

<b>e-Journal Philosophie der Psychologie</b>	<b>THE TWO PROCESS MODEL OF COGNITION AND KIERKEGAARD'S STAGES OF LIFE<sup>1</sup> von Jörg Disse</b>
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**Abstract:** *My aim is to relate Søren A. Kierkegaard's early theory of stages as described basically in "Either-Or" to the theory of interest underlying the two process model of cognition of the Canadian psychologist Keith E. Stanovich with regard to the question of the highest formal goal we can pursue in our life. On the basis of Stanovich's distinction between type 1 and type 2 processing and Kierkegaard's distinction between an esthetical and an ethical stage of life, I argue for an extension of Stanovich's understanding of the goal structure of type 2 processing, for Kierkegaard's ethical stage of life being a natural expression of our cognitive faculties and for a critical approach to Kierkegaard's idea of a religious stage as hinted at in "Fear and Trembling".*

Bo Jacobsen has stated in 2008: "Kierkegaard's stages are regarded as a major contribution to world literature and philosophy. They also represent a psychological theory that, strangely enough, never seems to have been subjected to empirical study".<sup>2</sup> Consider this paper as an attempt, not to subject Kierkegaard's theory of stages to empirical study, but to start a dialogue with an interpretation of its findings in order to connect Kierkegaard's thought to contemporary issues in psychology and philosophy of psychology. More precisely, I will start a dialogue between Kierkegaard's early theory of stages as described basically in "Either-Or" and the theory of interest underlying the so called two process model of cognition of the Canadian psychologist Keith E. Stanovich. This dialogue will be initiated by focusing on the following question: Are we, as human beings, made for pursuing happiness as our highest interest or goal? We all have all kinds of interests, we pursue all kinds of goals. But goals are subordinated to more universal ones, which I call formal goals. The question is: What are the most formal goals we are driven by and we can choose as a highest goal in our life?

In the first part of my paper, I will show that Stanovich denies that the most formal goal we pursue in our strivings is just happiness. Our inclinations are complex. As living beings, we are driven by at least one other basic interest, the interest of the genes. Despite this, for him, the only highest goal we can reasonably choose is our individual happiness. In the second part, with Kierkegaard's distinction between an esthetical and an ethical stage in "Either-Or", I will establish that on the level of consciously lived forms of life that imply reasonable choice Stanovich's theory of interest is too narrow, that on this level there are two formal goals as a candidate, and that therefore Stanovich's theory of interest needs to be extended. I will further show that this extension allows considering Kierkegaard's ethical stage of life as a natural expression of our cognitive faculties. Finally, with reference to the description of the religious in "Fear and Trembling", I will argue for there being no particular type of interest corresponding to the religious stage, and that to the tripartite understanding of the stages in Kierkegaard's writings later than "Either-Or" should be preferred the bipartite understanding of "Either-Or" as the most basic distinction within a theory of stages.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper has been presented at the international congress "Kierkegaard Reconsidered in a Global World" held at the "Søren Kierkegaard Research Centre" of the University of Copenhagen (May 6-8, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Bo Jacobson: Invitation to Existential Psychology: A Psychology for the Unique Human Being and its Applications in Therapy. John Wiley & Sons, 2008, 139.

As a methodological presupposition for this dialogue between Stanovich and Kierkegaard one must confront the third-person-perspective of empirical psychology with the first-person-psychology of the theory of stages. There would be a problem with such a procedure only for those operating in the defense of a strict ontological naturalism. But this is in many respects a difficult philosophical position. My understanding of the relationship of these two perspectives is an application of Richard Swinburne's principle of credulity: it is reasonable to trust the first-person-perspective as long as there is no decisive counter-evidence from a third-person-perspective.<sup>3</sup> Following this principle, I do not need an empirical foundation of Kierkegaard's theory of stages for claiming its truth, as long as there is no serious empirical counter-evidence available. Of course, I would welcome any attempt of a third-person-verification for it. But the first-person-perspective as such can offer as valuable insights in the human goal structure as the empirical one. All we need is to allow both forms of explanation to be mutually critical of one another.

