

K. E. LØGSTRUP

Beyond the Ethical Demand

Introduction by Kees van Kooten Niekerk

*University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana*

5. Translators' note: For "the ultimate authority," cf. Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, 171.

6. Translators' note: In the Danish original Løgstrup only refers to a page (corresponding to 55–56) where he acknowledges the possibility of external compliance with the social norms. He does not refer to the wider context that points to the limits of this possibility. To avoid misunderstandings, the reference has been extended to include the whole context.

T W O

The Sovereign Expressions of Life

In *Opgør med Kierkegaard* (Controverting Kierkegaard), Løgstrup's critical assessment of Kierkegaard's understanding of Christian belief provides the context for his exposition of the notion of the sovereign expressions of life. These are formulated and elucidated in Part Three, which carries the title "The movement of infinity." The allusion is to Kierkegaard's notion of "the infinite movement of resignation," which consists in the individual's renouncing everything to which he or she is attached in this world for the sake of loving God alone. For Kierkegaard, this movement preconditions another, the movement of faith, the making of which restores the person to life in the world.

Løgstrup sets the scene for his account of the sovereign expressions of life by comparing "Sartre's and Kierkegaard's respective characterizations of demonic self-enclosedness" (Part Three, chapter IV). For this, he introduces into the discussion Sartre's *Le diable et le bon dieu* (*The Devil and the Good Lord*), a play set in sixteenth-century Germany at the time of the peasant revolt. The main protagonist is Goetz, an army commander responsible for besieging the city of Worms, which was in revolt. Born out of wedlock, Sartre's Goetz is despised by the world. He sets about revenging himself on both world and God

by seeking to epitomize absolute evil. Heinrich, a priest from Worms, betrays his city to Goetz in order to save his fellow priests from execution by the people. However, when Heinrich declares that no human being is capable of achieving the good, Goetz takes this as a challenge and, steering now towards the opposite extreme, determines to become a saint.

On Løgstrup's reading of the play, Sartre's Goetz, in dedicating himself to evil, performs a movement of infinity, but of a demonic kind. For in it "he shrinks into himself in a wickedness that is infinite" (*Opgør med Kierkegaard* [Copenhagen, 1968], 88). According to Løgstrup, the very notion of such a movement draws its substance from Kierkegaard's idea that, ultimately, all human existence consists in a relationship to eternity. Consequently, eternity "marks, indeed, determines all of human existence, even when the individual is unaware of it or does not want to recognize it" (ibid., 91).

From the analysis of Sartre's Goetz it is but a short step to a comparison of that character with the eponymous figure in Goethe's play *Goetz von Berlichingen*. Despite sharing a common protagonist, Goethe's and Sartre's plays are, Løgstrup insists, completely different. Most notably, whereas Sartre's characters are driven by their ideas, the actions of Goethe's personae are the manifestations of character. In contrast to Goetz von Berlichingen, who is trusting and whose word is his bond, Adelbert von Weislingen, his adversary, is vain, faithless, and a philanderer. Weislingen betrays Goetz by succumbing to erotic allure and flattery. In the extract that follows, Løgstrup uses Goetz's conduct towards Weislingen to illustrate two sovereign expressions of life, trust and openness.

Having provided brief accounts of the two thematically linked plays and illustrated Kierkegaard's idea of the movement of infinity by reference to Sartre's Goetz in sections a–c of chapter IV, Løgstrup takes up the theme of the sovereign expressions of life in section d of that chapter. To facilitate comparison with the Danish text, the original chapter numbers and section lettering have been retained.

IVd. The sovereign expressions of life

Kierkegaard and Sartre neglect a large part of human life. What that part comprises can best be brought out by means of a distinction between two kinds of phenomenon, which, for brevity, I shall call "the obsessive" and

"the sovereign." Let me offer three examples of "obsessive" or "encircling" phenomena: offence, jealousy, and envy.

In taking offence, one makes oneself the victim of an affront, notwithstanding that one knows in one's heart of hearts that there is no reason to feel aggrieved. Even when it is not pure invention, the affront will have been occasioned by some trifle of which one makes too much. There is no proportionality between what occasioned the affront and one's reaction to it, and in that resides the ludicrousness and pettiness characteristic of offence. Often, offence's preoccupation with some imaginary or trivial affront serves to save one from having to face up to one's own fault, even when the latter is not so grave as to make acknowledgment of it a great matter. But perhaps the individual in question has too high an opinion of himself to be able to bear the thought of having acted wrongly, and so offence serves to deflect attention from his own misdemeanor, and this it achieves by making him the wronged party.

An individual is seized by jealousy when another displaces him or threatens to do so in respect of a relationship with a third party, which relationship the former believes to be rightfully his. He finds himself ousted from his place in the affections of the one he loves, be it an object of romantic love or a friend. He assumes that he is entitled to be the preferred choice, inasmuch as the relationship is deemed exclusive. So he is cheated of what is his by right. His bitterness is directed not so much at his rival—who is the object of envy, rather—as towards the one whose favor he covets and who does wrong in bestowing it upon the rival.

It is not, however, the case that the richer the relationship from which the jealousy-stricken individual is ousted, the greater his or her jealousy. The peculiar thing is that these two features need bear no relation to each other: on the contrary, the most glaring disparity may obtain. That a given relationship is unworthy of jealousy does not render the jealousy any less extreme, with all other and far more valuable relations being held of no account, indeed, being forfeited for the sake of this one paltry relationship. Life-enhancing opportunities are far from always the object of the struggle: as often as not, jealousy is a mania engendered by weakness.

In contradistinction to envy, where only two parties are involved, jealousy is a trilateral relationship. In the former case, the one begrudges the other his or her abilities, qualities, position, assets, lot in life, or whatever it may be. But envy does not merely spring from the other's having what one lacks oneself, for that circumstance might equally well elicit

admiration. What is required is that the things one has to do without are of such a nature that one feels unable to come to terms with the lack thereof. And one regards the other's possession of them as illicit. Properly considered, he is not worthy of it. The enviable person's advantages are undeserved and the envious individual feels deprived of his due.

What jealousy and envy have in common is that they both spring from powerlessness. For after all, the jealous individual can do nothing to become the favorite and win the good graces that he covets. Nor can the envious individual alter the distribution of advantages and disadvantages. In their powerlessness, both the jealous and the envious are thrust back upon themselves, immersing themselves in their own exclusion. They bury themselves in their rancor and take a certain relish in doing so. Jealousy and envy are encircling thoughts and emotions in which the individual imprisons himself.

All movements of thought and feeling that pursue their own obsessive course—such as, for instance, hatred and the desire for vengeance—are self-supporting, with most of the grievances that sustain them being ones they themselves engender. Excessive distrust leads to putting the worst construction on everything. Taking satisfaction in the conception of oneself as the wronged party, one has to invent wrongs with which to feed it. It is hardly accurate to call what the individual encloses himself with “emotions”: they are rather fixations, whose paltry emotionality consists in the self's forcing them to revolve around him. Attached to his leash and urged on by his whip, these thoughts go round and round in the self's own private ring.

The contraries of the obsessive movements of self-enclosedness are the sovereign expressions of life: trust and mercy, for example. Unlike pity, which cannot be called sovereign, if only for the reason that often there is nothing to be done—the sufferer's situation being irremediable—mercy, qua expression of the will to transform the situation of the person in need, is sovereign. While pity is concern, perhaps resigned concern, and its object the person who has been disadvantaged in life, mercy draws its impetus from the thought that the other has received his or her life in order to realize it and is now hampered in so doing.

The sovereign expression of life draws its content from the specific situation and the relation to the other, which is to say, from my conception of that situation and relation, of their actual circumstances and history.

The expression of life is not something to be applied. Principles, precepts, and maxims are applied. The expression of life cannot be applied, but can only be realized, as I realize myself in it. This is due to its sovereign character. It does not rigidify the situation but frees it up, transforms it, which is why the individual must involve himself in it throughout.

All of this stands in contrast to the obsessive and encircling movements of thought and feeling. Once a person is under their sway, agency is driven by contingencies. Action is reactive, not sovereign. The individual is simply a function of the situation, whereas in what concerns the sovereign expression of life the situation is a function of the agent: we turn the situation round through trust, through mercy, through the openness of speech.

