

Individuals, Gods and God-substitutes— Is Christian Existentialism an Impossibility?

With figureheads of the movement such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre professing atheism¹, the person who is first introduced to Existentialism might consider it an atheistic movement, but the man considered the “father of Existentialism”², Søren Kierkegaard, was a Christian. His “stages of the self” can be contrasted to other models such as Nietzsche’s superman/last man dichotomy, and in this essay I will analyse both in connection with *The Trial* by Franz Kafka and *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky to see whether or not the idea of “Christian Existentialism” can exist.

¹ "Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence" Sartre, Jean-Paul, Mairret, Philip (trans.) (1946). *Existentialism Is a Humanism* [online]. Last edited 18 September 2009. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at http://www.philosophyarchive.com/index.php?title=Existentialism_is_a_Humanism_-_Sartre.

² “Kierkegaard is most commonly known as ‘the father of existentialism’.” O’Mara, Joseph (1949). *Kierkegaard Revealed, Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* [online], **38** (152), p. 448. Article from JSTOR, last accessed 6 May 2012 at <http://www.jstor.org>.

As seen in his *Preparation for a Christian Life*, where he extols contemporising with Jesus over becoming one with priests who care more for worldly materials³, Kierkegaard was anticlerical, and the influence can be seen in stage theory where the goal is to become an individual in relation to God and not the church. The three stages of this model— the aesthetical, the ethical, and the religious— can all be linked to levels of Christian devotion.

Kierkegaard depicts the aesthete as somebody who lives for the self⁴, who is caught up in the follies of worldly pleasures such as the music of Mozart⁵ and cannot become true to God⁶. As can be expected, Kierkegaard has a low opinion of the stage⁷. A, the aesthete of *Either/Or*, laughs at those who go to church even once a year⁸, simultaneously raising Mozart to the level of his own personal deity⁹. He lives by Mozart's teachings, creating a model of existence— an aesthetically-dominated reinterpretation of his author's one— based on his works¹⁰. A's entire belief system is based on the works of Mozart, who can be considered a "God-substitute" — an earthly object or concept to which the aesthete's devotion begins to resemble that of a pious Christian towards God.

³"If you cannot master yourself so as to make yourself contemporaneous with him and thus become a Christian; or if he cannot, as your contemporary, draw you to himself, then you will never be a Christian. You may, if you please honor, praise, thank, and with all worldly goods reward him who deludes you into thinking that you are a Christian; nevertheless he deceives you." Kierkegaard, Søren (2008). *Preparation for a Christian Life* [online]. Last modified 25 January 2011. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Preparation_for_a_Christian_Life.

⁴ "I'm... generally as self-reflected as any reflexive pronoun" Kierkegaard, Søren and Hannay, Alastair (trans.) (2004). *Either/Or*. London, Penguin, p. 44.

⁵ "From the moment my soul was first overwhelmed in wonder at Mozart's music (it) bowed down to it in humble admiration" Kierkegaard, *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶ "My views are the fleeting observations of a travelling scholar... People say the good Lord fills the stomach before the eyes. I haven't noticed, my eyes have had enough... and yet I hunger." Kierkegaard, *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷ "According to Kierkegaard... 'immediacy' is the *failure* (emphasis added) to reflect seriously upon the nature of one's way of living" Watts, Michael (2003). *Kierkegaard*. Oxford, Oneworld, p. 192.

⁸ "...that fear of God was to go to communion once a year... I laughed." Kierkegaard, Penguin (2004), p. 51.

⁹ "I shall form a sect that... refuses to accept anyone besides Mozart; and I will beg Mozart to forgive me because his music did not inspire me to great deeds but made a fool of me" Kierkegaard, *ibid.*, p.62.

¹⁰ "As for the immediate erotic stages, I owe anything at all I have to say on this subject to Mozart alone" Kierkegaard, *ibid.*, p. 83.

According to Kierkegaard, ethics are determined by the individual in relation to the public sphere^{11 12}, adding that all ethical acts are performed towards God¹³. This is a wider definition of ethics than the general meaning of morality, and I will use “ethics” to refer to the Kierkegaardian concept and “morality” to refer to the general meaning preferred by Nietzsche. Even though Kierkegaard disliked the clergy, choosing to worship in a church, for example, would be considered an ethical act as the individual has made their own decision to relate to the public and God by doing so. The way to achieve the ethical mode is to choose oneself in relation to God through repentance, and Kierkegaard says that as Christians invented repentance, only they can choose themselves^{14 15}. Even the Jew, whose religion provided the basis of Christianity, cannot make the absolute choice as he cannot repent the sin he inherited from his predecessors¹⁶.

