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**KATEDRA FILOZOFIE**

***The Ethics of Transgression***

**Diplomová práce**

Autor: Ali Yansori

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Martin Jabůrek, Ph.D.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto práci zpracoval sám a že jsem uvedl všechny zdroje, které jsem pro tuto práci použil.

v Olomouci

.....

autor

Děkuji Mgr. Martinu Jabůrkovi, Ph.D. za kritické připomínky a rady.

**Abstrakt:**

Práce prozkoumá možnosti zdůvodnění transgrese a obhajuje tezi, že znalost dává jedinci možnost transgrese. Pouze ti, kteří mají adekvátní znalost, mohou přebývat mezi různými (etickými) říšemi, aniž by úplně patřili k jedné určité říši: právě to umožňuje transgresi. Domněnkou práce je, že znalost implikuje etiku a etika implikuje jednání; získáním znalosti se jedinec stává součástí etiky. Kierkegaard popisuje etický paradox subjektivity jako poznatek, že jedinec znamená více než obecně, což naznačuje, že jedinec může přesahovat obecné zákony etiky chováním mimo dobro a zlo. Cílem práce je ukázat jaké etické důsledky má transgrese – jednání mimo dobro a zlo – ve filozofii Kierkegaarda a Nietzscheho.

**Klíčová slova:**

Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, etika, znalost, transgrese, jednání, zodpovědnost, odcizení, subjektivita

**Abstract:**

The present work explores the possibility of justifying transgression and defends the thesis that knowledge gives the individual the possibility to transgress. Only those who have adequate knowledge can dwell between two (ethical) realms without fully belonging to either realm—this is what makes transgression possible. The assumption of my thesis is that knowledge implies ethics, and that ethics implies action; by acquiring knowledge, the individual becomes entangled in ethics. Kierkegaard describes the ethical paradox of subjectivity as the knowledge that the individual is higher than the universal, which implies that by acting beyond good and evil, the individual can transgress the universal laws of ethics. The aim my master's thesis is to show what ethical implications transgression—acting beyond good and evil—has in the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

**Keywords:**

Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, ethics, knowledge, transgression, action, responsibility, alienation, subjectivity

“Ed io, ch’ avea d’ orror la testa cinta,  
Dissi: Maestro, che è quel ch’ i’ odo?  
E che gent’ è, che par nel duol sì vinta?  
Ed egli a me: Questo misero modo  
Tengon l’ anime triste di coloro,  
Che visser senza infamia e senza lodo.  
Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro  
Degli angeli, che non furon ribelli,  
Nè fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sè foro.  
Caccianli i Ciel per non esser men belli:  
Nè lo profondo inferno gli riceve,  
Chè alcuna gloria i rei avrebber d’ elli.”  
—Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*

“Of good and evil much they argued then,  
Of happiness and final misery,  
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame:  
Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy!”  
—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

«А гений и злодейство—  
Две вещи несовместные.»  
—Александр Пушкин, *Моцарт и Сальери*

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## Theses

- I. If the individual succeeded in establishing his own personal ethics, it would still be necessary that he should remain subjected to the ethics of his society while he practiced his personal ethics.
- II. What makes the Nietzschean great man an existential figure is his incommunicability.
- III. Incommunicability does not entail irresponsibility.
- IV. Individual responsibility is always incommunicable and a solitary affair.
- V. If an individual were equally at home in states A and B and could not decide between the rules of either state, it would be possible to construct a third state, state C, where the best of the two states would be conserved. Acting beyond Good and Evil means transgressing to state C in order to consult one's moral code.
- VI. An action performed by the individual can be called good or evil only retroactively.
- VII. Forming philosophical (and ethical) systems should be considered a genre of poetry.
- VIII. Justification is possible only retroactively.
- IX. Every new philosophical system is proposed as the final word.
- X. Irony is a prerequisite for acting beyond Good and Evil.
- XI. Every so-called philosophical truth is a poetic truth.
- XII. Every moment in which a truth is fabricated could count as a vantage point.
- XIII. No ethical system can be a perfect algorithm that can be applied to every situation.
- XIV. We need an ethical system that acknowledges the gaps of all ethico-philosophical systems—an ethical system whose sole concern is the gaps of other ethical systems.
- XV. Every new philosophy is a transgression.
- XVI. Creating new ethical systems is possible because there are no eternal truths.
- XVII. Once we have knowledge, we are bound to act ethically.
- XVIII. Without knowledge, no justification would be possible.
- XIX. Suffering is a prerequisite for acting beyond Good and Evil.
- XX. Suffering serves as a filter that separates the weak from the strong.
- XXI. Accepting one's downfall is a hallmark of the higher man.
- XXII. Once exalted, the individual is free to choose whichever path that would work out best for him as an individual.
- XXIII. Acting beyond Good and Evil presupposes having options to choose from.
- XXIV. Just as artistic—poetic—activity can never be justified, no individual can justify their ethical activity.



# **Introduction**

## **Why Kierkegaard and Nietzsche?**

I have chosen to base my thesis on the philosophy Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Following Jaspers, I am of the opinion that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche should be presented as an inseparable duo. Jaspers regards these two figures as the “expression of destinies.”<sup>1</sup>

Their affinity is so compelling, from the whole course of their lives down to the individual details of their thought, that their nature seems to have been elicited by the necessities of the spiritual situation of their times. With them a shock occurred to Western philosophizing whose final meaning can not yet be underestimated.<sup>2</sup>

The present work is but a gravel created by the shock wave of their writings that blasted philosophy.

## **Justifying Egalitarianism**

Undoubtedly, the subject of the present work has echoes of egalitarian ideas. It is undeniable that Nietzsche and Kierkegaard had egalitarian beliefs; that being the case, if we are to build on their philosophy, it is most urgent to ask: What is a good criterion for discrimination? We humans do not have the greatest track record when it comes to executing antiegalitarian ideas in the real world. With history in mind, before we answer our question, we need to emphasise that we cannot allow any criterion that might lead to social injustice pervade our ethical systems. This is so obvious that it may not seem necessary to mention it, but human history and human inclinations caution me to assert emphatically that no criterion that might lead to social injustice can pervade the ethics I am promoting in my master’s thesis. Though there may be many candidates to choose from, our aim is to single out a common criterion in Nietzsche’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophies that will not undermine what we have emphasised. It seems to me that knowledge is the only criterion that passes our test, and for that reason, it takes centre stage in the present work. It is the aim of the present work to show how knowledge and transgression are related ethically.

## **A Brief Historical Account of the Role of Knowledge in Western Literature**

Knowledge has always been a central theme in Western literature: According to the Bible, the history of man on Earth began by consuming the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The concept of devouring something to gain knowledge of good and evil is not unique to

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<sup>1</sup> Jaspers, Karl. *Reason and Existenz: Five Lectures*. The Noonday Press, 1955, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Christian mythology; we observe the same theme in Hesiod's *Theogony* according to which Zeus swallows Metis, so she would advise him on good and evil.<sup>3</sup>

Early Western literature aside, perhaps the earliest philosopher who posed knowledge as a real ethico-philosophical problem was Aristotle. We encounter this problem particularly in the first three chapters of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle leaves no doubt about the purpose of his book, and we are told that the book is not solely meant to be read “for the sake of theoretical knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> He explains the purpose of his book by telling us that “we must investigate what relates to actions.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, ethically speaking, “the end is not knowledge but action.”<sup>6</sup> Aristotle compares those who take refuge in philosophical arguments without acting to sick people who listen to doctors but do not follow what they are prescribed.<sup>7</sup>

Although some might think we should resist the temptation to compare Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to Kierkegaard's writings,<sup>8</sup> it is evident from Kierkegaard's journals that he was interested in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>9</sup> The reason why I am mentioning Aristotle is to show that the themes that the present work deals with goes as far back as Aristotle. These themes did not die with Aristotle, and later philosophers continued to work with them. The present work follows the same line of tradition.

### **The Form of the Thesis**

In writing my thesis, inspired by the musical sonata form, I have divided my thesis into four parts: introduction, exposition, development, and recapitulation. In the introduction, the general idea behind the work gets presented. In the exposition, I present the two thematic materials that

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<sup>3</sup> See Hesiod. *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*. Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated with Introduction and notes by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2014, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> See Løkke, Håvard. “*Nicomachean Ethics: Ignorance and Relationships*.” *Volume 2, Tome II: Kierkegaard and the Greek World - Aristotle and Other Greek Authors*, edited by Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun. London: Routledge, 2016, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard goes so far as to claim that if one wishes to understand Aristotle's philosophy properly, “one must be familiar with his *Ethics*.”\* Kierkegaard knew Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and paid attention to Aristotle's “distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary, acting from ignorance and unknowingly.”\*\* As it is evident from his attention to ignorance and types of actions, we can safely assume that the problem of knowledge and action interested Kierkegaard.

\* Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 3: Notebooks 1-15*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 376.

\*\* Ibid.

are the concern of my thesis: transgression and knowledge. In the development, the philosophical possibilities of the themes of exposition are explored. Finally, the recapitulation concludes the thesis.

### **An Overview of My Master's Thesis**

The present work is a sequel to my bachelor's thesis, *The Ethics of Metamorphosis in Kierkegaard's Philosophy*. In that work, regarding the problem of subjectivity, I argued that since we are social beings, even in the height of inwardness, we would still like to communicate our subjective truths to others. In its radical form, this strong desire for communication could lead to zealotry and dogmatism. In order to prevent such unwanted behaviour, I suggested that knowledge could be an effective way to curb our overenthusiasm. Furthermore, I highlighted the relation between knowledge and ethics by claiming that not only can a person who lacks knowledge not be a believer (e.g., believer in science, believer in Christianity) but also he cannot act ethically, for it is education that ultimately saves one from making a mistake. To put it briefly, two things are essential to Kierkegaardian ethics: action and knowledge. In his ethics, Kierkegaard requires us to be deeply moved, for it is passion that prompts one to action; for that reason, knowledge is required to save one from misguided passion. In one sentence: an ethics that does not lead to action is a meaningless construct, and an action that is not based on knowledge leads to mistakes. Following the discussion about knowledge, I briefly dealt with what I regarded as one of the most important consequences of being knowledgeable: transgression. Knowledge gives the individual the possibility of transgression, and it is this possibility that is the focus of the present work.

Transgression does not in any way imply irresponsibility; that being the case, there should be a system of checks and balances to prevent unacceptable actions from being committed. This is the challenge we face: since we are dealing with an ethics that is overwhelmingly subjective, talking about external systems of checks and balances does not make much sense. It is true that external (e.g., social, legal) pressure can be effective to some extent; nevertheless, it can never be enough to convince everyone to refrain from transgression, for the simple reason that some individuals are willing to break the norms and pay the price.

Kierkegaard describes (the ethical paradox of) subjectivity as the realisation that the individual is higher than the universal,<sup>10</sup> which entails that the individual can transgress the universal laws of

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<sup>10</sup> See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VI, Volume 6: Fear and Trembling, and Repetition*, by Johannes de Silentio, and Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 55.

ethics. It is my intention to show the limits of transgression by emphasising the importance of knowledge as an internal pressure on the individual to act responsibly.

In the section titled *Transgression: Knowledge and Action*, I start the thesis by reminding the reader how, in my bachelor's thesis, I interlinked knowledge and action as essential components of every transgressive action. By introducing the themes of the essay, the section serves as the thematic introduction to the rest of my thesis. The two recurring themes of the thesis are: knowledge and action. It is the aim of the present work to outline in what way these two concepts relate to transgression.

Since existentialism is concerned with the single individual, we start working with the two mentioned themes (knowledge and action) by talking about solitude. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were not different from their romantic counterparts in glorifying solitude; however, where they differed from other romantics were in how they thought solitude was not a movement towards the aesthetic, but towards the ethical. Thanks to the solitude of the single individual, we cannot talk about subjectivity in existentialism without putting the individual in opposition to the crowd. Kierkegaard asks us to turn away from the crowd since the crowd is untruth; we examine in what sense Kierkegaard equates the crowd with untruth, and how truth and responsibility are related.

Despite the negative aspects of the crowd, social pressure, as we mentioned, can be an effective way to make an individual refrain from committing unacceptable acts of transgression. Constant tension between society and the single individual is inevitable; however, if society is to work, there should be a balance between the subjective ethics of the individual and the universal ethics of society; we explain how this balance is maintained in Kierkegaardian ethics.

After examining Kierkegaard's views on solitude, we turn to Nietzsche's views on the necessity of solitude, incommunicability, and responsibility. Carlyle, who, like Nietzsche, was concerned with acting beyond Good and Evil, argued in favour of heroes by exempting them from the universal ethics of society. We argue that, with regard to acting beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche's philosophy is in sharp opposition to Carlyle's.

Since alienation is a natural consequence of incommunicability, section 1.2 is devoted to the problem of alienation. It would be pointless to talk about ethics if we neglected real life; accordingly, in sections titled *Statelessness* and *Artists as Ethical Heroes*, we look at historical (and musical) examples of what it means to be an alienated individual by giving a brief historical survey of how the romantics were haunted by alienation; additionally, we mention Mahler and Schönberg as two great real life examples that can be served as symbols of individuality.

Section 1.2.3, titled *Transgression*, is the theoretical heart of my master's thesis. It is clear what one can transgress, but it is not clear where one transgresses to; it is possible to transgress an ethical

rule, but transgress *to where*? That is the question we try to answer by offering an abstract foundation. The type of transgression with which we are concerned could take place if the individual could not choose between the rules of two different systems. In such a situation, the individual founds a third state to which he transfers some of the rules of both systems.

If the ethical system of the individual is essentially incommunicable, how do some subjective systems become universal? Section 2 is an effort to answer this question. *On the Genealogy of Morality* gives us an account of one of the most potent forms of universalisation: retroaction. By outlining the implications of Nietzsche's work, we argue that creating an ethical system is an aesthetic activity, and that the creation of new ethical systems is achieved by what Nietzsche refers to as the "retroactive force." Moreover, we argue how Kierkegaard and Nietzsche formed their philosophies thanks to retroaction.

The aesthetic activity of creating truths and systems poses a problem: How can we justify a system whose truths are constructed? Section 2.4 and its subsections try to answer this question. I posit the idea of vantage points and argue that each philosophical system is a vantage point from which we can observe and evaluate other philosophical systems.

Section 3 offers a historical context to analyse how Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's irrationalism fare against other irrationalist philosophies. What interests us is the relation between irrationality, reason, and justification. For the purposes of our discussion, irrationality is important in so far as it sanctions transgressive actions. In Kierkegaardian ethics, the ethical paradox states that the individual is higher than the universal, and it is this paradox that has the potential to transform Abraham's murderous act into a holy act; similarly, an irrationalist might argue, the truth perceived through madness can transform a madman into a saint. By considering the case of Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, we point out how ludicrously comical a person could become if he misunderstood what it meant to act beyond Good and Evil. Dostoyevsky's book has the Nietzschean message that a person cannot *become* a hero with the power to act beyond Good and Evil; rather one either *is* or *is not* a hero. The idea that becoming a hero is something that one cannot choose can be derived from Nietzsche's fatalism. If a person did not have any heroic instinct, no amount of self-exploration and self-development could lead him to become a hero.

Ethically speaking, knowledge could result in inaction (or the wrong kind of action) if one became disillusioned with knowledge. We treat the problem of becoming disillusioned with knowledge in section 4 where we distinguish between three types of disillusionment: (a) aesthetic (or poetic) disillusionment, (b) ethical disillusionment, and (c) religious disillusionment. An example of aesthetic disillusionment, which is the lowest type of disillusionment, can be seen in Lord Byron's *Manfred*; Goethe's *Faust* offers an example of ethical disillusionment; and the

highest type of disillusionment, religious disillusionment, can be seen in those who act ethically subsequent to their disillusionment—this type of disillusionment is religious because the individual acts upon his *subjective* ethics in a Kierkegaardian sense. Following Fichte, Kierkegaard interlinks knowledge, action, and ethics, and it is this interrelation that the present work emphasises; we are arguing that knowledge would mean nothing if it did not prompt us to action, and action would mean nothing if it were not concerned with ethics.

To complete our discussion about disillusionment, the second part of section 4 explores the problem of the knowledge of Silenus *qua* knowledge. Nietzsche's treatment of the knowledge of Silenus enables us to see why knowledge is a prerequisite for any sort of justification, and why suffering is a prerequisite for acting beyond Good and Evil.

Sections 5 and 6 are complementary sections that explore the concept of exaltation. Section 5 argues that one must accept one's downfall when the times comes, and section 6, by drawing upon Camus' *The Fall*, argues that only those who have options are truly exalted and have the freedom to choose. The freedom we are concerned with should not be confused with the freedom that is connected with the idea of free will in philosophy.

Section 7 criticises Schwitzgebel's article, *Do ethicists steal more books?*, by claiming that the article poses the wrong question. Mainstream ethics differs qualitatively from subjective ethics. By forming his personal ethics, an ethicist might exclude himself from the moral norms of his society; for that reason, when asking a question like "do ethicists actually behave better in real life than non-ethicists?" we cannot regard the actions of the ethicist as right (or wrong) based on the mainstream ethics of society, for his actions cannot be judged by the same moral standards.

The final section, section 8, briefly touches upon the political implications of the thesis.

# **Exposition**



## 0. Transgression: Knowledge and Action

The subject of the present work was conceived when I was writing my bachelor's thesis. In a section titled *Transgression*, I planted the seed of what I had planned to develop into my master's thesis. Since the general structure of my master's thesis does not deviate from the original plan, I would like to familiarise my reader with it. The following originally appeared in *The Ethics of Metamorphosis in Kierkegaard's Philosophy* as section 2.3.2.1 of that work.<sup>11</sup>

Knowledge gives the individual the possibility of transgression. Only those who possess adequate knowledge can dwell between two different realms without completely belonging to either realm. The history of arts is full of such figures. Take Arnold Schönberg 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 a breaking point in his *Verklärte Nacht* and String Quartet No. 1 in D minor. This kind of ability is impossible without adequate knowledge, and progressive change in society (or in any system) relies on such knowledge. 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 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.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A couple of words and phrases have been altered for stylistic effect and clarification; however, the philosophical content has remained unchanged.