But is not Sartre's Goetz as sovereign as anyone? No, only in an external, arbitrary, and ruthless sense, and his arbitrariness and ruthlessness show his sovereignty to be a sham, an epiphenomenon arising from the compulsive course his thoughts and feelings have traced in seeking revenge for his fundamental defect.

Yet another difference between the sovereign expressions of life and the obsessive movements of thought and feeling is this: should battle be joined between them, between, say, sincerity and betrayal, there is no foregone conclusion that the sovereign expression of life will prevail. Far from it. But sovereignty has such weight that fear informs the opponent's countermeasures. To hold his own, he must find ways of subduing his fear of sincerity. However robust his public standing, fear will not elude him. Irrespective of who triumphs or who suffers defeat, in one respect it is an unequal game. The one party trusts to the sovereign expression of life and is able to do so because of the latter's sovereignty. The other party must resort to stratagems, tricks, and threats, since in the end his fight is a defensive one, even when ending in triumph.

Kierkegaard never spared the sovereign expressions of life so much as a thought. And that is no accident. He is forced to leave them out of account in order to preserve the role of self-reflection. For to say that the expressions of life are sovereign is to say that in them, the human person is—*ipso facto*—himself. He no longer has to reflect upon becoming an independent person, nor has he to reflect upon the task of becoming his true self; he has only to realize himself in the sovereign expression of life, and it is that expression of life—rather than reflection—that takes care of the

person's selfhood. Kierkegaard is mistaken in thinking that only through religious reflection can the human person accomplish the task of becoming a self, as though we were not equipped with the sovereign expressions of life that accomplish it for us.

As we have seen, Kierkegaard operates with both a concrete and an abstract self. But Kierkegaard understands the human person's concretion only through what is individual: abilities, aptitudes, circumstances of life—in short, the individual in all that distinguishes him or her.

Kierkegaard leaves out the sovereign expressions of life. And since the self can only be won in relation to eternity, he conceives the person's true self as an abstract entity—as though it were not the case that a person becomes his true self, and concretely so, by realizing himself in the sovereign expressions of life and identifying himself with them.

But what has become, then, of the sovereign expressions of life? If they are absent in Kierkegaard, something must have taken their place! Their place must be occupied by something else! And so it is—by philistinism. The sovereign expressions of life are engulfed by conformity, are drowned in a life where the one individual imitates the other. For Kierkegaard, the universal disjunction is either to live in relation to the infinite idea or to live a life of conformism. The requirements enjoined upon us are either those of eternity or those of conformity. These alternatives recur in Heidegger with the difference there that eternity is replaced by death. But this disjunction is spurious. The sovereign expression of life also has a claim on us, and has it in virtue of being definitive; it is not first engendered by us through the deployment of vague mental powers. The expression of life, whether it takes the form of speech, action, or conduct, or all of these at once, is transmutable in a trice, quick as lightning: its fluidity, mutability, is eminent and yet it is definitive at every moment. It is no less definitive for being spontaneous: spontaneity does not figure in human existence as an indeterminate surge of life. In the most elemental manner conceivable, claims are imposed on human beings: they are implicit already in the definitiveness of the sovereign expression of life. A claim has entered into the spontaneous expression of life and has given it character, making it the definitive thing it is. And the claim is strong because it is so elemental. Let me offer an illustration. Let us imagine that we stand facing a destroyer who is trying to win us for his cause, but we know that he will

shun no means in doing so and that he is not to be trusted. Face to face with the destroyer, we discover how much effort it takes to remain on our guard. The thought that, by talking things out, we would be able to dissuade the destroyer from his destructive enterprise keeps presenting itself; there is no eradicating it once and for all. We must keep telling ourselves that it is an illusion to think that we could talk things out, and must continually bear in mind that anything we say will be used to put a third vulnerable party out of the way. But why is that thought so persistent? Why do we need to make such an effort to restrain ourselves, and why do we experience doing so as nothing less than contrary to nature? It is because we are opposing the requirement inherent in speech that speech be open. To speak is to speak openly. The requirement comes from speech, springs from speech itself, is identical with its definitive character *qua* spontaneous expression of life, and is imposed by speech at the very instant in which I have recourse to it and realize myself in it. For all their spontaneity, the expressions of life are always, and antecedently, definitive. To realize oneself in them is thus to conform to the requirement that they be realized on their own definitive terms. The expression of life is indeed mine, but not in the sense that I invest it with its definitive character. My speech is indeed mine, and it is indeed up to me whether I will be open in my speech, but it is not I who have brought it about that the definitive feature of speech is its openness. If I deceive another or raise my guard, I challenge the definitive feature of speech which attaches to it in advance of, and independently of, me.

In order further to clarify the alternative to Kierkegaard's view, let me elaborate the relationship between Goetz von Berlichingen and Weislingen as it is presented to us at the beginning of Goethe's drama. Knowing that Goetz can deliver on both counts, Weislingen seeks information and advice from Goetz von Berlichingen, confident that Goetz will assist him to the best of his ability.

Now in the event, Goetz von Berlichingen does not deceive Weislingen. This is not because Goetz von Berlichingen is unaware that whenever he finds it expedient, Weislingen will misuse whatever Goetz offers him by way of support in word or action. Goetz von Berlichingen may also retain

a vivid recollection of the many occasions on which Weislingen deceived him—and yet notwithstanding this, he does not take advantage of Weislingen's present difficulty to procure sweet revenge by giving Weislingen a taste of his own medicine. But why does Goetz von Berlichingen not do precisely that? We say that it is against his nature to do so, he cannot bring himself to act in that way, he is not sufficiently without substance to do so. But then how does a person acquire substance? He does so by identifying himself with the definitiveness inherent in the expressions of life through which he realizes his life. Through his identification with the definitiveness inherent in a complex of expressions of life, the individual becomes a concrete self. Goetz von Berlichingen may toy with the idea of exploiting the precarious situation in which Weislingen finds himself to lead him astray, bring about his downfall, and by so doing get him back for his past misdeeds—but never gets beyond merely toying with it.

What, then, have Kierkegaard and the existentialist to say about a character like Goethe's Goetz and his decisions? One or other of two things! Either: In the circles in which Goetz von Berlichingen grew up, it was good form to be honest and forthright. So he follows convention, conducts himself as the others do. He has yielded up his identity to the others, is not a self, not spirit.

Or else: In Weislingen's request for information and advice, Goetz von Berlichingen finds himself challenged, which is to say challenged by eternity, which is in turn to say removed from the great mass of people, from convention, set apart as a particular individual and rendered a self. Eternity challenges Goetz von Berlichingen in order to constitute him as an eternal self in obedience to the eternal demand. Eternity places Goetz von Berlichingen before the choice between obedience and disobedience and constitutes him as choice's abstract and empty subject.

Crucial to the understanding of both Kierkegaard and the existentialist is the fact that for them there is no concrete command which runs: Irrespective of your experience of the other as a traitor, you are to show him trust and offer him the assistance you think he needs (not necessarily the trust and the assistance he desires). What those words express is merely a convention, compliance with which does not render one a self. But what is there, then, for the existentialist theologian and philosopher? Only the empty demand to the effect that you live your life as demanded—and from

which it follows what, in the particular concrete situation, you are to do. If Goetz von Berlichingen yields to his thirst for revenge he fails to live as demanded, and ergo, he should not yield to it. As if he did not already know from his thirst for revenge that it is evil. If Goetz von Berlichingen shows Weislingen trust and offers him his help, then Goetz lives as demanded, and ergo, he ought to show trust and offer his help. As if he did not already know from the nature of trust and help that they are possibilities given him so that he may realize them.

But if it is the case that Goetz von Berlichingen, as portrayed by Goethe, has become so concrete and substantial through his identification with the definitive in the expressions of life of trust and speech that he neither dissembles nor wreaks revenge, what then? Well, then he is not sufficiently abstract and devoid of substance for it to be a question of choice and decision. But what explanation of his conduct are Kierkegaard and the existentialist able to offer? None other than that which says that he conducts himself in conformity with convention—he does as others do.

