

Collaborative Dialogue Assignment

RELI 342-50 Theistic Existentialism

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Kirk is riding on the front seat of a crowded bus as it pulls into the stop. He reflects that the bus driver is different today. He looks much more sophisticated than the last one. He introduces himself to the driver, who's name is Richard. Kirk sits in the first row and a downtrodden-looking man boards the bus and slumps down next to Kirk. The bus starts moving.

Man (Kyle): **glumly** Welp, today's the day.

Kirk: **looks towards Kyle, clearly concerned**

Man (Kyle): I'm getting married today.

Kirk: Why so sad about such a usually happy topic?

Man (Kyle): It is an arranged marriage.

Richard: **mumbles** Truly shameful, some cultures.

Kirk: **curiously** Is this something that you are worried about?

Man (Kyle): No doubt. I can't stop worrying. My parents only met her family two weeks ago and I have yet to see her at all.

Richard: **glancing back from his driver's seat** Oh dear, oh dear. And here I was hoping that society was past such things. What family are you from?

Kyle: I am Kyle of the Montegues. We own a plantation west of town.

Richard: I see. How old are you anyway? You look like a child.

Kyle: I'm eighteen. Why do you ask?

Richard: Ah, just all the less time to explore earth's wonders. Is there no way for you to avoid this marriage? Close association tends to be corruptive.¹

Kyle: Not really. It would terribly upset my family and ruin their reputation. They would disown me forever.

Kirk: **mumbles under breath** They should realize that marriage is no casual matter.

¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: First Part*, Friedrich Nietzsche, 1883, pp. 173

Kyle: They aren't concerned about the actual marriage itself. Just the money and security that comes along with it. I certainly don't think my happiness is being taken into consideration.

Richard: She comes from a wealthy family then?

Kyle: Yes, I would say twice as wealthy as mine.

Kirk: Wealth should have nothing to do with the commitment of a relationship.

Richard: And yet it does all too often. Say, Kyle, what would their disowning you mean for your life? How much do you really depend on them?

Kyle: Well, I have enough to make it by without them, but their money allows me a comfort that would otherwise be inaccessible. I would have to sacrifice my lifestyle for that of a grimy, middle class man.

Richard: I see. But our world is so vast! Certainly it would be worth jumping ship to live your life instead of falling in line for money. Why limit your ability to appreciate the rest of earth's glory?

Kyle: But money is one of earth's glories. Ultimately, doesn't money make all earthly wonders accessible?

Kirk: To a degree, but marriage is not a commitment to be taken lightly! Just because your parents provide a financially comfortable path of life does not mean it is right in the eyes of God.

Richard: God, shmod. Let's keep on what's important...

Richard nearly misses a red light and snaps his focus back to driving before he can finish his thought

Kyle: Right, lets focus on the here and now, why should I worry about God? Even if I don't know her, I know that there's a fortune in it, so why shouldn't I go along with this?

Kirk: Pleasure of money is nothing without love.

Kyle: Is love really worth it though?

Kirk stares off into the distance wistfully

Kirk: I was once young and driven by the aesthetic - in my case, much of it was a drive for wealth. I ignored the more important aspects of life because they were not enjoyable - at least not in the short term. Then one day God spoke to me and I realized the importance of living a life in pursuit of Christianity.

Richard: Do you listen to every voice in your head?

Kirk: **annoyed** That “voice in my head” is God speaking to me. And what are love and wealth without God?

Richard: Wealth and love just the same, I would argue.

Kyle: How could one be happy without money? All things pleasurable seem to require money today.

Kirk: I once thought wealth and pleasure were everything but then I learned that it's not the case.

Richard: And why is that? I mean, obviously I agree that one should live for more than gaining wealth, but I'm curious as to what caused your change of heart.

Kirk: I used to live a life purely for wealth in hopes to find pleasure from it. I would only do things in my life that would give me money and pleasure. I found no use in relationships. When I did partake in romantic endeavors, I would rush to the highest point of pleasure in a relationship and then leave. I found no reason to take part in the boring repetition of married life. This life never met my expectations and left me feeling empty.

