

RULES OF LIVING INVENTING OR DISCOVERING

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The rules of living refer to psychological, ethical, social, legal and political issues. A proper understanding of them require a universalist grasp of human community as something that is more than any particular community of human individuals. That is community rests on universal rules of what a community is, and what rules of living best promote a community of the best laws, political institutions, and so on. We can look at this both from the point of view of discovery and the point of view of creation. Going back to antique philosophy, we see that in Plato rules of living must refer to pure ideas (or forms) of virtue and the good. While in Aristotle, we see that rules of living are thought of in terms of a form of knowledge distinct from the knowledge of pure ideas. That is Aristotle refers rules to phronesis, a practical intellectual capacity for learning about the best actions through experience, the formation of habits on the basis of experience, and the capacity for reflection on the best actions, habits and rules. In Aristotle, we see a view of rules of living which refers more than Plato to creation rather than discovery. The distinction between Plato and Aristotle is not absolute through. Both are concerned with the best way of living as a practical issue, both are concerned with the idea of a human community as a form of life which requires cultivation like any aspect of any organism, in order to reach it highest level. Both are concerned with bringing chance under to control of reason in individual life and in social life. Both think of ethical life as resting on the triumph of reason over desire, through a will controlled by reason. Both are also concerned with the Greek world as the only fully human world, and with the assumption that different communities within that world will have a very separate conception of themselves, rooted in different laws and different histories. In Aristotle, these themes are partly expressed through the idea of friendship as both the highest part of individual life (but possibly after philosophy) and the highest part of the life of the state.

The emergence of Christian thought both continues antique ethical traditions and rejects it, as in Augustine where we see love become dominant. The role of love in Christian thought conflicts with the role of love as friendship in earlier antique thought. Love is universal and unconditional, in contrast with friendship, though since Augustine's Christian love is the basis of the City of God, the community of the next life in Augustine, the civic friendship of the pagans is part of the

formation of Christian love. The arguments around love, and around our life of struggle against sin, refer to the control of desire by intellect central to antique ethics, but also introduces ruptures. We cannot exercise love through our own will, and see it come from out nature, it must be given to us by God, as only God can lift us above our sinful nature. Our nature is seen as strongly conditioned by our tendency to give way to desire, in Augustine's view only Adam before the Fall and Christians who have received grace, can have the kind of self-limiting with regard to the desires that antique ethics places at its centre. Looking at Augustine in a secular perspective, he develops an account of the foundations of politics, law and ethics, in world of universalist 'love' that is the social and communicative bonds between humans, in a word where the most universalist aspects of 'humanity' are coming to the centre.

The Augustinian view is taken up within the context of modernity by Kierkegaard, not uniquely by Kierkegaard, but no has done more to both look at how the concepts of 'modernity' are rooted in Christian concepts, and by extension the concepts of any universalist transcendental religious position. Kierkegaard has a secular description of religious faith as a psychological moment. We can find in Kierkegaard a view of rules of living which rests on the contrast between the empirical and the absolute, the temporal and the eternal, universality and particularity, ancient and modern, and so on, which are not religious. The love which is the expression of Christian faith is itself explained as seeing ourselves in others, in all others, and can itself be followed without reference to religious positions, in nearly all respects.

One text by Kierkegaard particularly brings this out in a social context, in contrast with the more individual psychological development to be found most clearly in *Concept of Anxiety* and *Sickness unto Death*. That is in *Two Ages*, where Kierkegaard is concerned with the difference between the revolutionary and the reflective, through its appearance in a novel. This intersects with a concern regarding the difference between antiquity and modernity, to be found in his thoughts about ancient and modern drama, as we will see. This is part of Kierkegaard's general examination of subjectivity with regard to the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious; the particular, the universal and the ethical. In this context, the theme is developed in *Two Ages* of the need to combine prudence and infinite enthusiasm, going back to Socrates.

