section is the implications of *The Book on Adler*, and it has been subdivided into four main parts, each of which takes issue with a different aspect of Adler's actions; finally, the last section is devoted to the ethics of love. The theme that connects all these parts is *metamorphosis*. I have used the word "metamorphosis" liberally as an umbrella term for similarly related concepts such as "alteration," change," and "transformation."

The final point that I need to address before closing the introductory section has to do with the sources I have used; in this thesis, I have solely relied on primary sources, and the reason behind this decision is quite simple: just as Kierkegaard considers a true Christian to be a person who discovers his own (subjective) truth by primarily reading the Bible, so do I consider a true Kierkegaardian to be a person who relies on Kierkegaard's own words rather than someone who gets entangled in a spaghetti of secondary sources and interpretations. In *For Self-Examination*, Kierkegaard describes his dystopia as a country in which "everybody turns into an interpreter,"[3] and "everything is interpretation."[4] In such a country, so much scholarly research and interpretation would be shoved between the text (in Kierkegaard's example, the Word of God) and the individual that attaining a subjective understanding would become impossible.

"It seems as if all this research and pondering and scrutinizing would draw God's Word very close to me; the truth is that this is the very way, this is the most cunning way, to remove God's Word as far as possible from me, infinitely further than it is from one who never saw God's Word, infinitely further than it is from one who became so anxious and afraid of God's Word that he cast it as far away as possible."[5]

[3] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXI: For Self-Examination* and *judge for Yourself!* Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 33.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid, p. 35.

Although, in academia, exclusive reliance on primary sources might draw criticism from certain readers,[6] along with Kierkegaard, I believe submission to the authority of the adviser can be a "cunning way to derive advantage from the authority."[7] Kierkegaard views this kind of submission as a "cowardly attempt to push away all responsibility by never acting on one's own."[8] Rather than trying to prove my point through the words of a secondary author, just like Kierkegaard, I claim to be without authority. The phrase "without authority," of course, has a double meaning: a) realising that I have no authority as an interpreter, and b) refusing to submit to the authority of any interpreter.

Given the importance of metamorphosis in the works of Kierkegaard, I have actively tried to avoid one type of change: changing the words of the philosophers I admire into something impersonal. Kierkegaard warns us that this change occurs when one yields to scholarly research and secondary sources (interpretations).[9]

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[6] I would like to acknowledge that I have intentionally used only primary sources, and that I am familiar with secondary sources on Kierkegaard such as the following publications:

Hannay, Alastair; Marino, Gordon. *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Stewart, Jon. *A Companion to Kierkegaard*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2015.

Solomon, Robert. *Existentialism*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Harries, Karsten. *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on "Either/Or*." Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2010.

Conway, Daniel. *Kierkegaard's "Fear and Trembling": A Critical Guide*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Evans, C. Stephen. *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Walsh, Sylvia. *Kierkegaard: Thinking Christianly in an Existential Mode*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Hannay, Alastair. *Kierkegaard and Philosophy: Selected Essays*. Routledge, 2003.

[7] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XII.1: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to* Philosophical Fragments, by Johannes Climacus. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 603.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXI: For Self-Examination* and *judge for Yourself!* Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 36.

1. Kierkegaardian Ethics and Irrationality

When a philosopher talks about ethics, he normally refers to a set of practices that ought to be carried out by individuals. Philosophers instruct us how to act in the hope that the prescribed individual actions carried out by each person would gradually gain enough momentum to become the norms of a given society. Kierkegaard is no exception; however, because of his religious background, the relation between ethics and practice is much more complicated in his philosophy than it normally is in the works of other philosophers.

1.1. Paradox as the Cornerstone of Christianity

Kierkegaard is what one might call a "Christian fanatic." As a well-educated theologian, he is well-aware of the paradoxes that can be found in Christianity. What makes him different from other theologians is that instead of justifying these paradoxes, or instead of trying to solve them, he embraces them and elevates paradox as the cornerstone of Christianity.

Kierkegaard believes that by trying to solve various paradoxes, as other theologians wish to do, one disproves Christianity, which is the very opposite of what theologians try to accomplish in the first place. I think one of the best passages which expresses this point can be found in his *Book on Adler*. The problems that this book takes into consideration are the same religious and ethical problems that the first Christians had to face. For instance, if a believer wondered what he would have done if he were alive in the same time and place as Jesus, he could find an answer to this question by testing himself against various claims of revelation. Today's Christians might not be able to imagine the ethical implications of living alongside Jesus, but they can have the best next experience when revelations are concerned. The dilemmas that a person faces in relation to revelations are the same kind of dilemmas that people faced about 2000 years ago: when someone claims to have received a revelation, people who hear these claims are put in the exact same situation in which people were put at the time of Christ. Adler was one such pastor who claimed to have received a revelation by God before writing the revelation in a collection of sermons. In his *Book on Adler*, not only does Kierkegaard criticise many aspects of Adler's claims, but he also talks about the nature of Christianity and juxtaposes it to what was happening in the 19th century. Whereas many had tried arguing that Adler was crazy for suggesting that he had had a revelation, Kierkegaard pointed out that such claims were preposterous because if one refuted the probability of a modern-day revelation, one would also have to refute Christianity itself, for Christianity had been founded upon claims of revelation.

"No Christian, and thus no Christian ecclesiastical superior either, can be willing to allow the syllogism: a man has claimed to have had a revelation in which the Saviour has communicated this and that to him—ergo, the man is mentally deranged. If the state Church ever allows this conclusion, it has destroyed itself."[10]

But what's most interesting is that Adler's claims lead Kierkegaard to analyse the concept of truth in Christianity.

At the beginning of the second chapter of this book, Kierkegaard makes yet another crucial confession by saying that the very same thing that has made Christianity so successful has made many atheists victorious. This same thing of which Kierkegaard is talking is Christian claims about eternal truth that under empirical scrutiny become nothing more than a series of bad hypotheses.

It is understandable why when faced with such a problem, many theologians try to resolve the existing paradoxes in Christianity in order to give Christianity a more coherent appearance. To begin with, the very concept of "eternal truth" is paradoxical, because Christianity was not formed as a religion until about two millennia ago, therefore the claims it makes are about 2000 years old. How, then, can a 2000-year old claim reach both backward and forward in time from the moment of Creation until the Day of Judgement for all eternity? (Or, in modern terminology, from the Big Bang until the Heat Death of the Universe.) The situation becomes even more paradoxical if we go back 2000 years in time to the moment when the claims were just made, because it was at that time that the new born truths were first said to be eternal. But as Kierkegaard sees it,

"the thousand years are no argument *pro* any more than newness in year one was an argument *contra*. The eternal truth is just as true in its first moment as it is in its latest."[11]

These truths about which Kierkegaard is talking are very different from those that are found in science. It is true that if it is true that molecules are made up of atoms, it has always been true before we discovered atoms and it will always remain true when the last human being dies; it could be argued that if there are any scientific truths, they are, in a sense, eternally true. But the eternal truths that are found in Christianity are quite different: when someone receives a revelation, that person might be endowed with new truths which were non-existent prior to the revelation; despite

[10] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV: The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age Illustrated by Magister Adler as a Phenomenon*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 78.