<sup>12</sup> Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 91.

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: Once knowledge has been acquired, one becomes ethical; in other words, individuals cannot refrain from acting *because* they gain knowledge.

“Knowledge for its own sake”—this is the final snare morality has laid; with it, we become completely entangled in morals once again.<sup>13</sup>

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 old chicken-and-egg problem; it is unclear which comes first for Carlyle: morality or knowledge? This ambiguity is in part intentional on Carlyle’s part as he is aiming to criticise the difference made between intellect and morality:

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*.<sup>14</sup>

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.

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<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 90.

# **Development**

## 1. Solitude

Solitude is a favourite motif of romanticism, especially English and German romanticism. Even as early as the seventeenth century, in his proto-romantic work, *Paradise Lost*, Milton wrote, “Solitude sometimes is best society.”<sup>15</sup> What the next two centuries saw was the growing appeal of solitude among the romantics. What we see in the romantic literature is an unprecedented emphasis on solitude—if not its outright glorification. Think of Wordsworth who, in *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, writes about the “bliss of solitude.”<sup>16</sup> Think of Byron’s Manfred who thinks he should “be sole in this sweet solitude,”<sup>17</sup> or Childe Harold who sees a bigger society in solitude than in real life, claiming that “we are *least* alone”<sup>18</sup> in solitude; and, to bring an endless number of examples to a close, think of Schopenhauer who believes, “Really great minds, like eagles, build their nests in lofty solitude.”<sup>19</sup> With these examples in mind, it should not be at all surprising to find the same admiration for solitude in the works of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, arguably the two greatest philosophers of the romantic age.

Contrary to most romantic writers, it is not sheer poetic sentiment that motivates Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to write about solitude—in them the poetry of solitude, which they inherited from their age, becomes transformed into a *philosophical* problem. In the works of these authors, it is no longer the case that the hero takes shelter in solitude to satisfy his or her aesthetic need; rather, the hero—the individual—seeks solitude to be away from untruth, the lower man, inauthenticity, sickness, irresponsibility, etc. In solitude, the individual moves away from the aesthetic toward the ethical—and, in Kierkegaard’s case, toward the religious.

### 1.1. Existential Solitude

As children of their time, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had an appreciation for solitude; however, unlike their contemporaries, they turned solitude into the heart of subjectivity. For the next few pages, we shall examine the role of solitude in their philosophies.

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<sup>15</sup> Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. London: Harper Press, 2013, p. 207.

<sup>16</sup> Wordsworth, William. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*. Oxford University Press, 1908, p. 187.

<sup>17</sup> Byron, George Gordon. *The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron*. London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited, 1890, p. 247.

<sup>18</sup> Byron, George Gordon. *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*. Oxford University Press, 1945, p. 222.

<sup>19</sup> Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Parerga and Paralipomena: Volume One*. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 445-446.

### 1.1.1. Solitude in Kierkegaard's Philosophy

Kierkegaard equates the crowd with untruth. Perhaps no other passage cries of his hatred for the crowd more than the following:

Wherever the crowd is, untruth is, so that even if—to carry the matter to its ultimate for a moment—all individuals who, separately, secretly possessed the truth were to come together in a crowd (in such a way, however, that “the crowd” acquired any *deciding*, voting, noisy, loud significance), untruth would promptly be present there.<sup>20</sup>

There are two points to bear in mind regarding the above passage:

I. The crowd is not be equated with lie, but *untruth*.

I think the reason why Kierkegaard chooses the word “untruth” over “lie,” or any other alternative has to do with his philosophy (and ethics) of subjectivity. Kierkegaard was careful when he wrote, “The crowd is untruth”<sup>21</sup> [*Mængde er Usandheden*]: Had the crowd been simply disregarded as lie, Kierkegaard’s philosophy could not have been considered a philosophy of subjectivity and, instead, should have been viewed as the rantings of a conspiracy theorist. By dubbing the crowd untruth, Kierkegaard places it in the murky region of doubt and scepticism, which paves the way for encouraging the reader to form his own subjective ethics.

Kierkegaard is killing two birds with one stone:

- (a) When you use the prefix *-un* (or *-non*) you transform the noun you are negating into some uncertain other. For instance, in works of fiction, when you read about the undead, you are reading about neither the dead nor the living. Likewise, when you read that “the crowd is untruth,” you are reading about neither lie nor truth.
- (b) Most importantly, since Kierkegaard is not equating the crowd with lie, we can never be sure if the individual is truth,<sup>22</sup> because there is no guarantee that the opposite of untruth [*usandhed*] is truth [*sandhed*]. The uncertainty of not knowing whether we

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<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXII, Volume 22: The Point of View*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard does claim that “truth is subjectivity”;<sup>\*</sup> however, the reader should not confuse the single individual with the state of subjectivity. According to Kierkegaard, when asking about truth, either a subjective or an objective question always precedes the concern; therefore, if “the question about truth is asked subjectively,” then “the individual’s relation [to truth] is reflected upon subjectively.”<sup>\*\*</sup> On the contrary, as I see it, the question regarding the crowd is posited objectively.

<sup>\*</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XII.1: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, by Johannes Climacus. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 189.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

are in truth is a precondition for constantly questioning ourselves and our motives; in other words, the uncertainty helps us not fall into the trap of dogmatism and misplaced self-assurance.

II. Truth is related to responsibility, and untruth to irresponsibility.

For Kierkegaard, truth is related to responsibility, and untruth to irresponsibility. This follows from what we discussed in the previous section. We mentioned how doubt and uncertainty can save the individual from dogmatism; there is yet another kind of doubt that originates from not being on the side of the crowd:

A crowd [...] is untruth, since a crowd either makes for impenitence and irresponsibility altogether, or for the single individual it at least weakens responsibility by reducing the responsibility to a fraction.<sup>23</sup>

By virtue of being part of the crowd, the individual dodges responsibility. That being the case, the individual could fend off the irresponsibility that the crowd engenders by becoming subjective—the individual could take responsibility by forming his own ethics.<sup>24</sup>

#### **1.1.1.1. The Individual vs. Society**

One of the main worries regarding subjective ethics is the danger of rejecting the ethical system of one's society; there is always the danger that the individual<sup>25</sup> might be convinced that he knows better than the rest of his peers when, in fact, he is in the wrong. Viewing the crowd as untruth allows the individual to form his own subjective ethical system without completely being justified in rejecting the ethical system of his society—from the viewpoint of society, subjective ethics is almost never justified. In fact, if the individual succeeded in developing his own personal ethics, it would still be *necessary* that the individual should remain subjected to the ethics of his society while he practiced his personal ethics. Thanks to this solution, Kierkegaard can have his cake and eat it too. Furthermore, this solution interlinks the Kierkegaardian stages to form a continuum in which the individual advances from one stage to the next without completely negating the previous stage. Kierkegaard's knight of faith, who is in the religious stage, would still be subjected to the

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<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXII, Volume 22: The Point of View*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> It should be borne in mind that subjective ethics ought to be subjected to high standards of responsibility.

<sup>25</sup> Initially, I had decided to use the singular *they* consistently to refer to a generic individual and other generic figures; however, in certain passages, such usage proved problematic by giving rise to various ambiguities. Thus, based on a coin toss, the male gender represents a generic individual—other generic figures in the present work have been assigned either the male or the female gender in the same manner.

ethical rules of his society; had society found out about Abraham's decision to sacrifice his son, his peers would have had every right to condemn his actions as murderous.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.1.2. Solitude in Nietzsche's Philosophy

Leiter is brief and to the point when he says, for Nietzsche, "the higher type is solitary and deals with others only instrumentally";<sup>27</sup> the higher type is "solitary by necessity."<sup>28</sup>

In section 962 of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche wants to know what a great man is, and he outlines three traits of a "man whom nature has constructed and invented in the grand style."<sup>29</sup> The first two traits are of no concern to us here, but the third trait is of utmost importance:

He [the great man] wants no "sympathetic" heart, but servants, tools; in his intercourse with men he is always intent on *making* something out of them. He knows he is incommunicable: he finds it tasteless to be familiar; and when one thinks he is, he usually is not. When not speaking to himself, he wears a mask. [...] There is a solitude within him that is inaccessible to praise or blame, his own justice that is beyond appeal.<sup>30</sup>

The most obvious part of the passage has been pointed out by Leiter, and we started this section with his observation; however, what Leiter fails to see is the ethical implications of this passage. Yes, the Nietzschean great man is solitary, and yes, he uses others instrumentally, but what makes him truly great, what makes him an existential figure is his *incommunicability*! What makes Nietzsche and Kierkegaard like-minded philosophers is the emphasis they each put on the incommunicability of their ideal figures. Like Nietzsche's great man, "the knight of faith is alone in everything,"<sup>31</sup> and Kierkegaard praises him for it!

The knight of faith, who in the loneliness of the universe never hears another human voice but walks alone with his dreadful responsibility. The knight of faith is assigned solely to himself;

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<sup>26</sup> In my bachelor's thesis, I have already explained how the individual can follow his subjective ethics and, simultaneously, be subjected to the ethics of his society. For further clarification, see section 1.2.1. of my bachelor's thesis, *Ensuring the Ethical of The Ethics of Metamorphosis in Kierkegaard's Philosophy*.

<sup>27</sup> Leiter, Brian. *Nietzsche on Morality*. London: Routledge, 2015, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Edited, with Commentary, by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1968, p. 505.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VI, Volume 6: Fear and Trembling*, by Johannes de Silentio, and *Repetition*, by Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 79.

he feels the pain of being unable to make himself understandable to others, but he has no vain desire to instruct others.<sup>32</sup>

### 1.1.3. The Solitude of Responsibility

We need to read Nietzsche and Kierkegaard side by side to remind ourselves that incommunicability does not entail irresponsibility, and that individual responsibility is always incommunicable and a solitary affair.

The philosophy of acting beyond Good and Evil can be traced back to Carlyle whose love for authority is dangerously combined with the passions of romanticism; consequently, Carlyle's heroes are beyond reproach. But Nietzsche is no Carlyle; there are two crucial differences between these two thinkers:

- (a) In reading Carlyle, there is always the sense in which the hero can and must only be worshiped, hence the title of his book: *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*. This is not the case with Nietzsche for two reasons: first, the "hero" can be neither praised nor blamed externally, e.g., by others, by external norms and criteria. Second, it may be the case that for both Carlyle and Nietzsche, the hero is subjected to no external ethical norms, but whereas there is also no internal system of checks and balances in Carlyle's case, as Nietzsche sees it, the individual does not remain completely beyond reproach, because there *are* internal checks: he does have his own justice, albeit a "justice that is beyond appeal."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Nietzsche's higher man would criticise himself if he failed to live up to his personal standards—needless to say, his *high* standards.
- (b) For Carlyle, the hero is not an essentially responsible figure; however, our existential solitary individual has a "dreadful responsibility."<sup>34</sup> Why the dreadful responsibility? Because of the dangers of his inaccessibility to praise or blame. This inaccessibility makes him a figure beyond Good and Evil. Nietzsche never failed to emphasise the responsibility of his higher man. As Leiter points out, "The higher type seeks burdens and responsibilities."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Edited, with Commentary, by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1968, p. 505.

<sup>34</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VI, Volume 6: Fear and Trembling*, by Johannes de Silentio, and *Repetition*, by Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Leiter, Brian. *Nietzsche on Morality*. London: Routledge, 2015, p. 94.



## 1.2. Alienation

Kierkegaard's knight of faith and Nietzsche's higher man are alienated in so far as they cannot communicate with others: In Kierkegaard's case, the knight cannot communicate with other subjects in general—the knight cannot even communicate with other knights—and in Nietzsche's case, the higher man cannot communicate with the lower man. In them, we see a movement toward inwardness [*Inderlighed*].

Regarding the state of incommunicability, the Kierkegaardian author Walker Percy distinguishes between someone who is alienated and someone who reads about a person who is alienated. For literally purposes, Percy imagines these two types riding a train:

The nonreading commuter exists in true alienation, which is unspeakable; the reading commuter rejoices in the speakability of his alienation and in the new triple alliance of himself, the alienated character, and the author.<sup>36</sup>

The former commuter is in a state of incommunicability, whereas the latter commuter is not. Surprisingly, Percy does not consider an author such as Kafka a truly alienated individual for the simple reason that: so far as communicability is concerned, Kafka was not silent when he wrote.<sup>37</sup> To make his point sharper, he says,

To picture a truly alienated man, picture a Kafka to whom it had never occurred to write a word.<sup>38</sup>

I would only add the following to Percy's words: It would have never occurred to a truly alienated Kafka to write, not because he would have been an illiterate person, but because his alienation would have been so overwhelming that he would have not even entertained the possibility of communicating his situation through writing.

### 1.2.1. Statelessness

A theme that is closely related to alienation is wandering—a motif that was loved by the German romantics. Although this motif precedes German romanticism (e.g., the Wandering Jew, Odysseus, Don Quixote), it found its true home in German romanticism—there, it gained a much darker tone. Starting with Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, we see the *angst* of

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<sup>36</sup> Percy, Walker. *The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989, p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

the German romantic manifesting itself through the figure of the wanderer: a Kantian man lost in the “immeasurableness of nature”<sup>39</sup> as if though he were not at ease in the world in which he lived and breathed. The sense of unease evoked by Friedrich’s painting is due to the inadequacy of the figure’s inability to dominate the situation in which he finds himself, i.e., nature. This feeling of not-belonging, this feeling of the inability to control permeated every aspect of the romantic mind. In Schubert’s *Winterreise*, we follow a man who declares,

*Fremd bin ich eingezogen,  
Fremd zieh’ ich wieder aus.*<sup>40</sup>

Finding no place to which he can belong, the song ends when the wanderer identifies with a hurdy-gurdy player to whom no one wants to listen.

In *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, Mahler depicts a wayfarer who takes refuge in nature; however, even the most cheerful song in the cycle tells us that he can never find peace. A finch sings of the beauty of the world and keeps rhetorically asking if it is not a beautiful world:

*Guten Tag, ist’s nicht eine schöne Welt?  
Ei du, gelt? Schöne Welt?*<sup>41</sup>

Inspired by the finch, the wayfarer asks himself if his happiness will now also begin; however, it does not take him long to answer that the happiness he seeks will never bloom.

Mahler himself was a romantic figure who felt deeply alienated. His was a threefold alienation: As a native of Bohemia, he was a wanderer in Austria; as an Austrian, he felt unwelcomed among Germans; and as a Jew, he was the eternal wanderer throughout the world.<sup>42</sup> He always felt that he was “everywhere an intruder, never welcomed.”<sup>43</sup> Mahler’s social alienation led him to escape to inwardness, and consequently, through his subjectivity, he built the most magnificent musical universe of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>39</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by James Creed Meredith; revised, edited, and introduced by Nicholas Walker. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 91.

<sup>40</sup> “As a stranger I arrived; as a stranger I depart.” [My translation.]

<sup>41</sup> “Good day, isn’t it a beautiful world? Hey, you, right? A beautiful world?” [My translation.]

<sup>42</sup> See Mahler, Alma. *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*. Translated by Basil Creighton. New York: The Viking Press, 1946, p. 98.

<sup>43</sup> Mahler, Alma. *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*. Translated by Basil Creighton. New York: The Viking Press, 1946, p. 98.

### 1.2.1.1. Artists as Ethical Heroes

The reader might be wondering why I am writing about music. My reason for doing so is that cultural figures such as Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, and Arnold Schönberg might have been composers, but make no mistake about it: They upset the balance of society; they were perceived as threats to the old morality. There is little wonder why protests were not uncommon during the performances of their works. The first performance of Schönberg's "Second String Quartet in 1908 led to protests."<sup>44</sup> The first performance of Bruckner's "Third Symphony turned out to be a disaster, the audience laughing and shouting protests, before leaving the hall in droves during the work's final movement."<sup>45</sup> Paul Hindemith's expressionist triptych of one-act operas *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen, Das Nusch-Nuschi*, and *Sancta Susanna* was found to be offensive, and "it provoked heavy protests."<sup>46</sup> The concert that Schönberg conducted on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1913 was so scandalous that it simply became known as *Skandalkonzert*—there is no need to mention how much rioting that must have caused! To mention but a few more examples of scandalous artistic events, we could further name Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*, Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Nijinsky's choreography of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, Edgard Varèse's *Déserts*, Erik Satie's *Parade*, and Richard Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra*. The list goes on and on. It is unthinkable to imagine such protests at concert halls today, and this should be a testimony to the fact that in the ethical battles of the previous two centuries, these lone composers were the victors. The reason why we are culturally tolerant today is because we are living by the ethics of Mahler and other similar individuals.

As the examples above show, ethics and aesthetics are interconnected, hence the reason for dedicating this brief section to musical examples. Artistic activity is a part of culture; since society influences artistic activity and artistic activity influences society, an ethics that ignores the aesthetic sphere does not cover all aspects of society.

### 1.2.2. From Social Alienation to Inwardness

Mahler was an existentialist composer if there ever was one: themes of suffering, alienation, passions, and subjectivity dominate his music. No wonder that Constantin Floros, a Mahler expert,

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<sup>44</sup> Brown, Julie. *Schoenberg and Redemption*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 135.

<sup>45</sup> Fischer, Jens Malte. *Gustav Mahler*. Translated by Stewart Spencer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, p. 72.

<sup>46</sup> Floros, Constantin. *Humanism, Love and Music*. Translated by Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012, p. 191.

likens Mahler to Dostoyevsky, claiming, “Mahler thought and felt in many respects like Dostojevsky.”<sup>47</sup>

Mahler was not alone in this; many other great cultural figures, especially the prominent cultural figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, shared Mahler’s fate one way or another, e.g., Kafka, Freud, Camus.