### 1. The individual's interest and the interest of the genes

Let me first present the two process model of Keith E. Stanovich, who is professor of Applied Cognitive Science in Toronto. I will mostly refer to his two monographs "The Robot's Rebellion" published in 2004 and "Rationality and the Reflective Mind" published in 2011.<sup>4</sup> According to the second book, there is a current consensus among empirical psychologists that the functioning of the mind can be characterized by two different types of cognition.<sup>5</sup> Stanovich calls them type 1 processing and type 2 processing. They implement two separable types of cognitive mechanisms being oriented towards different formal goals.<sup>6</sup>

Type 1 processing is a kind of cognition that is mainly automatic and unconscious, execution is rapid, it is mandatory when the triggering stimuli are encountered. This kind of processing is basically domain-specific: many kinds of type 1 processing form independent mechanisms that respond to a limited array of domain-relevant stimuli in order to solve specific problems. Examples of type 1 processing are recognizing faces, understanding speech, recognizing the presence of predators or avoiding poisonous food.<sup>7</sup> They are the product of a long-scale evolutionary adaptation, favoring the reproduction probability of the genes.<sup>8</sup> With Dawkins, Stanovich holds that on this level of the functioning of organisms the genes do not exist for the sake of the organism but the organism is mainly the means or vehicle for the survival of the genes.<sup>9</sup> Our brains were built by entities, says Stanovich, not exclusively concerned with instantiating goals that were good for us.<sup>10</sup>

Type 2 processing is cognitive activity characterized by conscious awareness and executive control. It is the mechanism of logical thought, inference, abstraction, planning and decision making.<sup>11</sup> Processing here is slow and domain-general: the processes can refer to all kinds of stimuli. The key

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Swinburne: *The Evolution of the Soul*. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1997, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Keith E. Stanovich: *The Robot's Rebellion : Finding Meaning in the Age of Darwin*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 2004; *Rationality and the Reflective Mind*. Oxford : University Press, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Stanovich: *Rationality*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Stanovich: *Rebellion*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Stanovich: *Rebellion*, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Stanovich: *Rebellion*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> Stanovich: *Rebellion*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Stanovich: *Rebellion*, 252.

<sup>11</sup> Stanovich: *Rebellion*, 47.

mechanisms are cognitive simulation and hypothetical thinking,<sup>12</sup> i.e. they enable to represent states of affairs not correlated to anything real at the moment we activate these mechanisms. We can set goals different from those we are directed to by immediately present stimuli, we can reason about alternative preferences, we can be critical about our own beliefs and desires<sup>13</sup> and we can manipulate the world.<sup>14</sup> The goals we pursue thanks to our capacity of type 2 processing are not goals that serve the gene's interest, but optimize the satisfaction of the vehicle's or let us better say the individual's interest.<sup>15</sup>

So type 1 processing typically serves to pursue goals that are in the interest of our genes and type 2 processing is oriented towards goal satisfaction that is in the individual's interest.<sup>16</sup> The two types can be at war with each other, specifically type 2 processing can override type 1 processing. In many cases the gene's and the vehicle's interests coincide, but because of their capacity of type 2 processing human beings are able to rebel against the selfish genes they are driven by on the level of type 1 processing. The individual is the vehicle of the genes as replicators but obviously the vehicle's interest does not always overlap with the replicator's interest and type 2 processing can interrupt type 1 processing. The individual can strive to realize his own interest in his personal goal satisfaction instead of the interest of his genes, he can escape the determinism of the genes.<sup>17</sup> Human beings can for example choose not to procreate children.