[11] Ibid, p. 36.

this contradiction, these new truths are eternally true even if they contradict the eternal truths of the past, hence the paradox!

The question we should be asking is, What makes this transformation possible? How can a series of bad hypotheses become transformed into true statements? The answer is: by virtue of faith. A religious truth is never a simple true statement: it is a paradox that metamorphoses into a *subjective* truth.

1.1.1. The Existence of Paradoxes

Despite believing Christianity to be an eternal truth, Kierkegaard tells us that

"Christianity is not an eternal truth in the sense of a mathematical […] theorem […]. Christianity is the paradoxical truth; it is the paradox that the eternal once came into existence in time. This paradoxical fact (an offense to reason, the object of faith) does not, because it is eighteen hundred years later, become truer than it was the day it occurred. That the eternal once came into existence in time is not a truth that must stand up to the test of time, is not something that *must be tested by human beings* but is the paradox *by which human beings must be tested*. […] Nor has the paradox itself survived for many years; it existed when Christ lived, and since that time it exists only every time someone is offended or truly believes. Whether the paradox had existed for one thousand years or for only a half-hour makes no difference."[12]

Here, we see that paradoxes don't simply become metamorphosed to truths: first, we need to take notice of them; we need to become offended by them. Without taking offence, there is no such thing as a paradox. By becoming offended, or by truly believing, we take the first step towards being able to transform paradoxes and becoming transformed by them.

1.2. Faith

According to Kierkegaard, it is the duty of each person to accept Christianity through faith despite the paradoxes that are present in Christianity. Take the case of Abraham who was willing to sacrifice his own son: it is hard to overestimate the ethical implications of Abraham's story; to realise the absurdity of the situation, you need to imagine what would happen if such an event took place today. What would happen if someone killed his own son and when the authorities captured him, he told them that he was not guilty because God had told him to kill his son in a dream. But in Kierkegaard's view, there are two realities involved in any similar story: the so-called objective reality from the viewpoint of society and the subjective reality which inevitably entails absurdity

[12] Ibid, pp. 37-8.

from the viewpoint of society; and in confrontation with the absurdity of such a situation, it is faith that "makes a murder into a holy and God-pleasing act."[13] The transformation from the ethical act of murder into the religious act of sacrificing happens by virtue of faith.

1.2.1. Ensuring the Ethical

In *Fear and Trembling*, two parallel perspectives are offered: the ethical and the religious. From the vantage point of the former, Abraham is a murderer; and from the vantage point of the latter, Abraham is a pious man.

Kierkegaard claims that ethically speaking,

"Abraham's relation to Isaac is quite simply this: the father shall love the son more than himself."[14]

It might be the case that faith transforms a murder into a holy act, but this transformation does not undermine the ethical problems which the act creates. From an ethical point of view, what Abraham did was utterly inexcusable. The ethical perspective ensures that if Abraham had killed his son and if he were captured, he would not have been able to justify his actions to anyone else, because to have faith is to have it individually, not in relation to other people; so, paradoxically, he is justified by virtue of being a single individual. Even his relation to the absolute is not what justifies him:

"He had faith. This is the paradox by which he remains at the apex, the paradox that he cannot explain to anyone else, for the paradox is that he as the single individual places himself in an absolute relation to the absolute. Is he justified? Again, his justification is the paradoxical, for if he is, then he is justified not by virtue of being something universal but by virtue of being the single individual."[15]

In Kierkegaard's view, it is faith alone that makes this justification possible:

"Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal."[16]

[13] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VI: Fear and Trembling,* by Johannes de Silentio, and *Repetition,* by Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 53.

[14] Ibid, p. 57.

[15] Ibid, p. 62.

[16] Ibid.

And since having faith is an individual act, it can have no impact on the ethical consequences of Abraham's actions from the viewpoint of the society in which he lives.

1.2.2. Subjectivity and Isolation

It is important to note that the person who has true faith, whom Kierkegaard calls "the knight of faith," is always an isolated individual. Just as Abraham's actions are only justifiable on the individual level, the knight of faith can have faith only as an individual with no connection to anyone else: an action might be justifiable by virtue of faith, but this justification will not be communicable to others. You cannot convince other people to see the world under the same light as you do; they can reach that conclusion, but they have to reach it for themselves. Therefore, something that becomes transformed to truth by virtue of faith completely belongs to the subjective realm:

"All religiousness lies in subjectivity, in inwardness, in being deeply moved, in being jolted, in the qualitative pressure on the spring of subjectivity."[17]

This subjectivity gives weight to our beliefs: not only is it our own responsibility to choose what truths to believe in, but we also become responsible for the truths we choose. In one of the most poetical passages, Kierkegaard tells us that

"in the loneliness of the universe [the knight of faith] never hears another human voice but walks alone with his dreadful responsibility. The knight of faith is assigned solely to himself; he feels the pain of being unable to make himself understandable to others, but he has no vain desire to instruct others."[18]

1.2.2.1. Camus' Sisyphus and Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith

The knight of faith is very much like a person who faces the Absurd in Albert Camus' philosophy; he is every bit as responsible as Camus' absurd hero; the only difference is that the knight of faith chooses faith in confrontation with the Absurd, whereas Camus' absurd man (or absurd hero) does not look beyond the Absurd. There is also another crucial difference: the Absurd

[17] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV: The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age Illustrated by Magister Adler as a Phenomenon*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 104.

[18] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VI: Fear and Trembling*, by Johannes de Silentio, and *Repetition*, by Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 80.

saves both Camus' Sisyphus and Kierkegaard's knight of faith, but Sisyphus is happy just by virtue of being confronted with the Absurd, whereas the knight of faith will have faith that he will be saved by the Absurd.

"[The knight of faith] can be saved only by the absurd, and this he grasps by faith."[19]

And I think this is the key difference between the two philosophers: the knight of faith "believes the absurd," but Sisyphus accepts the Absurd as a brute fact. Here again, we see the role of transformation. Sisyphus is not able to subjectivise the Absurd by virtue of faith; therefore, the Absurd remains a neutral thing for him. In contrast to Sisyphus, the knight of faith transforms the paradoxical nature of the Absurd into a subjective truth.

1.2.2.2. Reflective Sorrow

To show another parallel between Camus and Kierkegaard, I will draw your attention to how both Camus and Kierkegaard viewed their ideal creatures: just as Camus famously claimed, « *il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux*, »[20] Kierkegaard wrote, "the knight of faith is the only happy man."[21] From a Kierkegaardian point of view, these two kinds of happiness are fundamentally different. The happiness of Sisyphus is only the fleeting happiness of an aesthete, and such happiness is momentary since it relies on the accidental. In the grand scheme of things, one should consider Sisyphus unhappy. On the other hand, the happiness of the knight of faith is much more stable because it has been transformed from aesthetical happiness to something higher.