The notion of not-belonging might sound exciting to a naïve nonconformist who wants to be a citizen of the world; however, Stefan Zweig explains it best in his autobiography when he remembers how his Austrian passport became void:

Often in my cosmopolitan reveries I had imagined how beautiful it would be, how truly in accord with my inmost thoughts, to be stateless, bound to no one country and for that reason undifferentiatedly attached to all. But once again I had to recognize the shortcomings of our mortal imagination and also that one can comprehend really significant sensations only after one has suffered them oneself.<sup>48</sup>

As Zweig points out, a passport is just a symbolic representation of one’s rights;<sup>49</sup> therefore, we could say, as far as the symbolic nature of belonging to a state is concerned, not much is lost by becoming stateless—that which is problematic is social alienation. Following social alienation, certain individuals take refuge in inwardness, self-exploration, and subjectivity. It needs to be stated that such acts of taking refuge should not be understood as what Isaiah Berlin describes when he writes about escaping into the “inner fortress” of the self.<sup>50</sup> The refuge of an existentialist into the self is prompted by the desire to establish a universe governed by subjective rules in the same way Mahler’s musical universe was governed by *his* musical rules. This kind of refuge is a precondition for establishing a subjective system, e.g., a subjective ethics. Thus, it is not surprising that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both shut themselves off from the world, and that they both were wanderers of sorts: Nietzsche kept moving around Europe, never settling anywhere permanently; and although Kierkegaard remained in Copenhagen for most of his life, just like his hero, Socrates, before him, he saw himself as the gadfly of his city. As Adorno observes,

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<sup>47</sup> Floros, Constantin. *Gustav Mahler. Visionary and Despot*. Translated by Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012, p. 157.

<sup>48</sup> Zweig, Stefan. *The World of Yesterday*. London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1947, p. 307.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See Berlin, Isaiah. *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*. Edited by Henry Hardy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 185.

He [Kierkegaard] gives testimony to the isolation of an intellectual, living on private income, shut in on himself; an isolation that, in this period of late German romanticism and late idealism, was expressed in philosophy only by Schopenhauer.<sup>51</sup>

And as Jaspers puts it concisely,

A terrible loneliness, bound up with their exceptionality, was common to both [Kierkegaard and Nietzsche].<sup>52</sup>

### 1.2.3. Transgression

To pay homage to Zweig, we will refer to the condition of not-belonging that is evoked by alienation as statelessness. When the individual does not belong to a specific state, he feels no obligation to be bound by its conventions; consequently, he does not feel obliged to commit to the ethics of the state. In and of itself, this can lead to neither a positive nor a negative change in the grand scheme of things. Under such circumstances the individual could simply become an outcast, a mere outlaw, or a petty criminal. But there is a far more interesting possibility: being stateless by virtue of belonging to two (or more) states. The examples of Kafka and Mahler which were given earlier could be taken quite literally, in which case, the difficulty for the individual could be summed up as the difficulty of not knowing whether to follow the customs and rituals of state A or state B; however, the condition of statelessness could be far more serious when the individual cannot choose between the rules of state A and state B. Such a situation could arise if, for instance, the rules which applied to all the elements of state A universally contradicted the universal rules of state B. There are three possibilities regarding this situation:

(a) states A and B are both external;

(b) state A is external while state B is internal;

or, (c) a combination of (a) and (b) in which there are at least two external states and one internal state.

In none of these cases the individual could be simply considered an outlaw if he did not commit to the ethics of one state, because if he did not abide by the rules of state A, he could transgress and abide by the rules of state B. In any case, it would indeed be a rare case if the individual neglected all the rules of one state in favour of another. The more likely scenario would be if the

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno, Theodor. *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Jaspers, Karl. *Reason and Existenz: Five Lectures*. The Noonday Press, 1955, p. 42.

individual could not decide between states A and B and, consequently, disregarded some rules of both states and conserved some other rules of both states. In this scenario, the individual constructs a third state, state C, to which he transfers the conserved rules. Being stateless, the individual cannot feel any commitment to all the rules of either state, and, as an ethical being, he cannot go around without being bound by some ethical system; therefore, he founds state C as a refuge in which he conserves the best of two worlds. Whenever the individual wants to commit an act, he transgresses to state C in order to consult his moral code.

What we have outlined here could be taken quite generally. “State” could be taken to mean “school of philosophy”: state A = rationalism; state B = empiricism; state C = transcendental idealism. “State” could be taken to mean an “ethico-philosophical system”: state A = free will; state B = determinism; state C = compatibilism. “State” could be taken to mean “genre”: state A = abstract art; state B = expressionism; state C = abstract expressionism. “State” could be taken to mean the “rules of a system”: state A = classicism; state B = modernism; state C = neoclassicism. And so on.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike the above examples, in subjective ethics, state C would be so individualistic that it would be incommunicable.

### **1.2.3.1. Zone Crossing**

Walker Percy identifies the hallmark of alienation as zone crossing. Transgression shares certain similarities with Percy’s notion of zone crossing,<sup>54</sup> for that reason, we will use Percy’s insight to illustrate how the individual can establish a subjective ethics. In explaining his notion, Percy refers to Huckleberry Finn. As Percy observes, the decision to set the adventures of Huckleberry Finn along the Mississippi River is no coincidence. Referring to Huckleberry Finn, he writes,

He is on the Mississippi, which, during the entire journey, flows between states: he is in neither Illinois nor Missouri but in a privileged zone between the two.<sup>55</sup>

To illustrate the importance of the setting, Percy invites us to think about another possibility: What if the Hudson River were chosen instead of the Mississippi River? Because of the position of the Hudson River, we would end up with a more static plot. On the Hudson River,

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<sup>53</sup> Please note, not everything could be viewed as a state; therefore, the following would be a preposterous example: state A = electricity; state B = magnetism; state C = electromagnetism.

<sup>54</sup> See Percy, Walker. *The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989, pp. 88-89.

<sup>55</sup> Percy, Walker. *The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989, p. 89.

one remains entirely *within* New York State; there is no zoning; there is no sense of pushing free of land into a privileged zone of the mobile.<sup>56</sup>

The Mississippi River is a “privileged zone” for Huckleberry Finn. This privileged zone, is a zone between—beyond—Good and Evil.

Huck represents someone who is stuck between two worlds. He must decide between two worlds: the world of Jim, and the world of the white folks. By adhering to neither the morality of Jim nor the morality of his race, Huck is in a position to form his own ethics. The moment Huck decides to follow his own voice is one of the most glorious moments in all of American literature. Huck knows that he must decide between two worlds, and he makes his decision:

I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: “All right, then, I'll go to hell.”<sup>57</sup>

Note, however, that his transgression, though perceived as praiseworthy by us, 21<sup>st</sup> century readers, would have been condemned by the members of Huck's society.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1987, p. 272.

## 2. Retroaction

Although the actions of the single individual are often condemned by other members of his society, the outcries of his contemporaries can never be the final verdict. It is only retroactively that an action performed by the individual can be called good or evil: It could generally be argued that if, in face of the action of the individual, the mainstream ethics prevailed, the action would be condemned, and if the action of the individual overthrew the old ethics of society and gave way to a new ethics, the action would be praised. Therefore, despite the condemnation of one's contemporaries, an action that springs from subjective ethics is, in fact, neither blameworthy nor praiseworthy at the time it is performed—only time will tell how an individualistic action ought to be regarded.

### 2.1. The Creation of Gods and Heroes

For Nietzsche, retroaction has an inevitable consequence in culture: it can create gods. The creation of gods is a backward process. There are commonly two steps that are involved in every such creation: First, an individual—or their work of art, i.e., their creation—gets transformed into a terrestrial god; and so, the poet,<sup>58</sup> or her (fictional) protagonist becomes a proto-god. This all-too-tangible proto-god is, to use Carlyle's word, a hero. Second, following the initial transformation, the attributes of the proto-god is further transformed into a being unreachably far away. There needs to be a considerable distance between this being and the people, and this distance could be spatial, temporal, or both. Thus, typically, the god-like figure either becomes located in the skies or they become someone venerably unreachable in the past (or a combination of both). This god could, of course, also exist in the future—many religions are familiar with the concept of a god-like messiah who is supposed to save humanity. Nevertheless, since the past is much more tangible for us, it is much easier to make our gods out of historical figures, and that is why even the mentioned messiahs are typically based on historical figures—these beings could be fictitious, or real.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains how a terrestrial god comes to be: The poet, who, by writing a tragedy, gives her audience a reason to live, either becomes that god or creates that god out of the protagonist of her work—the need to find a reason to live creates the first gods who affirm life through tragedy. Needless to say, these stage heroes are normally characters taken from the folklore tradition of a given culture. When she is born, the poet enters into a culture in which those heroes have always existed; the poet, by exerting a “retroactive force” brings about the

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<sup>58</sup> I am using the word “poet” as an umbrella term.



undiscovered secrets of these figures, and sometimes, she does so by convincing us that these figures were godlike heroes.

Every great human being exerts a retroactive force: for his sake all of history is put on the scale again, and a thousand secrets of the past crawl out of their hiding places—into *his* sunshine. There is no telling what may yet become a part of history. Maybe the past is still essentially undiscovered! So many retroactive forces are still needed!<sup>59</sup>

Thanks to the retroactive force exerted by the poet, actual human beings (or fictional characters) of the past become gods. To understand how Nietzsche explains this latter point, we can have a look at the following passage from *On the Genealogy of Morality* in which he explains “the relationship of the *present generation* to their *forebears*.”<sup>60</sup>

There is a prevailing conviction that the tribe *exists* only because of the sacrifices and deeds of the forefathers [...]: people recognize an *indebtedness* [*Schuld*], which continually increases because these ancestors continue to exist as mighty spirits. [...] Through the hallucination of the growing dread itself, the ancestors of the *most powerful* tribes must have grown to an immense stature and must have been pushed into the obscurity of divine mystery and transcendence: —inevitably the ancestor himself is finally transfigured into a *god*.<sup>61</sup>

### 2.1.1. The Poetics of Forming a Subjective Ethics

So much for the creation of gods. Now that we know how gods are created, we need to explain briefly in what way it matters to our philosophy of subjectivity.

When a poet creates an influential artwork, she inevitably introduces a new ethics, and her new ethics could be introduced either unintentionally or intentionally. Schlegel’s *Lucinde* is an example of an intentional introduction of a new ethics. What Kierkegaard found horrifying about Schlegel’s *Lucinde* was that the book was “an attempt to suspend all ethics.”<sup>62</sup> The subjective ethics introduced by the book went too far: it burned all bridges without offering any proper replacement. Moreover, the book put the irony of the subject above the ethics of society without requiring him

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<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 53-54.

<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 60.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>62</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Writings, II, Volume 2: The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 289.

to respect the ethics of society.<sup>63</sup> Kierkegaard himself argues in favour of suspending ethics, but what he promotes is a *teleological* suspension of ethics, and such a suspension differs considerably from what Schlegel promotes.

### 2.1.2. Subjective Ethics as a Genre of Poetry

Formulating a subjective ethics should be considered as a genre of poetry—I am using the term “poetry” as Aristotle used it in his *Poetics*—since it is, in fact, an act of creation.

Kierkegaard took issue with how the Romantics, such as Schlegel, used irony, saying,

Here we perceive that this irony was not in the service of the world spirit.<sup>64</sup>

As it is implied by this claim, Kierkegaard believed that there was a right way which the “world spirit” ought to take—there is a right direction in which individuals ought to go, and there is a right way to use irony. Furthermore, Kierkegaard distinguishes between justified and unjustified irony, yet, bizarrely, as we have argued, justification is possible only retroactively.

What do we mean by retroactive justification here? Thanks to irony, “the subject becomes free”;<sup>65</sup> he becomes liberated from social norms, tradition, conventions. Simply put, the subject becomes liberated from the ethics of his society. In such a situation, the ironist faces two options: he should either use “irony *sensu eminentiori* [in the eminent sense]”<sup>66</sup> or progress to a higher stage. Only *after* the subject makes his decision and acts can his action be deemed justified or unjustified. The judgement depends on the outcome of the action; therefore, there can be no judgment prior to the action, because the outcome is never certain: When one stands outside the ethics of one’s society, there is no assurance that one is heading in the right direction.

### 2.1.3. Gods Beyond Good and Evil

How does the creation of gods relate to our topic? Well, one usually common trait of gods and heroes is the ability to act beyond Good and Evil. Thomas Carlyle makes this point clear in a series of lectures given in 1841, published later under the title *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*. According to Carlyle, prior to creating a god,

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<sup>63</sup> As we previously mentioned, one’s subjective ethics should not undermine the ethics of one’s society.

<sup>64</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Writings, II, Volume 2: The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 275.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

man first puts himself in relation with Nature and her Powers, wonders and worships over those; not till a later epoch does he discern that all Power is Moral, that the grand point is the distinction for him of Good and Evil, of *Thou shalt* and *Thou shalt not*.<sup>67</sup>

By putting on a mask, the poet subtly presents her own ethical system as if it were the ethics of the god (or the hero) she is writing about—cunningly, the poet acts as if she were merely reporting, not creating. The poet transforms her literary character into a hero and worships him, and in so doing, she retroactively bestows the power to act beyond Good and Evil on her newly born god. This process is the basis for creating the gods of all religions. Viewed thusly, there is not much of a difference between a poet and a prophet. The main distinction may perhaps come down to this: whereas a prophet predicts, the poet retrodicts and retroacts. Indeed, as Carlyle himself points out, the word for “poet” and “prophet” is the same in some languages: the word “*vates*” is such an example.<sup>68</sup>

Retroactive force is the secret power of poets, and with it, they can take anything from the past and transform it into anything they wish. It is perhaps no coincidence that the three greatest poet-philosophers took advantage of this retroactive force: Heidegger used it to weave his own philosophy of Being out of the spectre of Aristotle; Kierkegaard championed Socrates and weaved his subjective philosophy out of the threads of Christianity; and Nietzsche used the tragedy of the ancient Greeks as the foundation for his life-affirming philosophy. What’s more, Nietzsche used this force in the very passage we read about the creation of gods.<sup>69</sup> There is absolutely no evidence to support this origin story, but it’s so enticing that we treat it as if it were true.

Given the parallel between prophetic poetry and philosophy in the works of the mentioned philosophers, it is not surprising that the philosophies of these poet-philosophers could yield to cult-following. And it is no coincidence that Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is a real historical figure—the same goes for Kierkegaard’s Abraham. Morality does not apply to these figures.

Previously, we saw how solitude (and alienation) can lead to incommunicability. Walker Percy sees the most extreme example of this in Kierkegaard’s category of trial, and it is for that reason that “Job’s and Abraham’s trials are lost in the telling.”<sup>70</sup> The job of the poet is to give her own voice to these voiceless historical figures.

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<sup>67</sup> Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 27.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>69</sup> Referring to the citation by Nietzsche in section 2.1. *The Creation of God and Heroes* of the present work.

<sup>70</sup> Percy, Walker. *The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989, p. 86.

By creating gods, poets become prophets of the religions they create, and as prophets, they themselves might be regarded as heroes, which means, they could be perceived as figures who may act beyond Good and Evil. In this regard, we can refer to Kierkegaard's analysis of the case of Adler. In his analysis, Kierkegaard reaches a similar conclusion to that of Carlyle's:

By his revelation-fact, by the new doctrine, by being under the direct impulsion of the Spirit, Magister Adler must himself readily become conscious of being placed completely outside the universal [...].<sup>71</sup>

The circumstances under which the prophet finds himself enables him to write and philosophise beyond Good and Evil—after all, he is “completely *extra ordinem*”<sup>72</sup> and “qualitatively different from every other special individual.”<sup>73</sup> Of course, the same could be said of every other prophet in history, not just Adler. Prophets, much like poets, work with what is already at their disposal: they work with their culture's myths and folklore. This is the reason why the two main Abrahamic religions after Judaism—Islam and Christianity—and their numerous branches are essentially similar, for, despite their differences, they focus on the same themes and myths, and the same threads run through them all. This fact is not surprising when we are reminded that each Abrahamic prophet had no choice but to work with what already existed in his culture. Thanks to the force of retroaction, every prophet rediscovered the same myths by giving them a different voice, and in doing so, each offered a different retelling of the same stories.

But shouldn't any deviation from the mainstream ethics be considered a heresy? Well, yes, but deviations are heretical if they involve the common people; heroes, as we have argued, act beyond Good and Evil, and the common morality does not apply to them—they *are* morality. With the same authority as Louis XIV, a hero can say, “*La morale, c'est moi.*”

The person who is called by a revelation is specifically called to appeal to his revelation; he must indeed use *authority* by virtue of being called by a revelation. In a religious revival it is not up to the person who has been awakened in an extraordinary way to go out and preach this to people; on the contrary, it can be completely right and pleasing to God and obedience to God for this to remain the awakened person's secret with God. But if the person who by a revelation is called to communicate a revelation wants to be silent about the revelation-fact,

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<sup>71</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV, Volume 24: The Book on Adler*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

then he offends against God and reduces God's will to nothing. It is the very revelation-fact that is decisive; it is this that gives him *divine authority*.<sup>74</sup>

## 2.2. The Conclusiveness of Every New Ethics

Kierkegaard points out a paradox concerning the eternity of the truth revealed by the prophet: Paradoxically, when a prophet contradicts the past—or brings to light what has been previously overlooked—he must be revealing a truth that has always been true. As Kierkegaard puts it, it does not matter if this truth was revealed a couple of minutes ago, or a thousand years ago:<sup>75</sup> once a truth, always a truth.

The same line of reasoning could be applied to philosophy: When a philosopher establishes a new ethical system and offers a new way of looking at the world, what they claim is offered in such a way as if it were always true. The retroactive tentacles of ethicists reach far into the past as well as into the future. Thus, every new ethics is always judgmental about past and future events, because it is offered as the final word.