¹¹ “The ethical as such is the universal, again, as the universal it is the manifest, the revealed. The individual regarded as he is immediately, that is, as a physical and psychical being, is the hidden, the concealed. So his ethical task is to develop out of this concealment and to reveal himself in the universal.” Kierkegaard, Søren and Lowrie, Walter (trans.) (1941). *Fear and Trembling* [online]. religion-online. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at <http://www.religion-online.org>.

¹² “In the ethical way of regarding life it is therefore the task of the individual to divest himself of the inward determinants and express them in an outward way.” Kierkegaard, *ibid.*

¹³ “One has therefore a right to say that fundamentally every duty is a duty toward God... Thus it is a duty to love one’s neighbor, but in performing this duty I do not come into relation with God but with the neighbor whom I love.” Kierkegaard, *ibid.*

¹⁴ “...as soon as I love freely and love God, I repent... it is only if I choose myself as guilty that I choose myself absolutely” " Kierkegaard, Penguin, 2004, p. 518.

¹⁵ “love of God has its absolute peculiarity, its expression is repentance... it is in Christianity that repentance first found its true expression” Kierkegaard, *ibid.*, p. 519.

¹⁶ “The pious Jew felt the sins of the fathers weigh upon him, yet he did not feel it nearly as deeply as the Christian, because the pious Jew could not repent it, for he could not choose himself absolutely” Kierkegaard, *ibid.*, p. 519.

The perfect state in Kierkegaard's model is the religious self. This is where the individual casts off both the aesthetic (the "wish"), and the ethical¹⁷ to choose God in relation to themselves. While the ethical self is a roundabout way of reaching God, the religious comes directly in contact with him.

Nietzsche was the son of a pastor¹⁸, but later broke from Christianity as he found it incompatible with his philosophy¹⁹. He made the statements that "God is dead"²⁰, that is, has become passé, and "Man is something that is to be surpassed"²¹. The superman is this successor, the creator of new values²² in place of the Creator. He is designed to destroy the old values of religion and morality, combined when Zarathustra, title character and organ for the concept, condemns both the "good and just" and the "believers in the orthodox belief" to the stage of the "last man"²³, who all want the same²⁴. Zarathustra predicts a time when last men will dominate and the superman will be unable to rise above this stifling sameness²⁵.

This is a reflection of late nineteenth century society— Christianity was still largely ingrained

¹⁷ "For the knight of faith wish and duty are... identical, but he is required to give up both." Kierkegaard, religion-online (1941) [online].

¹⁸ "Nietzsche acceded to the wish of his mother, who wanted him to become a pastor and follow in the footsteps of his deceased father" Safranski, Rüdiger, Frisch, Shelley (trans.) (2002). *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. London, Granta, p. 43.

¹⁹ "The Christian dogmas of resurrection, grace and vindication by faith... no longer had any binding force to Nietzsche" Safranski, *ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, Common, Thomas (trans.) (2006). *Thus Spake Zarathustra* [online], p. 34. Last modified 14 April. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Thus_Spake_Zarathustra.

²¹ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, p. 34.

²² "You creators, you higher men!" Nietzsche, *ibid.*, p. 354.

²³ "Herdsman, I say, but they call themselves the good and just. Herdsman, I say, but they call themselves the believers in the orthodox belief." Nietzsche, *ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁴ "Every one wanteth the same; every one is equal: he who hath other sentiments goeth voluntarily into the madhouse." Nietzsche, *ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁵ "Alas! there cometh the time when man will no longer launch the arrow of his longing beyond man--and the string of his bow will have unlearned to whizz!" Nietzsche, *ibid.*, p. 39.

in Western culture, and in some countries blasphemers against the faith, supermen as they subverted ethics in the name of their own atheism, were punished by the last men that upheld the law for God²⁶.