Regarding Sisyphus' sorrow, Camus writes:

« J'imagine encore Sisyphe revenant vers son rocher, et la douleur était au début. Quand les images de la terre tiennent trop fort au souvenir, quand l'appel du bonheur se fait trop pressant, il arrive que la tristesse se lève au cœur de l'homme : c'est la victoire du rocher, c'est le rocher lui-même. »[22]

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[19] Ibid, p. 47.

[20] Camus, Albert. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Éditions Gallimard, 1942, p. 168.

"One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Penguin Group, 2005, p. 119.

[21] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VI: Fear and Trembling*, by Johannes de Silentio, and *Repetition*, by Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 50.

[22] Camus, Albert. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Éditions Gallimard, 1942, p. 166.

We can understand why this sorrow comes to Sisyphus' heart: just as the everyday man becomes aware of everydayness and encounters the absurd when he reflects, Sisyphus' awareness of the absurdity of his situation is the result of reflection; however, from a Kierkegaardian point of view, it remains unclear how Camus' everyday man (or Sisyphus) transforms this sorrow to happiness. The transition from being an everyday man to being an absurd man entails reflection; the absurd man is a reflective individual, and such an individual "will transform every sorrow into a reflective sorrow."[23] The very morbidity which makes the absurd man realise the absurdity of life prevents him from becoming happy.

"I fancy Sisyphus returning towards his rock, and the sorrow was in the beginning. When the images of earth cling too tightly to memory, when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man's heart: this is the rock's victory, this is the rock itself."

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Penguin Group, 2005, pp. 117-8.

[23] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, III: Either/Or, Part I,* edited by Victor Eremita. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 171.

2. Externalisation

At this point, we need to go back to one of the passage quoted earlier and focus on its last part where it tells us that the knight of faith "has no vain desire to instruct others." This lack of desire makes Kierkegaardian ethics fly in the face of common sense, for Kierkegaard tells us that it is not always the case that an individual should manifest his beliefs outwardly. Believing something to be right or true is not enough justification for instant action or externalisation of that belief. Commonly, when religious beliefs are concerned, people are outspoken more often than not. But in Kierkegaardian ethics, we face the strange situation of being asked not to externally manifest our beliefs.

To illustrate this point, let's have a look at one of Kierkegaard's own examples by recalling the case of Adler: the story is that one night, Adler supposedly received a divine revelation, and he instantly began to jot down what was revealed to him in a collection of sermons. We are not interested if this story is true or not. What we care about is what follows the event of revelation: before the event, Adler was a Hegelian, but Adler says that that night, after receiving the divine revelation, he realised that Hegelian philosophy was wrong, so he burned all his books. So, we could say, Adler suddenly came to a *belief*, namely, that Hegelian philosophy was wrong. The question is: was this belief enough to justify his extreme action of burning all his books?

Adler's transformation is a wonderful example which touches upon various aspects of Kierkegaardian ethics, so we need to go into details in order to demonstrate the ethical issues of Adler's story. Overall, I could outline at least four aspects from which Adler's actions could be considered problematic:

I. Superficial externalisation
II. Irony in ethics
III. Subjectivity
IV. Aesthetics

We shall examine each of these aspects in turn.

2.1. Superficial Externalisation

In order to take a closer look at the first problem, we need to simplify Adler's story to find out what's ethically wrong with it: Adler claimed that he had realised Hegelian philosophy was wrong. In fact, his feelings were so intense that he had *believed* that Hegelian philosophy was wrong. This means that Adler took a qualitative leap:

"Adler by a qualitative leap was transported from the medium if philosophy, and specifically the fantastic medium if Hegelian philosophy (pure thought and pure being), into the sphere of religious inwardness. The main point is that by a qualitative leap from the objectivity if abstract thinking Magister Adler came to himself, because all religiousness lies in subjectivity, in inwardness, in coming to oneself."[24]

A realisation like this is only possible by achieving a subjective truth, and subjective truths take place inwardly in the individual. Based on this analysis, Kierkegaard has no objection to Adler's qualitative leap; what he objects to is the externalisation of Adler's belief before internalisation, because a truth that has not become internalised cannot be called a true belief. This is what's at the heart of Kierkegaard's ethical message.

When an outside observer views the actions of Adler, his actions will seem decisive to the observer; but Kierkegaard would say that it is precisely this deceiving appearance that should indicate to us that Adler's actions are too decisive to be true. In fact, what happened to Adler afterwards supports Kierkegaard's claim: despite burning all his Hegelian books, Adler continued being a Hegelian.[25]

This contrast between passionate inwardness and quiet outwardness is so essential to Kierkegaard's philosophy that even the external environment needs to be adequately calm. In *Stages on Life's Way*, Kierkegaard suggests that we should select an environment on the basis of the mentioned contrast. In Kierkegaard's view, even the quietness of the forest, or the stillness of night is not desirable since they contain fantastic elements:

"I have deliberately selected an environment on the basis of contrast. I have sought the solitude of the forest, yet not at a time when the forest itself is fantastic. For example, the stillness of night would not have been conducive, because it, too, is in the power of the fantastic. I have sought nature's peacefulness during the very time when it is itself most placid. I have, therefore, chosen the afternoon light."[26]

Kierkegaard's criticism is not restricted to Adler; any priest or any person who spends his whole time in advocating his beliefs should be criticised. In fact, Kierkegaard generalises that, as a rule,

[24] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV: The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age Illustrated by Magister Adler as a Phenomenon*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 99.

[25] See Ibid, p. 102.

[26] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XI: Stages on Life's Way: Studies by Various Persons,* by Hilarius Bookbinder. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 16.

"the greater the need for a striking outer manifestation of the decision, the less the inner certitude."[27]

Moreover, when someone claims to have found a truth, he should know that his outward behaviour cannot possibly have any effect on the truth: a truth would not become less true if we kept silent about it, and it would not become truer if we expressed it loudly at every opportunity. So, when Archimedes runs naked in the town and shouts "Eureka!" this extreme outward manifestation of his internal feelings has nothing to do with the value of his discovery.[28] In Kierkegaard's view, the discovery is only an excuse for such a behaviour—it does not justify it.

2.1.1. Conviction

A man who devotes his whole time in propagating his beliefs and views to mankind is in a strange position, because in such situations, the question is not whether his views or ideas are right; rather, we should be asking, Whom is he trying to convince? Is he trying to convince himself or other people? No doubt that it will seem to others that his convictions are firm, but this firmness is only an appearance. In the case of such a person,

"it is he who needs people, he who wants to convince himself by convincing others. If in the intellectual sense one were to place him in a vacuum, he will have no conviction."[29]

And this raises a very interesting point: it is not just religious fanatics, like terrorists and so on, whose beliefs become undermined by the very extreme actions they take to prove that they are firm in their beliefs, but any sort of belief is undermined by immoderate externalised actions: take the case of atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Lawrence Krauss, or Alex Rosenberg[30] who have paradoxically made a religion out of atheism thanks to their fanatic approach—talking about irony! One becomes tempted to ask, Whom are they trying to convince that God doesn't exist? Others or themselves? The same argument holds true for all sorts of activists: anarchists, communists, feminists who go to great length to show that anything with the remotest relation to the phallus is purely evil, or vegetarians who become outwardly disgusted by the sight meat, and so on.