But it is not that simple. There is a difference between whether Goetz von Berlichingen is open and trusting because it is for that that his life has been given him, or whether he does so because that is what custom requires. If he acts out of conformity, he will scarcely be able to avoid acting ineptly. He will not find in what is merely custom and convention the impulses to take the specific circumstances informing his relationship to Weislingen into account. If he is simply anxious to satisfy the common standards of chivalry, to adhere to that code, he would walk, eyes closed, straight into Weislingen's trap. Good form prompts him merely to follow his nose. His conformity would turn his trust into credulity, his openness into indiscretion.

If, instead, he is anxious to help Weislingen and show him trust, he will conduct himself otherwise. He will neither trivialize nor disguise the fact, neither from Weislingen nor from himself, that it is a traitor he is dealing with. He will discover Weislingen's traps, thwart him whenever he is able, and take all precautionary measures. He will take up the challenge, acting prudently and shrewdly, narrowing the scope for Weislingen's treachery as far as he can. He will let Weislingen know that he is aware of what he can expect from him. Yet in all of this, he will still be giving him a chance—the chance which consists in his not washing his hands of him;

and in so doing Goetz von Berlichingen will realize trust and openness—on his own terms and not on Weislingen's treacherous terms. The opportunity he offers Weislingen is that of being won over to his side against his own treacherous self. No matter how convinced Goetz von Berlichingen may be that this opportunity, too, Weislingen will abuse—he is to have it all the same. But he cherishes no illusions: at the same time, he does everything in his power to neutralize Weislingen's schemes. Were Goetz von Berlichingen, by contrast, merely conformist, demonstratively credulous, and indiscreet, he would be inviting Weislingen to dupe him, thereby further entrenching him in his ways. Only by unsparingly letting Weislingen know what he thinks of him—without breaking with him—does he give him a chance. Conformity rigidifies the expressions of life—they become templates, poses, gestures. If, instead, they are realized, since it is for that end that each has received his life, it lies with the individual to let the definitive expression of life thrust its way through in even the most complicated and unpropitious of situations.

I mentioned earlier that, for Kierkegaard, only what is eternally certain is certain: unless God binds him, the individual is unbound, left to his own experimentation with himself. But no such phenomenon exists, I would contend. For experimentation with oneself to be possible, the sovereign expressions of life would have to be indifferent. But indifferent is what they are not; they are definitive. Alternatively, their definitiveness notwithstanding, the sovereign expressions of life would have to be neutralizable. But they are not neutralizable either, since it is in virtue of their definitiveness that they make claims on us. It might be said of an actor that in playing a part he or she experiments with another persona. But this renders the sovereign expressions of life neither indifferent nor neutral. On the contrary, the actor shows just how definitive and demanding the sovereign expressions of life are in the life of the character whom he plays, whether that character realizes himself through them or betrays and misuses them. If, by contrast, a person seeks to be an actor playing himself, he fancies that he can play around with and do as it suits him with the sovereign expressions of life, as though they were neither definitive nor demanding. But in that case, he is under a misapprehension: the sovereign expressions of life are the stronger, rendering the person who seeks to ex-

periment on himself a poseur or a liar. The person portrayed by Kierkegaard says: When I speak or act I experiment with my speech or agency, I am not inside my words or action, I am always outside of them. But that is impossible: one of two things results. Either he will speak and act as the poseur that he is. The non-natural has become his second nature, and he is in the grip of a fantasy if he believes that because he puts on an act, he stands outside his words and gestures—as though his affectation were mere play-acting, while he, intact, which is to say, unaffected, is able to remain outside it. He is steeped in his affectation, not merely in some external sense, but as the self that he is. Or, alternatively, the person patently does indeed stand outside his words or actions, like the liar, hypocrite, and cheat who pretends that his words or actions are true, sincere, and honest. The experimental stance vis-à-vis oneself is either a theory that the poseur uses to flatter himself—there is more to him than affectation—or else it is a theory that may be used to trivialize and render innocuous lying, hypocrisy, and deception. In the full knowledge that what he passes off as true, sincere, and honest is mendacious, hypocritical, and deceitful, he pretends to himself that in virtue of his possession of such knowledge he is not a liar, a hypocrite, and a fraud.

Neglect of the sovereign and definitive expressions of life leads to two things: notions of choice, determination, and freedom become abstractions, and the choice between existing as an individual in relation to the infinite idea or living a life of conformity takes center stage, and we are left with existentialism's vacuous talk of the vacuous self.

Kierkegaard's capital error, which the existentialists, both philosophical and theological, have perpetuated, is that he, and they with him, make the individual's choice, decision, and freedom alone that which renders life definitive—as though our existence were not already and antecedently something definitive in each of its, as it were, anonymous expressions of life. That which is alone subject to the individual's choice, determination, and freedom is whether to fulfill the definitiveness which, already and antecedently, attaches to the sovereign expression of life through which the individual realizes himself—or to be guilty of its dereliction.

Let me in conclusion illustrate the problem by reference to another of Sartre's plays, by turning to Johanna and Werner's relationship in *Les séquestrés d'Altona* (*The Condemned of Altona*). Werner is a Hamburg lawyer living happily married to Johanna, when his father, who has been told

by doctors that he has not long to live, requires of Werner that he replace him in his post as head of Germany's largest shipyard and fleet, a mighty concentration of financial power. The older brother Franz, for whom this position was intended, has, for reasons I shall not enter into but which in fact furnish the play with its central theme, disqualified himself for the post. Johanna, knowing that it will be a disaster for Werner and herself if he yields to his father's demand, does what she can to prevent it, but in vain. As soon as he is within the familial environment, everything Werner says or does is a reflection of the jealousy engendered in childhood by his father's slighting of him in favor of Franz. In one scene, Werner appears to be standing out against his father, but Johanna intervenes and interrupts him: "You're listening to yourself speak. Once you get mired in self-pity we are lost . . . Just say no, without shouting and without laughing." Johanna senses that neither sentiment nor self-pity is able to invest a decision with substance. But what, then, is required? My answer is that what is required is that the person identifies himself with a sovereign and definitive expression of life. What this consists of, in Werner's case, is simple: it is his love for Johanna. Were Werner capable of identifying with that, he would be capable of giving substance to a decision that ran counter to his father's wishes. But more powerful than Werner's love for Johanna and hers for him is his jealousy, and so he gives in to it.

But what is Kierkegaard's position on this? He maintains that eternity alone is able to invest a decision with permanence; only eternity can put an end to the shrinking into oneself. The possibility of a cure consists in the help that resides in the absurdity that for God all things are possible. But the difficulty of accepting such assistance is the greatest thinkable, Kierkegaard adds, and is so because the person in need is allowed no say in how he is to be helped; he must leave it all to God, and unconditionally to boot. To be helped he must surrender his self and become as nothing in the hand of the succorer. And that is the last thing he wants. There is nothing the self recoils from more; rather be the self that one is and suffer the torments of the damned than seek help.

But this means that the difficulty of accepting religious help is one Kierkegaard has rendered so acute that the needy individual is driven to cling to his distress. The religious remedy as a possible cure is rendered so impossible that it can only serve as an incentive to ever more intensified self-enclosedness. This is the result of making the relation to God abstract,

of abstracting from all the opportunities for cure that life presents in the way of opportunities—in the individual's relation to his work, to other people, to the world around him—for spontaneous flourishing. These lie outside Kierkegaard's range of vision because our ordinary, temporal, earthly life has nothing to do with eternity. It is a life that exists merely to be sacrificed, not to be lived.

V. Absolute good

I return to *Le diable et le bon dieu* to proceed with its second half. If disasters had struck the powerless and poor when Goetz waged war on them, they rain down on them with a vengeance now that he has started to love them. The catalogue of sufferings to which his love subjects them is nothing if not comprehensive. His estates and his castle, all that he owns, he gives to the poor. He aims to turn his estates into the City of the Sun where, before the year is out, happiness, love, and virtue will reign. Nasty [the leader of the poor] warns Goetz that the German soil will bleed if he gives all his property away. His misguided magnanimity will merely lead to slaughter. This is incomprehensible to Goetz; good cannot beget evil. But it does. What the rich young man was exhorted to do by Jesus, but which he left undone, Goetz would appear to do, and the result is disaster upon disaster. Everywhere, and without any preparation, the peasants rise up tumultuously against the barons and are crushed. The barons invade what were formerly Goetz's estates and murder the peasants.

