**Introduction:**

While many people cherish Abraham’s story as a testament of faith, Kierkegaard puts a grand twist on it. The Bible assumes God’s authority because God is the pinnacle of moral superiority. Some may disagree with this and argue that God has no such authority. In Sorin Kierkegaard’s writing, he posits the notion that when there is ethical and religious conflict, the religious must prevail, and to prove his point, he uses the story of Abraham. However, it is possible that Kierkegaard could do a better job at defending his view that the religious surpasses the ethical and his argument could use some more work.

**Summary/Exposition:**

In the preface, Kierkegaard starts off by describing how bewildering Abraham’s faith is. One major concern is that “Abraham is at no time a tragic hero but is something entirely different, either a murderer or a man of faith” (Marino 2004, 11). Abraham acts by “virtue of the absurd,” in that it is absurd that he is higher than the universal, or the ethical in this case. In the dilemma, Abraham would either realize he was in a trial and does not sacrifice his son, or go back to the universal in his sorrow. At first, Abraham did not question God and simply obeyed his orders. Abraham must also surely love his son, but he goes through with this because God demands proof of his faith and for his own sake, in order to prove his faith. Perhaps he did so, believing that God will give him his son back and because he believed he will earn the love and salvation of God. As such, Abraham has faith by “virtue of the absurd”.

Kierkegaard defines the ethical as the universal, which he then associates with the divine and the duty to God, stating, “it is proper to say that every duty is essentially duty to God” (Marino 2004, 24). If people can understand God as the divine and the universal, then every duty traces back to God and becomes a duty to God. For example, it is a duty to love one’s neighbor, which can thus be ethical. The ethical is the universal and thus a duty to God. This gets tied back to Abraham in that if an individual wants to fulfill his absolute duty in the universal, he could resist it and not fulfill the duty or do it and be a sinner, even if his act really was his absolute duty. The ethical would suggest that Abraham must love his son, but the absolute relation to God merely reduces it to the relative by comparison.

From the ethical, Abraham is lost and a murderer by consideration, but he is saved as a knight of faith. As stated by Kierkegaard, “Faith is this paradox, and the single individual simply cannot make himself understandable to anyone” (Marino 2004, 29). Basically, what he argues is that there is a religious plane that surpasses the universal in terms of ethics and that only those with true faith can see this plane. While Abraham cannot justify himself to others, he saved by entering this plane of religious faith. Basically, Kierkegaard is trying to make it known that the predicament that one can find themselves in is one that only they themselves can deal with. No one else can provide a better answer other than themselves, especially as one tries to make this transition from the ethical to the universal.

**Critique/Critical Evaluation:**

Looking back, Kierkegaard does well in acknowledging that Abraham’s decision to sacrifice his son with no hesitance is quite perplexing. Starting from that point helps to make his argument more understandable to those who would say that God is not always the ultimate source of authority or morality. Some might say that just because God ordered an execution, it does not make such an act right. While the argument he provides is that all duties are to God, and that all else is merely relative compared to one’s relationship with God, it’s possible that he could provide better justifications for it. As Abraham makes himself into a knight of faith because he believes he will get his son back for his action, his story and example may not be the best in convincing others. Also, Kierkegaard never acknowledges the atheists and those who may have a different religion, meaning he never tries to explain how any of his views could apply to them. While Kierkegaard includes other examples, the fact that he focused on Abraham may have made it more difficult for him to explain his views, as others could easily argue against Abraham, despite receiving orders from God. He does, however, provide a unique and uncomfortable way of looking at how Abraham can be “redeemed” and thus justified through his own faith. And lastly, blind passion could sometimes be dangerous and lead to cult-like behavior. What if God ordered someone to eat only babies for the rest of their life? Perhaps there should be a limit to this religious stage that Kierkegaard believes in.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude, Kierkegaard does not do the best job in defending his notion that the religious takes precedence over the ethical through the story of Abraham. While he starts off through an ethical view, just as others would have to settle his audience, there are some things he did not address. For example, he never acknowledges those who may not be religious or those who may come from a different religion. He does explain concepts like how the ethical is the universal and how it all traces back to God, suggesting that the ethical merely becomes relative when compared to one’s duty to God. He then ties things up by claiming that there is a religious stage that one could pursue by which no one else would understand at this point. However, there are still some issues as Kierkegaard may not have considered the possibility of having “too much faith” or blind passion, which may lead one completely to absurd behavior, which could be cult-like. While some might disagree with his views and points, he provides a unique way of looking at Abraham’s situation and thus understanding how Abraham can be “redeemed”. If he addressed the issues described above, then his notion that the religious surpasses the ethical might be perfect.

Works Cited:

Marino, Gordon Daniel. *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. Modern Library, 2004.