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[27] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV: The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age Illustrated by Magister Adler as a Phenomenon*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 100.

[28] See Ibid, p. 112.

[29] Ibid, p. 101.

[30] See Rosenberg, Alex. The Atheist's Guide to Reality. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011

Of course, the point is not that women don't have equal rights as men, or that God exists. Although Kierkegaard would disagree, atheists are not mistaken in believing that there is no imaginary being or entity called God, but constant manifestation of such a belief is wrong. Just as we do not waste time proving or disproving the existence of Zeus or Apollo, a true atheist should realise that it is ridiculous to argue over the existence or non-existence of God.

The same argument holds true for feminism.

2.1.2. Ironical Defence

What's interesting is that Kierkegaard has a three-page essay in defence of women's rights, but he doesn't use the normal feminist language of attacking and protesting. What does he do instead? By using irony and comical remarks, he shows that women have rights to get proper education. Irony is precisely what someone like Adler lacks. To understand how irony works, we can have a look at Kierkegaard's essay: for instance, he argues, if we are to take the matter seriously, women should have more rights than men, because it is they who are more prone to gain knowledge than men; in the story of the Fall, it is not Adam who listens to the snake's philosophical lectures, but Eve! Consequently, it is Eve, as a woman, who has a craving for deeper knowledge and a talent for philosophical speculation.[31]

To give you another example, according to Kierkegaard, the witch trials in the middle ages should have been enough to convince people that it was always the woman who had had a deeper insight into nature, not men. In fact, men were always afraid of this deep insight; that's why they suppressed women.[32]

By utilising a comical tone, Kierkegaard uses people's own conservative and religious language against them, and such an approach is far more effective than many harsh attacks. Take Voltaire's case as one of the best examples whose criticism of Leibniz is far more memorable and more effective than thousands of forgotten philosophical essays that were written against Leibniz.

2.2. Irony in Ethics

Based on what was said in the previous section (2.1.2), it could be argued that Kierkegaard's solution to the problem of *action versus belief* would be irony. Imagine how an ironist behaves: a

[31] See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, I: Early Polemical Writings: Articles from Student Days, From the Papers of One Still Living, The Battle between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars*. edited and translated by Julia Watkin. Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 3.

[32] Ibid.

true ironist would go on to live in the world among other people and their preposterous social norms; to an observer, the actions of an ironist might seem sincere: the ironist might seem to be following the norms of his society and so on, but inwardly, nothing could be further from the truth. In contrast to the ironist, if a person like Adler were positioned in such a situation, he would feel uncomfortable, because he cares what others think of him—he cannot resist showing his true beliefs. Even if such a person used irony or sarcasm, he would make sure everyone was aware that he was being ironical and that he didn't literally mean what he was saying; but for Kierkegaard, a true ironist is someone who uses irony without caring at all if others realise that he is being ironic or not. The ironical attitude towards the world should be manifested inwardly. Of course, this doesn't come without risks: imagine what would happen if people took your ironical attitudes literally. Yet again, a true ironist wouldn't care.

2.2.1. Silent Inwardness

So, when confronted with a realised subjective truth, taking drastic actions is not the right response:

"A more earnest person prefers to conceal the decision and to test himself in silent inwardness in order to see if it might not deceptively be the case that he, because he is *weak*, needs the *strong* outer manifestation of the decision. If a person can persevere in silent inwardness, can endure being totally changed without changing the slightest outwardly, he then can easily take the striking step."[33]

Strangely enough, viewed under this light, Kierkegaard's ironist has ethical characteristics. His ethical message in his *Book on Adler* is:

"to be able to be entirely as one ordinarily is, to live among the daily and continual recollections of the old and yet to be changed in the deepest ground of one's being—yes, that is the art."[34]

Isn't this exactly how an ironist behaves? The change that an ironist undergoes is always a deep change from the inside; on the outside, he seems to live in uniformity with everyone else.

[33] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV: The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age Illustrated by Magister Adler as a Phenomenon*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 101.

[34] Ibid.

2.3. Subjectivity

There is a third problem with immoderate outward manifestation of a belief: when a person acts out frantically, it will be less likely for other people to find their own subjective truths. For instance, many people consider themselves to be religious, but they have religion only as an idea; they keep the actual religiosity at a distance. They might even go to church or perform certain religious rituals, but they imitate these actions like sheep in a herd. These people, "they do have religiousness, but inwardly they have not made up their minds about when it is to be used, what it is, how it is to be used."[35] Their decision to be religious is completely the opposite of how the knight of faith decides to be religious. In Kierkegaard's view, at least Adler had one positive quality: he was truly shaken by the experience he had had.[36] But when other people, who attend religious ceremonies solely as a social duty, see Adler's extreme actions, they will become relieved; they will feel as if though they have undergone a deep spiritual experience, and this might suffice to falsely convince them that they have experienced a change. This feeling deceives them into thinking that they are religious; but they cannot possibly be religious, because their beliefs are not affecting them inwardly—their beliefs are not subjective. In other words, they do not achieve the deep inward change that an ironist achieves—the sort of change we talked about in an earlier section.

Adler's extreme actions prevents others from metamorphosing as individuals. Those who attend Adler's ceremonies become content with the superficial experience they undergo. The situation is comparable to going to the movies to watch a horror film: we might become so shaken to feel as if though we were in the same situation as the actors, but as soon as the movie ends, the intense feeling dissipates.

2.3.1. Awareness

Oddly enough, in the example mentioned in the last section, the metamorphosis which Kierkegaard wishes individuals to undergo is not the typical transformation that makes a believer out of a pagan. He is asking *Christians* to become Christians, for it is not enough to be called Christian. This is a point which he makes clear in his *Point of View*:

[35] Ibid, p. 107.

[36] See Ibid, pp. 107-8.

"It is indeed a delusion on the part of the multitude who call themselves Christians."[37]

The problem arises when someone such as a pastor addresses these so-called Christians. In a passage which sounds complementary to his criticism of Adler, Kierkegaard remarks:

"Ordinarily, also in Christendom, the person who is striving to lead people to become Christians employs everything in order to establish securely that he himself is a Christian; he gives assurances and assurances. He fails to note that from the beginning there is an enormous confusion here, since, after all, those whom he is addressing are Christians. But if he is addressing Christians, what then does it mean to get them to become Christians?"[38]

In contrast to Adler, Kierkegaard claims that

"compel a person to an opinion, a conviction, a belief—in all eternity, that I cannot do. But one thing I can do […]: I can compel him to become aware."[39]

So, Kierkegaard sees his task as something fundamentally different from Adler's: he wants to compel individuals to become aware. To become a Christian, it is not enough to call oneself Christian—that is only the first step! A Christian should metamorphose into a Christian, and the first step in this process is awareness, without which all the passions and intense feelings of the so-called Christian do not really belong him/her; rather, they are evoked by "the person who is striving to lead people to become Christians"[40] and belong to him.