Kierkegaard demonstrates the nature of the modern public, along with its attitudes to ethics and politics with a deep unifying argument, in the terms of paradox. The problem Kierkegaard identifies at the basis of any understanding of the political world, or any understanding of the public domain, is one of equality, excellence and envy. In antiquity, the excellence of a relative few apparently undermining inevitably stimulates envy, dealt with both through comic drama and through ritualised exclusion, as in the Athenian institution of ostracism. That still allows the community to be shaped by the excellence of the few, by emphasising it in a negative way, so resisting the emptiness of formal equality of individuals gathered in an aggregate. In the modern world, Kierkegaard finds an alternation between the revolutionary reshaping of society through form, passion and immediacy; and a reflective emptying out of form, passion and immediacy so that we have only formalism, prudentialism, and reflection. A public has emerged which cannot accept excellence, and insists on the superiority of majority opinion to any form of excellence. Associations are experienced as negative limits, since the public is a pure aggregate which cannot form itself in associations of a positive kind. Kierkegaard's response includes a commitment to the role of literature in giving shape to the chaos of the times, and for maintaining enthusiasm behind the mask of prudence. Kierkegaard suggests that monarchy rejected in revolution, can only be accepted in the modern world through its reduction to mere symbol. He is seeking antique substance and excellence, along with the form and passion of revolution, in order to transform modern reflectiveness, through concrete institutions, and rules, which recognise individuality. The loss of the antique vision cannot be simply negative for Kierkegaard, since he sees it as connected with the Christian distinction between the religious and the worldly. What fits Kierkegaard's preconceptions is a politics, connected with an aesthetics, which draws us to the absolute through social forms that do not substitute for the absolute or obliterate the individual.

These are the ways we encounter subjectivity and the problems of communication. Kierkegaard puts the tension between collective attempts to change rules and passivity before existing rules at the centre of modernity. What he largely argues for is an inner subjective reaction, which overcomes that split in the absolute relation the self with itself.

It has political and social significance though because does shape his argument with reference to that context. We could say that Kierkegaard leads us to seek both rule following and engaged subjective transformation of rules, and to put that forward as the social and political question of the modern age.

There is a process of emergence in Kierkegaard's attitude to human nature. This can be clarified in relation to Religiousness A and Religiousness B in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Religiousness B religion requires Religiousness A, though it cannot be reduced to Religiousness A, and Religiousness A cannot be reduced to it. In Religiousness B, the human individual accepts its nullity before God. The Religiousness A already has the individual accept the superiority of God, without accepting the need for self-abnegation. The difference between the two kinds of religiousness is between pathos and dialectic, so between an emotional state and a form or reasoning, in both cases dealing with what is in psychology before we get onto discussing God. We can describe human nature without God, but not without reference to the need for an end (*telos*). This can be experienced in a relative way, as what gives ends to areas of human experience, but they only make complete sense with regard to the absolute end. This is explained with reference to history in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which itself leads into the long discussion of pathos and the dialectical.

A fundamental aspect of Kierkegaard's view of the human is the distinction recollection and repetition, and repetition has a historical aspect within it. Repetition appears as higher than recollection, something made very clear in the text *Repetition*, but recollection itself is a high stage of human existence, or at least it is higher than that of life without recollection. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* discusses the limits of recollection, and the nature of immanent repetition, while *Stages on Life's Way* contains a section concerned with the value of recollection, in "'In Vino Veritas" A Recollection Related by William Afham', which as the title suggests focuses on the value of recollection.

The distinctions between life without recollection, recollection, and repetition, appear through various texts of Kierkegaard. *Repetition* is a group of fragments about the failure of repetition. It is something that is explained through failure, and through fictional fragments about that failure. The fragmented form enacts that failure, but also the necessity of failure. These are ways of experiencing time. The life without recollection is the life which completely fails to rise above the moment to moment aspect of existence. The whole idea of a purely moment to moment existence lacks coherence, but the 'aesthetic' aspects of *Either/Or I*, in particular, give a sense of what it is like to lack proper coherence.

Kierkegaard refers in "'Guilty?'" / "'Not Guilty?'" to the nature of the ethical, with regard to Socrates towards the end. Socrates has a kind of earnestness appropriate to the complete relation between the individual and ethics in Socrates. That relation produces an earnestness which can exclude the comic but not in the mixture which comprises Socrates' highest form of earnestness. Kierkegaard, here, offers a contrast between that and the higher earnestness which does include the comic. That puts a significant light on the suggestion in *Either/Or I* that you always have the laughter on your side. This is just one of many moments in the 'aesthetic' writing of *Either/Or I* which is related to the religious. The aesthetic in Kierkegaard cannot be treated as something that is excluded by the religious, the aesthetic is just as necessary to the religious as ethics, and ethics cannot connect with religion with the aesthetic.

In 'Letter to the Reader', in *Stages on Life's Way*, Frater Taciturnus' describes three kinds of sophistry. The Sophisms refer to moving to religion to quickly from: the aesthetic, the ethical, the metaphysical. The discussion of sophistries is tied up with the discussion of paradoxes. The sophisms may be a product of failure to grasp the paradoxes clearly. The claims to access to religion from the individual are an attempt to ignore the problem. The Letter maybe offers a critique of sympathy based ethics following on from *Fear and Trembling*. There it is suggested that Richard III in Shakespeare play manipulate sympathy, and is part of his daemonic nature. The implication is that sympathy is where there is a lack of a relationship and therefore more of an interest in one's own reaction to the suffering of others.