Now for Stanovich, the only conceivable highest goal of type 2 processing is the well-being or happiness of the individual or vehicle. And we ought to rebel against the interest of the genes insomuch as it is adverse to the individual's well-being. We should use our type 2 processing for maximizing our own happiness. Anything else would be a "thinking error", as he calls it.<sup>18</sup> In the last chapter of the "Robot's Rebellion" his understanding of the human quest for maximizing the individual's interest is quite elaborate.<sup>19</sup> Stanovich introduces Nozick's notion of symbolic utility, that we pursue values that are not directly connected to experienced utility, he introduces Harry Frankfurt's notion of second-order-desires, and he favors Nozick's idea of rational integration between first- and second-order-desires, so that type 2 processing does not just serve our immediate desires but allows a reflective and critical evaluation of them. Despite this, for Stanovich, the well-being of the individual remains the only conceivable highest formal goal for type 2 processing. In one place he admits that ethical considerations could override vehicle well-being at times, particularly when the sacrifice to our well-being is minimal,<sup>20</sup> but he does not pursue any further this train of thought that could lead him beyond the individual's interest.

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<sup>12</sup> Stanovich: Rationality, 47f.

<sup>13</sup> Stanovich: Rebellion, 82.

<sup>14</sup> Stanovich: Rebellion, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Stanovich also calls it utility maximization for the vehicle. Cf. Keith E. Stanovich ; Richard F. West: Evolutionary versus instrumental goals: How evolutionary psychology misconceives human rationality. In: D.E. Over (Ed.): Evolution and the psychology of thinking: The debate. Psychology Press, 2003, 171-230, here 185.

<sup>16</sup> Stanovich: Rebellion, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Stanovich: Rebellion, 82.

<sup>18</sup> Stanovich: Rationality, 23 note.

<sup>19</sup> Stanovich: Rebellion, 207-275.

<sup>20</sup> Stanovich: Rebellion, 231.

## 2. The esthetic and the ethical stage

Stanovich's description of type 2 processing is, I think, too narrow. But what is the goal structure of type 2 processing really like? Here I reach the point where the theory of stages in Kierkegaard's "Either-Or" needs to be introduced. The distinction between type 1 and type 2 processing is certainly essential for our understanding of the human psyche, and there would be quite a few things to be said about the relationship of type 1 processing to Kierkegaard's theory of stages, but what I am now going to focus on is just the understanding of the goal structure of type 2 processing. The interest of the individual is not only limited by an interest of the genes, it is also limited by another interest, specific to type 2 processing, as can be deduced from the theory of stages of "Either-Or".

Let me begin with naming the stages, as developed by B in the second part of "Either-Or", in a more Wittgensteinian terminology forms of life, leaving aside for a moment the notion of a "stage" connoting a hierarchical order between them. Forms of life, as I conceive them, consist in a number of beliefs and in a given goal structure. The two forms, the esthetic and the ethical one, as they are described in "Either-Or", are distinguished mainly by their goal structure, particularly by their specific highest goal. As a matter of fact, their identity depends also on the basic beliefs they represent. In "Either-Or", in the "Stages" or in the "Postscript", Kierkegaard does not so much reflect on the beliefs such forms imply or should logically imply. In the discussion of the religious stage in the last section of this paper, I'll try to argue that there would have been good reasons for Kierkegaard to better distinguish between the belief aspect and the goal aspect as criteria for the identity of the different stages. But let me first show, in what sense the theory of "Either-Or" allows to state the goal structure of type 2 processing more precisely than Stanovich does.

What is the highest formal goal of the esthetic form of life? At the beginning of his description of it, B says: "Every human being, no matter how slightly gifted he is, has a natural need to formulate a life-view, a conception of the meaning of life and of its purpose. The person who lives esthetically also does that, and the popular expression heard in all ages and from various stages is this: 'One must enjoy life'."<sup>21</sup> The purpose of life for the estheticist is enjoying life. B distinguishes between different levels or stages within the esthetic form of life, but they are just variations of the purpose of enjoying life.<sup>22</sup> From the countess who lives her life centered upon the idea that she and her husband are the handsomest people in the whole country to the estheticist that finds satisfaction in his absolute dissatisfaction, as it is the case for A to whom B writes his letters, they all in one way or another seek enjoyment as their highest goal. The choice they make for where to find enjoyment in, and the cognitive processes involved in this kind of choice, will be, as B explains, directed to the accidental individual. Our self "contains in itself a rich concretion, a multiplicity of qualities, of characteristics",<sup>23</sup> and what is an enjoyment depends on the individual's particular biological and psychological constitution, on talents, on the possibilities the environment provides etc.<sup>24</sup> The esthetic choice, says B, is based on the difference, one could say: on that which makes one individual being different from other individuals. What the estheticist "has his own life in" is differences.<sup>25</sup> In this double sense, in the sense that esthetic persons seek their own enjoyment