It could be said that if someone like Adler managed to convince someone to "become a Christian," his subject would not make this transformation for himself, but for someone else (i.e., Adler). A person who truly metamorphose is like the knight of faith: his transformation is subjective and for himself alone. Along the same lines as Nietzsche's advice to "become who you

[37] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXII: The Point of View: On My Work as an Author, The Point of View for my Work as an Author,* and *Armed Neutrality*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 51.

[38] Ibid, p. 52.

[39] Ibid, p. 50.

[40] Ibid, p. 52.

are,"[41] we read in Kierkegaard that "the ethical is that by which he becomes what he becomes."[42] As a matter of fact, Kierkegaard views the will to be someone else as the lowest form of despair.[43] Someone like Adler wishes to model everyone after himself, and if he accomplished to change others in this way, these changes would be but superficial:

"As a rule, one who despairs in this way is very comical. Imagine a self […], and then imagine that it suddenly occurs to a self that it might become someone other—than itself. And yet one in despair this way, whose sole desire is this most lunatic of lunatic metamorphoses, is infatuated with the illusion that this change can be accomplished as easily as one changes clothes. The man of immediacy does not know himself, he quite literally identifies himself only by the clothes he wears, he identifies having a self by externalities […]. There is hardly a more ludicrous mistake, for a self is indeed infinitely distinct from an externality."[44]

2.3.2. Knowledge

What we have said thus far, of course, does not mean that intense inward feelings are enough. A person cannot just sit in a room and think inwardly; people talk and do things. Because we are humans, and because we are social animals, we have a deep need for communication; so, it should not be surprising that when someone thinks they have discovered a deep truth, they have a desire to communicate it to other people, so everyone else would also benefit from that truth. That being said, there needs to be a balance between what we say and what we believe. One way to curb our passions in speech is through knowledge.

A Greek who believes in Zeus could have the highest intense feelings about his religion; he could even talk more passionately than any Christian. What distinguishes these two are the concepts they express. A pagan's religious education will expose him to different concepts than a Christian.[45] Therefore, it is absolutely essential to be educated in what we have faith.

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[41] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 152.

[42] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, IV: Either/Or, Part II,* edited by Victor Eremita. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 178.

[43] See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XIX: The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening,* by Anti-Climacus. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 52-3.

[44] Ibid, p. 53.

[45] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV: The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age Illustrated by Magister Adler as a Phenomenon*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 114.

Many people call themselves Christians without having read the Bible; consequently, they are not exposed to sufficient religious concepts. This lack of knowledge makes metamorphosis an impossibility. How can anyone become a Christian without knowing what Christianity is and what it entails? Not only can a person who lacks knowledge not become religious, but he also cannot act ethically, for it is education that will ultimately save the person from making a mistake:

"Even to the most earnest ethicist who is out upon the waters of reflection, it can happen that he at some time makes a mistake for a moment, but he will quickly discover it, because he tests his life in order to see where he is. Even to the most earnest ethicist it can happen that he is at some time ensnared in a self-deception for a moment, but he will soon discover it."[46]

It is not enough to act: an ethics which only commands you to act is not doing a very good job. In Kierkegaard's view, good ethics tells you to be ready for your mistakes, and the only way you could see your mistakes is through proper education and knowledge:

"Only ethics can place a living person in the proper position; it says: the main thing is to strive, to work, to act, and if one has taken a wrong direction of reflection, then above all to come back from it."[47]

This problem is not restricted to Christianity; for instance, think of that strange breed of people who call themselves communists—they go to protests, they form rallies, they distribute flyers, and so on—without having read a single page by Marx. We all have encountered such people, and as firm as these people might be in their beliefs, in Kierkegaard's view, an action which does not have an educational support behind it is unfounded. It does not matter how intensely we feel that our actions are right; we must also be able to justify them conceptually. Being deeply moved and education are two important pillars of an action, and "in our age there is a shortage of both, both of being deeply moved and of education in concepts."[48]

2.3.2.1. Transgression

Knowledge gives the individual the possibility of transgression. Only those who possess adequate knowledge can dwell between two different realms without completely belonging to

[46] Ibid, p. 128.

[47] Ibid, p. 131.

[48] Ibid, p. 115.

either realm. The history of arts is full of such figures; take Arnold Schoenberg as a prime example: his books, such as *Structural Functions of Harmony* and *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, are testimonies to the fact that he had mastered all the rules of harmony; in musical composition, he was unsurpassable, and his unrivalled knowledge gave him the authority and power to walk on the fine line between the old and the new. Before devoting his life to his invention, dodecaphonic music, he had already stretched the possibilities of harmony to an unprecedented extent in his *Verklärte Nacht* and String Quartet No. 1 in D minor. This kind of ability is impossible without adequate knowledge; progressive change in society (or in any system) relies on such knowledge. And in ethics, as in any other system, it is knowledge that enables the individual to act beyond Good and Evil. The person who has adequate knowledge is incapable of not acting, and it is this incapability that transforms him into an ethical person.

There are two related approaches to the problem of knowledge in ethics: that of Carlyle's, and that of Nietzsche's. Carlyle had assumed that being moral entails being knowledgeable:

"A thoroughly immoral *man* could not know anything at all! To know a thing, what we can call knowing, a man must first *love* the thing, sympathize with it: that is, be *virtuously* related to it. If he have not the justice to put down his own selfishness at every turn, the courage to stand by the dangerous-true at every turn, how shall he know? His virtues, all of them, will lie recorded in his knowledge."[49]

In the passage above, it is evident that Carlyle gives priority to morality: being moral implies being knowledgeable; however, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it is the other way around: because a person gains knowledge, he cannot refrain from acting.

"'Knowledge for its own sake'—this is the final snare morality has laid; with it, we become completely entangled in morals once again."[50]

Once you have knowledge, you become entangled in morality.

It needs to be pointed out that although Carlyle puts morality above knowledge, it could be argued that it is still knowledge that gives rise to moral behaviour. It is the chicken-and-egg problem; it is unclear which comes first for Carlyle: morality or knowledge? This ambiguity is in part intentional on Carlyle's side as he is aiming to criticise the difference made between intellect and morality:

[49] Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*. University of California Press, 1993, p. 91.

[50] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 152., p. 58.

"We talk of faculties as if they were distinct, things separable […]. That is a capital error. Then again, we hear of a man's 'intellectual nature,' and of his 'moral nature,' as if these again were divisible, and existed apart. Necessities of language do perhaps prescribe such forms of utterance; we must speak, I am aware, in that way, if we are to speak at all. But words ought not to harden into things for us. It seems to me, our apprehension of this matter is, for most part, radically falsified thereby. We ought to know withal, and to keep forever in mind, that these divisions are at bottom but *names*."[51]

For Carlyle, a man's morality is a testimony to his knowledge, and his knowledge is a testimony to his morality; for Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, this relationship is one-sided: a man's morality is a testimony to his knowledge—not the other way around.