The key concept of Existentialist authenticity was invented by Kierkegaard, who said that not only was it the avoidance of pressure to conform to society²⁷, it was an inwardness towards God²⁸. In other words, it is the religious self. Jesus, who encouraged repentance to get closer to God²⁹, was an example. He dismissed many aspects of Jewish law^{30 31 32} and called himself the freedom from the original sin that bound the Jews³³ while spending much time alone talking to nobody but his father³⁴.

²⁶ See Foote, G. W. (2009), *A Prisoner for Blasphemy* [online], for a detailed account of the author's trial for printing anti-Christian sentiments in his periodical *The Freethinker*, Project Gutenberg. Last accessed 12 April 2012 at <http://www.gutenberg.org>.

²⁷ Earnshaw, Steven (2006). *Existentialism: A Guide For the Perplexed*. London, Continuum, p. 3.

²⁸ "(The worldly) use their abilities, amass wealth, carry out enterprises, make prudent calculations, and the like, and perhaps are mentioned in history, but they are not authentic selves. They are copies. In a spiritual sense they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self for God..." Kierkegaard, Søren, *Anxiety and the Gospel of Suffering*, in Kierkegaard, Søren and Moore, Charles E. (ed.) (2011). *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard* [online], p. 137. Rifton, Plough. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at <http://data.plough.com>.

²⁹ "Jesus began to preach, and to say, 'Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'" Matthew 4:17, *World English Bible* (2004) [online]. Last modified 13 April. Last accessed 14 May 2012 at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Bible_%28World_English%29.

³⁰ "(nor) shall there come upon you a garment made of two kinds of material." Leviticus 19:19, *ibid*.

³¹ "Whatever parts the hoof, and is cloven-footed, and chews the cud among the animals, that you may eat." Leviticus 11:1, *ibid*.

³² "Therefore I tell you, don't be anxious for your life, what you will eat, nor yet for your body, what you will wear." Luke 12:22, *ibid*.

³³ "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (The Jews) answered him, "We are Abraham's seed, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free?' " Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:32-36, *ibid*.

³⁴ "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, 'Sit here, while I go there and pray.' He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and severely troubled.

Later Existentialists turned towards considering religion inauthentic as it made the individual inauthentic. Nietzsche considers those who speak of “superearthy hopes”, like Jesus, “poisoners”³⁵, and says that “only we are responsible to ourselves... not at some higher powers”³⁶, while Sartre says that only we can invent truths in the absence of God³⁷. For ease of reference I will refer to Kierkegaard’s authenticity as “God-positive” and the Nietzschean-Sartrean state as “God-negative”.

In *The Trial*, the law resembles Christianity. The highest figures are the high court judges, who, like God³⁸, pass judgement unseen³⁹. Joseph K.’s case is preached in a court, a congregation that meets Sunday at 9am⁴⁰, and everyone and everything “belongs” to it⁴¹, as if they belong to a church. Jesus separated church and state⁴², implying through this that religious and civil law should also be separated. Before the time of Jesus, Jewish law was

Then he said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me.’ He went forward a little, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire.’...” Matthew 26:36-46, *ibid*.

³⁵ “I conjure you, my brethren, *remain true to the earth*, and believe not those who speak unto you of superearthy hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not.” *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Wikisource, pp. 34-35.

³⁶ Mette, Hans Joachim (ed.) (1994). *Frühe Schriften, 1854—1869 (Early Writings, 1854—1869)*, Munich, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, p.63. Cited in Safranski, Granta, (2002) p. 39.

³⁷ “in the absence of any putative God or eternal order of truths, ‘there must be someone to invent truths’, and that ‘someone’ must be us” Linsenbard, Gail (2010). *Starting with Sartre*. London, Continuum, p. 25.

³⁸ “Judge me, Yahweh, according to my righteousness, and to my integrity that is in me.” Psalm 7, *World English Bible* (2004) [online].

³⁹ “the Judges of the lowest grade.. haven't the power to grant a final acquittal, that power is reserved for the highest Court of all, which is quite inaccessible to you, to me, and to all of us” Kafka, Franz, Butler, E. M. (ed.) Muir, Willa and Edwin (trans.) (1968). *The Trial*, London, Secker and Warburg, p. 177.