Repetition is fundamental to Christianity and is also fundamental to modernity and to philosophical advance on the Ancient Greeks. Repetition is connected with the idea of not wishing to giving offence to someone we love, of not wishing to be right in relation to God, which can be found expressed in the 'Ultimatum' section of *Either/Or*, though not with reference to repetition. That theme underlies the story of Abraham and Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*, and the issue of how Abraham comes to be committed to sacrificing his son. The teleological suspension of the ethical, the expectation that Isaac will not have to be sacrificed in the end, itself creates a perspective for the not giving offence. Maybe we don't need to give offence, because we expect God's behaviour to match our ethical law later, if not now. 'Repetition' is explained in *Repetition* with regard to the story of Job, who expects a repetition of his love for God, even as God takes everything away from him. Job does not want to be in the right in relation to God, though God is behaving capriciously, cruelly and unjustly, even if it is through the agency of Satan.

Repetition is contrasted with fake repetition and with recollection. Fake repetition is also explored in *Repetition*, where it is the desire to repeat the external circumstances of life. This is immanent only, lacking the transcendence of repetition proper. This transcendental movement is one in which love is repeated. Kierkegaard refers to repetition as the basis for dogmatics and which goes beyond ethics or metaphysics. Repetition brings us to the singularity beyond universality. These claims mesh with *The Concept of Anxiety*, where Kierkegaard suggests that dogmatics provides a basis for a second ethics, superior to a first ethics based on metaphysics. Dogmatics refers to Christian belief. The link between dogmatics and repetition (along with anxiety) also introduces the idea that Christian belief is a form of repetition and that repetition is the essential form of Christian belief, and the substance is less essential.

The theme of repetition is itself connected with the paradoxes of understanding explored in *Philosophical Fragments*. Understanding seeks paradox as the passion of understanding. That is because understanding always seeks what goes beyond itself, and that brings us to a paradoxical situation, in which understanding tries to understand what is beyond understanding. Kierkegaard compares Christianity with Socrates: Socrates leads a life concerned with paradox and a midwifery of reason which means that he tries to introduce transcendent truths into the world of understanding. Socrates' paradoxes do not provide a challenge to reality though. They are largely an adaptation to reality, and to the society in which Socrates lives, even if Socrates did come into conflict with that society. Christianity presents us with the paradox of observing God in man which is just as much as paradox for the first hand witnesses as it is for us.

Repetition belongs to the modern world, as Kierkegaard suggests, since it goes back to the origins of Christianity, in contrast with antiquity. Kierkegaard means that modernity depends on that Christian moment. His writings on tragedy and on opera suggest that he believes that aesthetic production since the sixteenth century is premised on Christian separation between the ideal and the observable world. His account of tragedy also suggests, in a rather Hegelian way, the weakening of ethical substance in modern tragedy and the greater isolation of the individual. The significance of the relationship between sympathy and tragedy is confirmed in *Either/Or, Part One* ('The Tragic in Ancient Drama').

The decline of tragedy rests on the decline of the substantial categories of family and state, which are taken from Hegel, but clearly refer back to Aristotelian assumptions about the naturalness of political and social community. The replacement of the tragic hero by the knight of faith rests on the decay of the classical-Hegelian concepts. The criticism of Hegel in Kierkegaard is partly on the basis that Hegelian assumptions about substantial ethical categories do not rise above the Greek point of view, and so are not 'Christian'. From the philosophical point of view, 'Christianity' can be replaced by inwardly gasped truth, the uniquely individual point of view necessary before the law.

Christianity, as Hegel suggested, is associated with a Romantic separation between individuality and law. In Kierkegaard, that Christianity exists in the world of modernity, 'our age', in which remorse replaces pain and guilt replaces sin. The public drama of pain and guilt is replaced in the Christian world by inwardness and the subjective ('The Tragic in Ancient Drama'). The relation of the Don and his servant Leporello in the opera *Don Giovanni* emerges from the way that the Middle Ages places before its own consciousness an individual as representative of the idea, and then usually places another individual alongside him in relation to him. This relation is usually comical and is one in which one individual makes up for the other's extreme qualities. These couples include: the king and the fool, Faust and Wagner, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The Middle Ages made the conflict between the flesh and the spirit within Christianity into a subject of reflection. For that reason Medieval culture created personified forms of both forces. Kierkegaard thinks of the the duality of experience, the way that ideas split up into opposites, which again gives a sketch of the phenomenology of experience.