Kyle: Yeah! I get that.

Kirk: Yes, now I know there is a beauty to life that I did not understand before.

Richard: But you're both missing so much else.

Kyle: What are you talking about? What am I missing?

Kirk: **Ignoring Richard's remark** The pursuit of money and the aesthetic made life easier and afforded me expensive physical things, but I was not getting any spiritual value out of it. When I connected and spoke with God, He showed me the beauty in repetition and settling down. He showed me that a pursuit of Christian life can be just as pleasurable as the aesthetic, while also offering the fulfillment of the ethical. ²

Richard: Kirk, I respect your approach but I fear you may still be missing much of the important stuff. By placing too much of your focus on God and Christianity, you again fail to appreciate this life.

Kirk: So, why are you a bus driver if you aim to appreciate all of the wonders of this life?

Richard: Oh, I'm not one for long. I was a salesman yesterday. A poet the day before. Who knows what tomorrow may bring.

Kyle: That doesn't make any sense. Why would you go from job to job like that?

Richard: It's quite simple really. By experiencing the world through a different lens every day, one can better appreciate the world in *all* its beauty.

Kirk: This sounds all too familiar, rotating day to day so that one never gets bored. ³

Richard: Ah, an unfortunate first-impression, and one that I've encountered many times before. But before you pin me as a rotational aesthete - as you appear to be doing - consider my motives.

The aesthete seeks to avoid boredom and maintain maximum pleasure. I care not for either of

² *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, by Robert Bretall, Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 97–108.

³ *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, by Robert Bretall, Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 21–32.

these. My approach simply allows for world appreciation through knowledge of - and attention to - its existence. ⁴

Kyle: Oh, so are you with a different wife every day too?

Richard: Of course not. A world appreciation doesn't require adultery or a promiscuous lifestyle.

Kirk: But you shy away from marriage?

Richard: Yes, somewhat. I only shy away from that which may limit my lifestyle of appreciation, and it is an unfortunate reality that contemporary marriage threatens this.

Kyle: So, if you were arranged to marry someone extremely wealthy, you wouldn't do it?

Richard: I would not. I prefer freedom to explore the world to comfort and material wealth.

Kirk: What if you had the opportunity to marry anyone?

Richard: I think that I still would not, unless she was always in pursuit of the same experiences that I am.

Kyle: So there is no one that you love?

Richard: On the contrary, I love many. In some ways, I love everyone. But I search for more to love every day. There's a certain beauty in everyone - something new in each individual. This is why I marvel at the idea that you would commit to only one.

Kyle: *sighs* Unfortunately it is not my decision.

Richard: Isn't it?

Kirk: Waiting to know if someone is the one for you is very important. I have had many "relationships" that lasted longer than two weeks that ended up not being what was right for me. If I would have gone through with them, it may not have been in my best interest. Going in and out of relationships too quickly was one of my downfalls. Once I found God, I realized being

⁴ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: First Part*, Friedrich Nietzsche, 1883, pp. 174

patient and finding the proper person is what is important. Not the pleasure or the money that might be involved.

Kyle: I've never spoken to God. How does one speak to him?

Kirk: I was at the point in life where I realized that I was not sufficient enough on my own. My method of a pleasurable life came to a point of despair. I came to the point where I needed God and not just myself.

Kyle: How did you realize that? Was it obvious or did it require a deep self reflection?

Kirk: I thought the life of pleasure and money was filling me with only excitement and happiness when in reality it was leaving me more empty than before. You come to a point when you realize that this life offers short term joy and does not give any lifelong fulfillment.

Richard: Indeed.

Kyle: I don't understand how I would live a happy life without the riches that I grew up with. I have become so accustomed to the wealthy lifestyle. I am not so sure that I would give it up so easily.

