

Gentrain Unit 12 Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), February 14, 2014, Dr. Cindy Ausec

Discussed Works

- *Either/Or* (1843)
- *Fear and Trembling* (1843)
- *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

‘Father of existentialism’ (**Existentialism** the belief that philosophical thinking begins with the human subject—not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual)

Causes of the human psyche’s problems

- Boredom - People are bored when they are not being stimulated, either physically or mentally
- Anxiety - Conflicts between one’s ethical duty and one religious duty cause anxiety
- Despair - A result of the tension between the finite and the infinite: Humans are frightened of dying but also frightened of existing forever. Only way to escape despair is to have total faith in God

Stages of becoming a true self

- Proposed that an individual passes through three stages on the way to becoming a true self: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious
- Aesthetic - The aesthetic is the realm of sensory experience and pleasures
 - To live the aesthetic life to the fullest one must seek to maximize those pleasures
 - Aesthetic stage of existence is characterized by: egotism
 - Fragmentation of the subject of experience
 - Flight from boredom
 - Two types of Aesthete: the immediate aesthete and the reflexive aesthete
 - Importance of the aesthetic is acknowledged but it is presented as an immature stage
 - Eventually the pleasures of an aesthetic life wears thin and one must begin seeking the ethical pleasures instead
- Ethics
 - The ethical life offers pleasures the aesthetic life cannot – an aesthete can never do something solely for the good of someone else
 - Ethics is used to mean both
 - A limited existential sphere, or stage, which is superseded by the higher stage of religious life - represents the prevailing social norms
 - An aspect of life which is retained even within the religious life
- The aesthete needs to choose the ethical, which entails a commitment to communication and decision procedures
 - The necessity of choosing seriously and inwardly

- The belief that predications of the good or evil of our actions have a truth value
- Choosing what one is doing, rather than just responding to a situation
- Actions are to be in accordance with rules
- Rules are universally applicable to moral agents
- From Kierkegaard's religious perspective the conceptual distinction between good and evil is ultimately dependent not on social norms but on God
 - Gods command supersedes any human society's definition
- The ethical life diverts one from self-exploration – requires an individual to follow a set of socially accepted norms and regulations

Religion

- *Fear and Trembling*
 - Conceptual distinction between good and evil is dependent on God
 - Gods command supersedes any human society's definition of ethics
 - The unique relationship between God and an individual may override all commitments arising from general ethical laws
- Considers the religious life to be the highest plane of existence
- Believes that almost no one lives a truly religious life – concerned with how to be a 'Christian in Christendom'
- Faith is a matter of individual subjective passion – not regurgitation of church dogma
- The individual is responsible for his or her choices upon which hangs their eternal salvation or damnation
- *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*
 - Believes that Christian dogma embodies paradoxes which are offensive to reason
 - Central paradox is the assertion that the eternal, infinite, transcendent God became a human being Jesus
 - We cannot believe in God because we cannot prove he exists – therefore we must have faith in him
 - Objective reflection vs. Subjective reflections
 - Objective reflections makes the subject accidental
 - Subjective reflection turns inwardly to the subject, and desires in this intensification of inwardness to realize the truth
 - If an existing individual could really transcend themselves, the truth would be something final and complete
 - Doesn't believe that we can transcend ourselves
 - The "I am I" mathematical point does not exist
 - Essential knowledge relates to existence
 - Accidental knowledge does not relate to existence
 - Passion is the means by which the subject is rendered infinite