## 2.3. The Ironist as a Prophet

From a Kierkegaardian point of view, certain philosophers, such as Socrates, can be prophets in another sense: They can be prophets by virtue of being ironists, because “the ironist is certainly prophetic.”<sup>76</sup> According to Kierkegaard, the ironist is prophetic because he points to the future, but he himself does not know what it is to which he is pointing.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, the early Kierkegaard tells us there is one crucial difference between the two: The prophet walks along with his age, whereas the ironist “has stepped out of line with his age, has turned around and faced it.”<sup>78</sup> It is this stepping out that is a prerequisite for acting beyond Good and Evil. Should he choose to, by stepping out of line with his age, the ironist is prepared to form his own ethics. It should, however, be noted that not every ironist is qualified to act beyond Good and Evil: Although every knight of faith is an ironist, not every ironist is a knight of faith.

Lastly, I would like to point out that the ironist also shares certain traits with the poet:

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>75</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>76</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, II, Volume 2: The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 275.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>77</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Everything established in the given actuality has nothing but poetic validity for the ironist, for he, after all, is living poetically.<sup>79</sup>

## 2.4. Justification of the Moral Law

We, philosophers, have a problem. We are men of reason and science, and we know that despite the apparent eternity of ethical claims, these claims are nothing more than fabricated laws and maxims, and as such, they need to be justified. Every so-called ethico-philosophical truth is a poetic truth—I am still using the word “poetic” in the sense it was used in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Philosophers concoct truths; these truths cannot possibly be eternal; to put it differently, philosophic truths are not Platonic—they are constructed. And so, to ask a rhetorical question: How could we claim a truth discovered, say, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has always been true? Kierkegaard was aware of this problem with regard to Christianity, and the irrationality of Christianity’s so-called eternal truths did not escape him.<sup>80</sup> But this problem did not bother him—in fact, he considered it to be a pivotal aspect of Christianity; accordingly, he did not see it as a problem to be solved, claiming, “To make Christianity probable is the same as to falsify it.”<sup>81</sup>

Kierkegaard acknowledged the reality of the system he was defending; the question is how honest are *we* with ourselves with regard to the philosophical (and ethical) systems that *we* promote?

### 2.4.1. Vantage Points in Philosophy

The attacks of the three giant poet-philosophers (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) on rationality become less surprising once we remind ourselves that it is not possible to verify objective truths, let alone subjective truths. Unlike science and most philosophical systems, (Kierkegaard’s version of) Christianity is at least honest and upfront with us in not claiming to be objective—the same goes for Heidegger’s metaphysics.

Such attacks on rationality are a common theme among poet-philosophers: Heidegger never missed a chance to claim that poetry and metaphysics were above science and logic; Kierkegaard thought there was more to life than the objective world of science; and Nietzsche, for all his reverence for science, did not fail to attack rationality and reason every once in a while. There is an obvious reason why their attacks on rationality and reason cannot be outright rejected: The

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>80</sup> See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Writings, XXIV, Volume 24: The Book on Adler*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 37.

<sup>81</sup> See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Writings, XXIV, Volume 24: The Book on Adler*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 39.

truths discovered in philosophy are seldom accumulative the way mathematical truths are. In mathematics, a mathematician starts with a series of axioms, another mathematician proves some basic theorems based on those axioms, then other mathematicians come along and prove further theorems—this procedure continues so long as no axiom is revised. A mathematician builds upon previously proven theorems, never falsifying the theorems of their predecessors. In contrast to this cumulative method, philosophical truths are born at specific points in time as elements of self-closing systems. To give you an example, Spinoza’s *Ethics*, for all its rigorous definitions and axioms, was a system that closed itself to further development upon its completion. Mathematical theorems are parts of a general system that is being continuously built, whereas philosophical theories are like little dots scattered all over the page. Some of the dots may connect, but they in no way form a coherent system called “philosophy” the way mathematical theories form a system called “mathematics”; rather, each dot is, to use a Leibnizian concept, its own windowless system. This peculiarity enables philosophical theories to become vantage points. From each one of these points, one can look in any direction, and if one happened to look at the past, one could affect the truths of the past retroactively, determining what was true and what was not true based on what was claimed to be true *here and now*. Rarely do we, philosophers, truly manage to build upon the works of our predecessors, or as Kierkegaard would say, “The beginning is not there where the previous generation left off.”<sup>82</sup> For each philosopher, the beginning is the moment he fabricates his truth.

#### **2.4.1.1. Ethics of the Gaps**

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were both against systematic philosophy. By “systematic philosophy” I mean the type of philosophy that erects a closed system of thought that is supposed to encompass all the answers—a system of thought that “tries to make the whole truth communicable.”<sup>83</sup> What is so problematic with such a system? Well, “system corresponds with what is closed and settled, but existence is precisely the contrary.”<sup>84</sup> There will always be gaps and cracks in every philosophical system, and thanks to these gaps, no philosophical system can give us all the answers we need—especially, the answers that we seek in special cases, under special circumstances. Jasper compares the philosopher of systems to a man who “builds a castle, but lives

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>83</sup> Jaspers, Karl. *Reason and Existenz: Five Lectures*. The Noonday Press, 1955, p. 26.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

next door in a shanty.”<sup>85</sup> Like no other philosopher, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche lived in the palace they built out of their subjective philosophical ideas.

As philosophers, we say one thing and do another. Can you in earnest show me an ethicist who lives by every word they profess? Can you in earnest show me a philosopher who applies every one of their philosophical convictions in real life? Do we not shy away from what we profess when the occasion arises to put our word into action? We cannot make up our minds about Good and Evil, about right and wrong many a time, not because we do not have an ethical system that tells us what good is—or what the right action is—but because no ethical system can be a complete algorithm that can be applied to every situation. Every situation is unique; existence is in a constant state of flux. Sometimes the choices we have to make are neither good nor evil but are in a purgatory beyond Good and Evil, between Good and Evil. We constantly need to move in the gaps of our philosophical systems, and we need an ethics that acknowledges these gaps. We need a new ethics: an ethics whose sole concern is the gaps of other ethical (and philosophical) systems. Let us call this new ethics “ethics of the gaps.” Ethics of the gaps does not deal with the universal, but with the individual—exceptional cases—for

only in the light of the exception which did the seemingly impossible can we find our way back without deception to a universality in the history of philosophy, which thereby once again becomes transformed.<sup>86</sup>

If ethics of the gaps moved beyond the solely exceptional and concerned itself with the universal, it would not lose sight of the individual and would acknowledge the gaps that are inherent to every philosophical system.

What I am proposing should be, in fact, a descriptive meta-ethical theory; accordingly, the present work is not normative. The meta-ethics of transgression cannot be normative, for any normative theory would undermine the criterion of subjectivity.

#### **2.4.2. Vantage Points in Science**

Such vantage points are not unique to philosophy; in science, too, we encounter similar points when a scientific revolution takes place. For all its antagonism against myths and philosophy, science has a lot in common with philosophy: Science deals with its theoretic truths the way philosophy deals with its poetic truths; the only difference being that, contrary to most

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 130.



philosophers, a good scientist acknowledges that scientific discoveries are not eternal truths, and that a discovered truth might get overthrown by another truth in the future. In a similar vein, even Popper saw myths as early attempts at forming scientific theories, arguing,

What we call “science” is differentiated from the older myths not by being something distinct from a myth, but by being accompanied by a second-order tradition—that of critically discussing the myth.<sup>87</sup>

If we accept this hypothesis, we need to acknowledge that science, unlike mathematics, is not cumulative, for that is what scientific theories are: unverified myths waiting to be critically discussed, not truths.

#### **2.4.2.1. It Is a Blessing That There Are No Eternal Truths**

Every new philosophy is a transgression, because once it is formulated, it stands outside previously formulated (philosophical) systems—so is the case with scientific theories. What is relevant to our discussion is realising that creating new ethical systems is possible *because* there are no eternal truths that we can formulate. If eternal truths existed, they would have to be accepted as fixed laws, as eternal anchor points—there would be no standing beyond them.

#### **2.4.2.2. The Danger of Science**

Scientific and philosophical truths are poetic in nature, and therein lies the danger: When philosophy becomes allied with science to build a boat on the same waters, there is always the danger of giving birth to a new ethical system. By not fully acknowledging the limits of science, the philosopher can hail science as the sole truth, as the eternal truth, as the eternal law by which everyone must abide; and so, science becomes a new religion with philosophers of science as its ethicists. This was precisely Nietzsche’s worry. After outgrowing his positivist phase of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche started to show signs of worry with regard to science. Science had lived up to its goal of overthrowing the idols of the past, but, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche became overly concerned that science itself might become a new idol, a new religion:

No doubt, those who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense which faith in science presupposes *thereby affirm another world* than that of life, nature, and history; and insofar as they affirm this “other world”, must they not by the same token deny its counterpart, this world,

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<sup>87</sup> Popper, Karl. *Conjectures and Refutations*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 170.

our world?...But you will have gathered what I am getting at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests—that even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take *our* fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato’s faith, that God is truth.<sup>88</sup>

It is hard to understand why the overthrowers of the *ancien régime* should fail to see the irony of it. The very same people who battle the idols of the past sometimes fail to see how what they are offering might be just another idol. The horror of Manfred can be recalled here:

Knowledge is not happiness, and science  
But an exchange of ignorance for that  
Which is another kind of ignorance.<sup>89</sup>

As Nietzsche predicted, the heyday of Christianity is over, but the old gods have been replaced by new ones. Laboratories are the new temples, and people in white coats have become our priests.

God is dead; but given the way people are, there may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow.<sup>90</sup>

Our new idols (e.g., scientists, doctors, laboratories, experiments, science) fail to live up to the original goals of enlightenment: having the audacity to think for oneself, and pluralism. The right kind of naturalism does not overpraise the merits of science and does not fail in reminding itself that it itself could be just another idol; it realises that

science, too, rests on a faith; there is simply no “presuppositionless” science.<sup>91</sup>

What we have said thus far parallels Zarathustra’s words when he says in horror, “Is godliness not precisely that there are gods but no God?”<sup>92</sup> Deleuze believes this line by Zarathustra tells us

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<sup>88</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 201.

<sup>89</sup> Byron, George Gordon. *The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron*. London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited, 1890, p. 250.

<sup>90</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 109.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>92</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 146.

of Nietzsche's disappointment in men and their failure to see how they keep replacing one god with another; he interprets the mentioned line as follows:

Pluralism is the properly philosophical way of thinking, the one invented by philosophy; the only guarantor of freedom in the concrete spirit, the only principle of a violent atheism.<sup>93</sup>

I will give the final word of this section to Jaspers who excellently expressed what Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were opposed to:

Out of the consciousness of their truth, both [Kierkegaard and Nietzsche] suspect truth in the naive form of scientific knowledge. They do not doubt the methodological correctness of scientific insight. But Kierkegaard was astonished at the learned professors. [...] Kierkegaard thought the most frightful way to live was to bewitch the whole world through one's discoveries and cleverness—to explain the whole of nature and not understand oneself. Nietzsche is inexhaustible in destructive analyses of types of scholars, who have no genuine sense of their own activity, who can not be themselves, and who, with their ultimately futile knowledge, aspire to grasp Being itself.<sup>94</sup>

#### **2.4.2.3. Scientism as Religion**

Since we possess nothing more certain than theories, ethically speaking, science is on par with philosophy. It is not only philosophers who establish new ethical systems; when, in a religious society, science comes into conflict with religion, the scientist questions the ethics of her day and, consequently, forms her own subjective ethics. Initially, she is condemned by other members of society, for she is rejecting the accepted morality—from the perspective of society, she is immoral. But ultimately, if she succeeds in overthrowing the contemporary ethics of her society, the scientist can establish a new ethics and hail science as the new religion.

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<sup>93</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Jaspers, Karl. *Reason and Existenz: Five Lectures*. The Noonday Press, 1955, pp. 25-26.

### 3. Irrationalism

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are sometimes regarded as irrationalists. In this part of the thesis, our aim is to clarify Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's philosophical positions by providing a historical context.

#### 3.1. A Historical Account of Irrationalism

Perhaps one of the most extreme examples of irrationalism can be found in Persian mystical philosophy: particularly, in the poetry of Hafiz and Rumi. Although these philosopher-poets each professed a different set of ideas in their philosophical poems, they both promoted madness (and drunkenness). Madness—or, “*jonun*” in Persian—is the highest level a spiritual person could reach according to Rumi's philosophy. Such a worldview is much more radical than Kierkegaard's philosophy of subjectivity, for the truth one encounters in Rumi's poems is a truth told by a drunkard, and a madman—far from rejecting the sayings of the mad, Persian mystic poets endorse them. We could find a parallel between this mystical worldview and how, in Europe, under the influence of Christian thought, madness became a form of reason.<sup>95</sup> Regarding this point, in Foucault's *History of Madness*, we read,

True reason is not free of the contamination of madness, but on the contrary, it borrows some of the trails first carved out by madness.<sup>96</sup>

Foucault goes on to ask,

How can a distinction be made between a wise act carried out by a madman, and a senseless act of folly carried out by a man usually in full possession of his wits?<sup>97</sup>

There is a certain affinity between this approach to truth and what we encounter in Dostoyevsky:

They say, “You are ill, so what appears to you is only unreal fantasy.” But that's not strictly logical. I agree that ghosts only appear to the sick, but that only proves that they are unable to appear except to the sick, not that they don't exist.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Foucault, Michel. *History of Madness*. London: Routledge, 2009, p. 32.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. Translated by Constance Garnett. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000, p. 246.

The idea here is that an ill person can reach another truth—perhaps a much higher truth—just as Rumi’s drunkard madman can reach a higher truth during bursts of madness. Thanks to the irrationality of such truths, one can, to use Dostoyevsky’s word, “transgress” beyond Good and Evil. Just as faith can transform a murder into a holy act,<sup>99</sup> the truth perceived through madness can transform the madman into a saint.

### 3.1.1. The Comedy of *Crime and Punishment*

It is noteworthy that, just like Carlyle, Dostoyevsky’s Raskolnikov believes there are certain individuals, such as Napoleon, who can transgress beyond Good and Evil; however, Raskolnikov’s failure to live up to the example of his idol, Napoleon, tells us that the truth he thought he had reached prior to the act of murder was not really an undeniable truth for him, hence his bad conscience; in other words, he failed to have the conviction of a religious person—by the word “religious,” I am referring to Kierkegaard’s religious stage and the knight of faith—and regressed to accepting the ethics of his society. Raskolnikov’s act remained a murder, and Raskolnikov did not transgress into committing a heroic act. For that reason, in my opinion, Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* is a comedy: it shows how ludicrously comical a person can become if he misunderstands what it means to act beyond Good and Evil; the book shows what preposterous consequences there could be if a person tried to transgress based on a misunderstanding.

The book also points out another misunderstanding: A person cannot *become* a hero who has the power to act beyond Good and Evil; rather, the individual must have it in himself. You cannot become Napoleon—you either are or are not Napoleon. Being a hero should be an instinct. Nietzsche’s fatalism is a testimony that he was aware of this. In talking about himself and others, he was quick to point out we are what we are because of our instincts. Regarding himself, he wrote, “I am warlike by nature. I have an instinct for attack.”<sup>100</sup> He even saw his atheism as an instinct:

I have no sense of atheism as a result, and even less as an event: for me it is an instinct.<sup>101</sup>

But more to the point:

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<sup>99</sup> See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Writings, VI, Volume 6: Fear and Trembling*, by Johannes de Silentio, and *Repetition*, by Constantin Constantius. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 53.

<sup>100</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 82.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

There is an *instinct for rank* that, more than anything else, is itself the sign of a *high rank*.<sup>102</sup>

One cannot *become* Nietzsche; one cannot *become* Napoleon; one cannot *become* Mahler; in one sentence: one cannot *become* a hero. That is why for Nietzsche, it would be preposterous to imitate heroes.

### 3.1.2. Reason vs. Unreason

It would not surprise anyone to hear that Kierkegaard was not the first person to promote irrationality. Elements of irrational existentialism can be traced back to Pascal who thought, “What is based on reason alone is very ill-founded,”<sup>103</sup> and claimed,

Men are so necessarily mad that it would be another twist of madness not to be mad.<sup>104</sup>

But not even Pascal can be considered the first irrational existentialist to promote irrationality; elsewhere in the world, the glorification of madness and irrationality had begun much earlier. For instance, in Persia, the proto-existentialist poet and scientist, Khayyam, set the first stones, and later, the baton was picked up by Rumi and other mystical poets. Whereas Khayyam had attacked reason to emphasise materialism and scepticism, Rumi sought God and mystical feelings of trance in the loss of reason.

In Europe, the exaltation of irrationality and madness happened a few centuries later than in Persia. In Foucault’s *History of Madness*, we get a glimpse of how this evolution took place. In the 16th century,

Madness becomes a form related to reason, or more precisely madness and reason enter into a perpetually reversible relationship which implies that all madness has its own reason by which it is judged and mastered, and all reason has its madness in which it finds its own derisory truth. Each is a measure of the other, and in this movement of reciprocal reference, each rejects the other but is logically dependent upon it.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 160.

<sup>103</sup> Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées and Other Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> Foucault, Michel. *History of Madness*. London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 28-29.