⁴⁰ “(K. thought) that it would be best to go to the address at nine o’clock on Sunday morning” Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴¹ “everything belongs to the Court” Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴² “Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” Matthew 22:21, *World English Bible* (2004) [online].

civil law for the people of Israel⁴³, and it was the Jews who called for Jesus' execution for rebelling against their faith, a position in breach of Deuteronomy 13⁴⁴. Despite this obvious case against the marriage of religion and law, many Christian countries still used Christianity as the basis for at least some of their laws, as seen in the cases of people being imprisoned for blasphemy.

Kafka, living in predominantly Catholic Bohemia⁴⁵, would have been familiar with the church's dominating influence, but even though he was born Jewish⁴⁶, he professed atheism from an early age⁴⁷. It could be argued that, due to his rejection of the beliefs he grew up with, he had an objection to all forms of religion converging with the law, but as he had a persecution complex⁴⁸ and a rich history of basing characters on himself⁴⁹, what evidence is there against K. being Jewish against this pseudo-Christian society? As K. is unaware of what crime, if any, he committed⁵⁰, his arrest could have been due to his original sin.

⁴³ "The distinction implied (between religious and civil law) did not exist in the old Jewish law" Civil law [online], in Adler, Cyril et. al. (eds.) (1906). *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Kopelman. Last accessed 13 May 2012 at <http://jewishencyclopedia.com>.

⁴⁴ "If there arise in the midst of you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he give you a sign or a wonder... That prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death, because he has spoken rebellion against Yahweh your God" Deuteronomy 13:1-5, *World English Bible* (2004) [online].

⁴⁵ "in the 1910 census, 97 per cent of (Bohemian) Czech-speakers had professed Catholicism" Wein, Martin J. (2009). *'Chosen Peoples, Holy Tongues': Religion, Language, Nationalism and Politics in Bohemia and Moravia in the Seventeenth to Twentieth Centuries, Past and Present* [online], **202** (1), p. 76.. Article from Oxford Journals, last accessed 10 May 2012 at <http://past.oxfordjournals.org.lcproxy.shu.ac.uk/content/202/1/37.full.pdf+html>.

⁴⁶ "(Kafka) could, indeed, have chosen a better time and place to be born a Jew." Hibberd, John (1975). *Kafka in Context*. London, Studio Vista, p. 8.

⁴⁷ "Rejecting religion, Kafka turned in his last years at school to... atheism... he liked to think he disproved the existence of God" Hibberd, *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁸ "(Kafka) depicts himself as suffering from some kind of persecution complex." *Kafka - Metamorphosis* [online]. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at <http://www.oppapers.com/essays/Kafka-Metamorphosis/152437>.

⁴⁹ "(Kafka's characters) are suspiciously like projections of the narrator's imagination" Hibberd, Studio Vista (1975) p. 28.

⁵⁰ "so it seems (I am arrested), but what for?" Kafka, Secker and Warburg (1968), p. 9.

In the priest's parable, the law is guarded by a door. A man spends his life trying to get in and dies in front of the doorkeeper, who says that the door was meant for him all along before closing it⁵¹. According to a note Kafka's friend Martin Buber found, "confession is what makes the door spring open"⁵². It is known Kafka read Kierkegaard⁵³, and he would have undoubtedly been captivated by the Jew in *Either/Or* being unable to become anything more than an aesthete due to his original sin. K. could have confessed this and become ethical, possibly saving himself from death. But can an ethical self be achieved at all in a God-substitute state? While ethical acts are performed towards God, devotion to a God-substitute is pure aestheticism. The existence of a Christian God is implied with the cathedral, and K. could have confessed to him instead of the God-substitute. However, we see him getting uncomfortable in the cathedral⁵⁴, an indication that the Jewish guilt Kafka knew all too well⁵⁵ was stopping him from making the absolute choice. Furthermore, the "Christian" character of the priest does not mention God in his sermon, instead giving the parable about the law before saying "I belong to the court"⁵⁶. Even if K. could confess, he would be confessing to the aesthete's God-substitute instead of the Christian God, falling into the trap of contemporising with priests that Kierkegaard has told the Christian to avoid. The fact that

⁵¹ "“No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it” Kafka, *ibid.* p. 240.

⁵² Horwitz, Rivka (1995). *Kafka and the Crisis in Jewish Religious Thought* [online]. *Modern Judaism*, **15** (1), p. 31. Article from JSTOR, last accessed 6 May 2012 at <http://www.jstor.org>.