2.4. Aesthetics

Finally, we come to the fourth problem. It is important to point out the strange relation between aesthetics, religion, and ethics.

Even though, according to Kierkegaard, the ethical stage is higher than the aesthetic stage and the religious stage is higher than the ethical stage, there is no such thing as acting ethically without acting aesthetically or religiously. When someone acts ethically, to a certain extent, he is acting aesthetically while his actions are partially religious. We've already pointed out the crucial role that faith plays in ethics: it is by virtue of faith that an ethical action becomes inward and subjective. However, not only must an action be subjectively ethical by virtue of faith, but it must also be aesthetic! We have indirectly touched upon this fact: an ironist is essentially an aesthetic being for whom everything needs to be approached ironically as if life were a play, yet it is precisely this playful approach that gives merit to an ethical action.

Let's remember Abraham's actions: his actions are religious, ethical, and aesthetic; by virtue of faith, he maintains his subjective truth, and in the process, by acting as an ironist, he is acting both aesthetically *and* ethically.

In fact, Kierkegaard takes the aesthetic dimension of an action so seriously that in *Either/Or*, he proposes that in the matters of unhappy love, under certain circumstances, the proper response would be to take the aesthetic action by committing suicide.

It might be argued that the first part of *Either/Or*, where this suggestion is made, does not concern itself with ethical and religious perspectives; therefore, we should not take the mentioned suggestion seriously. That is why I would like to direct your attention to what Kierkegaard says

[51] Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*. University of California Press, 1993, p. 90.

about "the father of faith": he suggests that Abraham could have alternatively "thrust the knife into his own breast,"[52] and thus avoiding killing his own son. This alternative solution would have been the aesthetic solution *par excellence*.

More importantly, Kierkegaard goes further than merely suggesting this alternative: in Kierkegaard's view, had Abraham doubted and done anything else (such as committing suicide), his actions would have still been considered great and glorious; the only difference being that in the alternative scenario, he would not have become the father of faith.

The very fact that this possibility is offered shows us the importance which an aesthetic action has for Kierkegaard; so, it is not surprising that he criticises Adler because his actions were not aesthetic enough. Kierkegaard does not object to Adler's transformation; if anything, it was an excellent quality in Adler that he had become so transformed that he could not rest; nevertheless, the extreme outward manifestation of this transformation gave an unaesthetic appearance to what he did and what he said.

But one must be careful how much emphasis one puts on the aesthetic dimension of an action. An ethical act implies the existence of aesthetics, but aesthetics alone does not imply an ethical action. Consequently, we cannot formulate maxims based on aesthetics alone; if we were to formulate such a maxim, this maxim would be "one ought to amuse oneself."[53] This is in fact the maxim by which "A" and Johaness, the Seducer live in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*; such a person would only act to avoid boredom. It is this concern with how to derive our maxims that brings us to the next chapter of the present work.

[52] p. 21.

[53] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, III: Either/Or, Part I,* edited by Victor Eremita. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 290.

3. Love

We need to keep in mind how Kierkegaard does something drastic in his ethics: unlike Kantian ethics in which one cannot derive a categorical imperative out of emotions or irrationality, in Kierkegaardian ethics, it is essential to do so.

One of these maxims concerns love, and it is perhaps the most important human emotion that gets formulated in Kierkegaardian ethics. This kind of ethics is inherently irrational and unknown to reason. Kierkegaard's understanding of love is not what we, in the 21st century, think of when we use the word "love." For us, the word "love" normally has romantic connotations. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's understanding of love is different even from the classical age. For him, love is not *agape*, the love of God for man and of man for God; it is not *Éros*, because he thinks erotic love only shows you "the beautiful dizziness of infinity" without giving you the infinite; Likewise, Christian love, for Kierkegaard, is not *Philia*, brotherly love; and neither is it *Stroge*, familial love. For Kierkegaard, love is something practical; therefore, dealing with love falls under the domain of ethics. Normally, when we want to show someone that we love them, we declare our burning love for that person, but the love Kierkegaard is talking about is not something that can be shown through speech; it can only show itself in deed and action.

3.1. Christian Love

From our modern perspective, Kierkegaard appears to be the least likely person to understand what love is; on so many levels, he is the worst adviser when it comes to love. His own personal life was a mess when it came to romantic relationships: let's not forget how he hopelessly fell in love with Regine, and when she finally accepted his marriage proposal and decided to marry him, Kierkegaard took his proposal back because he wanted to be with his sweetheart, Melancholy. In his journals, we find out what happened after he proposed to Regine:

"She said Yes. [...] The next day I saw that I had made a mistake. Penitent that I was, my vita ante acta, my melancholia, that was enough."[54]

This, in a nutshell, shows how Kierkegaard felt about romantic love. So, what could such a person, who would rather be melancholic than be with the woman he loved, tell us about love? The trick to answering this question is to realise that Christianity is at the heart of his understanding

[54] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 3, Notebooks 1-15.* Edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Bruce H. Kirmmse, George Pattison, Vanessa Rumble, and K. Brian Söderquist. Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 432.

of love; however, it would be a mistake to assume that this understanding is orthodoxically Christian—nothing could be further from the truth. Like the rest of his philosophy, the concept "love" is a subjective truth that each person has to understand for himself. This fact alone tells us why his conception of love is so different from everyone else's.

3.1.1. "Every Tree Is Known by His Own Fruit"

If love is a Christian phenomenon, it follows that it is only possible through faith and belief. But as an ethical phenomenon, it must also be lived. To understand how this could be so, Kierkegaard uses an analogy: he compares love with trees. It is important to mention that this is a biblical analogy; in Luke 6:44, we read,

"every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes."[55]

In contrast to earthly love, Christian love is something eternal. When an earthly tree blossoms, we can quantitatively say for how long it blossoms and for how long the blossoms will last, but this is not the case with Christianity. "Therefore no one […] would think of saying of Christian love that it blossoms."[56] We can talk about earthly love just as we can talk about earthly trees, but

"no poet […] would think of singing [the praises of the eternal love of Christianity]. What the poet sings about must have the sadness, which is the riddle of his own life, that it must blossom and […] must perish. But Christian love abides, and for that very reason it is. What perishes blossoms, and what blossoms perishes, but something that *is* cannot be sung about—it must be believed and it must be lived."[57]

In this analogy, we see that there is no becoming in Christian love: there is no blossoming, and most importantly, there is no perishing. Because of its unchangeability, Christian love is immune to perishability.

[55] *The King James Bible*, Luke 6:44.

[56] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI: Works of Love*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 8.

[57] Ibid.