This reciprocal relation between madness and reason comes into being because man's knowledge is put next to God's side by side, and

when measured against the truth of essences and God, human order is nothing but madness. And in this human order, the movement through which man tries to break free of his earthly bonds becomes just another form of madness.<sup>106</sup>

According to Foucault, a new worldview thus started to dominate Western culture, because once this notion found its place in culture, the stage was set for irrationality to become promoted; and so, for certain theologians, getting closer to God became a path to madness—or, as Foucault calls it, an “abyss of unreason.”<sup>107</sup>

During the middle ages, madness was considered a vice, but after in the 16th century,

under the powerful influence of Christian thought [...] madness was no longer a dark power that threatened to undo the world, revealing fantastical seductions, and no longer showed, in the twilight of Time, the violence of bestiality, or the great struggle between Knowledge and Interdiction. It is caught up instead in the indefinite cycle that attaches it to reason.<sup>108</sup>

Consequently, unreason “becomes a form of reason.”<sup>109</sup> As we can see, these are precisely the themes with which Kierkegaard plays. Even though this evolution, as we have said, took place prior to Kierkegaard, he is seen as the irrational philosopher *par excellence* because he takes this trend and brings it all the way home: As Foucault tells us, although in the past, unreason was considered a new path, it was still attached to reason. Kierkegaard went a step further by liberating irrationality from reason, positioning it on a higher level than reason. Consequently, thanks to Kierkegaard, it was no longer the case that irrationality and reason had to be dependent on one another. In Foucault's analysis of madness, we see how it was thought that true reason borrowed from unreason;<sup>110</sup> however, in Kierkegaard's philosophy, the relation between madness and reason becomes more extreme since irrationality takes centre stage. It is precisely this new emphasis on the irrational in philosophy that Jaspers identified in Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's writings. Thanks to these two figures, philosophy understood that “the rational is not thinkable without its

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

other, the non-rational.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, philosophy understood the need to turn the irrational “into a form of reason.”<sup>112</sup>

### 3.2. Knowledge, *Episteme*, and *Doxa*

The Platonic realm is a “Universe of Higher Reality, of the Unchanging and Determinate ‘Forms’ of all things,”<sup>113</sup> and

True and Certain Knowledge (*epistēmē* = *scientia* = *science*) can be of this Unchanging and Real Universe only, while the visible world of change and flux in which we live and die, the world of generation and destruction, the world of experience, is only a kind of reflection or copy of that Real World. It is only a world of appearance of which no True and Certain Knowledge can be obtained. All that can be obtained in the place of Knowledge (*epistēmē*) are the plausible but uncertain and prejudiced opinions (*doxa*) of fallible mortals.<sup>114</sup>

*Doxa* might not be on the same epistemological level as *episteme*, but it could still provide a firm ground for science, reason, and knowledge; *doxa* might not be absolute certainty, but it could be high probability, and for that reason, despite its uncertain opinions, science is always likely to prevail. Nevertheless, interestingly, when Kierkegaard examines irrationality and reason, he does not oppose *episteme* to *doxa* and remodels the opposition between knowledge and opinion. In his journals, dating from 1850, he advocates the idea that faith cannot be supported by reason; in effect, he argues against *doxa*; instead, he substitutes *doxa* with *πίστις*:

I have put forth the view that a Christian rhetoric ought to be introduced in place of dogmatics. In classical Greek *πίστις* is a conviction that relates to what is probable (more than *δοξή*, opinion). But Xnty [Christianity], which always turns the concepts of natural man upside down, producing the opposite, lets *πίστις* relate to the improbable. [...] The absurd, the paradox, is constructed such that reason, on its own terms, is in no way capable of dissolving it into nonsense and showing that it is nonsense.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Jaspers, Karl. *Reason and Existenz: Five Lectures*. The Noonday Press, 1955, p. 19.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Popper, Karl. *Conjectures and Refutations*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 104.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 7: Journals NB15-NB20*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 20.



Here, we see a stark contrast between Kierkegaard and an existentialist like Nietzsche: For Nietzsche, the relation between reason and irrationality is a reciprocal relation just as it was in the 16th century, but not for Kierkegaard. Because of his infatuation with positivism, Nietzsche, though an irrationalist, was not able to go as far as Kierkegaard, and for that reason, he emphasised the importance of unreason without ever abandoning scientific methodology. It is because of his devotion to scientific methodology that certain philosophers (such as Leiter) believe that, just like Hume and Freud, Nietzsche was a naturalist.<sup>116</sup>

From this, we could conclude that whereas for Kierkegaard, transgression should be justified by virtue of the paradox—the Absurd—for Nietzsche, the irrationality of the higher man is not completely cut off from reason.

### 3.3. An Appreciation for the Limits of Knowledge

Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* begins with the same sort of questions with which we have tried to deal in the last few sections; Nietzsche wants to know how rationality is related to irrationality, and whether the former can originate from the latter—he poses the same question with regard to logic and unlogic, and truth and error. As we are told, these are not real opposites; it is only thanks to the “customary exaggeration of popular or metaphysical interpretations”<sup>117</sup> that we falsely believe that, say, rationality stands opposed to irrationality. It needs to be pointed out that for Nietzsche, the belief that rationality can originate in irrationality is not an attack on science. Nietzsche was a naturalist, but he did not worship science as a fetish; he believed in science *qua methodology*:

It is not the victory of science that distinguishes our nineteenth century, but the victory of scientific method over science.<sup>118</sup>

At this point, it would be befitting to remember why Nietzsche was obsessed with the Pre-Socratic philosophers: he admired their methodological naturalism (which he himself adopted), but what he also admired about these philosophers was their appreciation for the limits of knowledge.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, unlike Kierkegaard, Nietzsche does not view the limits of knowledge

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<sup>116</sup> See Leiter, Brian. *Nietzsche on Morality*. London: Routledge, 2015, p. 2

<sup>117</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>118</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Edited, with Commentary, by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1968, p. 261.

<sup>119</sup> See Leiter, Brian. *Nietzsche on Morality*. London: Routledge, 2015, p. 30.

as a chance to lapse into paradoxes and the Absurd; rather, he is merely pointing out these limits as an honest observer.

#### 4. Disillusionment

Disillusionment with knowledge is a recurring theme in romanticism. In its simplest form, we meet Manfred, a Faustian figure, who is sick of knowledge:

Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most  
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,  
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.<sup>120</sup>

In Lord Byron's *Manfred*, after being disillusioned, there is no higher goal, no higher vocation that Manfred pursues; Manfred simply wishes his pain to stop. The nature of Manfred's pain is not completely disclosed. Manfred's anguish can be summed up as knowing too much; and, to find peace, he summons seven spirits to alleviate his suffering. When the spirits ask what it is that he wants, Manfred simply answers, "Forgetfulness."<sup>121</sup> I call this type of disillusionment "aesthetic disillusionment," or "poetic disillusionment": The individual afflicted with aesthetic disillusionment is disillusioned with knowledge, but he takes no positive action subsequent to his disillusionment. I say "positive" for the sake of clarity, because, like Manfred, the individual might take *negative* action: in Manfred's case, we encounter the negative act of forgetting.

The next development can be encountered in Goethe's *Faust*. Like Manfred, Faust is disillusioned with knowledge and believes "what we know fulfils no need at all";<sup>122</sup> however, unlike Manfred, Faust is not content with just complaining and takes positive action. In *Faust*, Goethe is concerned with knowledge *and* action. I call this type of disillusionment "ethical disillusionment."

Finally, we have the highest form of disillusionment with knowledge: "religious disillusionment." Once religiously disillusioned, the individual is not content with just acting; rather, the individual wants to act *ethically*. What makes this type religious (rather than merely ethical) is that the individual's ethics is subjective.

##### 4.1. Religious Disillusionment

In his *Journal AA*, Kierkegaard writes the following:

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<sup>120</sup> Byron, George Gordon. *The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron*. London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited, 1890, p. 242.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>122</sup> Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust I & II*. Edited and translated by Stuart Atkins. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 29.

What I really need is to be clear about what *I am to do*, not what I must know, except in the way knowledge must precede all action. It is a question of understanding my own destiny, of seeing what the Deity really wants *me* to do; the thing is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*.<sup>123</sup>

David J. Kangas believes the above passage is a reaction to Fichte's *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* [*The Vocation of Man*], writing,

Kierkegaard's thought generally registers the profound shift in Fichte's thought toward the radical priority of practical reason, of interest, over theoretical reason. The idea, what philosophy aims at, is not simply something to contemplate, but something for which to live and die.<sup>124</sup>

If we accepted this conclusion, which I think we should, then Kierkegaard's philosophical task would become clear by referring to Fichte's book. What makes Fichte's book relevant to our discussion is precisely the priority of practical reason over theoretical reason. The heart of the book could be summed up in the following line:

*Nicht bloßes Wissen, sondern nach deinem Wissen Tun ist deine Bestimmung.*<sup>125</sup>

Mere knowledge is not enough. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge means nothing. Both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard were opposed to gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge alone. Warning against "knowledge as such"<sup>126</sup> [*Erkenntniss an sich*], Nietzsche thought mere knowledge would be pointless if it were not harnessed in a wider context, and Kierkegaard poke fun at scholars who were merely interested in the objective—he sometimes referred to it as the "historical point of view."<sup>127</sup> We need knowledge to act. But, in this, Fichte was only manifesting the spirit of his age. As we have seen, there is nothing new about his emphasis on action. We encounter the same

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<sup>123</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 1: Journals AA-DD*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 19.

<sup>124</sup> Kangas, David. "J.G. Fichte: From Transcendental Ego to Existence." *Volume 6, Tome I: Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries - Philosophy*, edited by Jon Stewart. London: Routledge, 2016, p. 70.

<sup>125</sup> Not merely knowing; rather, your vocation is to act upon your knowledge. [My translation.] Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*. Felix Meiner Verlag, 2018, p. 87.

<sup>126</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 87.

<sup>127</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XII.1: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, by Johannes Climacus. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 23.

theme in Goethe's *Faust*, a book much loved by Kierkegaard. In his study, Faust declares, "In the beginning was the Act."<sup>128</sup> Faust was tired of accumulating mere knowledge, and he wanted to act; and so, Faust acted. What we need to bear in mind is that the emphasis of *Faust* is on acting alone: Faust wanted to experience both good *and* bad—he did not concern himself with acting morally.<sup>129</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Interweaving Knowledge and Action in Ethics

The theme of knowledge and action preoccupies both Goethe and Fichte; nevertheless, were the emphasis of Fichte's book on acting alone—as it is the case with Goethe's *Faust*—there would be no reason to mention it in my thesis. We talked about *Faust* mainly for historical reasons, but we are talking about Fichte for philosophical reasons. What is truly radical about Fichte's approach is that he goes beyond the spirit of his age by interlinking knowledge, action, and ethics. Knowledge is needed to act, and we act because of our vocation [*Bestimmung*] to moral activity.

*Es ist überall nur Eine Beziehung auf mich möglich, und alle andere sind nur Unterarten von dieser: meine Bestimmung, sittlich zu handeln. Meine Welt ist—Object und Sphäre meiner Pflichten, und absolut nichts anderes.*<sup>130</sup>

It is precisely this preoccupation with ethics that is at the heart of every Kierkegaardian action. Knowledge means nothing if it does not prompt us to act, and action means nothing if it is not concerned with ethics. Knowledge entails action, and action entails ethics; once we know, we are bound to act ethically.

The important point which we should not fail to notice is that, in Fichte, the ethical and the religious are woven together. It is not a coincidence that all the passages which I have quoted here are from the third book of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, titled *Faith [Glaube]*.

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<sup>128</sup> Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust I & II*. Edited and translated by Stuart Atkins. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 33.

<sup>129</sup> Here, I need to make myself clear regarding the ethics of Faust. Although Faust could be considered immoral by the standards of his day, his actions are, in a sense, ethical because he takes positive action, and because he is committed. Moreover, it could be argued that Faust is an ethical figure on other grounds: Although Faust did not abide by the ethics of his society, he did adopt the ethics of Mephistopheles. Nevertheless, the point remains that Faust's ethics is not subjective; therefore, he cannot be beyond praise or blame—he does not act beyond Good and Evil. Furthermore, based on a Kierkegaardian reading, "Faust represents doubt personified."\* To go back to Fichte, we could say that Faust's doubt is caused by knowledge and never progresses to the final stage of faith [*Glaube*].

\* Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXV, Volume 25: Letters and Documents*. Translated by Henrik Rosenmeier. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 43.

<sup>130</sup> There is, universally, only one relation that is possible for me, and everything else is a subspecies of this: my vocation to act morally. My world is—the object and the sphere of my responsibilities, and absolutely nothing else. [My translation.]

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*. Felix Meiner Verlag, 2018, p. 100.

Finally, there is another similarity between Kierkegaard and Fichte that deserves attention. What we see in both philosophers is that: it is *I* for whom the triad of knowledge-action-ethics is a problem—it is *I* that is concerned with knowledge, action, and ethics. It makes sense to talk about the mentioned triad only in so far as *I am concerned*. This is how Fichte sees himself in relation to philosophy, and the world:

*Es gibt überhaupt kein bloßes reines Sein für mich, das mich nicht angehe, und welches ich anschaute, lediglich um des Anschauens willen.*<sup>131</sup>

Likewise, for Kierkegaard, nothing would be worthwhile “if it had *no* deeper meaning for *myself* and *my life*.”<sup>132</sup>

#### 4.2. The Knowledge of Silenus

Greek tragedy, according to Nietzsche, was a reaction to the knowledge of Silenus: “The Greeks knew and felt the terrors and horrors of existence,”<sup>133</sup> and they had to justify the world and existence in the face of these horrors. The brilliant solution of the Greeks was to justify existence—and consequently, to affirm life—as an aesthetic phenomenon.

In the secondary literature, the knowledge of Silenus is typically mentioned just to remind the reader of the pessimism with which life should be regarded, and it is not uncommon to go no further than associating the knowledge of Silenus with man’s suffering, and pessimism.<sup>134</sup> As a result, the way the knowledge of Silenus is mentioned typically leaves out half the story: Scholars always neglect the important role the knowledge of Silenus *qua* knowledge plays in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. Once this knowledge is acquired, there is no turning back, and the person is faced with two options: they must either give in to pessimism or justify (and affirm life) despite this knowledge. The latter would be the Nietzschean option, but whether the task could be actually accomplished is another story. Some might argue that justification of life is not possible for individuals, and that the world should be justified “not, clearly, to individual human beings, but

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<sup>131</sup> For me, there is no pure, mere existence at all which does not concern me, and which I merely contemplate for the sake of contemplating. [My translation]  
*Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>132</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks, Volume 1: Journals AA-DD*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 19.

<sup>133</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 23.

<sup>134</sup> For instance: Came, Daniel. “The Aesthetic Justification of Existence.” *A Companion to Nietzsche*, edited by Keith Ansell Pearson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006, p. 42.

rather to the world creator.”<sup>135</sup> Personally, I do not agree with such a claim, and to substantiate my claim, we refer to *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche talks about “our ultimate gratitude to art”<sup>136</sup> and writes, “As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable to us.”<sup>137</sup>

The weightiness of this knowledge in Nietzsche’s philosophy is only comparable to the biblical story of the Fall: in Nietzsche’s philosophy, acquiring the knowledge of Silenus weighs as heavily on mortals as eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—it is the Nietzschean original sin. Where Nietzsche differs from the Bible is in viewing the sin of acquiring knowledge as something positive, as something that we need—acquiring the knowledge of Silenus is a prerequisite for setting out to justify life! I would push the argument even further and claim that knowledge in general is a prerequisite for any sort of justification. First, we must know, then we can set about doing something in a justified way.

#### **4.2.1. Being Conscious of Illusions**

According to Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (and section 107 of *The Gay Science*), we may need illusions to tolerate and affirm life; nevertheless, the Greeks first acquired the knowledge of Silenus and only then did they choose to use illusion as a means of comfort. A choice like this comes from a position of power and exaltation. There would be nothing wrong with having illusions so long as those illusions were self-inflicted deliberately based on knowledge. There is a difference between a person who is blissfully ignorant (and has all sorts of illusions about the world) and a person who knows how things in reality are but *chooses* to have illusions.

#### **4.2.2. Suffering**

The idea that knowledge and suffering are related is nothing original; it is at least as old as the Bible:

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.<sup>138</sup>

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also saw a connection between knowledge and suffering; but, unlike others, they found a root that connected knowledge and suffering: existence. They were the first philosophers to perceive that existence has meaning: In his *Journal NB31*, Kierkegaard has an

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<sup>135</sup> Young, Julian. *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 52.

<sup>136</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 104.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *The King James Bible*, Ecclesiastes 1:18.

entry with the heading “The Meaning of Existence,”<sup>139</sup> [*Tilværelsens Betydning*], and in *Either/Or*, he asks about “the meaning of this life”<sup>140</sup> [*Betydningen af dette Liv*]; similarly, we can come across the phrase “the meaning of existence” [*der Sinn des Daseins*] a few times in Nietzsche’s unpublished papers.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, Zarathustra expresses his desire to “teach humans the meaning of their being”;<sup>142</sup> and just like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche talks about the meaning of life [*der Sinn des Lebens*].<sup>143</sup> What is truly interesting is that for both these authors, the meaning of existence is linked with truth and suffering. In Nietzsche we read,

*We must take upon ourselves the voluntary suffering for truthfulness, the personal agonies. Suffering is the meaning of existence.*<sup>144</sup>

And, similarly, in Kierkegaard’s *Journal NB31*, we are told,

And this is how God has arranged this existence: In this world it is impossible truly to relate oneself to the truth without coming to suffer—and eternity judges everyone as to whether, in suffering, he has related to the truth.<sup>145</sup>

It is evident that for Nietzsche and Kierkegaard the connection between knowledge and suffering is existential; therefore, this connection plays a bigger role in their existential philosophies. For the next few pages, our aim is to show that although knowledge is defended by both philosophers despite the suffering it causes, not every piece of knowledge ranks equally—for instance, the knowledge of Silenus is not existentially on par with knowing how to bake a cake. Most importantly, we will argue that suffering is a prerequisite for acting beyond Good and Evil.

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<sup>139</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks: Volume 10, Journals NB31-NB36*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018, p. 16.

<sup>140</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Writing, III, Part I: Either/Or*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 31.

<sup>141</sup> See Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*. Translated by Richard T. Gray. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, pp. 288, 336, 338 & 342.

<sup>142</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>143</sup> See Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*. Translated by Richard T. Gray. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 349.

<sup>144</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*. Translated by Richard T. Gray. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 336.

<sup>145</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks: Volume 10, Journals NB31-NB36*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018, p. 16.



#### 4.2.2.1. Suffering in Kierkegaard's Philosophy

A trip to the nearest bookstore should convince anyone that people abhor suffering: the unbelievable number of published self-help books can serve as a testimony to this. Nevertheless, an existential thinker cannot be cured of his suffering by consulting such books.