⁵³ "Kafka read Kierkegaard in August 1913 and found many of his own thoughts and feelings reflected in his philosophy" Hibberd, *Studio Vista* (1975), p.60.

⁵⁴ "K. wondered whether this was not the time to remove himself quickly; if he did not go now he would have had no chance of doing so during the sermon." Kafka, Secker and Warburg (1968), p. 232.

⁵⁵ "(Kafka saw) his own insecurity as an essentially Jewish trait" Hibberd, *Studio Vista* (1975) p. 16.

⁵⁶ Kafka, Secker and Warburg (1968) p. 248.

nobody is known to have been acquitted⁵⁷ further indicates it is impossible to repent to the God-substitute and to get to the ethical stage.

K. starts out unaware of the law⁵⁸, and when he does becomes aware of it, he makes a conscious decision to dismiss it, as seen when he refers to the court as the “alleged court”⁵⁹. As the moral code of the law incorporates pseudoreligious elements, it is possible to rise above it and become a superman, which K. does. He refuses to back down from this stage and at the end he is met by two men “in frock-coats, pallid and plump, with top-hats that (are) apparently irremovable”⁶⁰, physical manifestations of the last men in their identicalness. K. calls them “Tenth-rate old actors”⁶¹, reflecting what Nietzsche says, that “man (shall) be to the Superman... a laughing-stock”⁶². Nietzsche’s situation of a world dominated by last men comes to light when K. is murdered by the last men⁶³. While murder, as discussed below, can be a rejection of morals, Nietzsche says that the last men also hang onto old values⁶⁴, and these last men may share the Catholic teacher Aquinas’ belief that “heretics” be executed⁶⁵, even though Aquinas wrote his views in the 13th century and they would have been outmoded when Kafka was writing the novel.

⁵⁷ Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 172.

⁵⁸ “‘I don’t know this Law,’ said K.” Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁰ Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶¹ Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶² Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (2006) [online], p. 34.

⁶³ “(One of the men) thrust the knife deep into (K.’s) heart and turned it there twice... ‘Like a dog!’ (K.) said.” Kafka, Secker and Warburg (1968), p. 255.

⁶⁴ “The creator, hate they most, him who breaks the law-tablets and old values” Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (2006) [online].

⁶⁵ “(Heretics) deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be severed from the world by death.” Aquinas, St. Thomas (2008). *Question 11: Heresy* [online]. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at www.newadvent.org/summa/3011.htm.

Here we see conflict between the Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean models. We have K., who on one end of the spectrum is considered an aesthete due to his Jewishness, and on the other end a superman because he is strong enough to rise above the law. While Kafka felt a connection with Kierkegaard, saying that "his case, *despite essential differences* (emphasis added), is very similar to mine"⁶⁶, he uses the inability of a non-Christian to reach the ethical self to drive the persecution of the Jew by a Christianity-substitute.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the author of *Crime and Punishment*, was a devout Christian⁶⁷, as well as an early Existentialist, marrying concepts of both in many of his works, including this and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

One of the lead characters, Sonia, is a prostitute with a strong Christian belief⁶⁸. Prostitution is seen as an immoral act in the Abrahamic religions— in Leviticus 19:29, God tells Moses that if prostitution was allowed to run rampant the land would become wicked⁶⁹. Mary Magdalene, a disciple of Jesus, has been speculated to have been a prostitute⁷⁰, albeit turning away from this alleged way of life when Jesus drove the seven spirits from her⁷¹. Judaism, as we have seen, was very law-orientated in ancient times, and by breaking free

⁶⁶ Hibberd, Studio Vista (1975), p.60.

⁶⁷ "(Dostoevsky's) devotion to the Church..." Slonim, Marc (1964). *The Epic of Russian Literature*. New York, Galaxy, p.275.

⁶⁸ "What should I be without God?" she whispered rapidly." Dostoevsky, Fyodor, Garnett, Constance (trans.) (1956). *Crime and Punishment* [online]. Last accessed 14 May 2012 at <http://www.kiosek.com>.

⁶⁹ "Don't profane your daughter, to make her a prostitute; lest the land fall to prostitution, and the land become full of wickedness." *World English Bible* (2004) [online].

⁷⁰ "The tradition of the Church has from early times identified Mary of Magdala with the woman living an immoral life in the city." Brownrigg, Robert (1993). Mary of Magdala, in *Who's Who: The New Testament*. London, Dent, p. 171.