<sup>21</sup> Søren Kierkegaard: *Either-Or*. Part II. Howard V. Hong ; Edna H. Hong (ed.). New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1987, 179/II 163.

<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard: *Either-Or II*, 180/II163.

<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard: *Either-Or II*, 222/II 199.

<sup>24</sup> Kierkegaard: *Either-Or II*, 251/II 225.

<sup>25</sup> Kierkegaard: *Either-Or II*, 228/II 205.

and that they are cognitively directed to all kinds of differences, we can call such persons centered in the vehicle's or individual's interest.

The theory of stages of "Either-Or" now implies that because of the existence of an ethical form of life this is not all there is to be said about the goal structure of type 2 processing. But in what sense does the ethical form of life have a different understanding of the highest formal goal to adopt? The ethical person, as one would expect, seeks to realize what is good. She acknowledges the good as the highest, says B.<sup>26</sup> Absolute choice, which is the choice through which one becomes an ethical person, is the choice of the good. Choosing the good in life means to choose it as opposed to evil, therefore "when I choose the good, I choose *eo ipso* the choice between good and evil".<sup>27</sup> And the choice of good and evil is not just one more difference among many esthetical differences. Absolute choice is a choice by which you make of good and evil the difference that becomes the supreme rule of behavior within the ethical form of life. It is not a difference among other differences, but it is, as B calls it, the "absolute" difference.<sup>28</sup> It is absolute, because within the ethical form of life all other differences are subordinated to it.

To be precise, we have to distinguish between a subjective and an objective understanding of the notion of goodness. In a very elementary sense, we experience everything that satisfies our desires as something good for us. In this subjective sense, every goal the estheticist pursues is also to be considered as something good. On the ethical level, however, the notion of goodness is related to a value or a moral law that is claimed to be good not only for one but for every individual. Ethical goodness involves the idea of universality: "The ethical is the universal", as B tells us.<sup>29</sup> Acting in conformity with the ethical form of life consists in becoming "the universal human being",<sup>30</sup> i.e. a human being that realizes what every other human being can and should also realize. It means to act according to laws that are universally binding.

At the same time, and this is the decisive feature, the *motivation* of the ethical person is different from the one of the esthetical. The notion of duty, that is central for Kierkegaard's understanding of the ethical form of life, reveals it. The ethical person does not seek to realize the universal good for the reason of enjoyment, but, says B, "places the meaning of life in living for the performance of one's duties".<sup>31</sup> What does it mean to do something because it is one's duty? It means not to act primarily for the enjoyment it provides, but for the realization of the universal good for its own sake. You act according to a moral law because your reason tells you that it is good to do so, you seek to realize a universal good because it tells you that it ought to be actualized. The highest goal of the ethical is not enjoyment but the universal good achieved for its own sake. B insists that of course the ethical person wishes to be happy in what it chooses to do,<sup>32</sup> nevertheless the basic motivation for its choice is not enjoyment. The esthetical is not banned from the ethical form of life, as B repeatedly assures, it comes back after having made the absolute choice, but only within the limits of a new highest goal. You may seek to enjoy, but only insofar as your enjoyment is indifferent to acting according to the absolute difference between good and evil.

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<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 227/II 203.

<sup>27</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 219/II 196.

<sup>28</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 223/II 200.

<sup>29</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 255/II 229.

<sup>30</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 256/II 230.

<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 254/II 228.

<sup>32</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 252/II 226.