A year and a day from Goetz's decision to forsake criminality and give saintliness a try, Heinrich appears, attended by an invisible devil, to execute a reckoning. But it is too easy an undertaking since, before they have even begun, Goetz is already halfway towards siding with Heinrich. This disconcerts Heinrich, who had envisaged it otherwise: Goetz hung with roses that he would have torn off him, and Goetz with a glint of triumph in his eyes that he, Heinrich, would have extinguished. He was to have brought Goetz to his knees—it was for that he had prepared himself. But the pride and audacity are gone—Goetz is half dead, and the pleasure of seeing him exposed and destroyed is limited. Goetz is only too aware that his good deeds were translated into corpses the moment the peasants came into contact with them. In a single day his virtue brought twenty-five

thousand casualties on his head, more than in all his thirty-five years of evildoing. His attitude of mind, his intentions—not even they are things he is prepared to defend. He gives up. When he was evil, the good seemed close at hand, but when he reached out after it, it evaporated. The good is a mirage; the good is impossible.

The warped nature of Goetz's mode of proceeding does not lie in the fact that a deed envisaged as good should produce adverse consequences, for that is simply the risk one takes and it cannot be eliminated. The warpedness lies, rather, in the fact that Goetz refuses to take those conditions into account, to factor them into his calculations so as to be able to identify the acts that carry the least risk of adverse consequences, even though risk cannot be eliminated. To achieve that, he would have to make the peasants' lot a starting premise. But he does not—out of sheer religiosity. He does not relinquish his possessions for the sake of the peasants but because he wants to do, not just good, but absolute good. It is not the poverty and oppressed condition of the peasants that moves him and leads to his resigning his estates. It is not the peasants' lot and his desire to improve it that prompt his action; nor are his donations the means at his disposal by which he might change their conditions. It is the other way round. Having opted for absolute good, he asks himself, as it were, what an act in which absolute good is manifest would look like. He is not led by the needs of the people to whom he is already bound; he gives no thought to their situation even though they are those towards whom his action is directed. Unconstrained by other people, he allows a religious consideration alone—not policy—to determine the form his act shall take. Goetz's choice both of the good and of the act through which its realization is sought is a choice that floats free of situation and world. The question is solely: what action would bear the hallmark of absolute good? Answer: that action through which a person divests himself of all that he owns. Ergo, he performs it, and through the power of the good the peasants must willy-nilly be its recipients. It is not for the peasants' sake that Goetz gives away his estates but because doing so constitutes an action the goodness of which is absolute. Goetz's action is a matter concerning himself and the absolute, not himself and the peasants. When, at the end, the reckoning is made, there is mutual exasperation on the parts of both Goetz and Heinrich;

mutual accusations follow thick and fast, the one self-reproach outbidding the other. Goetz reproaches himself for being munificent simply in order to raise his inheritance and smash it to the ground, reducing it to shards. The poor were the victims, since he made it look as though he was bestowing his possessions upon them, while in fact he despised them. He used their gratitude to subjugate them. Earlier, he had ravished souls through torture, now he was doing so by means of the good. This is exaggeration, and yet is not exaggeration. Goetz has in fact pressed his good deeds upon the poor—deeds that sprang not from a feeling for their adversity but from his obsession with absolute good, with the fate of those who suffer as a result of his benefaction set at naught. In the same conversation he also admits to simply mimicking virtue. And there is something in that. When an agent chooses to perform an action not because he is driven by a strong sense of the other's need, but because the action bears the hallmark of absoluteness, as was the case with Goetz's renunciation of his estates, the act is simply a mimicry of the good.

Of the sacrifice to which he is converted in the latter half of the play, Goetz could say what he had previously said of his wickedness: There is only God and himself; everything else and everyone else are phantoms. To perpetrate an enormity he has no need of others, except for the sole purpose of being his victims. Nor, to perpetrate a monstrous good, to sacrifice himself, does he need others—at least not for any purpose beyond offering him resistance and tempting him.

Goetz is unaware that the performance of a good deed is reserved to those whose attitude of mind lies hidden beneath policy deliberations about what is best for a fellow human being—the term “policy” being used in the broadest sense. The agent's attitude of mind is a matter for the individual and God, hidden from others, something that Kierkegaard knew and yet was able to forget. If the individual is set upon accomplishing the absolute and manifest good, the good becomes the mirror image of evil. This is what Sartre seeks to convey through the narrative of his play. As far as that goes, he is right. Just as the madness in Goetz's wickedness lay in the fact that, because of it, God was supposed to fear for himself, the madness in Goetz's goodness is that God has to be immediately present to it.

It comes so easily to the theologian to speak of the infiniteness, unconditionality, and radicalness of the [ethical] demand and of the good. But it is not as simple as that. There is an absolute goodness not vouchsafed human beings—should they seek to attain it, its consequences will

be indistinguishable from those of wickedness. Goetz takes his wickedness to extremes, making it monstrous so that it can draw infinity from God's infinity. Infinity is what Goetz has to have in his life if he is to have any sense of being alive; without it he is nothing. But it is the same with goodness. That too exists solely to save him from being reduced to nothing. Lacking everything, he needs infinity to fill out existence, nothing less will do; and it can only be attained through a feat, an achievement which bears the hallmark of infinity, and sacrifice alone does that. If a person is to have the imprint of eternity stamped upon his life, because without eternity his life is a desolation, he must devise an action that he feels in himself represents eternity.

It is not only through Goetz but also through Hilda, Goetz's sweetheart in the second half of the play, that Sartre wants to say that Christianity makes the good absolute and that the absolute turns the good into a corruptive power both for the agent who practices it and for those who suffer as a result of the good actions. Such actions confer benefits and happiness upon our neighbor only if they proceed on terms that are a-religious, purely human. Hilda, who has abandoned faith in God, is capable of doing good. With bitterness, Goetz says to himself that no matter whether he does good or evil, he makes himself hated. But Hilda is loved. Why? She does not act differently from Goetz, she reserves nothing for herself, she gives everything away, she helps everyone. Goetz thinks there must be more to this than meets the eye, but fails to comprehend that the crucial difference resides in the fact that Hilda acts for the sake of the poor, while he acts for the sake of an idea.

Today we often hear the theological claim, for which Kierkegaard can take the credit, to the effect that the radical ethical demand is without content. To invest it with content to the effect that we must have a care about the life of the neighbor is to humanize the demand. To this it must be replied that when devoid of content, the demand is obeyed for its own sake and the resultant action is cold, religious self-affirmation, even if obedience to it consists in renunciation and sacrifice.

The idea of absolute good can take one of two forms: it can either be realized in sociopolitical institutions or it involves setting at naught life as lived in human society. If Goetz's fanaticism, his vision of institutionaliz-

ing the Kingdom of God in what he refers to as the City of the Sun, fails to connect with any present-day theological thinking, the idea of doing absolute good through setting at naught what belongs to this world is, by contrast, in the ascendancy. On Kierkegaard's view, eternity must descend and infinity be captured in one single determinate act, namely, by helping the neighbor to love God. All other deeds bear no relation to the ethico-religious sphere. Never has the ethical so closed in on itself and closed itself off from the world as in Kierkegaard. What Hermann Broch calls the ethical qua closed system finds its extreme religious expression in Kierkegaard.

VI. Conformity and the collision between faith in God and the neighbor

The individual wants to be himself without God and the neighbor. He makes the fulfillment of his own desires and aspirations his idol, with others, time after time, suffering the consequences of it. His own godlessness brings him into conflict with his neighbor.