⁷¹ "Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out" Luke 8:2, *World English Bible* (2004) [online].

from the law-cum-religion to become a prostitute, Mary Magdalene became a superman as well. However, she did not maintain her superman status when she began following Jesus, preacher of the “superearthy hopes” Nietzsche referred to.

In Dostoevsky’s work we see the case of a prostitute who has the possibility to become a superman by breaking the law, but cannot as she, like Mary, is a Christian. However she cannot be categorised as a last man as she prefers to contact God on her own terms⁷² instead of going to church⁷³ with the herd of Nietzschean individuality-fearers.

With Nietzsche's model considering her neither superman nor last man, I shall attempt to place her in stage theory. She gives up her morals but keeps her ethics because she commits an ethical act in becoming a prostitute to help her family out of poverty⁷⁴. Because she has not given up the ethical, she cannot be a religious self, nor is she an aesthetical self as she has made a choice in relation to the public sphere. She is an ethical self, which illustrates the disparity between Kierkegaardian ethics and general morality, which would see her as immoral just for being a prostitute, despite her having morals in her objection to Raskolnikov’s murders⁷⁵ and performing an etho-moral act in coaxing him to confess to both men and God⁷⁶.

⁷² “So you pray to God a great deal, Sonia?” Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1956) [online].

⁷³ “‘I... haven't been (to church’ said Raskolnikov). Do you often go?’ ‘N-no,’ whispered Sonia.” Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

⁷⁴“Sonia... turned to prostitution as a means of giving her family financial aid” Berry, Thomas E. (1978). *Plots and Characters in Major Russian Fiction*. Folkestone, Dawson, p. 22.

⁷⁵ “‘I’ve only killed a louse, Sonia, a useless, loathsome, harmful creature.’ ‘A human being- a louse!’” Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1956) [online].

⁷⁶ “(Sonia said) 'bow down to all the world and say to all men aloud, 'I am a murderer!' Then God will send you life again. Will you go, will you go?’” Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

Another character, Nikolay, suffers on behalf of the then-unknown murderer by confessing to their crime⁷⁷. After he is found not guilty, it is mentioned he might belong to a religious group called the Old Believers⁷⁸, a very zealous branch of Orthodox Christianity whose members would sometimes martyr themselves for the sake of their religion⁷⁹. It makes sense, then, that Nikolay would attempt to martyr himself, and suffering on behalf of others, or “vicarious suffering” is a Christian belief⁸⁰ that would be considered an ethical act in Kierkegaard's model. He does not give up the aesthetical as suffering is his wish, nor does he give up the ethical as he confesses in relation to another person. Much like the other Christian, Sonia, he is an ethicist. He humbles himself before both law and God, so he would have been a last man if it was not for his belonging to a religious minority and as such not following the general creed, making him at least somewhat authentic.

The superman appears to be a very difficult stage to reach in this novel, but that is perhaps due to the fact that the abovementioned characters are Christian ethicists. Let us look at the nihilist Raskolnikov, who creates a model where the “extraordinary person” has the self-granted right “to overstep... certain obstacles”⁸¹. The opposite is the ordinary person, “conservative in temperament and law-abiding”⁸². Here we see similarities with the Nietzschean model, but unlike his last men, who ponder the meanings of life while blinking

⁷⁷ "I am the murderer.... I want to give evidence," Nikolay pronounced." Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

⁷⁸ "There have been Wanderers (a Christian sect) in (Nikolay's) family, and he was for two years in his village under the spiritual guidance of a certain elder." Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ “millions of (Old) believers, rejected the reforms (of Patriarch Nikon, Head of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1660s), sometimes choosing martyrdom rather than abandoning the old ways.” McKibben, Margaret (bibliographer) (2007), *Old Believers in America* [online]. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/ec/oldbelievers/intro.html>.

⁸⁰ "particularly in Christianity, the doctrine of vicarious suffering was developed. (In vicarious suffering) an individual was understood as suffering on behalf of others" Goring, Rosemary (ed.) (1992). *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions*. Edinburgh. Chambers, p. 503.

⁸¹Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1956) [online].

⁸² Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

Sinead Fletcher

simultaneously⁸³, some “(‘ordinary people’)... like to imagine themselves advanced, or 'destroyers'”⁸⁴.