Kirk: I am not saying this relationship is not for you, I just believe you need to think more on it with God and yourself and base it less on your family's wishes.

Kyle: So you are saying I should betray their love?

Kirk: Do they truly love you if they are forcing you into unwanted marriage?

Richard: How could they.

Kyle and Kirk look up

Richard: They almost certainly feel no love at all towards you.

Kyle: That isn't true. They obviously love me enough to find me a rich wife.

Richard: They love *money* enough to find you a rich wife. Now this doesn't mean that you should actively try to cut them out of your life, but if they do disown you for not bowing to their wishes then I would take some time to consider your priorities.

Kyle: There's no way I could cut them out of my life - they mean too much.

Richard: Of course. And it would be wrong to deny yourself that. But do be mindful of how much they demand, as well as the time you spend under their control, because the rest of the world is waiting.

Kyle: But I can explore the rest of the world with all of the inheritance from her family.

Richard: Not if you are tied down by your family and a wife whom you don't love. No amount of money will account for that.

Kirk: Well, you have to commit to someone who you truly love. You need someone who you can settle down with and be happy in marriage.

Richard: Why must he?

Kirk: First he needs a strong relationship with God, without that no relationship would work. Having a strong relationship with God will allow him to have a strong, lasting relationship with a girl who he loves. The next step if you should try to get out of this arranged marriage.

Kyle: Why do you keep accusing me of a lack of godliness? I am a Christian!

Richard: Kirk, will you stop it with the God thing? God is dead. Besides, look at the boy, he calls himself a Christian but lacks any religious conviction.

Kyle: Hey, watch-it! I go to church on Christmas and Easter, and I own two bibles, just so you know.

Kirk begins to silently pray for Kyle. Richard doesn't see because he is driving.

Richard: **in an ironic tone** Devout. As. Hell.

Kirk: Going to church twice a year and having bibles sitting on a bookshelf is not enough. You always have to be in the process of becoming a Christian. If you are not always striving to be Christ-like then you aren't on the path to becoming a Christian. ⁵

Richard: You're still missing the point, Kirk.

Kirk: And what point am I missing?

Richard: You don't know if there even is a God - and if there once was there almost certainly isn't anymore. Better to focus on this life, this world, the things we *can* know and *can* control. You see?

Kirk: Are you familiar with Pascal's Wager?

Richard: Naturally, but I disagree with the logic of the wager.

Kyle: Who is Pascal and why are we betting on him?

Richard and Kirk sigh in unison

Kirk: There is a philosophical wager that deals with one's decision to believe in God or not. If you believe in God and he does not exist you lose nothing. If you believe in God and he does exist you gain infinitely.⁶ If you do not believe in God and he does not exist you do not gain anything. But if you do not believe and he does exist you lose infinity in heaven with him.

Richard: Of course, the wager neglects the worth of mortal life. Fulfillment should matter now, even if it is also to matter later.

Kyle: Well, to me, it seems better to believe rather than risk infinite loss. I think I'll take the wager.

⁵ *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, by Robert Bretall, Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 433–436.

⁶ *Pascal's Wager*, sites.saintmarys.edu/~incandel/pascalswager.html.

Richard: Alas, another lost soul.

Kirk: In my eyes, it is a soul gained.

Richard: But not in this world. He will lose years - maybe his entire life to the blind following of Christ that you advertise.

Kirk: You speak a lot about your skepticism of God, do you not believe?

Richard: Believe? I believe in many things.

Kirk: Is God not one of them? What are these “many things” you believe in?

Richard: I believe that there could be. Surely *I* wouldn't know. But I also believe that one's belief in God or an afterlife should not interfere with this life to a detrimental extent.

Kirk: I do not think that my belief in God is in any way affecting my life, if anything it is allowing me to be more sure of decisions I make.

Richard: So your faith doesn't limit you in any regards? Certain pleasures or experiences perhaps?

Kyle: Well, my youth pastor said that as long as we pledge our faith, we can do whatever we want to.