Kierkegaard gives due consideration to idolatry in relation to the temporal, which he refers to as relating in absolute terms to the relative. But that so doing is often to the detriment of the neighbor is not something about which he spares much thought. He is more concerned with the fact that, in their idolatrous relation to the temporal, people reach agreement on terms dictated by conformity. People relate in absolute terms to the relative in the same ways, they are of like mind regarding them, and each lets his life be determined by the other. In a word, being lost in wickedness towards the neighbor hardly figures at all for Kierkegaard as compared to losing oneself in conformity.

Kierkegaard has, therefore, no sense of faith in God being able to restore a person's life in such a way that his expressions of life gladden and benefit the other. For Kierkegaard, faith in God does not consist in the individual's realizing his life with the other in the expressions of life given him by God to that end, and which serve the good of the other.

This all springs from the fact that while he gives very little thought to the conflict with the neighbor into which the individual's godlessness plunges him, Kierkegaard gives copious thought to the conflict with the

neighbor into which his faith in God plunges him. Worse than the conflict between godlessness and the neighbor is the conflict between faith in God and the neighbor. Any non-conflictual relation with the neighbor is, for Kierkegaard, conformity, and in the final analysis only one thing accomplishes a break-out from conformity, and that is the unremitting and irremediable clash with the loved one to which faith in God gives rise.

Admittedly, Kierkegaard distances himself from the idea that the work of faith should be one of loveless obedience. Without a lively love of the neighbor, the work is not one of faith. This is insisted upon again and again as early as in *Fear and Trembling*, only with the amplification that love, to be Christian, must consist in a grieving over the impossibility of realizing the fellowship with the neighbor within which it is the nature of love to reside. Christian love is a love that is out of its true element; it is sustained and vivified by the anguish associated with its inability to achieve its realization. Christian love is love bereft of fellowship.

According to Kierkegaard, God has no part in human mercy, goodness, solidarity. God does not work through what humanity has been given but only through that which, despite what they have been given, God is able to compel in humans through his demand. In the human world, God is only present to the deed which—because it runs counter to all human possibilities—bleeds from the stigmata of infinity.

VII. The sovereign expressions of life and the question of whether the will is free or constrained

Like Luther, Kierkegaard rejects the notion of a free will. But for Kierkegaard, a further issue imposes itself, namely, the battle against determinism. He has to engage in combat on two fronts, contending not only against the conception of a disengaged free will but also against determinism. And to wage war on two fronts he needs the distinction, of which Luther was innocent, between the freedom of the will and the freedom of existence. In introducing his conception of the latter, Kierkegaard sets himself in opposition both to the notion of a free will and to determinism. While Luther takes exception to the notion of a free will on the basis of his conception of the will, Kierkegaard does so on the basis of his conception

of freedom. By turning inwards, *The Concept of Anxiety* tells us, the individual discovers freedom: not the abstract volitional freedom to choose this or that, but the freedom that the individual is in himself, and which he uses to render himself unfree, and to live in guilt. What Kierkegaard—in his opposition to determinism—is anxious to show is that the individual has himself to blame for his unfree life, since his existence is freedom.

If we ask wherein the freedom of existence resides for Kierkegaard, the answer is, by living as directed by eternity and the beyond. But even though, on Kierkegaard's conception of it, so living is a sheer positive, nothing positive can be said about it since the individual has severed himself from eternity and lives with that loss in unfreedom and guilt. What is of moment for human beings, which is to say of infinite moment, is the absolute alone—or the idea, as Kierkegaard also calls it—and the absolute or the idea lies beyond human existence. What has empirical existence is and remains indifferent. Is this also true of trust, mercy, and sincerity, understood in human terms? Indeed so, since, strictly speaking, the expressions of life have no claim on us, seeing that their realization redounds to our benefit.

Unlike Kierkegaard, I hold that there is much to be said, both of a positive and of an empirical nature, about the freedom of existence (to use Kierkegaard's expression)—for it consists in the sovereign expressions of life. The principal thrust behind Kierkegaard's concern with the absolute, with the idea, is that the absolute makes a claim on us that is imperative and not up for negotiation. But this is precisely the claim made by the sovereign expressions of life, in virtue of the fact that they are definitive and resist qualification. Taking up Kierkegaard's own concepts to use them against him: What he is aiming at in his talk of the absolute, the idea, is to be sought in empirical reality, in the sovereign expressions of life.

But my differences with Kierkegaard do not end there. Human life is not sheer unfreedom since the sovereign expressions of life are indeed realized, they assert themselves. Were that not so, we would not come off as well as we do in our common life. That we do so can only be because we live off something that we cannot credit to ourselves. The sovereign expressions of life are not the achievement of the will. On the contrary, when

the expression of life overwhelms self-enclosedness, it is because the expression of life, and not the will, is sovereign.

Just as Kierkegaard maintained that if existence were not freedom, human beings would not be guilty, I for my part would maintain that were it not for the presence of the sovereign expressions of life, no guilt would attach to our self-enclosedness. But there my agreement with Kierkegaard ends. In contrast to him, I contend that guilt springs from the fact that wickedness feeds off goodness. If goodness did not exist for wickedness to be parasitic upon, there would be no such thing as guilt. Precisely because we have known the positive experience of the freedom of existence in the realized sovereign expressions of life, and yet flout that experience and close in on ourselves, the unfreedom of self-enclosedness is guilt and wickedness. Kierkegaard casts a blight upon human existence, rendering everything in it inconsequential, with the result that guilt becomes so comprehensive as to lack every concretion, and ends as the individual's incapacity to sustain a sense of guilt. I shall return to this.

Johannes Møllehave has leveled against me an objection to the effect that if the sovereign expressions of life do indeed exist, their realization is a matter for the individual's free will, confounding his self-enclosedness. He invokes Kierkegaard in his support, but to no avail. If I stand convicted by Møllehave's objection, so does Kierkegaard. If Møllehave says to me: If the human person is endowed with sovereign expressions of life, his will must be free—he must likewise say to Kierkegaard: If the human person's existence is freedom, his will must be free. But even without his appeal to Kierkegaard, Møllehave's objection fails. The sovereign expression of life precedes the will; its realization takes the will by surprise. It is one of those offerings in life which, to our good fortune, preempt us, and in whose absence we should be unable to carry on from one day to the next. The fact that we do so, our wickedness notwithstanding, is something Møllehave is unable to explain once he has discounted the sovereign expressions of life.

Either the will, allowing itself to be overmastered, surrenders to the expression of life, or it relies on its own efforts, and through morality's ersatz action we do what we surmise the sovereign expression of life would

have done had it preempted our volition. Or else we corrupt the sovereign expression of life by, for instance, crediting ourselves with what the sovereign expression of life achieves and thus, flattering our will, we deprive the former of its sovereignty. This, then, is another way in which self-enclosedness, now in the guise of self-righteousness, is parasitic upon the sovereign expression of life.¹ The sovereign expression of life is thus not concealed by selfishness or stifled by self-enclosedness. The power so to conceal does not lie within our volition. Admittedly, I once thought that this power should be conceded to the latter when in *The Ethical Demand* (in the section "The wickedness of human beings and the goodness of life") I claimed that natural love and trust are "constructs" with which we operate "speculatively." Ole Jensen has criticized this claim, and I fully endorse his criticism, which produced clarity. For it will not do, Ole Jensen points out, simply to draw a parallel between the ethical demand and the sovereign expression of life.² To be sure, it is the sovereign expressions of life and their works that are demanded, but the difference between the ethical demand and the sovereign expression of life "lies precisely in the realization." The demand is unfulfillable, the sovereign expression of life is not produced by the will's exerting itself to obey the demand. The sovereign expression of life is indeed realized, but spontaneously, without being demanded. The demand makes itself felt when the sovereign expression of life fails, but without engendering the latter; the demand demands that it be itself superfluous. The demand is the correlate of sin; the sovereign expression of life is that of freedom.

There is a further point to which Ole Jensen draws attention. If we consider life to be utter equivocality, and if we regard that equivocality as the result of human iniquity, we attribute to ourselves and to our iniquity a truly stupendous power—which we do not have. To be sure, there are no limits to our iniquity, but there are limits to the devastation it can effect; which limits are evidenced by our inability to prevent the sovereign expressions of life from forcing their way through and realizing themselves. This does not mean that the grace of existence in the expressions of life renders the grace of the gospel superfluous. On the contrary, precisely because, through their realization, we are acquainted with the sovereign expressions of life and have experienced their freedom, we are without excuse when we persist in living closed in on ourselves and doing as we please in our unfreedom.