Raskolnikov destroys morality when he murders the old stockbroker and her sister^{85 86}, but unlike the atheist⁸⁷ Napoleon he so frequently invokes, he cannot rise above God. He cannot decide, like Kierkegaard’s A, whether or not to believe in God — he can only really say “*perhaps*, there is no God at all”⁸⁸, making him an ordinary self with “destroyer” aspirations. He is authentic as he refuses to conform to societal norms in his intense isolation⁸⁹, but this authenticity hovers between God-positive and God-negative, a doubtfulness that foreshadows his making the absolute choice by confessing. His eventual embrace of Christianity⁹⁰ indicates that beginning a route to God-positive authenticity is the only way.

⁸³ "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?"--so asketh the last man and blinketh. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (2006) [online], p. 39.

⁸⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1956) [online].

⁸⁵ "As (Alyona Ivanovna) was so short, the blow fell on the very top of her skull. She cried out, but very faintly, and suddenly sank all of a heap on the floor... Then he dealt her another and another blow with the blunt side and on the same spot. The blood gushed as from an overturned glass, the body fell back. He stepped back, let it fall, and at once bent over her face; she was dead." Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

⁸⁶ "The axe fell with the sharp edge just on the skull and split at one blow all the top of (Lizaveta's) head. She fell heavily at once." Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

⁸⁷ "From (the moment Napoleon heard in a sermon that Cato and Caesar were in hell) he decided he could no longer call himself a believing Christian" Cronin, Vincent (1972). *Napoleon*. Glasgow, William Collins Sons, p. xxx.

⁸⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1956) [online].

⁸⁹ "(Raskolnikov) had become so completely absorbed in himself, and isolated from his fellows that he dreaded meeting, not only his landlady, but any one at all." Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

⁹⁰ "Under (Raskolnikov's) pillow lay the New Testament. He took it up mechanically." Dostoevsky, *ibid.*

In John 3:31, it is said that “He who comes from above is above all. He who is from the Earth belongs to the Earth, and speaks of the Earth.”⁹¹, and as the "extraordinary self" is an analogue of the superman, both modes are controlled by earthly desire and are nothing more than aesthetic in Kierkegaard's model. The religious characters, including the reformed Raskolnikov, are ethicists, an indication that Dostoevsky has a religious objection to the superman and prefers a Kierkegaardian model in relation to Christian devotion.

Nietzsche's model calls for the abandonment of morals as necessary to reach the superman level, and in *Crime and Punishment* this leads to the murder of two innocent women. Jesus says that “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”⁹². After his confession, Raskolnikov is "humbled" by his sentence⁹³, and from this perspective it is better for people to be humble instead of Napoleonesque supermen.

While Nietzsche's model lends itself well to the analysis of atheistic, rebellious characters such as Raskolnikov and K., it does not translate well to explicitly religious characters such as Nikolay and Sonia. In this case, stage theory takes over, but this relegates the antiheroes to the aesthetical self that Kierkegaard disdains.

Philosophy has been built on opinions since time immemorial, but I feel that by Kierkegaard shoehorning his own unorthodox beliefs into stage theory—the aesthete is lowly, one cannot achieve God-positive authenticity simply by going to church—it is extremely biased towards those aiming for God-positivity. Nietzsche's model could also be called biased due to his depiction of the last men being similar to Kierkegaard's opinion of the

⁹¹ John 3:31, *World English Bible* (2004) [online].

⁹² Matthew 23:12, *World English Bible* (2004) [online].

⁹³ “Raskolnikov... must humble himself and submit to ‘the idiocy’ of a sentence, if he were anyhow to be at peace.” Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1956) [online].

aesthetes, but Kierkegaard's model has more faults in relation to both Christianity and Existentialism.

Kierkegaard calls any Christian who is not striving for the religious self/God-positive authenticity fake in comparison to his so-called true Christians⁹⁴. Sonia may be a "true Christian" as she is striving towards a religious self by communicating directly with God, and the reformed Raskolnikov may appear to be starting his path to God-positive authenticity, but the priest in *The Trial* appears to be content with his position, and the general reader would likely consider him Christian even if he follows a God-substitute. I believe there is no "real" or "fake" Christianity and that a Christian can worship and live how they like. Again, this is Kierkegaard's criticism of traditional Christianity informing his opinions.