3.1.2. The Role of Faith in Love

This brings us to another Christian characteristic of love: it must be accepted by faith, and not by reason. As we have pointed out, paradoxes which are found in Christianity are not flaws of Christianity; quite the contrary: they make belief possible. By trying to resolve the paradoxes, we reduce Christianity to something inferior; in such endeavours, we ultimately reduce the heavenly to the earthly. Consequently, love, as a component of Christianity, is something to be enjoyed by "its manifestations"; if we tried to fathom it, we would disturb it:

"The suffering is always most painful when the physician is compelled to cut and penetrate into the more vital and therefore the hidden parts of the body; likewise suffering is also the most painful and also the most pernicious when someone, instead of being gladdened by love in its manifestations, wants to take delight in fathoming it, that is, in disturbing it."[58]

For this reason, "we must believe in love—otherwise we simply will not notice that it exists."[59]

So, the act of believing does at least two things: a) as an alternative to fathoming, it protects love against change, and b) just as we previously saw how being offended, or truly believing makes religious paradoxes exist, so does believing in love make love exist.

3.2. Types of Love

Christian love is not the only type of love that can be found in Kierkegaard's philosophy, and we need to keep in mind that Christian love is not the only type of love that can be considered ethical. In his other works, Kierkegaard distinguishes between different attitudes towards love. The best example of this can be found in his *Stages on Life's Way* in which Victor Eremita, Johannes, the Seducer, Constantin Constantius, and two other people known as the Young Man and the Fashion Designer plan a banquet. The atmosphere is reminiscent of Plato's *Symposium*: The five begin to drink wine, and they decide to talk about erotic love. If you are familiar with Kierkegaard's philosophy, you should be able to recognise these names: Victor Eremita is one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms and he is known as the editor of *Either/Or,* and in this book, the part entitled *Diary of a Seducer* is written by Johannes, the Seducer; likewise, Constantin Constantius is another one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms who is known as the author of *Repetition,* a book which revolves around someone known as the Young Man.

[58] Ibid, p. 9.

[59] Ibid, p. 16.

By presenting the opposing views of these five people in one setting, Kierkegaard tries to show how the three stages of life reflect one another. The overall setting is also very Kierkegaardian: the contradictory views are presented to the reader and it is ultimately the reader who should decide for himself which one of the views is the best one.

Whenever we read Kierkegaard, we should always have Johannes, the Seducer in mind who objects to his companions by saying, "Victor is a fanatic; Constantin has paid far too much for his intellect; the Fashion Designer is a madman."[60] Following Johannes, the Seducer, this is precisely the attitude that we should have: we need to be critical and juxtapose all the presented views against one another to form our own judgment by discarding everything we have read or heard. Here, in the words of a person who leads an entirely aesthetic life, we hear ethical reasoning. Along the same lines, in Kierkegaard's philosophy, one of the things we realise is that even erotic love has its own ethical aspect. To give you an example, I will refer to the second part of *Either/Or* in which Judge Vilhelm tries to argue that the ethical can and should contain the aesthetic. A person who lives a purely aesthetic life, lives for accidental moments and only such moments interest him or her—moments such as a chance encounter at a party, or a smile from the opposite sex in an interesting situation.[61] But Judge Vilhelm argues that this accidental quality can be preserved in the ethical stage; the example he uses concerns his relation to his wife:

"I know very well that her nose is not flawlessly beautiful and that it is too small, but it nevertheless pertly faces the world, and I know that this little nose has provided the occasion for so much teasing that even if it were within my competence I would never wish her one more beautiful."[62]

Bizarrely enough, here we see that in Judge Vilhelm's view, something as accidental as the size of a nose can have profound significance. The ethical stage does not renounce the accidental, rather it transforms it, and therewith maintains that which is aesthetic in the ethical stage.

3.2.1. Marital Love

Since there are different types of love, it is to be expected that each type should get its own treatment in Kierkegaard's philosophy. For instance, Christian love is said to be immune to

[60] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XI: Stages on Life's Way: Studies by Various Persons,* by Hilarius Bookbinder. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 73.

[61] See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, IV: Either/Or, Part II,* edited by Victor Eremita. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 7.

[62] Ibid, p. 9.

alteration, whereas erotic love does and should undergo alteration; this is in fact what happens when an individual progresses to the ethical stage by renouncing erotic love in favour of marriage. When this happens, "in a certain sense a change has occurred,"[63] and this change "could be termed the metamorphosis of the lover and the beloved into groom and bride."[64]

3.2.1.1. Awareness in Marital Love

In the second chapter, we talked about how awareness makes progress from a lower stage to a higher stage possible. Without awareness, no metamorphosis is possible. Along the same lines, the change from romantic love (the aesthetic stage) to marital love (the ethical stage) involves awareness. One of the points Judge Vilhelm makes in *Either/Or* is precisely this: there is awareness in marital love, and that's what distinguishes romantic love from marital love. Judge Vilhelm argues that "A" is deluding himself because he fears the metamorphosis which leads to this awareness.[65]

3.2.2. "Thou Shalt Love"

Of course, erotic love is one type of love; in Kierkegaardian ethics the most important type of love is Christian love. We all have heard the famous commandment "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." In his unique interpretation, Kierkegaard puts an emphasis on the word "shalt," thereby shifting the emphasis from the object to the agent. Under this light, "thou shalt love" is the kernel of this commandment, and the neighbour is only a secondary concern. This shift in emphasis transforms love into an ethical duty. But this won't change the fact that the neighbour plays an important role in this commandment; if the neighbour were just a redundant figure, there would have been no mention of him. So, why is the neighbour mentioned? The subjective nature of love tells us that love is not something that exists (as a source) in abundance for everyone to be enjoyed. In other words, love is not something that takes place among people; it happens between people. Even though everyone in a community might experience love, their experience of love always remains on the individual level, and it will be always experienced between two individuals.

It is true that the Christian doctrine of love tells us to love the whole human race without making exceptions, but each one of the people in the human race must, in a sense, be loved individually:

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[63] Ibid, p. 57.

[64] Ibid.

[65] See Ibid, pp. 145-6.

"The object of both erotic love and of friendship has preference's name, 'the beloved,' 'the friend,' who is loved in contrast to the whole world. The Christian doctrine, on the contrary, is to love the neighbor, to love the whole human race, all people, even the enemy, and not to make exceptions, neither of preference nor of aversion."[66]

One of the differences between Christian love and *Philia* or *Éros* is that although *philia* and *Éros* also take place between two people at a time, they differ from Christian love in that they do not embrace the whole world.

3.2.2.1. Alteration in Love

Furthermore, love in Christianity is also Hegelian: it does not change randomly, this is because, as we have mentioned, love is eternal. "In civil matters [...] it can very well happen that a man begins all over again even more than once and without any fuss lets the past be forgotten;"[67] he "can change his profession, tries his luck in a new career, and without any fuss lets the past be bygone and forgotten."[68] But this cannot be done in the world of spirit. "In the world of the finite, the randomness of the changes may be all right,"[69] but in the world of spirit only continuity is possible.