VIII. Engaging with the situation through the sovereign expressions of life

There is another peculiarity to note that attaches to the sovereign expressions of life: the claim they have on you is non-negotiable. If you are not fully at one with them, you are the reverse. If you compromise sincerity the very least, you fall into insincerity. If your fidelity is in the least qualified, you fall into infidelity. In a trice, light becomes dark. Corresponding to the radicalness of the ethical demand is the fact that the modes of existence through which alone it can be obeyed are intrinsically whole. Another thing is that what passes for sincerity, mercy, and fidelity is often only insincerity, unmercifulness, and infidelity, constrained by the pressure of external prescriptions to cloak itself in the performance of actions that are normally expressive of sincerity, mercy, and fidelity. But when what is demanded is not external, prescribed actions but—upping the ante—the whole person, it must be that the demand is obeyed with what life is in itself. Obedience can never be an integral whole unless realized through the life-possibilities already vouchsafed the individual; they are the correlates of the demand. The naked will to obedience will never render obedience an integral whole. To be obedient, the individual has to be more than obedient: he has to be sincere, merciful, faithful. The demand does not bring about the possible modes of existence through which it is to be obeyed. They are there already.

Setting aside those cases where existence presents perplexities that the individual is reluctant to recognize because of an ingrained character flaw, our task is not, as an abstract and negative self, to appropriate existence and the conditions it presents, but to engage with the interpersonal situation through the sovereign expressions of life.³ Kierkegaard is mistaken in thinking that the escape from desire and pleasure's immediate attachment to the world calls for an effort of reflection in which the individual recalls to mind the infinite and eternal in himself, and becomes an abstract and negative self. The immediacy with which the individual is bound to the world through desire and pleasure is matched by the immediacy with which he is bound to the world through such sovereign expres-

sions of life as trust, mercy, and the openness of speech. And since the sovereign expressions of life make claims on the individual—claims that are non-negotiable because the expressions of life are definitive and not subject to qualification—the individual is already, through his immediate embeddedness in the world, subject to a radical demand. The tussle between desire and trust, between pleasure and mercy, is played out in that immediacy. It is there that it begins.

Kierkegaard is mistaken in thinking that the infinite movement of resignation is needed for the individual to be able to apprehend himself in his eternal truth. He is mistaken in thinking that the ethical task consists in concerning oneself at every moment of one's earthly life with the winning of one's identity and becoming a self by using every instant of time to relate oneself to eternity. That concern is one of which the human person is free. Winning one's identity and becoming a self is something the individual should let happen unawares, by leaving it to the sovereign expressions of life. Eternity has incarnated the demand it imposes upon us in the interpersonal situation and in the sovereign expressions of life that correspond to it. Eternity incarnates itself not, in the first instance, in Jesus of Nazareth, but already in creation and the universality of the demand. Christianity itself contends that the idea of creation is not a peculiarly Christian notion, and it is a Christian contention that the radical demand is not a peculiarly Christian demand. Kierkegaard's thought was that eternity creates the self in the human being for eternity by situating it in the movements of infinity—through which, driven by infinite despair, the self severs itself from eternity. In this, Kierkegaard was correct, but what he ignored was the fact that eternity creates the self not only for eternity but for the neighbor too, by investing it with the sovereign expressions of life as possibilities that correspond to the claims in which eternity incarnates itself in the interpersonal situation.

If the interpersonal situation is engaged with, this engagement is mediated through the sovereign expression of life. Only when it is the conditions of existence that have to be appropriated can the subject who has to appropriate them with some justice be called an abstract and negative self, since then the individual, resisting the appropriation of his concretion, has, in thought, separated himself from it. The resisting subject is conceived as an abstract and negative self.

Does the subject engaging with the interpersonal situation never think of itself as an abstract and negative self? Yes indeed, if one shrinks

from the situation and reflection sets in and one is faced with a choice. When the situation becomes a moral one, the self thinks abstractly and negatively about itself, since the situation becomes a moral one when the sovereign expressions of life fail to materialize. This is something to which I shall return.

A hypothetical objection needs to be considered. Earlier [in section V] I said that it is madness to distill eternity into a definitive act. Now I say that eternity incarnates itself in the claim that proceeds from the existence of the other and in the corresponding definitive expressions of life. Does that not amount to a flagrant contradiction? No. Generally speaking, what applies to the sovereign expression of life does not apply to the deed. In a crucial respect, the definitiveness attaching to the expression of life is the antithesis of the definitiveness attaching to the act. The expression of life does not permit deeds to be pointed out to it that it must perform whatever the circumstances. On the contrary, it sees and listens its way towards what, in the given circumstances, can be done to turn the situation round. The expression of life is what kindles the deliberations of the imagination and the intellect about what to say and do. To prescribe a particular action is to get things the wrong way round and by so doing kill off the expression of life. It is sovereign, it admits of no determination. Definitive although it may be, its realization consists least of all in some conventionally marked-out course.

Since the sovereign expression of life aims at changing the given situation and delivering the neighbor from external need or, as the case may be, the obsessive course of emotionally laden thought, eternity can incarnate itself in it. But to nail eternity to a definitive deed is, by contrast, a religious perversion of temporality: even were the deed the godliest of all, so doing would only make matters worse.

IX. The disappearance of the ethics of custom, conformism, and the relational duplication of the spirit

When the accepted morality⁴ as laid down in custom and convention loses its persuasive power, reflection sets in. The moral credentials of morality

are questioned, it is subjected to criticism from the perspective of a new and different understanding of what is good or bad—one at variance with that which comes to expression in time-honored morality. It may be that the old morality has become so much a matter of externals, so etiolated and fusty, that it calls out for criticism even in the absence of anything to take its place. However that may be, time was when the collective, society and religion, vouched for morality; now it is up to the individual.

But *pari passu*, something else happens too. There is more to the upheaval that such a fresh departure brings. When the established morality begins to crumble, the change does not merely consist in the replacement of the old duties by a new set of rules that assume their authority. The displacement goes deeper than that. The moral stance does not simply assume a new and different content but its very structure changes. When public morality loses its purchase, it results not only in the individual finding himself freely situated vis-à-vis a moral content bequeathed by tradition, but in his finding himself freely situated vis-à-vis morality as such. It is not simply a matter of weighing up the duties that had hitherto held sway, but concerns duty itself. It is the very question of moral commitment as an individual that is in the balance, and this manifests itself in the shift from talking about duties in the plural to talking about duty in the singular. In other words, just as it becomes a task for the individual to determine what moral content he will accept, so, by the same token, it becomes a task for him to decide whether or not to regard his life as something that makes claims on him. When the duties dictated by custom lose their sway, the result is not simply that the individual begins casting about for some other system of conventional duties. Rather, the question arises as to whether anything at all attaches to the idea of the individual being under moral obligation, or, if it does, why it does. The question manifests itself in a duplication: Who says we are to live under moral obligation when convention no longer does? In Hegel's formulation: Have I a duty to duty? Morality becomes spirit in a duplication. Hegel draws attention to this and Kierkegaard concurs.

The shift from *Sittlichkeit* (ethics) to *Moralität* (morality), to use Hegel's terminology, is appraised differently in empiricism and idealism, respectively. What is important for empiricism is that a deontological approach yields to, or is supplemented by, a teleological approach. Primitive ethics is deontological: there are strict duties, taboos, customs, and

demands. Behavior not conforming to the prescribed norms is condemned. There is no room for criticism of the moral code. As Stephen Toulmin puts it, the harmonization of members' wishes and acts is robustly ordered. But, Toulmin continues, sooner or later some of the principles will be found to be in conflict with one another, or members will become aware of the morals of other peoples, or society itself evolves. For one reason or another the code begins to be questioned. The recognition takes hold that members of society have a right to criticize reigning practices and to propose changes. A fresh phase in ethical development is inaugurated. Now *motives* for action and the *outcomes* of social practices are weighed, and people no longer simply adhere to the letter of the law. The deontological code is supplemented by a teleological one, which provides a measure for the criticism of the former (Stephen Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics* [Cambridge, 1953], 137–143).