Kierkegaard gives Abraham as the only example of a religious self he can find⁹⁵, but is this categorisation incorrect? Despite communicating directly with God in sacrificing Isaac, Abraham could not confess his original sin as he was Jewish. Taking this major stumbling block, the one that brought K. down, into account Abraham would not have been a religious self but aesthetic, unable to make the absolute choice by accident of religion and law. Here, I have proven one of the key examples in Kierkegaard's writings incorrect, and this casts doubt onto the accuracy of the stages of the self.

⁹⁴ "Historic Christianity is sheer moonshine and un-Christian muddle-headedness. For those true Christians who in every generation live a life contemporaneous with that of Christ have nothing whatsoever to do with Christians of the preceding generation, but all the more with their contemporary, Christ." Kierkegaard, *Preparation for a Christian Life* (2008) [online].

⁹⁵ "Abraham really goes further, and reaches faith... I candidly admit that in my practice I have not found any reliable example of the knight of faith." Kierkegaard, religion-online (1941) [online].

Eastern philosophical models have a shared belief in a higher self, an inner freedom known as the *nirvana* which can only be achieved by giving up the world⁹⁶, much like Kierkegaard's religious self does. However, unlike in Kierkegaard's model, there are many examples of real people reaching *nirvana*⁹⁷. In the novels, the closest thing to somebody giving themselves up to God is Nikolay. His inability to give up both the aesthetical and the ethical as he desires them in relation to God illustrates the difficulty in applying a *nirvana*-like state to Christianity.

The descendants of stage theory, models such as Nietzsche's superman and Heidegger's authentic and inauthentic selves⁹⁸, saw fit to abandon any and all religious elements, and indeed, if we strip Kierkegaard's model of its religiosity, including absolute choice, we get two stages, one authentic and the other inauthentic — a dichotomy similar to Heidegger's. In these stripped stages, one can easily put the pre-confession Raskolnikov, K., and the priest, all those who failed to graduate from the aesthetic stage, in the authentic stage with Sonia and Nikolay as they are authentic, be it God-positive, God-negative or even "God-neutral". This is evidence that it is only the Christian beliefs that Kierkegaard tacked onto his model that is stopping it from reaching concordance with other Existentialist ones.

⁹⁶ "(*Nirvana*) referred to someone... who was... freed into a state of non-attachment, purity and tranquility" Goring, Chambers (1992), p. 374.

⁹⁷ "Recall that there have been thousands, even tens of thousands of *Arahants* (people who have reached *nirvana*) in the past, and that there will be many hundreds, even thousands of *Arahants* in the future." Ajahn Brahmavamso. *In the Presence of Nibbana: Developing Faith in the Buddhist Path to Enlightenment* [online]. Last accessed 12 May 2012 at http://www.dhammadataalks.net/Books6/Ajahn_Brahm_In_the_Presence_of%20Nibbana.htm.

⁹⁸ "The 'they-self,' which we become when we are like Others is contrasted with the authentic self, which we become when we confront possibility" Coffrin, Trevor. *Understanding Heidegger* [online]. Last accessed 11 May 2012 at <http://trevorcoffrin.hubpages.com/hub/Understanding-Heidegger>.

Sinead Fletcher

I have identified two major forms of authenticity in this essay— the God-positive and the God-negative, with the God-neutral being somewhere between these two opposites. As seen in *Crime and Punishment*, having neither God-positive nor God-negative authenticity can lead to internal conflict, hardly "God-neutral" in this sense, but this is in the opinion of the Christian writer. I have analysed fiction where the authors' beliefs predominate over realism. If I was to transfer this idea to authenticities in the real world I would be willing to argue that while there would be some "God-conflicted", most would be either God-negative or God-neutral with no God-positives, even among the devout Christians. The few God-conflicted would be a result of Kierkegaard's religious stage being so difficult to achieve.

I would say Christian Existentialism exists as Kierkegaard's model does, but the model is so flawed it can only be applied with some degree of precision to people who profess Christianity, like several characters in *Crime and Punishment*. Due to the speciality of its scope I consider Christian Existentialism to lead a separate existence from mainstream, atheistic Existentialism, even if they share many of the same concepts.

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Sinead Fletcher

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Sinead Fletcher

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Sinead Fletcher

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