"Continuity is not sameness, in continuity there is also change, but the continuity is that every change is made dialectically in relation to the preceding."[70]

Here, we see that the world of the finite, just like the aesthetic life, relies on that which is accidental. If it is our purpose to accept love as an ethical duty, we should overcome this randomness. Based on this analysis, it is not completely certain whether alteration in Christian love is possible in Kierkegaardian ethics; however, what is certain is that if such a change were to take place, it would need to take place dialectically. Despite this possibility, we need to be careful when we talk about alteration in love: we could ask ourselves, Why should love be a duty in the

[66] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI: Works of Love*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 19.

[67] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV: The Book on Adler: The Religious Confusion of the Present Age Illustrated by Magister Adler as a Phenomenon*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 83.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

first place? Well, it has to do with alteration: earthly love like anything else withers away with time. It is like a hammer, or any other tool that we use. The intensity of our love is no guarantee that it will last. Christianity, however, is supposed to be eternal, and so should be the love that it commands.

"*Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally and happily secured against despair*. Spontaneous love can become unhappy, can reach the point of despair."[71]

There is only one solution to make love secure against despair and alteration, and that is to make it a duty. By using the word "shall," the act of love becomes a conscious decision. The interesting thing to point out is that by this conscious decision we change love, but this one change is required by Kierkegaard to make love eternal; therefore, by permanently changing it once, we make it immune to further alteration. Kierkegaard describes this metamorphosis as undergoing "the change of eternity by having become a duty."[72]

Alteration is not always caused by the person in love; it can also be caused from the outside. If you stop loving your beloved because your beloved has stopped loving you, your love is dependent on an external factor. But a love which has undergone eternal change by becoming a duty does not care about dependency. The person who loves ethically, loves regardless of external factors—such a love is self-contained and independent.

3.3. Responsibility in Love

If a devout Christian loves unconditionally and persistently, others might take advantage of his/her generous love. What's more, Kierkegaard tells us that "all you have to do is to obey in love."[73] It's not hard to realise that if A sees that B's love is unchangeable and unconditional, and that B will always obey, A might take advantage of B. But this obedience is not the simple relationship which is observed between a master and a slave; it is a two-way mastery, because it is conceivable that when A obeys B, B might take advantage of A, but the point is that since love forms a dual relationship between two people, B also needs to obey A; this situation forces each individual to become "responsible" and to use their advantage position responsibly, because if B takes advantage of A and misuses his relation to him, A has the capacity to do the same. This

[71] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI: Works of Love*. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 40.

[72] Ibid, p. 32.

[73] Ibid, p. 20.

relation between A and B is quite Hobbesian: B knows that A knows that if B misuses his relation to A, A will misuse his relation to B; and A knows that B knows it; and B knows that A knows that B knows this, and so on. This threat alone is enough to guarantee that none of them will misuse their advantage over the other.

Conclusion

We started our journey by talking about the irrationality of faith. Given Kierkegaard's religious background, and given our remoteness from Christ,[74] we proposed a simple thought experiment: since it is not easy to imagine people's reactions to Christ when he first proposed his new vision, we suggested that we could test ourselves against the best next available thing, i.e., present-day claims of religious revelation. When we are faced with claims of revelation, not only do we ask ourselves whether these claims are true, but most importantly, we also realise that if these claims were true, they would negate the religious truths of the past. Obviously, this conflict between various truths gives rise to paradoxes. The question is, How are we to react to these paradoxes? Kierkegaard is clear about one thing: trying to resolve religious paradoxes should be viewed as the most treasonous thing a theologian could do; if we are to become subjective, paradoxes are needed, because it is the job of paradoxes to offend us. Only by becoming offended can we take a major step towards subjectivity: paradoxes have the potential to transform us by offending us, and we in turn can transform paradoxes to subjective truths.

Once the individual accepts the absurd paradoxes of religion by virtue of faith, there will always be the risk that they will put themselves above the law by performing some drastic action. The example we used was Abraham and his attempt at sacrificing Isaac; by arguing why ethics will not in any case become suspended in society, we tried to provide an answer to the concern that subjectivity is a rejection of ethics—in Kierkegaard's philosophy, the ethical consequences of an action is always ensured: in Abraham's case, faith might transform a murder into a "holy act," but it does not diminish the ethical implications of his action.

Besides ensuring the ethical consequences of an action from a social perspective, Kierkegaard also ensures a personal ethics by putting the heavy burden of responsibility on the individual: for Kierkegaard, subjectivity entails absolute responsibility for the individual—not freedom from responsibility. The notion of responsibility is so important that in *Fear and Trembling*, we encounter Kierkegaard's knight of faith as someone whose utter isolation makes him the sole bearer of responsibility in the universe.

Besides responsibility, we also looked at other characteristics of the knight of faith in the last two parts of the first section: for instance, it was shown that what distinguishes Kierkegaard's knight of faith from Camus' absurd hero is their differing reactions to the Absurd: the absurd hero

[74] By remoteness, I mean: a) spiritual remoteness due to living in a secular age, and b) physical remoteness due to living about two millennia after Christ's death. I am overlooking the fact that religious people typically believe Christ to be omnipresent.

accepts the Absurd as a brute fact, whereas the knight of faith transforms the paradoxes of the Absurd into subjective truths.

In the second section of the thesis, we pointed out the ethical issues of Adler's actions by demonstrating how Adler failed to become an individual and furthermore, how his actions prevented others from becoming subjective; among other things, Adler's excessive externalisation and lack of irony were said to be major contributors to this failure.

The second section also dealt with one of the problems of subjectivity by looking at an odd request from Kierkegaard, namely asking Christians to become Christians. Awareness was offered as the key to this metamorphosis.

Another important topic which we covered in the second section had to do with transgression. Whereas in the first section, we analysed the role of social constraints on transgression (such as in Abraham's case), in this section, we delved deeper into the problem by outlining the (personal) limits of transgression. Kierkegaard describes (the ethical paradox of) subjectivity as the realisation that the individual is higher than the universal,[75] which entails that the individual can transgress the universal laws of ethics; nevertheless, it was my intention to show the limits of transgression by emphasising the importance of knowledge; it was proposed that in contrast to Carlyle, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the relation between morality and knowledge was one-sided: a knowledgeable person is a moral person—not the other way around.

Before moving on to the third section, in the last part of the second section, we mentioned the possibility of formulating subjective maxims; in contrast to Kantian ethics, in Kierkegaardian ethics, our maxims can be subjective and based on emotions; this peculiarity of Kierkegaardian ethics lead us to examine the concept of love in the final section of the thesis. Emotions are alterable by nature; we saw how Kierkegaard immunised love against change by putting an emphasis on the word "shalt" in the commandment "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Furthermore, we argued how the commandment consisted of two parts—one part concerning love as a duty, and a second part concerning one's neighbour.

Moreover, in the third section, we saw the reoccurrence of previous themes such as faith, awareness, and responsibility.

[75] See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VI: Fear and Trembling*, by Johannes de Silentio, and *Repetition*, by Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard and Edna Hong. Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 55.

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