Interestingly, Kierkegaard believed his upbuilding discourses, as good as they might be, were in the end like any other self-help book—no one could be saved by them. Regarding his upbuilding discourses, Kierkegaard warned his readers that in the end, “the sufferer must help himself.”<sup>146</sup> Even more radically, we could argue that, at least on this occasion, Kierkegaard entertained the idea that not even God could help the sufferer. Given the responsibility of the sufferer to help himself, no wonder that Walker Percy despised self-help books, joking that seriously devoting oneself to them would lead to despair and suicide.<sup>147</sup> (Percy himself wrote a parody of self-help books titled *Lost in the Cosmos*.)

To understand why suffering is required for justifying one's actions, we need to have a look at Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Initially, the reader might get the impression that the person who suffers, and the person who acts are essentially two different people:

The suffering of the sufferer is different from the suffering of the one who acts, inasmuch as when the latter suffers, his suffering has significance for the victory of the good in the world; whereas when the sufferer takes upon himself the sufferings allotted to him, he wills to suffer everything for the good, that is, in order that the good may be victorious in him.<sup>148</sup>

To put it more simply, the distinction between the two types boils down to this: “the one who acts works outwardly,”<sup>149</sup> and the one who suffers works inwardly.<sup>150</sup> But upon closer examination, we realise that the distinction does not mean one type cannot transform into the other.

The person who wants to act must first suffer. This strange requirement comes from Kierkegaard's belief that the right kind of suffering makes the good victorious in the individual. It seems that Kierkegaard does distinguish between the person who acts and the person who suffers,

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<sup>146</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XV, Volume 15: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 107.

<sup>147</sup> Percy, Walker. *The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989, p. 85.

<sup>148</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XV, Volume 15: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 99.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>150</sup> See *ibid.*

but he makes this distinction to tell his readers that they must first suffer before their actions can be sanctioned, because the good must

be victorious in the inner self of the person who acts if he is truly to work for the good outwardly.<sup>151</sup>

We need to point out that Kierkegaard is saying this in a religious context; meaning, he is assuming that he is giving advice to the individual who already has faith. As we have previously seen (in Abraham's case), what the religious individual calls the good can come into serious conflict with what the ethics of his society demands of each person, and that is why the individual needs to suffer for the good. We can be sure that the good Kierkegaard is talking about is subjective because we can find parallels between Kierkegaard's rhetoric and what we read in *Fear and Trembling*. Just as Abraham's faith can make a murder into a holy act, Kierkegaard claims that every road can lead to the good by virtue of suffering, "even the road of error."<sup>152</sup> Reading Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, we get the impression that in the process of suffering, the individual's action becomes justified. Subsequent to suffering, action originates from the good, albeit the subjective good of a subjective ethics. Any such justification can be dangerous, and that is why Kierkegaard reminds his reader of the responsibility of the individual in suffering:

The person who suffers essentially also has a responsibility for how he has used time and has utilized the earthly misery.<sup>153</sup>

#### **4.2.2.2. Suffering in Nietzsche's Philosophy**

Not embracing suffering rules out most people as candidates for acting beyond Good and Evil; as a matter of fact, a typical person avoids suffering like the plague.

Nietzsche advocated suffering, but, of course, he did not advocate just any kind of suffering. For instance, while the kind of suffering promoted by most religions, which is said to be repaid after death, would be considered a bad kind of suffering, as Nietzsche saw it,

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., pp. 116-117.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

a morality that seeks to eliminate suffering thereby also eliminates precisely those conditions under which alone the growth of the human type is possible.<sup>154</sup>

Suffering acts as a filter: it filters out the weak. Those who are weak suffer essentially differently from the strong. The latter, “affirms even the harshest suffering,”<sup>155</sup> because “he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying to do so.”<sup>156</sup>

Without suffering, we would have the comedy of a gang of Raskolnikovs committing terrible crimes in the name of acting beyond Good and Evil, for they would not grasp the responsibility of their actions. A Raskolnikov acts prior to acquiring the maturity of a higher man.

#### 4.2.2.3. Nietzsche on Knowledge and Suffering

In section 109 of *Human, All Too Human*, under the heading “*Sorrow is knowledge*,”<sup>157</sup> Nietzsche tells us of the importance of knowledge and the suffering it causes. In this passage, Nietzsche’s question comes down to this: Is it possible to reject the consoling, pacifying lies and errors offered by religions and replace them by facts? In other words, are there any consoling facts that science (or philosophy) can offer? The answer is a sharp no: the best they can offer are “other metaphysical plausibilities (at bottom likewise untruths).”<sup>158</sup> Though we need solace and comfort, it is hard to turn our backs on knowledge. According to Nietzsche, we can do no better than to turn to knowledge, but the problem is: there is the “danger that man may bleed to death from knowledge of truth.”<sup>159</sup> That being the case, what are we to do? Are we to give up knowledge and go back to the comfort of lies and errors? The answer, again, is negative:

What is certain, however, is that any degree of frivolity or melancholy is better than a romantic return and desertion, an approach to Christianity in any form. [...] Those agonies may be painful enough: but without agonies one cannot become a leader and educator of mankind!<sup>160</sup>

We need to suffer because of knowledge, for, here again, suffering is a filter that separates the weak from the strong.

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<sup>154</sup> Burnham, Douglas. *Reading Nietzsche: An Analysis of Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 131.

<sup>155</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Edited, with Commentary, by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1968, p. 543.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> An allusion to Lord Byron.

<sup>158</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 60.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

#### 4.2.2.4. Kierkegaard on Knowledge and Suffering

Because of his Christian beliefs, the relationship between knowledge and suffering is reversed in Kierkegaard's philosophy: it is suffering that leads to knowledge. Regarding this reversal of relations, we need to bear in mind that Kierkegaard is talking about a specific kind of knowledge: knowledge that is turned inward. The following passage makes this relation clear:

Without suffering there is no true knowledge, because suffering is the very qualification of inwardness.<sup>161</sup>

In a previous section, we made a distinction between the person who acts and the person who suffers. Now, in this section, we can name each step that leads to action: First, the individual has a cause; second, the individual must suffer for his cause; third, the individual takes suffering upon himself responsibly; fourth, the suffering leads the individual to gain knowledge; fifth, the individual becomes qualified for inwardness by virtue of the knowledge he gains; sixth, inwardness transforms the individual's cause to the good subjectively; seventh, by virtue of inwardness, the individual becomes qualified to work outwardly; eighth, the individual acts in the name of his sanctioned cause.

We need to be aware that Kierkegaard associates this kind of suffering with danger and goes on to say:

Yet, because the schooling of suffering is so dangerous, we justifiably say that this school educates for eternity; this danger does not exist in any other school, but then there is not the gain either: the greatest danger and the greatest gain.<sup>162</sup>

And right after telling us about the dangerous schooling of suffering, he reminds us that suffering is associated with self-knowledge and inwardness:

If [...] a person in learning turns *outward*, he can come to know very much, but despite all this knowledge he can be and continue to be a riddle to himself, an unknown. [...] Suffering, on the other hand, turns a person *inward*.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, IX, Volume 9: Prefaces: Writing Sampler*. Edited and translated by Todd W. Nichol. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 41.

<sup>162</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XV, Volume 15: Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 256.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. The Jester

I am devoting this section to analysing the sixth section of the Prologue from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the reason being that there are many motifs in this part of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that are relevant to our discussion.

Section VI of the prologue centres around a tightrope walker who meets his doom. You might ask: Why does Nietzsche choose to write about a tightrope walker? There are several reasons, but the two most important reasons which we will focus on have to do with what this figure represents. The first reason has to do with the nature of the profession: being a tight rope walker is a dangerous profession. Let us remind ourselves how Nietzsche always urges his audience to live dangerously:

The secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is—to live dangerously!<sup>164</sup>

In his personal life, Nietzsche lived by the philosophy he professed and abided by the maxim of living dangerously, and he urged his readers to do so as well. The second reason for the importance of this figure becomes apparent once we realise that the German word for “tightrope walker” is “*Seiltänzer*”; therefore, a tightrope walker is someone who, with the lightness of a dancer, performs dangerous feats. In the final part of the book, we read that Zarathustra himself is referred to as a dancer:

Zarathustra the dancer, Zarathustra the light one who waves with his wings, the flightworthy, waving to all birds, worthy and ready, a blissful lightweight.<sup>165</sup>

We could go back to the early Nietzsche and read why he valued dancing so much:

Not only do the festivals of Dionysos forge a bond between human beings, they also reconcile human beings and nature. [...] As they sing and dance, human beings express their membership of a higher, more ideal community; they have forgotten how to walk and speak. Yet it is more than this: they feel themselves to have been transformed by magic, and they really have become something different.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 161.

<sup>165</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 239.

<sup>166</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 120.

As we can see in the above passage, for Nietzsche, dancing does not mean just moving your hips—it means affirming life itself!

With the two mentioned reasons in mind, let us proceed to analyse the text. The scenery is quite important: the action takes place on a rope that is stretched between two towers. We are told that the rope hangs “suspended over the market place and the people.”<sup>167</sup> The bystanders represent the loathsome crowd who themselves neither dance nor act dangerously; instead, they only cheer the adventurer. Incidentally, we find similar echoes in Kierkegaard’s *Two Ages*: Kierkegaard tells of an irresistibly desirable treasure that lies on a thin crust of ice in such a way that anyone who sets out to retrieve it puts himself in great danger. At the shore, the crust is at its thickest, and as we move towards the treasure, the ice becomes thinner and thinner. Kierkegaard uses this metaphor to distinguish between two ages, and between two types of people: Whereas in the age of passion, there are real ventures and risk-takers, in an age devoid of passion, there are acrobatic stunts and bystanders. Kierkegaard describes the passionless age with much horror as follows:

They would go out and from their safe vantage point appraise with the air of connoisseurs the expert skater who can skate almost to the very edge (that is, as far out as the ice is still safe and just short of being dangerous) and then tum back. One of the skaters would be exceptionally skilled, and he would even be able to perform the stunt of making one seemingly hazardous swoop right at the very edge, causing the spectators to shout: “Ye gods, he is crazy, he is risking his life.” But you see, he is so exceptionally skillful that he can make a sharp turn precisely at the extreme edge- that is, where the ice is still completely safe and still short of being dangerous.<sup>168</sup>

We can think of the people at the marketplace as the bystanders of Kierkegaard’s story, and the tight rope walker is analogous to the skilful skater. It is true that this figure dances and takes risks, and it is true that Zarathustra praises him for it, but it is not enough.

Metaphorically, the tight rope walker, by virtue of taking risks and dancing, is positioned above the passive crowd of the market place; nevertheless, he is not the real star of the tale—that honour goes to the jester.

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<sup>167</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>168</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard’s Writings, XIV, Volume 14: Two Ages*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 72.

As the tightrope walker reaches the midpoint of the rope, the jester enters. Following Zupančič's interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy, whenever we come across a midpoint in Nietzsche's writings—be it in the form of midday, middle, or what have you—there is something important to which we should pay attention. According to Zupančič, the “middle” in Nietzsche's philosophy is always the time of an event.<sup>169</sup> What does the midpoint of the rope represent? For Zupančič, it is the point of a crisis that we encounter in the “neutrality of life”;<sup>170</sup> however, I believe, it represents the point of being beyond, for, in Nietzsche's philosophy,

“beyond” clearly does not mean a synthesis or a third transcendent term. “Beyond” means in the middle.<sup>171</sup>

Zupančič believes that the tightrope walker is the hero of this section of the Prologue. She invites her readers to learn from him:

Anyone who wants to be up to (the task of) this “middle” has to have the skill, concentration, strength, and light, nimble ease of a tightrope walker.<sup>172</sup>

But unfortunately for Zupančič, the tightrope walker should not be our standard for the reason we will get to in a moment; but before that, to convince you that Zupančič is wrong with regard to the tightrope walker, let us read the following passage:

We lived in the market-place, where I was often entertained by strange sights, such, for instance, as performances by a troupe of acrobats, in which a man walked a rope stretched from tower to tower across the square, an achievement which long inspired me with a passion for such feats of daring. Indeed, I got so far as to walk a rope fairly easily myself with the help of a balancing-pole. I had made the rope out of cords twisted together and stretched across the courtyard, and even now I still feel a desire to gratify my acrobatic instincts.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Zupančič, Alenka. *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>170</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>171</sup> Badiou, Alain. *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, p. 65.

<sup>172</sup> Zupančič, Alenka. *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003, p. 89.

<sup>173</sup> Wagner, Richard. *My life*. Dodd, Mead and Company, 1936, p. 7.

This passage was written by Wagner in his autobiography, a work with which Nietzsche was familiar.<sup>174</sup> The similarity between Nietzsche's tale and Wagner's text is too striking to be ignored. Nietzsche's philosophical independence from Wagner was officially announced in *Human, All Too Human*—a book in which even the dedicatee of the first volume, Voltaire, was meant as an offence to Wagner.<sup>175</sup> By the time *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was published, Nietzsche had become a fully fledged independent thinker; so, it is hard not to imagine he was indirectly attacking Wagner whom he was portraying as a tightrope walker.

If the tightrope walker should not be regarded as our standard, then to whom should this honour go? The answer is: the jester! It is the jester who is the master of the realm between the two towers, the realm beyond Good and Evil, not the tightrope walker.

So, who is this jester, and what does he represent? Whenever I read this section, I am reminded of a play by Pushkin. The reader might be indirectly familiar with Pushkin's play if they have seen the movie *Amadeus* by Miloš Forman. The movie is based on a play that was in turn inspired by a poetic drama, titled *Mozart and Salieri*, written by Alexander Pushkin. The interaction between the tightrope walker and the jester reminds me of the interaction between Mozart and Salieri as they are portrayed in the play. In Pushkin's little tragedy, Salieri is depicted as someone who has given up everything and has devoted all his life to becoming a prominent person in the musical world: he has a successful career as a composer, and he enjoys being loved by the people. All is fine for Salieri until Mozart, who is portrayed as a jester, comes along and ruins Salieri's career. These are Mozart's words as he enters the stage:

*Ага! увидел ты! а мне хотелось  
Тебя неожиданной шуткой угостить.*<sup>176</sup>

Of course, Salieri cannot have his musical life ruined by this buffoon, so he seals Mozart's doom. The tragedy ends differently in Pushkin's play than in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: in the play, it is Mozart who dies, and in the book, it is the tightrope walker. Nevertheless, the general point that both authors are making remains the same: No matter what high mountains you may climb, and no matter how many hardships you may endure in your journey, there will always

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<sup>174</sup> "At Basel, Nietzsche took charge of the negotiations for the printing of the first instalments of the autobiography, so that there is no question of his familiarity with this passage."

Hollinrake, Roger. *Nietzsche, Wagner and the Philosophy of Pessimism*. Routledge, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>175</sup> Schacht, Richard Schacht. "Nietzsche: Human, All Too Human." *Introductions to Nietzsche*, edited by Robert Pippin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 94.

<sup>176</sup> "Aha! You noticed! But I wanted to treat you with an unexpected jest." [My translation]

Пушкин, Александр Сергеевич. *Маленькие трагедии*. Фолио, 2007, с. 50.



be someone who can dance his way up the same mountain with much more naturalness and ease than you.

The jester teases the tightrope walker so much that he eventually falls off. We can interpret this in two ways: either he lost his balance and fell off the rope unintentionally, or he chose to fall off the rope. I personally think it is the latter case, because we read,

He [the tightrope walker] threw away his pole and plunged into the depths even faster than his pole.<sup>177</sup>

If we pay attention to the structure of the sentence, we notice that it is in the active voice.

The jester might have been closer to Zarathustra's ideal than the tightrope walker, but the tightrope walker is not a despicable figure—he is still far better than the passive crowd of bystanders. There are all sorts of indications that Zarathustra praised the tightrope walker, and accepting one's downfall is one of them. When the tightrope walker sees someone is a better dancer than he could ever be, he chooses his own downfall—herein lies the difference between Pushkin's tragedy and Nietzsche's story. This acceptance is comparable to the myth told by Vasari: When da Vinci's master, Verrocchio, saw the angel that Leonard had painted, he “resolved never to touch a brush again, for Leonardo had surpassed him in this craft at such a young age.”<sup>178</sup>

The tightrope walker thinks of his life and vocation as something base and unworthy, but Zarathustra assures him that he is mistaken. In Zarathustra's view, the life of the tightrope walker is many times more praiseworthy than the lives of those who passively hang around the marketplace. In fact, his life and his vocation are so praiseworthy that he has Zarathustra's respect, and Zarathustra shows him this respect by burying him; however, based on what we have discussed, the burial of the tightrope walker should be seen as having double meaning: (a) Zarathustra pays his respect to the dead and, at the same time, (b) puts his Wagnerian past behind him; in doing so, he overcomes himself. Thus, by burying the tightrope walker, Zarathustra can move forward. The latter point becomes even clearer when we remind ourselves that Zarathustra dragged the dead body around for a while before he finally gave up.

Lastly, by reading the passage, we can sense that the tightrope walker is worried that abandoning hope in the otherworldly would render life meaningless; however, Zarathustra tells him that is not the case:

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<sup>177</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>178</sup> Vasari, Giorgio. *The Lives of the Artists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 236.

“Not at all,” said Zarathustra. “You made your vocation out of danger, and there is nothing contemptible about that.”<sup>179</sup>

We can offer a second reason as to why the life of the tightrope walker was not meaningless: he gave way to a higher being—the jester—who, unlike him, knew how to dwell beyond Good and Evil. In that sense, the tightrope walker’s going under [*Untergang*] was his going over [*Übergang*].

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<sup>179</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 12.

## 6. Exaltation

The Kierkegaardian individual is a Nietzschean *Übermensch* who *chooses* to have faith. Reading Kierkegaard, one often gets the impression that it is all the same to Kierkegaard if God truly exists—the important thing is to have faith in order to be saved from nihilism, from leveling. In this sense, Kierkegaard is very much like Nietzsche who believed that, to a certain extent, we need illusions in order to cope with the “horrors of existence.”<sup>180</sup> Once the overman becomes exalted, he is free to choose whichever way that would work out best for him as an individual. Once the overman becomes exalted, he can choose to remain an immoral antichrist like Nietzsche, a firm believer like Kierkegaard, or make his way back to the aesthetic stage—or perhaps even the immediate stage. In what follows we examine the latter choice as it was made by the protagonist of *The Fall* and explain how the novel relates to Nietzsche.