The conscious practice of a form of life necessarily involves cognitive processes of the second type. Thus, we have now two possibilities of a highest formal goal for type 2 processing. But how are we to justify a double goal structure within type 2 processing as the theory of stages in "Either-Or" suggests it? I would like to do it in the following way. Whenever we exercise a basic ability like breathing, eating, drinking, moving etc., we do not always but usually and to a variable extent enjoy exercising it, and there is a basic desire to exercise it, if we are prevented from doing so. This is true also for our ability to think or to perform type 2 processing. There is a natural desire or interest in knowing or reasoning. Now, human type 2 processing is based on the use of concepts and concepts represent characteristics of objects they have in common with other objects – they direct our knowledge to the universal. Human beings therefore have a natural desire or interest in the universal. Even more, there is a natural interest in proceeding from the less general to the more general or to subsume statements under more universal principles and finally to understand reality as such as a systematic whole. Kant has called it in the "Critique of pure reason" the interest of reason.<sup>33</sup> I will call it from now on the mind's interest. But the mind's interest is not confined to theoretical knowledge. It includes our knowledge related to practical goal setting. The mind is, given its structure, interested in pursuing goods of the most universal kind. Feeding oneself is good, feeding one's family is better, but it would be best to feed every human being. The mind's interest would be completely satisfied only with reaching the highest conceivable universal good. And the desire of realizing this universal good is a desire of realizing it for its own sake. We enjoy knowing, reasoning or the pursuit of the universal good for its own sake.

Based on this justification my contention is: It is type 2 processing guided by the practical mind's interest that Kierkegaard's ethical form of life is about. The mind as such is not interested in seeking to maximize individual happiness as its final goal. If we consider that the ethical person is mainly driven by the mind's interest, individual happiness is more like a by-product. This leads to an extension of Stanovich's model to a third type of interest. In contrast to Stanovich, we can use our type 2 processing as an instrument for the vehicle's interest or for the mind's interest. Besides the gene's and the individual's interest, as a third type we therefore have a mind's interest.

It is possible to even go one step further. Our desires, insomuch as they are not exclusively driven by the interest of the genes, do not even *naturally* point to our individual happiness as a formal goal. There is not a natural interest in individual happiness within us and some added mind's interest that is more like an awkward superstructure to our natural constitution. On the contrary, the mind's interest has to be considered as being most natural. Let me introduce now the understanding of forms of life as stages. In "Either-Or" the ethical form of life is conceived as a stage superior to the esthetical one. For B it is only when we reach the ethical stage that we choose our own self, our true or absolute self. Absolute choice means choosing one's absolute self or choosing one's self according to its absolute validity.<sup>34</sup> My interpretation of this statement is: The absolute self is nothing else than our striving for the universal good for its own sake. B insists that the ethical stage does not mean that duty is something exterior to the individual as an obligation coming from outside, on the contrary the ethical person has chosen its true self and for the true self duty is lived as something in accordance with itself: "The truly ethical person ... does not have duty outside himself but within himself".<sup>35</sup> Remember: Striving for the universal good for

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<sup>33</sup> Immanuel Kant: Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B 365.

<sup>34</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 219/II 196.

<sup>35</sup> Kierkegaard: Either-Or II, 254/II 228.

its own sake means becoming the "universal human being".<sup>36</sup> This universal human being is constitutive for each individual. Being guided by a desire for the universal good for its own sake, and with Kant for the most universal good that we possibly can conceive of, is a characteristic of every human being. To refuse this striving for..., therefore, means to remain below one's full potential. This is why the esthetical stage appears to be inferior to the ethical.