Don Juan is the demonic as the sensuous, where Kierkegaard must be referring to the demonic in a pre-Christian sense. Faust is the demonic as the spiritual, which is still excluded by Christianity. The general flow of Kierkegaard's philosophy is that Christianity heightens contradictions such as that between the demonic and spiritual, and also provides a way of unifying opposites. Christianity can bring the sensuous and the demonic idea into relation with the absolute in the spiritual.

Kierkegaard discusses the impact of Christianity on art in terms that carry on from Hegel's discussion of 'Romantic' art in the *Aesthetics*, though as we have seen Kierkegaard is not satisfied with everything in Hegel's position. By Romantic, Hegel meant art conditioned by a Christian opposition between the physical and eternal worlds. It is Christianity which establishes the idea of

'sensuality'. This is because when we posit something, what is excluded is indirectly posited. Christianity brings the sensuous into existence by denying it. Sensuality exists because it is denied in spirit. In Greek culture, there was something like sensuality in beautiful individuality. There was no attempt to suppress, deny, or eliminate it, as it was seen as a positive side of life. Erotic love was part of that undefined sensuality, and the sensuous does not exist as a principle in Greek culture. So Kierkegaard the Christian thinker identifies Christianity as the source of erotic obsession. "

Repetition is part of the loss of the Greek polis with its sense of individual embedment in strong communities of family, state, and pagan religion. It is significant that in the Preface to *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard refers to the crime of lack of civic duty in Athens. To some degree, Kierkegaard suggests that Christianity belongs to a world, or shapes a world, in which the ancient sense of belonging to the political community has disappeared, but that itself deepens the sense that our life is the experience of a contrast between antique particularity and modern universality.

We have seen that the discussion of 'repetition' brings historical difference into the deepest moments of human experience. This should be compared with the discussion above of the difference between antiquity and modernity, in Kierkegaard's account of tragedy in *Either/Or I*, 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama. A Venture in Fragmentary Endeavour'. Kierkegaard, or 'A' the author of papers collected in *Either/Or I*, suggest that 'our age' is like the late Ancient Greek age, because the political bond between states dissolved spiritually. His argument is that the power in religion that insisted upon the invisible has been weakened and destroyed now as then. We can see Kierkegaard's age as an age of European nations which have lost the bond of Medieval Christendom. However, 'our age' goes higher than the ancient Greek age, in that it is deeper in its despair. Everyone wants to rule but no one wants responsibility. This leaves individual isolation which is naturally comic. The comic consists in subjectivity wanting to assert itself as pure form. Every isolated person becomes comic by wanting to assert his accidental existence, against the necessity of the process of the time, which gives us a way of thinking about Socrates as the first modern individual. He is after all the individual who was executed for allegedly deviating from the gods of Athens.

Kierkegaard argues that the modern age transforms everything fateful into individuality and subjectivity. A pain indicates a reflection upon the suffering that sorrow does not know. Our age has no great sympathy for what is the truly Greek sorrow. The sorrow is more profound because the guilt has aesthetic ambiguity. In modern times the pain is greater. The greatest pain is repentance, but this is ethical not aesthetic reality. It is less substantial than sorrow because it is more detached from the substance of society. Modern tragedy produces anxiety out of the pain of the hero. Repentance is the greatest pain because it has the complete transparency of total guilt, and the transparency destroys aesthetic interest, since it is religious. There is also psychological interest, but psychological and aesthetic interest are different. The modern world has lost the substantial categories of family and state, so that the individual is self-creating. There is profound sorrow where there is an element of guilt which is not subjectively reflected, so that it is the responsibility of the hero.

As *Fear and Trembling* indicates, there is no possibility of appreciating the absolute within myself unless I have appreciated the possibility of breaking universal law, unless I have appreciated the way that individuality is never moral in a universal rules kind of way, because it is always a particular subjectivity. The particularity of subjectivity is defined with relation to the subjectivity of psychology, along with the combination of mind and body in humanity. Psychology has to go beyond itself in order to appreciate the nature of pure unmotivated choice.

It is only here that there can be a self which is a subject in a strong sense, and therefore a moral self in the strong sense. A moral self can never be the mere follower of rules, it must include the reflection of free will on itself in which the will can choose 'sin', a fear of choice and a fall back into a view of ourselves as lacking freedom from our desires. In Kierkegaard's view of rules of living, at least in their secular aspect, the distinction between discovery and creation becomes arbitrary and secondary, because the real challenge is to make ourselves responsible agents which can reflect on, and act on, the tensions between: our momentary self and our enduring self, antique forms of sociability as the integration of life with the life of the city and modern forms of isolated individuality I universal human community; passionate interest in politics and the sense that political forms are empty. It is in the act of struggle with these tensions, intellectually and in everyday life, that rules of living emerge as what are both created and discovered.