### 6.1. The Fall of the *Übermensch*

I would like to devote this section to Albert Camus and his final novel, *The Fall*. One may assume *The Fall* depicts the moral crisis of a man who cannot live without “moral absolutes,”<sup>181</sup> but I would argue the opposite: Although Clamence is not bound by any external moral absolute, as a person who acts beyond Good and Evil, he does have internal—subjective—moral absolutes. In fact, the crisis of Clamence is caused by his inability to get away from society, and as a member of society, he has to abide by the ethics of the masses. His crisis is precisely this: that he cannot turn his back on the moral absolutes of society. *The Fall* is the story of a man who chooses to “fall” from the state of bliss, so he could become subjective in alienation.

The general outline of the novel is apparent from the title of the book which, evidently, refers to the biblical story of the Fall—if there are any doubts about this reference, the garden of Eden is explicitly mentioned in the novel.<sup>182</sup> The book follows Clamence in the aftermath of his fall from the life he had in Paris to how he is now living in Amsterdam, a place whose “concentric canals resemble the circles of hell.”<sup>183</sup> Clamence had what could be considered, by many, an ideal life: everyone respected him; he was successful with women; he was a lawyer whose speciality was “noble cases”; and so on. Now, he lives in Amsterdam and takes solace in drinking *genièvre*, which he finds as the “the sole glimmer of light in this darkness.”<sup>184</sup> Clamence’s wish is to break away

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<sup>180</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 23.

<sup>181</sup> See King, Adele. “Structure and Meaning in *La Chute*.” *PMLA*, Vol. 77, No. 5, 1962, p. 660.

<sup>182</sup> See Camus, Albert. *The Fall*. Translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage International, 1991, p. 27.

<sup>183</sup> Camus, Albert. *The Fall*. Translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage International, 1991, p. 14.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

from society, but everything in the book tells us that he is failing in his misanthropic endeavours. Even the usage of the second-person narrative mode is a testimony to this failure: Typically, the second-person narrative mode is used to reduce the distance between the author and the reader—in other words, to establish contact between the author and the reader. Why should the story of a misanthrope who wishes to be alone be told by writing in the second-narrative mode? We can also see this failure in how Clamence opens up to a complete stranger—in fact, he opens up so much that a whole book accounts for what he tells the stranger! Obviously, Clamence is not an indifferent person, but he wants to be one, and although he does not hold humanity in high regard, he still confides in his listener.

The following passage is the first glimpse of his mental struggle:

I never cross a bridge at night. It's the result of a vow. Suppose, after all, that someone should jump in the water. One of two things—either you do likewise to fish him out and, in cold weather, you run a great risk! Or you forsake him there.<sup>185</sup>

This ethical either/or dilemma is deeply personal for Clamence, because he has been on both sides of the either/or. It is this dilemma that makes clear how his life in Amsterdam differs from his life in Paris: had such an occasion arisen in the past, he certainly would have jumped in the water to help the drowning person, but now, he would not do any such thing—or at least, he would hesitate before jumping in.

Clamence's past was a point of exaltation; his past was the high point of his life. After all, we are using the metaphor of the Fall; so, it is reasonable to imagine him at some high point before the event of the fall. There are several indirect references to Nietzsche in the novel, and one of them is the notion of exaltation. For Nietzsche, exaltation is something praiseworthy, and as Clamence tells us, he has never “felt comfortable except in lofty places,”<sup>186</sup> so much so that even in the details of his everyday life he “needed to feel *above*.”<sup>187</sup> Don't we encounter the same line of thinking in Nietzsche? This is how Zarathustra talks about himself:

You look upward when you long for elevation. And I look down because I am elevated.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 28.

### 6.1.1. The Tragedy of the Fall

Interestingly enough, it is precisely this exaltation that makes the fall possible. You cannot fall if you are not elevated—this formula is at least as old as Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Aristotle gives the example of Oedipus by reminding us how a messenger intended to free Oedipus from his “fear with regard to his mother,”<sup>189</sup> but as we know from the story, as soon as the knowledge was acquired by Oedipus, his downfall began; therefore, “by disclosing Oedipus’ identity he [the messenger] brought about the opposite result.”<sup>190</sup> Aristotle uses the word “recognition” to describe the process of changing from ignorance to knowledge.<sup>191</sup> We are told when recognition is used with *peripeteia* (reversal of fortune), it produces the most impact.<sup>192</sup> In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, there is the assumption that once recognition takes place, it is expected of the hero to act according to the acquired knowledge. The tragic hero should be someone who is “held in great esteem and enjoy great good fortune,”<sup>193</sup> because the higher the position of the hero, the greater will be his downfall. Under this light, we could interpret *The Fall* as a tragedy; however, it should be considered a self-inflicted tragedy—Clamence’s actions were completely intentional, and in that sense, he *chose* to fall.

To refer to Aristotle’s *Poetics* one last time: in so far as recognition is concerned, Aristotle does not view *Oedipus* as the best possible play. The problem with *Oedipus* is that although Oedipus gains knowledge, he gains it too late; in other words, Oedipus acted in ignorance when he committed the key act. The best-case scenario would be to gain full knowledge of the situation prior to the act.<sup>194</sup> Similarly, Clamence’s story follows the rules of the best-case scenario, because he is not in ignorance when he falls. He acts in full knowledge, and for that reason, his current situation was not imposed on him; rather, he himself brought it about wittingly. Clamence *chose* to fall, and this act was a conscious decision on his part.

Clamence tells us that he looked upon himself “as something of a superman.”<sup>195</sup> This simple line tells us much about Clamence and helps us interpret the story he tells us. Whereas an ordinary person does not have the option to choose, the *Übermensch* can always choose, and therein lies his power to act beyond Good and Evil. It would be preposterous to talk about acting if the individual did not have the option to choose. Acting beyond Good and Evil presupposes the

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<sup>189</sup> Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by Malcolm Heath. Penguin Group, 1996, p. 18.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>194</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>195</sup> Camus, Albert. *The Fall*. Translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage International, 1991, p. 28.

freedom to choose. And just to be clear, I am not claiming that the individual who acts beyond Good and Evil acts according to his free will—there is no free will—nor am I arguing in favour of compatibilism. What I am saying is that, thanks to their knowledge, the individual who acts beyond Good and Evil has *options* prior to committing the key act.

## 6.2. Rebellion

Whereas Camus' previous works were written for the ordinary person, *The Fall* was written for the extraordinary person. In *L'Homme révolté*, Camus calls upon the ordinary man to rebel, simply because there is nothing that an ordinary person could do except say no! Camus describes the rebel as a man who says no,<sup>196</sup> not as a man who has options. Moreover, if the individual said no, it would be in accordance with their (subjective) ethics; however, the ordinary person would say no in an ethical void—they would say no to the ethics that was imposed on them, but this “no” would not come from a second ethics.

No ordinary person can have his own subjective ethics; therefore, their saying “no” can never come from subjectivity. Camus believes that Nietzsche's philosophy centres around the problem of rebellion,<sup>197</sup> yet I am not sure if his interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy is not based on a misunderstanding. Camus is under the impression that Nietzsche does not consider Christ to be a rebel;<sup>198</sup> however, rebellion is precisely what Nietzsche objected to in Christ and Christianity. In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche criticised Christ for the rebellion he caused, for this rebellion [*Aufstand*] was

a rebellion against the “good and the just,” against the “saints of Israel,” against the social hierarchy—*not* against its corruption, but rather against caste, privilege, order, formula; it was a *refusal to believe* in “higher men.”<sup>199</sup>

The early Camus might have thought that the rebellious Sisyphus was happy, but for the mature Camus, it is Clamence who has the right to declare, “I am happy unto death.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York: Vintage Books, Inc., 1956, p. 13.

<sup>197</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>198</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 25.

<sup>200</sup> Camus, Albert. *The Fall*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage International, 1991, p. 144.

## 7. The Problem of Knowledge

In this part, we examine in what sense the actions of the expert are justified, and whether non-experts can question the expert.

### 7.1. Do Ethicists Behave Better in Real Life than Non-Ethicists?

In an article titled *Do ethicists steal more books?*, Eric Schwitzgebel intends to find out whether ethicists actually behave better in real life than non-ethicists.<sup>201</sup> Schwitzgebel misses the point, for the question is not whether they behave better or worse; rather, the questions we need to ask are: (a) whether ethicists *believe* they behave better in real life than non-ethicists, and (b) if yes, whether they are *justified* in believing so. These two questions should be asked in a way to lead to the final question: (c) Do ethicists act within the same moral boundary as everyone else? Thanks to the ethical knowledge that the ethicist possesses, he becomes, in his mind, an expert on good and evil, on right and wrong. In acting, the ethicist does not ask whether his personal actions are right or wrong, or whether they are good or bad; rather, in acting, the ethicist simply acts beyond the conventional dichotomy of good and bad, of right and wrong.

To illuminate the problem, let us consider an analogy before returning to Schwitzgebel's question. A novice pianist might pause every now and then during practice to see whether the key she is pressing is indeed the middle C, or whether the chord she is playing is indeed a diminished seventh chord on E, but when an expert pianist plays the piano, what he, as an expert, plays is what he instantaneously translates from perception into action. For the novice, every decision is accompanied by doubt: Is this the right note? Is this the right moment? Did I play this tuplet wrongly? What is the right way to play this passage? For the expert, however, there is only the act of playing—there is no right or wrong. For the expert, it is no longer the question whether the note he sees on the sheet is an A or a C, for he already *knows* what note it is as soon as he sees it.

It might not be seen as a big deal that the expert reads all the notes correctly since, after all, he is an expert; however, the instant decisions that an expert pianist has to make and execute become much more pronounced when he is faced with unique situations. The expert, who has a voice of his own, just *knows* how loud a certain passage should be played; he just knows if he needs to use the sustain pedal in an unspecified circumstance or not; he just knows on which note(s) he should put more emphasis when he is playing one of Rachmaninov's massive chords; and so on. Someone like Sviatoslav Richter might play Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C minor, BWV 847 from *Das*

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<sup>201</sup> See Schwitzgebel, Eric. "Do ethicists steal more books?" *Philosophical Psychology*, Vol. 22, No. 6, December 2009, p. 712.

*wohltemperierte Klavier* quite fast, whereas someone like Tatiana Nikolayeva might play it not so fast. It would be absurd to ask Richter and Nikolayeva to justify their decisions—they just *know* that is how the piece is to be played! Any offered justification in such circumstances should be regarded as rationalisation. To give you another example, Glenn Gould recorded two radically different interpretations of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*: both the 1955 recording and the 1981 rendition are beyond justification.

Previously, we presented subjective ethics as a genre of poetry; here, we are arguing that: just as there cannot be any justification of artistic—poetic—activity, the individual cannot justify his ethical activity.

The reader might object that it is precisely because of his extensive knowledge that the pianist always plays the right way, or that the pianist renders the right interpretation, but that would be missing the point. Yes, an expert pianist is less prone to make mistakes during performance, but this fact is unrelated to the point I am trying to make. My point is: when an expert executes a decision, no one with a lower level of expertise could possibly object or question him. If an expert came across a passage that was supposed to be played *piano*, and for whatever reason, he saw fit to play it *fortissimo*, no one could hold this against him. If, in a flight of fancy, the expert changed certain notes, transposed a passage written in a major key into a minor key, improvised, or syncopated a regular rhythm, no novice could ever question him.

The same line of reasoning should be adopted with regard to Schwitzgebel's question. Do ethicists behave better than non-ethicists? This is the question Schwitzgebel wants to answer, and he endeavours to find an answer to the question by the indirect method of seeing how many ethics books are missing from libraries in comparison with other philosophy books. To his astonishment, he finds out that

ethics books are more likely to be missing from academic libraries than other types of philosophy books.<sup>202</sup>

And so, he concludes,

It does not appear that the people reading philosophical ethics behave any better than those reading other sorts of philosophy.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 722.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.



But there is something odd here. Perhaps it is a wrong-headed approach to ask whether ethicists behave worse (or better) in real life than others. If an ethicist founded his own system of ethics (consciously, or unconsciously), his actions would be governed by the rules of *that* system; therefore, his behaviour in the real world would tell us nothing about his devotion to *his personal ethics*; and so, since subjective ethics is qualitatively different from mainstream ethics, maybe the question is not whether ethicists act better or worse. The better question would be: Do ethicists act within the same moral boundary as everyone else? Mainstream ethics differs qualitatively from subjective ethics. An ethicist might exclude himself from the moral norms of his society, but, when asking Schwitzgebel's question, we cannot regard his actions as right (or wrong) based on the mainstream ethics of society, for his actions should not be judged by the same moral standards. Asking whether ethicists behave better in real life presupposes that ethicists play by the rules of mainstream ethics.

### **7.1.1. Hypocrisy**

The question is not whether one acts contrary to the principles of one's field. In another paper, Schwitzgebel points out the obvious:

Police officers commit crimes. Doctors smoke. Economists invest badly. Clergy flout the rules of their religion.<sup>204</sup>

It surprises no one that a doctor might be a smoker despite her better judgment. Moreover, it makes no difference whether doctors, on average, smoke more than non-doctors, or whether priests, on average, flout the rules of their religion more than the general public. What I am proposing here is that these types of questions are wrong-headed. I, as someone who has no medical expertise, am in no position to judge a doctor who smokes. It may very well be the case that smoking is considered a bad thing, but this judgement ceases to be applicable in the doctor's case—provided that the doctor is an expert. Before lighting her cigarette, the doctor does not ask whether what she is about to do is good or bad, she already knows how bad smoking is better than anyone else. In fact, if asked about the dangers of smoking, she could give a detailed account of it. Lighting a cigarette for such a doctor is simply an act, neither good nor bad. It is only from my perspective as an observer that the deed seems wrong, yet from the doctor's perspective, her act of smoking has nothing to do with rightness or wrongness. That being said, I am not claiming that

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<sup>204</sup> Schwitzgebel, Eric; Rust, Joshua. "The Moral Behaviour of Ethicists: Peer Opinion." *Mind*, Vol. 118, No. 472, 2009, p. 1043.

doctors are beyond reproach; we are entitled to call the expertise of doctors into question, and the same goes for the members of other professions; nevertheless, the expert remains beyond external reproach.

#### **7.1.1.1. Hume's Guillotine**

The expert doctor knows what effects smoking has on our cells; furthermore, she knows these effects could result in the deterioration of our cells' condition until one of them eventually turned cancerous. The doctor takes what she knows as *facts*. A statement, in its facticity, is completely neutral and devoid of any positive or negative connotations—it is merely descriptive. Should a doctor choose to smoke, she knows what is likely to await her, and she takes the consequences as neutrally as the statement that predicts those consequences.

What has been said gives new meaning to Hume's guillotine: The actions of an expert cannot be judged based on some *ought* that is derived from an *is*, whereas in the case of non-experts, it is permissible to derive an *ought* from an *is*.

#### **7.2. The Expert**

I am against Mozart's music, and despite what the average person may believe, I think Mozart has done more harm to classical music than good. I am not writing a musicologist thesis, so I will spare you the details of my argument; instead, I would like to focus on what is relevant to our discussion—namely, people's unjustified belief in Mozart's music. I vehemently criticise Mozart's compositions, but I do not criticise every single person who listens to them; rather, I criticise, to use Adorno's words, not the expert listener, but the non-expert listeners who have no independent musical identity apart from the crowd.

I personally know people who are expert listeners, people who know all there is to know about harmony and musical analysis, yet they love Mozart's music with religious zeal. Where these experts are concerned, my criticism is not applicable, for they know everything there is to know about the history of music and (what I would describe as) the dangers of listening to Mozart. To interpret Adorno, I would argue that when someone is an expert listener, they *choose* to listen to a specific composer, whereas everyone else are dictated what to listen to by convention, ideology, social norms, or what have you.

The point is not to make every listener into an expert listener. As Adorno himself points out, the plan to convert every listener into an expert would be an “inhumanly utopian enterprise.”<sup>205</sup> That being said, he does not in any way defend musical relativism, nor does he think highly of the lower types, e.g., the entertainment listener.

The same principle concerning the expert listener can be applied to composers. The finest composers are those who have mastered every rule in the book and can push the boundaries of music composition thanks to their knowledge. There are few examples of such true heroes in history: The first true musical hero was Johann Sebastian Bach. It is not controversial to claim that Bach was not an innovator: Bach was not an innovator in the sense that composers such as Beethoven, Wagner, Schönberg, Stravinsky, and Ligeti were—the power of Bach’s music lies elsewhere. Bach was a master of all the genres of his time and combined them as the synthesiser *par excellence*. There are passages in his music which clearly tell us that “Bach was well aware of the conventional practice [of his time], but *chose*, intentionally, to rethink its meaning and value.”<sup>206</sup> Thanks to his knowledge, Bach could evaluate, and ultimately, reevaluate the conventions that were passed down to him. Bach’s music was a “critique of exemplary models,”<sup>207</sup> and he often distorted the models of his day.<sup>208</sup>

The same principle applies to other fields. For instance, as people are quick to point out, you do not need to know human anatomy as well as a doctor to be able to draw human figures, and similarly, you do not need to study physics to be an excellent baseball player, but having adequate knowledge will certainly not hurt your case. John Constable is a case in point: Thanks to his meteorological understanding, Constable’s “skies are the most scientifically accurate of all landscape art.”<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Adorno, Theodor. *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. Translated by E. B. Ashton. New York: The Seabury Press, Inc., 1976, p. 5.

<sup>206</sup> Dreyfus, Laurence. *Bach and the patterns of invention*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 42. [Italics added for emphasis.]