In terms of cognitive psychology this idea is expressed as follows: The desire for the universal good for its own sake is a basic desire within us because of the nature of type 2 processing that feeds our desires with goals. Our brains have evolved in such a way that for whatever evolutionary reason there is at the level of type 2 processing a thinking mechanism within us that orients our desire towards realizing goals that express a universal good. There is a drive within us to pursue such universal goods even if they do not serve the individual's interest. We sacrifice our own interests not only because of our genetic inclinations but also because of our mind's interest. Of course we can use type 2 processing for maximizing our individual's interest, but the structure of our mind is such that we would find it difficult to completely resist the mind's interest. I think, it is because of our mind's constitution that so few people in this world consequently use their reasoning just for maximizing their own happiness. Being resolutely esthetical would be a hard struggle against our biological and psychological constitution as human beings. Our mind's constitution makes us being moral or ethical whether we want or not.

### 3. The ethical and the religious stage

In several of his theoretical writings Kierkegaard's theory of stages is not restrained to just two stages as it is in "Either-Or". He distinguishes basically three of them in "Stages of Life's Way" and also in the "Postscript". The third is the so called religious stage. We have seen that the esthetical and the ethical stage are distinguished from each other because of their different goal structure expressed by the difference between the individual's and the mind's interest. The question arises now, whether the religious stage implies another goal structure, different from the first two. I would like to discuss this question with reference to "Fear and Trembling", a writing that I am inclined to consider as a kind of theoretical extension of "Either-Or" with respect to the theory of stages. Does the existence of a religious stage indicate the existence of a third yet unknown interest linked to type 2 processing?

There is no explicit theory of stages in "Fear and Trembling" but from the chapter "Problema I" on, Kierkegaard distinguishes faith from the ethical in such a way that it suggests the addition of a third, religious stage to the two stages theory of "Either-Or", even if the ethical in "Fear and Trembling" is not in every respect identical to the ethical stage in "Either-Or".<sup>37</sup> The pseudonym de Silentio characterizes the religious person as different from the ethical person in terms of the religious being a teleological suspension of the ethical.<sup>38</sup> Abraham obeys God's command to kill his son Isaac, a command that is ethically absolutely unjustifiable. Now, what is meant to be suspended with this act of obedience, in my view is Abraham's reasonable judgment concerning what is good or not. Abraham suspends his reasoning about the ethical justification of this command because it is a command that comes from God. Hereby de Silentio does not want to

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<sup>36</sup> Kierkegaard: *Either-Or II*, 259/II 232.

<sup>37</sup> See Wilfried Greve: *Kierkegaards maieutische Ethik*. Frankfurt a.M. : Suhrkamp, 1990, 165.

<sup>38</sup> Søren Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling*. C. Stephen Evans ; Sylvia Walsh (ed.). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2006, 60/II 106.

claim that the pursuit of the objective good for its own sake is not to be considered as the highest goal for a religious individual. He rather claims that the objective good is *a priori* identified with God and God's will. The religious person does whatever God asks him to do independently of the insight of reason into the goodness of what is being asked, but, that is crucial, with the conviction that it is good, because God, who asks him to do it, is *a priori* absolutely good.

If this is true, at the origin of the religious relationship to God, there must be an act of reason, of type 2 processing, because the identification of God with absolute goodness and trustworthiness is not possible otherwise. But then it makes sense to affirm with de Silentio that the ethical is not "abolished" with the religious individual but receives "a different expression".<sup>39</sup> It is not the universal good as such that the religious person has lost of sight but the universal as "the intermediate factor", the intermediate factor being our reason determining what is good in every particular situation.<sup>40</sup> De Silentio says that the religious individual "determines his relationship to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal".<sup>41</sup> This means in terms of the interpretation I propose that his relationship to the universal is determined by the absolute or God because what is good is *a priori* identified with that which God commands. Because of the identification of goodness with God through an act of type 2 processing, the religious person acts as God wants him to act without any further type 2 processing as an intermediate. It is important that according to "Fear and Trembling" Abraham never doubts that God would not demand Isaac of him.<sup>42</sup> For Abraham, God is good, God cannot therefore seriously allow to happen what he commands him to do.

