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Long Term Romantic Relationships over Short Term Flings

I. Introduction

The debate over the benefits of long term romantic relationships as opposed to many short-lived flings is a central subject of Kierkegaard's, *Either/Or*. In the book, his two characters exemplify both types of relations: The Seducer thrives off of the pursuit of each new fling, while Judge William is many years happily married and frowns upon the Seducer's uncommitted lifestyle. The arguments that he brings in support of long term romantic relationships, as well as points made by other philosophers, such as Aristotle, are much stronger than those made in favor of short term flings. This paper will examine the ideas Kierkegaard and others use to support each type of relation in order to prove that long term romantic relationships are more beneficial for one's wellbeing.

II. Background

In, *Either/Or*, the Seducer lives an aesthetic lifestyle, gaining all of his joy from the intense deliberation he engages in as part of his hunt to try to get a new woman to give herself to him freely. He lacks any major emotional connections to others because of the life he lives and depends on short-lived relationships with people he uses to attain his goal. Judge William, however, looks down on the Seducer's way of life and instead preaches the benefits of a long term relationship, many of which are drawbacks from the Seducer's point of view. He is unable to extend the initial love he shares with a person over time without finding someone new. The Seducer instead closely follows the "Rotation Method", which advocates for constant change because, "boredom is the root of all evil" (Kierkegaard, p. 22). According to the Rotation

Method, marriage and other long term relationships have too much repetition, leading to potential boredom because being tied to one person prevents any rotation or change.

III. Main Points

Despite the great pleasure the Seducer enjoys in pursuing his next conquest, this pleasure is fleeting and dependent on a number of intricate calculations that are required to be successful. In Kierkegaard's, *Either/Or*, the Seducer is only shown at the top of his game during a single part of his life. The book fails to show what the Seducer's life is like when he grows older and loses the good looks that were such an integral part of his success. Unlike a long term relationship, the short flings he experiences are unsustainable and it is highly unlikely that he would enjoy the same amount of pleasure each success brings throughout his whole life. If he instead chose to commit to a single person and pursue a lasting relationship with them, he would not have to worry about ever having to be without another's affection should he ever be unable to gain it. Should the Seducer fail to change, he will be much more likely to die alone than if he would have committed to a single relationship.

Another significant flaw to the Seducer's argument is the intense deliberation he goes through in pursuing each new woman. He does this in an effort to keep his options open and avoid any semblance of commitment, but he fails to recognize all of the options he sacrifices in waiting so long to make a decision. Experiencing pleasure is a passive life because people, like the Seducer, refuse to choose and commit to something. Willing and making decisions, on the other hand, requires one to be active and our choices help us to develop virtuously. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle advanced the idea of habituation; choosing to act virtuously in situations allows one to develop character traits that make the relevant actions natural. Acting

virtuously helps us to achieve human flourishing or, “Eudaimonia”. This flourishing is, “the highest end, and all subordinate goals... are sought because they promote well-being” (Kraut, Section 2). It is ultimately achieved by completing worthwhile activities that are done well and these activities are often done best when they are joint activities with someone else. Having a long term relationship with another builds your knowledge of them and theirs of you. The better someone knows you, the more they can help you grow virtuously and flourish, something a series of short flings are unable to accomplish. Choosing to commit to a single person is choosing to help better yourself through the relationship that you develop with them.

One of the things the Seducer finds most unappealing about long term relationships is the fact that they commit you to a single person and do not allow you to pursue other people. The duty you have to another person, “comes as an old friend, an intimate, a confidant, whom the lovers mutually recognize in the deepest secret of their love” (Kierkegaard, p. 95). It can be an obligation, but having one person to be loyal to can be a comforting sense of familiarity because of the shared history you have with that person. They are the one person you can always depend on and look to for help because you provide the same for them. This relationship is what the Seducer lacks and does not know he is missing. Long term romantic relationships are composed of two people that know each other and can help one another grow and flourish over time. The Seducer only bonds with a person for as long as it takes him to take what he wants from them. He does not have someone who he can always share feelings and experiences with. Instead, the experiences he creates with others are wholly artificial because he manipulates them into happening in order to work towards his end goal of another conquest. Once he has succeeded, he leaves the lives he entered and is again without relation to anyone. He is then left without anyone to share memories with or relate to: he is truly alone in the world. Being bonded to another

person may prevent external rotation to other people, but the strength of that bond makes that unnecessary and prevents boredom because you are constantly learning more about your partner as you both grow together. The Seducer refuses to consider any of this as a possibility and chooses instead to live a life that provides only temporary pleasure and enjoyment as opposed to something more permanent.

IV. Conclusion

Many short term romantic relationships are insufficient compared to long term relationships because they are lacking in permanence and cannot sustain a person for their entire life. Gradually, they will lose the ease of creating new relationships and eventually be left alone without anyone to connect with. Relationships like marriage, however, ensure that you will always have someone that loves you and will be there for you.

V. Bibliography

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/ Or*. Princeton University Press.

Kraut, Richard. "Aristotle's Ethics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 15 June 2018, plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/.