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>208</sup> We could also name Mahler, Schönberg, and many others as composers who acted beyond Good and Evil, but they acted in a different sense. They each mastered the musical rules of their time and reevaluated them; nevertheless, unlike Bach, they had a pathological need to innovate and give words to their own voice. Bach’s case is special because he had high respect for convention, though he broke the rules from time to time.

<sup>209</sup> Thornes, John. *John Constable’s Skies: A Fusion of Art and Science*. The University of Birmingham Press, 1999, p. 20.

## 8. Political Philosophy

Whenever I bring up the topic of my thesis in casual conversation, for some inexplicable reason, everyone starts to carve out the political implications of my views. I need to make it clear here and now that, for me, existential philosophy should not be carried out the way Sartre philosophised; rather, existentialism should remain uninterested in politics the way Kierkegaard distanced himself from politics. Although a royalist, Kierkegaard did all he could to avoid any close contacts with the King of Denmark, Christian VIII.<sup>210</sup> In the spirits of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, I explicitly refuse any political conclusions to be drawn from the present work; nevertheless, given what the tendencies of philosophers are, I have reluctantly decided to devote this small section to the political implications of my thesis rather than seeing someone else drawing unwanted conclusions.

What form of government I support should remain anyone's guess, for it has nothing to do with the contents of my master's thesis. That being said, if the reader is inclined to draw a conclusion, I would not object if they utilised my views in defence of epistocracy.

### 8.1. Epistocracy

Ilya Somin's book, *Democracy and Political Ignorance*, is packed with statistics taken from various sources, showing how the general public is frighteningly ignorant about politics. Ignorance in politics is not an issue in and of itself. In fact, ever since Anthony Downs, many economists and philosophers would be ready to tell you that people are rationally ignorant since not investing any time to gain political information makes rational sense:

For a great many citizens in a democracy, rational behavior excludes any investment whatever in political information *per se*. No matter how significant a difference between parties is revealed to the rational citizen by his free information, or how uncertain he is about which party to support, he realizes that his vote has almost no chance of influencing the outcome. Therefore why should he buy political information?<sup>211</sup>

Some might call it rational ignorance, and some, following Bryan Caplan, might call it "rational irrationality."<sup>212</sup> Whatever you may wish to call it, being ignorant in politics is not an issue so long as the ignorant person refrains from having a voice in politics. The problem, to use the words of John Stuart Mill, is that

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<sup>210</sup> See Stewart, Jon. *Søren Kierkegaard Subjectivity, Irony, and the Crisis of Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 168-169.

<sup>211</sup> Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1957, p. 245.

<sup>212</sup> Caplan, Bryan. *The Myth of the Rational Voter*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 114.

the power which the suffrage gives is not over himself [the voter] alone; it is power over others also.<sup>213</sup>

Or, as Jason Brennan puts it, it is like being in a restaurant and “imposing one meal on everybody.”<sup>214</sup> If the act of voting is not justified in the case of each voter, we would have a gang of Raskolnikovs deciding what is good for the rest of us. Today’s politics is biased and tribalistic, and, in effect, each political group wants to act beyond Good and Evil in imposing its decisions upon everyone else. Today, democracy *is* trying to take place beyond Good and Evil, but its players are a society of Raskolnikovs, not Nietzsche’s higher men.

## 8.2. The Monarch as the Hero

Given my defence of individualism and subjectivity in ethics, it might be thought that I am a tyrant sympathizer. I am devoting this sub-section to state clearly that I do not defend despots, and that I advise against submitting to absolute authority. The hero I believe in is not Carlyle’s Napoleon. In my book, the person who best deserves to be called a hero is Peter the Great. What Peter did cannot be judged in terms of good and evil. It cannot be evil, for he transformed a backward country into what later became an international super-power; he cannot be called good either, for what he did in the name of progress should raise the eyebrows of moral human beings. Peter wanted to reform his society, and he knew he had to westernise Russia to achieve his goals, for as he saw it, “in the West resided knowledge, reason, and salvation.”<sup>215</sup> Nevertheless, notice that what Peter did became justified only by virtue of the knowledge he (and his government) obtained: by sending people—he himself included—to the West to become knowledgeable in all sorts of affairs, Peter formed a society that was, in essence, epistocratic.

It was the [...] emphasis on knowledge, ability, and work—on getting things done—that accounted for the extraordinary motley group of assistants who gathered around the ruler.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Mill, John Stuart. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XIX: Essays on Politics and Society*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977, p. 323.

<sup>214</sup> Brennan, Jason. *The Ethics of Voting*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>215</sup> Riasanovsky, Nicholas. *The image of Peter the Great in Russian history and thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 7.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Without this single aspect, Peter would have gone down in history as just another tyrant. Riasanovsky calls Peter the Great a “true enlightened despot,” for Peter regarded ignorance as an enemy and found salvation in education.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

# Recapitulation

## Conclusion

We started our journey by drawing the general outline of the present work in the section *Transgression: Knowledge and Action*. Transgression takes place when one cannot fully commit to only one external system, e.g., utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, tradition, religion. Our general argument contended that knowledge gives the individual the possibility of transgression, because only those who possess adequate knowledge can dwell between two different realms without completely belonging to either realm. The aim of the thesis was to justify this claim and point out its implications. With that purpose in mind, we first examined the role of solitude in transgression, the reason being that we are concerned with existential ethics and existential ethics concerns the single individual. We argued that, whereas other romantics sought solitude to delve into the aesthetic, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche sought solitude to become ethical; by turning solitude into the heart of subjectivity, solitude became an essential part of subjective ethics for these two thinkers.

Kierkegaard contrasts the single individual with the crowd, because he sees the crowd as untruth; however, as we argued, although existential solitude in Kierkegaard's philosophy requires the individual to turn away from the crowd, the crowd is not to be equated with lie. Furthermore, it was pointed out that Kierkegaard does not call the individual truth, and this uncertainty of not knowing whether the individual is truth helps us not fall into the trap of dogmatism and misplaced self-assurance.

In order to enjoy the fruits of society, ethical systems of checks and balances are needed to inhibit the kinds of actions that would dismantle society. Despite Kierkegaard's ceaseless attacks on the crowd, the fact of the matter is that society acts as a good enough pressure that deters the individual from committing unacceptable actions; however, giving in to social pressure can come at the cost of progress. The tension between social ethics and subjective ethics is that, although society needs to be governed by universal laws to prevent social upheaval, transformative progress is made by those who, guided by their inner voice, undermine the universal and assert their subjectivity. The existentialist novelist, Hermann Hesse, brilliantly touches upon this point in his *Steppenwolf* when he asks why the bourgeois prospers:

The bourgeois is [...] by nature a creature of weak impulses, anxious, fearful of giving himself away and easy to rule. [...] No medicine in the world can keep a pulse beating that from the



outset was so weak. Nevertheless the bourgeoisie prospers. Why? The answer runs: Because of the Steppenwolves.<sup>218</sup>

Unintentionally, the Steppenwolf helps the bourgeoisie prosper thanks to his existence as an outsider.<sup>219</sup> Hesse likens Harry Haller's (the Steppenwolf's) suffering and alienation to that of Nietzsche: both were caught between two worlds, two ages, two cultures.<sup>220</sup> By not fully belonging to any realm, individuals such as Harry can listen to their own voice and transgress, and their acts of transgression could sometimes transform society for the better. The Steppenwolf is a stateless, alienated being who is "in unceasing and bitter conflict with public opinion and morality."<sup>221</sup> He is stateless, because he does not belong to only one world. By challenging the public morality, the Steppenwolf surpasses it and makes progressive change possible at the cost of himself. To read Hesse's novel under a Kierkegaardian light, we could say, the Steppenwolf is "a sacrifice that the world process demands."<sup>222</sup> Nonetheless, the prospect of progress is not enough to grant the individual absolute authority to transgress the ethics of his society. If the individual, after turning away from the crowd, succeeded in developing his own personal ethics, it would still be *necessary* that he should remain subjected to the ethics of his society while he practiced his personal ethics. For all his abhorrence of the bourgeois, even Hesse makes it clear that the Steppenwolf is "captive to the bourgeoisie and cannot escape it."<sup>223</sup>

There is another reason why I have mentioned *The Steppenwolf*: Harry Haller is an example of the Nietzschean great man. What makes the Nietzschean great man great and an existential figure is his solitude. Solitude makes the higher type incommunicable to others; however, for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, incommunicability does not entail irresponsibility, and in fact, individual responsibility is always incommunicable and a solitary affair. This view is contrasted with Carlyle's philosophy. Carlyle exempted his heroes from responsibility. Although both Carlyle and Nietzsche were concerned with the ethics of acting beyond Good and Evil, section 1.1.3 (titled

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<sup>218</sup> Hesse, Hermann. *Steppenwolf*. Translated by Basil Creighton and revised by Walter Sorell. London: Penguin Group, 2011, pp. 64-65.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>220</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>221</sup> Hesse, Hermann. *Steppenwolf*. Translated by Basil Creighton and revised by Walter Sorell. London: Penguin Group, 2011, p. 82.

<sup>222</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, II, Volume 2: The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 261.

<sup>223</sup> Hesse, Hermann. *Steppenwolf*. Translated by Basil Creighton and revised by Walter Sorell. London: Penguin Group, 2011, p. 65.

*The Solitude of Responsibility*) offers two sharp distinctions between Carlyle's and Nietzsche's views:

- (a) Whereas Carlylean heroes are objects of worship and praise, Nietzschean individuals can be neither praised nor blamed externally. Furthermore, whereas there is no system of checks and balances to control Carlylean heroes, the Nietzschean higher man sets his own internal system of checks and balances. In other words, the Carlylean hero is beyond reproach, whereas the Nietzschean higher man is not.
- (b) For Carlyle, the hero is not an essentially responsible figure; however, for Nietzsche (and Kierkegaard) the individual cannot dispense with responsibility.

In section 1.2, we looked at alienation as a natural consequence of incommunicability. By giving real life examples of alienated figures (e.g., Mahler and Schönberg), it was posited that alienation makes the individual stateless. Statelessness allows the individual to transgress the rules of states and systems. We also named various figures from the history of music whose alienation and subjectivity challenged the old morality, and in so doing, we linked ethics with aesthetics. Cultural figures such as Mahler came up with new systems (systems which, despite their artistic nature, challenged the ethics of society) by taking refuge in subjectivity. Artistic activity is an ethical activity. Certain creative works (e.g., protest art) make the ethical dimension of art more palpable, but ethics is not limited to artworks created by activists—it is an integral part of art in general.

To understand whether the individual transgresses, section 1.2.3, titled *Transgression*, established the theoretical basis of the present work. We stated that if an individual were equally at home in states A and B and could not decide between the rules of either state, it would be possible to construct a third state, state C, where the best of the two states would be conserved. Acting beyond Good and Evil means transgressing to state C in order to consult one's moral code. In its radical form, state C would be so individualistic that it would be incommunicable to others.

In section 2, we examined how transgressive actions which were based on an incommunicable ethical system could ever be evaluated by other members of society, and we came to the conclusion that if the actions of the individual caused significant change in the old ethical system of society by becoming a part of it (or by overthrowing it), his transformative actions could be evaluated positively by future generations only *retrospectively*; however, if his actions failed to cause any large-scale change, and if the old ethical system remained intact, his actions would be evaluated negatively. The interesting thing to point out is that in the former case, the individual would be judged based on the ethical system he himself created; if the individual managed to overthrow the old ethical system and replaced it with his own system, elements of his subjective ethics would become universal and would apply to him equally as to any other member of society.

Furthermore, in section 2, I suggested that the creation of ethical systems should be viewed as an aesthetic activity. Following Carlyle and Nietzsche, we hypothesised how ancient poets might have created new religions through their writings: In the process of writing, the poet subtly presents her own ethical system as if it were the ethics of the god (or the hero) she was writing about—cunningly, the poet acts as if she were merely reporting, not creating. Eventually, the poet transforms her literary character into a hero—which is to say, an object of worship—and in so doing, she retroactively bestows the power to act beyond Good and Evil on her newly born god. This process is the basis for creating the gods of all religions. The poet typically uses historical figures to shape her ethics, and since these figures cannot speak for themselves, it is the job of the poet to give her own voice to these voiceless figures.

The subjective nature of existential ethics—not to mention its aesthetic nature—leaves us with the problem of justifying any such ethical system. Philosophy is not a cumulative discipline like mathematics; in mathematics, new theories build upon previously proven theories, and the collection of theories form a coherent whole called “mathematics,” but in philosophy, new philosophical truths are not built upon old truths to form a coherent whole called “philosophy.” Every new philosophy is a transgression; every philosophical truth is a poetic truth that can live and breathe independently of other philosophical truths. In philosophy, each truth is a vantage point from which the rest of philosophy can be observed and judged. We need different vantage points, because unlike mathematics, existence is dynamic, and unique situations call for new moral laws. No ethico-philosophical system can ever give us a complete algorithm that could be applied to every situation; we need a new ethics which acknowledges that gaps are inherent to every system, and that it itself as a system also contains gaps. The philosophers’ tendency to find universal rules in ethics originates from what can be called the scientific bias. The success of science could be attributed to the ability of science to formulate general laws; nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that the same approach must be taken in every field. Kierkegaard was horrified by the excessive objective tendency of his contemporaries; in particular, he was horrified to see how ethical (and religious) doctrines were passed down from teacher to student as if there were scientific discoveries. For Kierkegaard, the objectivity of science cannot be applied to ethics. To scoff at the ethicists who neglect the subjective, he wrote,

To be an observer, that is the ethical! That a person ought to be an observer is the *ethical* answer.<sup>224</sup>

Regarding Kierkegaard's comments on the objective, Warnock writes,

The objective is the rule-governed. It is the *myth* of objective truth which Kierkegaard above all wanted to explode. Hence was derived his hostility to science; for his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is in fact not so much unscientific as anti-scientific.<sup>225</sup>

Warnock got half the above passage right: Kierkegaard wanted to destroy the illusions of science. Science is rule-governed, but ethics cannot be rule-governed, for, in philosophy, every general rule can be considered general only by virtue of neglecting the exceptions. But she got the second half wrong: Kierkegaard was not against science! As he put it in one of his letters, he just thought there is more to life than what science offers.<sup>226</sup> One conclusion that could be drawn from my thesis is that transgression shows us that ethics is unsusceptible of being a rule-governed discipline.

To address the worry that the wrong kind of person might decide to transgress the ethics of society, we stated that not every person is qualified to commit transgressive actions based on their personal ethics. Just as Nietzsche's fatalism suggests that being a higher man is an innate instinct, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* helps us understand that being a hero is not something that one decides. According to these existentialists, it would be preposterous to assume that everyone is qualified to transgress the ethics of their society. Only someone who is already a higher man can act upon the idea that the individual is higher than the universal. The idea that becoming a hero is something that one cannot choose is not something original in Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche: this type of fatalism can be seen in Nietzsche's favourite Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who claimed "Man's character is his fate."<sup>227</sup> If a person did not have any heroic trait, no amount of self-exploration and self-development could lead him to become a hero.

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<sup>224</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XII.1: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, by Johannes Climacus. Edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 133.

<sup>225</sup> Warnock, Mary. *Existentialist Ethics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>226</sup> See Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXV, Volume 25: Letters and Documents*. Translated by Henrik Rosenmeier. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 45.

<sup>227</sup> Heraclitus. *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: A New Arrangement and Translation of the Fragments with Literary and Philosophical Commentary*. Edited by Charles H. Kahn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 81.

In general, the present thesis has talked positively about knowledge, but now we have to ask whether knowledge can result in anything negative. Knowledge could lead to negative consequences if one became disillusioned with knowledge. After distinguishing between three types of disillusionment (aesthetic disillusionment, ethical disillusionment, and religious disillusionment), we focused on religious disillusionment as the highest type of disillusionment. An individual who is afflicted with religious disillusionment interweaves knowledge and action in his subjective ethics; subsequent to his disillusionment, the individual realises that knowledge for the sake of knowledge means nothing, and that knowledge should be gained for the purpose of action. Knowledge entails action, and action entails ethics; once we know, we are bound to act ethically.

In section 7 we argued that much like an artist who cannot offer any justification for her artistic activity, the individual cannot justify his ethical activity. For the expert ethicist, there is only action; if the expert offered any justification, his justification would be tantamount to rationalisation. If an ethicist founded his own system of ethics (consciously, or unconsciously), his actions would be governed by the rules of *that* system; therefore, his behaviour in the real world would tell us nothing about his devotion to *his personal ethics*; and so, since subjective ethics is qualitatively different from mainstream ethics, maybe the question is not whether ethicists behave better than non-ethicists. The better question to ask would be: Do ethicists act within the same moral boundary as everyone else?

The final chapter briefly dealt with the political implications of my thesis: I stated that the contents of the present work should not be applied in politics; however, in case the reader were overwhelmingly inclined to draw political conclusions, I would not object if the contents of my thesis were used in defence of epistocracy.

What is clear is that what has been said in the present work could not be applied in politics if we considered each participant as an individual with his own personal ethics—at best, this approach would lead to monarchism. However, it might be possible to look at all epistocrats as a collective body that would be endowed with the possibility to transgress. I leave the possibility of this proposition to be discussed by other philosophers. As for me, I have nothing further to add in this regard.

The last issue I would like to address appertains to equality. Throughout the thesis, I have emphasised that despite his superiority, the individual needs to remain subjected to the ethics of his society. Since the final chapter of my work is about politics, we can readdress this issue in political terms. In politics, one concern is that accepting individual inequality can lead to political inequality. As Popper remarks, it cannot be denied that human individuals are unequal—he even

suggests that this inequality is “of great importance and even in many respects highly desirable.”<sup>228</sup>  
Nonetheless, as he rightly points out,

all this simply has no bearing upon the question whether or not we should decide to treat men,  
especially in political issues, as equals, or as much like equals as is possible.<sup>229</sup>

Likewise, following Kierkegaard, I am claiming that although, in my view, the single individual  
is higher than the universal, he should remain subjected to the universal ethics of his society.

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<sup>228</sup> Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. With a new introduction by Alan Ryan and an essay by E. H. Gombrich. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 439.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

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