

On *Either/Or* part 2 and "The Present Age."

The Aesthetic Validity Of Marriage

Whether Judge William is responding to A, or if A's writings are a response to the judge's essays, it is clear that when he appears to be addressing someone, like in the following passage when he addresses "my friend," he is speaking to A.

My Friend....There are two things that I must regard as my particular task: to show the aesthetic meaning of marriage and to show how the aesthetic in it may be retained despite life's numerous hindrances....for I am still within my calling, I who, myself a married man, battle on behalf of marriage.... [My wife] is the only one I have ever loved, the first, and there is one thing for which I pray to God with my whole heart, that he will give me the strength never to love any other.... All feelings, even the highest religious ones, can take on a certain indolence if one is always alone with them. In her presence I am simultaneously priest and congregation (p. 8ff.).

As we saw in part 1, the category of the aesthetic is associated with recollection, and particularly the recollection of love conquests. This contrasts with the ethical stage of commitment to the beloved which Kierkegaard calls repetition. Here the judge seeks to cull aesthetic value from the ethical state of marriage. Note also that the judge's wife is his first love. This is a reference to "The First Love" in *Either/Or* book one, which, in fact, the judge later mentions.

Inasmuch as it now appeared as a defect in romantic love that it was not reflective, it might seem proper to have true marital love begin with a kind of doubt. This might seem all the more necessary because we come to it out of a world of reflection. That a marriage is artistically feasible after such doubt, I will by no means deny, but the question whether the nature of the marriage is not already altered thereby, since it envisages a separation between love and marriage. The question is whether it belongs essentially to annihilate the first love by doubting the possibility of realizing it, in order through this annihilation to make marital love possible and actual.... The question remains whether the immediate, the first love, by being caught up into a higher, concentric immediacy, would not be secure against this skepticism so that the married love would not need to plough under the first love's beautiful hopes, but the marital love would itself be the first love with the addition of qualifications that would not detract from it but would ennoble it. It is a difficult problem to pose, and yet it is of utmost importance, lest we have the cleavage in the ethical as in the intellectual between faith and knowledge.... It is now sufficiently clear that reflective love continually consumes itself and that it altogether arbitrarily takes one position and then another; it is clear that it points beyond itself to something higher, but the point is whether this something higher cannot promptly enter into combination with the first love. This something higher is the religious, in which the reflection of the understanding ends.... In the religious, love again finds the infinity that it sought in vain in reflective love (p. 29f.).

Judge William does not seek to blur the distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical. In fact, the judge is attempting to alert A to the *clear* distinction between the two, and to show that understanding love from the perspective of the ethical is a leap forward, a jump to the next sphere. B criticizes people's infatuation with love poetry and aesthetic love stories. These stories reflect on the period of romantic love before marriage, or on romantic love. When the lovers go riding off into the proverbial sunset to be married, thinks B, is when the story should begin.

D2.1. What is the relationship between love and the notion of the comic-tragic B alludes to in his comparison to the fall of Athens (81-82)

D2.2. How does the notion of beauty tie into the idea of aesthetic (romantic) love? Looking back, what is it that A finds beauty in?

D2.3. Why does B think that a marriage contract made in sphere of recollection is not a real marriage?

D2.4. According to B, what is the relation between romantic love and conjugal love? B, and even to some degree A, throw around the following terms: infinite/finite, temporal, eternal, absolute, individual, universal, how do these terms fit with, and provide grounds for the distinction between conjugal and romantic love?

The Balance Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality

The judge begins by accusing A of not being able to make the either/or decision, that he is non-committal. The judge thus reinforces that the ethical stage is one of commitment (repetition), while the aesthetic stage is dreamily connected to the past, or even to the moment.

Your choice is an aesthetic choice, but an aesthetic choice is no choice. On the whole, to choose is an intrinsic and stringent term for the ethical. Wherever in the stricter sense there is a question of an Either/Or, one can always be sure that the ethical has something to do with it. The only absolute Either/Or is the choice between good and evil, but this is also absolutely ethical. The aesthetic choice is either altogether immediate, and thus no choice, or it loses itself in a great multiplicity.... Therefore, the ethical choice is in a certain sense much easier, much simpler, but in another sense it is infinitely more difficult. The person who wants to decide his life task ethically does not ordinarily have such a wide range; the act of choosing, however, is much more meaningful to him (p. 166f.).

Kierkegaard contemplated adding the following postscript to the second edition of *Either/Or* (1849).

I hereby retract this book. It was a necessary deception in order, if possible, to deceive men into the religious, which has continually been my task all along. Maieutically it certainly has had its influence. Yet I do not need to retract it, for I have never claimed to be its author (Journals, X 1 A 192).

D2.5. Does B think that one needs to abandon all aspects of the aesthetic when one moves to the ethical?

D2.6. B is supposed to represent the ethical sphere of existence. How does this come out in his work? Give some examples from the text.

On “The Present Age” (Optional Reading)

Kierkegaard's thesis is that the present age is reflective, yet without passion. The present age "levels". By leveling, Kierkegaard means reduces to the lowest common denominator.

The present age is essentially a *sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived enthusiasm and prudentially relaxing in indolence. ...* whereas a passionate age *accelerates, raises up, and overthrows, elevates and debases*, a reflective apathetic age does the opposite, it *stifles and impedes, it levels....* In antiquity the individual in the crowd had no significance whatsoever; the man of excellence stood for them all. The trend today is in the direction of mathematical equality, so that in all classes about so and so many uniformly make one individual.... For leveling to take place, a phantom must first be raised, the spirit of leveling, a monstrous abstraction, an all-encompassing something that is nothing, a mirage—and this phantom is the *public....* The present age is essentially a sensible age, devoid of passion and therefore it *has nullified the principle of contradiction* (p. 68, 84f., 90, 97).

When individuals (each one individually) are essentially and passionately related to an idea and together are essentially related to the same idea, the relation is optimal and normative (p. 62).

D2.7: How does the notion of “leveling” relate to individuality? What else is Kierkegaard worried about with respect to leveling.

D2.8 Why do you suppose that Kierkegaard was willing to use his real name in conjunction with this piece, but not others? Is “The Present Age” an example of Kierkegaard communicating directly? If so, how does this show in comparison to the other things we read?