In its view of that shift, idealism, unlike empiricism, remains within a deontological conception of ethics, indeed, it insists upon it. The duty to duty is grounded in the claim that human persons stand in relation to the absolute. With the collapse of morality, ideality is discovered, as Kierkegaard puts it. This is the achievement of Socrates and Plato.

In his free and admirable rendering of Kant, Hegel says that morality transcends virtue, ethics, integrity, and so on, and does so by dint of being distinguished by reflection. Morality is a determinate consciousness of what duty requires and action based on that consciousness, which accordingly precedes it. Of his own volition, freely, the human person has set duty as that which he wills. It is the duty to duty, duty for duty's sake and its fulfillment, for which, through morality and the reflection it involves, the individual decides. Its adoption as a rule of conduct, and compliance with it, proceed from a freely formed conviction. For Kant, the foundation was reason, which relates to itself in its own absoluteness, which is, as such, freedom. Hegel expresses this by saying that Kant made self-consciousness, which discovers itself to be infinite and knows itself as such, foundational. This represents a turning point in modern philosophy, as Hegel recognizes. His divergence from Kant, which springs from the fact that Kant slid back into affirming the antithesis between abstract universality and the sensuous particular, I shall not consider here (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 12 [Stuttgart, 1953], 85–95).

As already noted, the notion of the relational duplication of the spirit emerges when the dominant ethics, qua custom and convention, begins to crumble, and subjective thought seeks morality in the idea. That, at least, was how Hegel saw it, and so did Kierkegaard in his interpretation of Platonism. But the undermining of shared codes of conduct takes place only at specific junctures in the history of the world, and once it has occurred in the history of a people and a society, a return to a primitive ethics of custom, underpinned by religion, ceases to be an option. But does this mean that all and sundry inevitably live in a relational duplication of spirit? Not at all: the life that is lived primordially and continues for the most part is that of the masses. Others determine one's life. In short, what fills the vacuum yielded by the decaying, religious, ethics of custom is conformism. Just as a life lived in the relational duplication of spirit emerged in the time of crisis following the collapse of the ethics of custom, so such a life continues to be our task, now vis-à-vis conformism. This is how Kierkegaard frames the issue.

Characteristic of the epoch in which we live is the fact that the shift from the ethics of custom to morality has become permanent. We are constantly querying and challenging the norms that we today call custom and convention, ready at every turn to put them to the test. We assume that the norms are in a constant state of flux. We live in an age of reflection, as Hegel said; the morality we know is that distinguished by reflection. The permanence of that shift means that today, too, ethical bearings are sought in one or other of two places: either, as with empiricism, in a teleological approach, or, as with existentialism, in what lies beyond this life.

In my judgement, however, ethical contexts are not well illuminated if one contents oneself with a concentration on the tension between the radical ethical demand and juridical, moral, and conventional norms: between the abstract, undetermined self and the ethics of custom. A third phenomenon has a part to play: the sovereign expressions of life.

Hegel and Kierkegaard are incorrect in thinking that once the ethics of the community has been undermined, the existence of the good or the recognition of it are conditional upon human capacities for abstraction, for thinking in generalities, for relating to the idea, with a relational duplication of the spirit being required for the attainment of the ethical. In any

given situation, before duty can begin to be relevant, the spontaneous expression of life—trust, mercy, sincerity, and so on—is called forth. Not that it is a matter of engaging with the expression of life, as though it were *that* we needed to relate to. So doing would be tantamount to turning it into a duty with the duplication to which duty gives rise, as Hegel and Kierkegaard correctly observe. No, the call to us is to engage with the situation—through the corresponding sovereign expression of life. As the story comes down to us, it was not a question of the Good Samaritan engaging with his own mercifulness in his exercise of it as his duty; rather, in his mercifulness, he took charge of the man who had been set upon and lay wounded by the roadside. What occupied the Samaritan's thoughts (if we simply take the story as it stands) were the needs of the victim and how best to help him. We are told nothing of the Samaritan's relating to his own mercifulness in a recognition that it was something he was duty-bound to show.

But we can easily amplify the story and imagine that the Samaritan was tempted in the same way as were the priest and the Levite and, eschewing engagement with the situation, needed to overcome his resistance by letting the duty to duty enter as a fresh and necessary motive. In the deliberations prompted by the temptation to pass by and leave the assault victim to his fate, the Kantian Samaritan pauses to consider mercy as a duty, which may result in his conveying the assault victim to the inn and tending his wounds not from mercy but from duty. And when the agent is merciful out of duty, without being driven by mercifulness, then duty is done for duty's sake, as Hegel rightly says. But what he is certainly not right in saying is that this is morality in the best sense of the word; on the contrary, it is morality as a substitute, and there is no other morality. Granted, it is better than brutality or indifference, but it is inferior to the immediate realization of mercy's sovereign expression of life. Duty enters when I am trying to wriggle out of the situation.

The duty to duty enters, then, in two, or if you will, three, contexts: when the ethics of custom crumbles away, when we are uneasy with our own conformism, and when what is to be achieved through action proves insufficient to motivate it and an additional motive is needed. The duplication of which Hegel and Kierkegaard speak also arises when duty has to fill a motivational gap if the action is to be realized at all.

X. Morality is the delivery of substitute motives to substitute actions

The sovereign expressions of life, being spontaneous, are pre-moral. Our attitude of mind is inseparable from what we seek to bring about through our agency since the motivational state consists in purposing the result of our agency. There is no point in asking whether a merciful act is good in itself without considering its outcomes. Such separation is impossible: a term like "merciful" is at once a characterization both of the attitude of mind and of the intention informing the act. Mercifulness is elicited by the perception of another person being hampered in the realization of his life. It appeals to as elemental a hope as that of seeing every life realized. The other person's lot is at odds with that hope, and from the dissonance inherent in that circumstance is born the mercifulness that seeks, through action, to vindicate the hope and remove what stands in the way of its fulfillment—whether the obstacles be poverty, need, oppression, or exploitation.

From a philosophical point of view, the neglect of ethically descriptive phenomena gives rise to pseudo-problems, with one such being the conflict between the ethics centered on attitude of mind and that centered on goods. With a phenomenon such as mercy, that problem cannot so much as arise in that the relevant disposition is triggered by the other's misfortune and consists simply in an effort to transform his situation. Kant could only arrive at his ethics of duty by disparaging all ethically descriptive phenomena as inclinations, and Kierkegaard, for his part, only by ignoring all sovereign expressions of life.

Duty is not a phenomenon that can subsist on its own; it is merely a motive which demands to be realized in some action which the agent remains reluctant to perform until the motive is strong enough. Mercy exists only as realization, an act that is motivated by what it seeks to bring about.

Once an action is declared to be a duty, the separation of motive and effect, mental disposition and outcome, has begun. The effects and outcomes in question begin to fade into the background to be replaced by a focus on the motive and its reinforcement. The act that is turned into a

duty is the act we are tempted not to perform; we are reckoning with inclinations that are powerful and that seek to deflect us from the action. Our interest in the consequences of the action proves insufficiently strong; it loses momentum. It is then that duty has to leap into the breach and ensure that the act is still performed. Duty contrives this not by seeking to reinforce our attachment to what the action is intended to achieve, but by supplying a fresh motive. That is important. When we turn an act into a duty we discount the motivation that consists in our being gripped by the objective of the action. We no longer count on our caring enough to get the thing done. The same applies to virtue, in that the motivation for which it is the disposition, namely, the thought and the sense of the rightness of the action, is a substitute for an engagement in what will be achieved through one's action, which is the only natural and genuine motive. Just as duty is a substitute motive, virtue is a substitute disposition. Morality exists to deliver substitute motives to substitute actions because the sovereign and spontaneous expressions of life, with their attachment to what the act is intended to achieve, either fail to materialize or are stifled.