Richard: **mumbles** Another shining example of Christian devotion.

Kirk: I used to believe that my faith limits my pleasures and experiences. This is why I used to live the aesthetic lifestyle. After God spoke to me, I realized that pursuit of the aesthetic was only limiting me more than the life I live now.

Richard: But do you not often think of the next life? Of beings and kingdoms, not of Earthly existence? Do not misunderstand, I am not advocating for a purely aesthetic existence. But surely an existence more focused on this world is better.

Kyle: Just imagine what it will be like to walk the streets of gold! I find it hard not to think about that and put efforts towards getting there.

Kirk: This life is good, but it is even better to devote it to God in hopes of infinite gain here and in the afterlife.

Richard: But I still can't see on what grounds? You may be right. There may be a God, but surely an honest and well intended life that is truly lived would be just as worthy to this God as a life wasted on blind devotion.

Kirk: It is not blind devotion, it is subjective devotion. But we are getting off subject...

Kyle: Richard, my stop is coming up in a few blocks.

Richard: And you still plan to be married this afternoon, as your family wishes?

Kyle: **hesitantly** Yes....

Kirk: I sense some hesitation in your voice. Are you reconsidering?

Kyle: Well, all of this talk about God and Christianity has made me think about taking my life more into my own hands.

Richard: How so?

Kyle: Everything that Kirk has said about God and how you should have a relationship with him before anyone else has really got me thinking. What you've talked about in regards to constantly pursuing faith has made me realize that I might not be right just calling myself a Christian. Maybe I need to do more, and maybe slowing down is a good place to start. Although I will upset my parents and forfeit my comfort, I will ultimately gain happiness.

Kirk: I think it is good that you are seeing this. Where do you think this revelation will take you?

Kyle: I can't say for sure, but definitely down a better path than I am on now. How do you think I should begin that journey?

Kirk: I think your very first step is when you get off this bus you have a talk with your parents and see if they are willing to take a step back. Hopefully they agree and give you an opportunity to find love yourself. If they chose not to agree, I believe it would be best to figure life out on your own, even if it means a less comfortable one.

Kyle: I see, thank you. You have helped me more than you know. Your insight is very helpful. What church do you go to? Maybe I can start attending.

Kirk: Here, it is called the Church of Christ we are meeting this Wednesday night for a quick service if you want to join.

Kirk writes down the address and hands it to Kyle

Kyle: Great, I will see you then! Thanks, again. I've gotta get going though.

Richard pulls the bus to the curb, stopping just a bit more aggressively than normal. Kyle gets off the bus and goes towards his parents house deciding how to tell them he does not want to marry so soon. The bus begins to move again.

Kirk: What a good kid, he will figure this all out with time.

Richard: I certainly hope he can still find some meaning to this life. At least you have shown him that there is value in taking things seriously. I can't be too upset I suppose.

Kirk: He was young, kids tend to think more short-term than long-term during those years. I just hope he does not take what I said too lightly and really emerges himself more into the Christian life.

Kirk glances out of his window. The bus stops again and more groups of people get on and get off. Kirk looks back towards the bus driver and realises that Richard has been replaced by the normal driver without his noticing

Kirk: **He mumbles to himself.* What a strange man. *As the bus rolls off again, he notices a familiar sounding voice singing from a street band as they pass. Now where had he heard that voice today?**

Later that Day

Kyle walks into the chapel, and talks to his parents. They decide that he must go through with the arranged marriage. Kyle disagrees and leaves, not getting married and accepting the fact that he will now lose the money he was once so hopeful for. Instead he makes the choice to attempt to live a Christian life and follow the advice of Kirk by pursuing a life of christianity and devotion.

Kyle *the Louis-esque, money-driven aristocrat* written by Kelsey Bomar

Kirk *the Kirkegaardian Christian* written by Barbara Daniels

Richard *the judgemental, thinks-he's-an-ubermensch-man* written by Noel Preece