The way de Silentio describes the knight of faith shows that both, the ethical and the religious person, pursue the good for its own sake as their highest formal goal. And Kierkegaard, in my view, had to describe the knight of faith this way, because there just are no other highest goals available for type 2 processing. The religious cannot be determined by any new goal structure because there isn't any. But in what sense is the religious then different from the ethical? I would say that they can only be distinguished in terms of the second constituent of forms of life, i.e. in terms of their basic beliefs. The ethical and the religious are distinguished from each other because of their different understanding of how to conceive the pursuit of the good for its own sake. At the same time however, the goal structure is the most basic criterion for a distinction between forms of life that can possibly be conceived. The distinction between the ethical and the religious is therefore necessarily less fundamental than the distinction between the esthetical and the ethical we find in "Either-Or". There are two most universal forms of life because of their different highest goal, the esthetical and the ethical, whereas the ethical and the religious are only two types related to one and the same highest goal. This difference of levels has not been stressed enough in Kierkegaard's theory of stages. It appears to be a little confusing to speak in the "Stages" and in the "Postscript" of three fundamental forms of life, the esthetical, the ethical and the religious, as if the basic distinction of a theory of stages were tripartite.

Beyond this, I doubt de Silentio's description of the religious as a form of life of its own that is *opposed* to the ethical form of life makes sense at any level at all. One could admit that there may be situations in life where a theist believing in God's absolute goodness decides to suspend his own

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<sup>39</sup> Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling, 67/III 119.

<sup>40</sup> Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling, 62/III 120.

<sup>41</sup> Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling, 61/III 119.

<sup>42</sup> Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling, 29/III 87.



moral judgment because he interprets some event as a command of God that surpasses his understanding. But this is only conceivable as a risky decision that may happen, let us say, once a lifetime to an exceptional individual. It is terribly risky because if an individual decides to do something that is not in agreement with his own moral insight, whether this is a temptation or he is a knight of faith by doing it, as de Silentio himself acknowledges, if at all only the individual himself can determine.<sup>43</sup> However, even if one admits such a decision as legitimate under certain circumstances, it remains an exception and exceptions don't constitute a form of life of their own. In my view, an individual that over a longer period of time suspends his moral judgment and acts in obedience to direct divine commands is inconceivable except as a pathological case. The religious as it is sketched in "Fear and Trembling" can at most be an extended version of the ethical form of life, i.e. a religious stage can at most be conceived as an ethical form of life that admits the possibility of an *exceptional* suspension of moral judgment.

What is the result of this dialogue between Stanovich's theory of interest and Kierkegaard's theory of stages? Happiness is certainly not the only goal a human being can be driven by, it is not the only one we are naturally driven by, and it is not the only conceivable highest goal we can choose. The picture is more complex:

1) There is a distinction between type 1 and type 2 processing that is basic for our understanding of the human psyche. Type 1 processing shows that we are driven by an interest of the genes that can be in conflict with the interest of the individual.

2) In contrast to Stanovich, Kierkegaard's theory of stages shows that related to type 2 processing there is not just one but there are two possible goal structures with two possible highest goals: happiness and the universal good, achieved for its own sake. In other words: Besides the individual's or vehicle's search for happiness there is a mind's interest and the ethical stage as described in "Either-Or" is an expression of it.

3) Following one's mind's interest is so deeply grounded in our biological and psychological constitution that we almost inevitably act according to it. Inasmuch as we are naturally driven to act morally because of our mind's interest and as the use of our mind's interest seems to be our highest possibility, the ethical form of life can be considered as a stage that is superior to the esthetical one. One could of course ask why an individual should adopt a form of life that fits with the highest possibilities of his biological and psychological constitution. Indeed, except for the belief in a Creator we owe our constitution as human beings, there seems to be nothing compelling about choosing an ethical form of life.

4) There is no specific kind of interest that corresponds to the so called religious stage. The distinction between the ethical and the religious is a distinction in terms of the beliefs they represent, but they are both driven by the mind's interest. A theory of stages should therefore be basically bipartite as in "Either-Or" and not tripartite as in some of Kierkegaard's later writings. If at all, a religious stage can only be conceived as an extended ethical stage.

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<sup>43</sup> Kierkegaard: Fear and Trembling, 69/III 127.