In duty and virtue, the individual's connection to others, to society, and to the world is loosened: the thought of and sense of the rightness of the act are given independent status and are interposed. Granted, the result of the action is not ignored, for, since the agent knows that achieving the outcome is indispensable, duty and virtue come into play; but the motive is no longer drawn from the consequences that the action will have for the lives of others and for society, but is sought in the individual himself. When motivation is divorced from the intended outcome, the individual is thrown back upon himself where motivation is concerned. Duty and virtue are moral introversions.

When the intended outcome of the act constitutes its motivation, that motivation consists in spontaneous expressions of life. That is why efforts to evolve a disposition that will produce such motivations and secure the performance of the relevant actions are unfeasible. The spontaneity of motivation makes it impossible. The establishing and fixing of duty and virtue is not something that can be worked at. Only reflection on motivation is amenable to such efforts. The agent reflects on the rightness of the act in order to do it for the sake of its rightness—and not for the sake of its results.

But what, then, is the sentiment evoked by the thought of the rightness of the act? It is easy to imagine that it would be one of rapture at one's own righteousness. The question is whether it can be anything else. It can indeed, say Kant and Kierkegaard. Couched in Kantian terms, the relation to the noumenal world cancels out what is here referred to as moral introversion, and reverence for the law precludes self-righteousness from acting as the motivating sentiment. Couched in Kierkegaardian terms, the relation to infinity and eternity represents not introversion but interiorization, and duty and virtue are replaced by decision. To put it perspicuously, albeit crudely: once motivation has been decoupled from the intended outcomes of the action, Kant and Kierkegaard deem it susceptible of a religious determination, with the result that the will, to speak with Kant, or obedience, to speak with Kierkegaard, becomes the only thing that is good in itself.

But then Kant and Kierkegaard have forgotten that it is of the nature of morality to be a substitute. Their respective ethics amount to a religious sublimation of the thinking that cleaves to the moral substitute.

Jørgen K. Bukdahl has put the question to me, partly as an objection, whether, in some sense or other, the individual does not have to "commit himself to" the sovereign expressions of life. There is a spontaneity of decisiveness, he says, by which he means that not only is the expression of life spontaneous but so too is decision. Bound up with the sovereign expression of life must be "oneself vouching for it," "oneself being integral to it," he says.

But what is meant by a spontaneous decision? Perhaps a comparison between a decisiveness in favor of a definitive expression of life such as trust or mercifulness and decisiveness in relation to duty will shed light. In one particular respect, the relevant decisiveness is different in each case.⁵

To decide to show trust or mercifulness is to decide to surrender oneself to trust or mercy. Trust and mercifulness must be there already as life-possibilities. If they are not, no decision can elicit them. So the expression "to decide to show trust or mercifulness" is somewhat inadequate, but it is not incorrect because the decision consists in the renunciation of attitudes or movements of thought and feeling that are incompatible with trust and mercifulness—such as, for example, aloofness, guardedness,

reticence, glibness, vengefulness, arrogance. The spontaneity accruing to the decision springs from the spontaneous expression of life—trust, mercifulness, sincerity, and so forth—to which the person decides to give free rein.

By contrast, no inadequacy attaches to the expression “deciding to do one’s duty.” Duty is self-governance and corresponds to the self-governance a decision represents. There is no such thing as surrendering to one’s duty. On the contrary, in duty I make myself master of everything that allures me and tempts me to neglect my duty. Thus it is that I can enlist duty as a substitute motive and do what trust or mercy would have done had they been present. I am not in control of trust and mercy to the same extent that I am of my duty.

While duty is a substitute motive, freedom is not even that. Kierkegaard says of the freedom that constitutes the individual that it is constantly pre-occupied solely with itself. Indeed, what distinguishes it from *liberum arbitrium* is determinable by reference to that feature: while *liberum arbitrium* relates to something external to the individual, the freedom that is the individual relates to itself. This makes it impossible for freedom to be a motive to action, something Kierkegaard seems not to have considered.

Let us imagine that, in a particular situation that calls for the performance of a concrete act, the individual reflects upon his freedom to act. The act enjoined by the situation is uncongenial to him; he performs it only with reluctance but concedes that he has the freedom to perform it. But even as he begins to reflect, a paralysis sets in. The individual has stepped out of the concrete situation and entered into himself, so to speak. Granted, the situation and the opportunity to act still obtain, they have not been forgotten, but now they serve merely as an occasion for self-reflection. But this means that what Kierkegaard is claiming for his determination of freedom as something that relates only to itself—in effect, that this determination describes what happens when a decision is taken and acted upon—is, properly considered, a description of its very antithesis, namely, of how we shrink from action and gravitate towards a state of paralysis. Reflection on the freedom to act is never an impetus to action. On the contrary, the impetus to action comes from a consideration of the

action’s purpose, content, and meaning. The realization of the freedom that I myself am, and in which my existence consists, is something I can achieve only by forgetting it. Not that this is so extraordinary: while it is one thing to act, it is quite another to reflect upon the constitution of my existence as the freedom to act. Both are indeed part of my life, but it does not do to confuse their respective realizations. That an action is free does not mean that reflection on that circumstance can serve as the mainspring of action.

Notes

1. Møllehave notes further that the sovereign expressions of life exclude offence. “There is no reason to take offence at the sovereign expressions of life; instead we should all be deeply affected by them: trust, openness, mercy.” That depends on how you look at it. Would one not, I wonder, have to approach one’s task somewhat superficially if it is to result in one’s being utterly grabbed by the sovereign expressions of life? Returning for a moment to my earlier illustration, let us imagine that Goetz von Berlichingen, offence welling up within him, asks how long he is to go on showing the traitor Weislingen trust, how many more times he is to give him a chance: he has now done so seven times and that must be enough. If Goetz von Berlichingen gets the answer that nothing less than seventy times seven will do, I wonder whether he would not take offence. No one can do other than take offence at one’s task if he takes it seriously. In order to hear a demand and take offence at it, it must be unintelligible, observes Møllehave in the same context. Yes, if the offence in question were of an intellectual nature, but not if it is ethical. What is as intelligible as can be may perfectly well offend ethically. As intelligible as it is to Goetz von Berlichingen that he should give Weislingen a chance seventy times seven times, he would be equally offended if he were to take in what it meant.

2. As I did in my original reply to Møllehave in *Information* [July 30–31, 1966], which could only have been misleading.

3. Translators’ note: In the Danish original, in order to stress the contrast to Kierkegaard’s concept of “self-appropriation,” Løgstrup, using the same verb—at *overtage*—lets it do double duty, rendered here as “appropriating” and “engaging with.”

4. Translators’ note: In this section Løgstrup uses the Danish terms *moral* and *moralisk* to refer indiscriminately to both traditional and reflective morality. We have translated these terms as “morality” and “moral,” respectively. Establishing a link with Hegel’s distinction between (traditional) *Sittlichkeit* and (reflective) *Moral*, Løgstrup also uses the Danish term *sædelighed* to designate traditional

morality. We have rendered this term as "ethics." Finally Løgstrup uses the Danish terms *etik* and *etisk* when he refers to ethical theory, which are translated as "ethics" and "ethical," respectively.

5. I am assuming that it is not an explanation of freedom that Bukdahl is after, inasmuch as I take it that he agrees with Kierkegaard that any attempt to explain freedom implies that it is an illusion, since what explanations elucidate are determining factors.

T H R E E

Sovereign Expressions of Life, the Golden Rule, Character Traits, and Norms

The sovereign expressions of life

At four o'clock in the morning there is an insistent ring at the door. When the woman descends the secret police are outside, demanding that she open up. Once inside, they ask for her husband. They are informed that, as it happens, he is not at home but away on business. One of the two men, the subordinate, heavily armed, ugly as sin, and looking capable of every kind of brutality, starts searching the house. The other, possessed of an engaging manner, all amiability and courtesy, is talking to the woman meanwhile and assuring her that the visit is of no consequence, merely a routine procedure. The woman acts obligingly, appearing surprised—a composed and polished performance. She is perfectly aware that his charming insistence on the insignificance of their visit is aimed solely at getting her to talk, and is not taken in by anything that he says. She knows that from the