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Anticipatory Grief in Light of Søren Kierkegaard and Simone Weil:

Making Sense of the Task of Loving the Dying

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Abstract

The paper aims to explore the notion of anticipatory grief - a form of emotional trajectory connecting a griever and a dying person - in relation to Søren Aabye Kierkegaard and Simone Weil. The main goal is to see how the philosophers can shed light on the relevance and limits of anticipatory grief. By conducting a literature review, the paper argues that Kierkegaard and Weil can mutually illuminate anticipatory grief as a moral attitude that is born out of love and, through attention, gets directed to those who are about to die. Kierkegaard's thoughts can elucidate the potential of the concept of anticipatory grief to embody the Christian command to love one's neighbour as oneself. In light of the duty to love, anticipatory grief gets disclosed as a moral relationship with the dying. In the search for the right ways to carry out this relationship, Weil's concept of attention provides a method of genuine openness, allowing one to become a neighbour of all dying in affliction. The paper concludes that anticipatory grief can be seen as an integral part of an authentic and caring life, significant in disclosing the value of the dying other.

Keywords: Anticipatory grief; Simone Weil; Søren Kierkegaard; Love; Attention.

Contents

1. Introduction

Anticipatory grief is oxymoronic. It is a phrase that brings what is generally understood as a felt response to someone's death into a timeframe before it has occurred. The concept was introduced in the 1940s by Eric Lindemann and, in contrast to bereavement grief, denotes the experience of loss that happens even before the death of the other (Ivancovich and Wong 209). Multifaceted and complex anticipatory grief receives attention from both philosophers and empirical researchers. Using parallels with bereavement grief and taking it as "an extended emotional trajectory" (Higgins 11), this paper will not focus on concrete symptoms and cases of anticipatory grief. Instead, the phenomenon will be explored on a conceptual level to consider its need and place in human life.

This will be done by positioning it against the thoughts of Søren Aabye Kierkegaard and Simone Weil. Grief in the sense of an emotional trajectory is not explicitly addressed in either Kierkegaard or Weil. Nevertheless, ideas on death, suffering, and love - all arguably being constituents of anticipatory grief - are attentively explored by both thinkers. They provide valuable insights into the core elements of human relationality, and by exploring the basics, the paper hopes to expose the less visible implications of anticipatory grief. Specifically, the necessity of Kierkegaard's love and Weil's attention on the one side against the weight of human limitation on the other will be taken as central. By moving along the lines of love and attention, Kierkegaard and Weil will be put into a conversation over the existential meaning of anticipatory grief.

The background of such a conversation is, most notably, Kierkegaard's and Weil's common axis of religious thought. Even though the breadth of their philosophy spans within and beyond religious thinking, the concepts of love and attention for both thinkers are deeply linked to the Christian tradition. In existing comparisons between Kierkegaard and Weil, God-based love is one of the most prominent parallels (Tietjen 78, Andic 35, Milligan 69).

For Kierkegaard, real love abides by the Christian command to love each neighbour as oneself (Krishek, "Two forms of Love" 596). In contrast to preferential love, it is not selfish or discriminatory and does not expect repayment. Similarly, since love that lies in recollecting the dead is removed from any reciprocity, it is considered by Kierkegaard as exemplary. This act of selfless remembrance can even be conceptualised as grief (Gravesen and Birkelund 4), deepening the link between love and anticipatory grief. With Weil, the connecting link with grief is attention. That is because attention, according to Weil, is the substance of love (*Waiting on God* 36). It brings into the discussion the surrounding concepts like fatigue (the exhaustion of body and soul) and force (the violent might), which are essential in understanding the relationship with the dying in a more rounded way. Attention is still related to the divine grace (both as a mode to recognise and come closer to it) and, as such, can be compatible with Kierkegaard's insights. At the same time, as a tangible method of approaching the world, it is hoped to highlight further implications in the implementation of the duty to love one's neighbour.

The question then to be addressed throughout the upcoming analysis is how love and attention can reveal the value of and, at the same time, shape our understanding of anticipatory grief. To find a possible answer, first, the concept of anticipatory grief will be introduced. Second, Kierkegaard's perception of love will be discussed, partly focusing on his views on love in recollecting the dead. It will be explored whether the moral implications that follow could be applied in the cases where death is only anticipated. Third, the paper will turn to Weil's thoughts on the need for attention in the face of force and the problems posed by fatigue. Finally, the last chapter will reflect on the difficulties in loving the dying. The forms of relationality suggested by Kierkegaard and Weil will be discussed together to see whether (and to what extent) they could be brought into a collaborative and socially relevant approach to morality and mortality.

2. Methodology

The focal points of the literature review will be Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* and Weil's essays and notes. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard not only sets out his basic argument about love but also, most importantly, explores love in connection to death. Weil's ideas on attention are approached through different angles depending on the piece of writing - that is why the analysis will disperse the focus around various points of her philosophical oeuvre. While Weil is an acknowledged philosophical figure, the amount of academic thought given to her is substantially smaller than to Kierkegaard, leading to this paper's slightly uneven reliance on secondary sources. This has been attempted to be balanced out by concentrating on a larger plurality of her own work. The focus will also be brought to primary sources discussing (anticipatory) grief. The papers used are selected based on their sagacity and impact on the general development of the concept due to the goal of exploring the value rather than the specifics of anticipatory grief.

The paper is aimed to be carried out in a pluralistic fashion. The philosophies and concepts will be taken in their own right with the premise of being "irreducible to one another" (Connolly 167). Taking a stance on pluralism is probably the most impactful in those comparisons that deal with deep cultural divides, while Kierkegaard and Weil can both be seen as members of Western Continental philosophy. Nevertheless, delineating lines along which reductionism is unwelcome can help avoid wrongly prescribing the underlying principles of both thinkers. This way, the study hopes to engage with "reciprocal illumination", a method where resisting viewing one thing through the lens of another discloses some hitherto hidden characteristics, enhancing the understanding of both sides involved (Sharma 247). After starting from unassuming grounds, the rest of the analysis aims

not to reach a consensus or a solution but to look for points of attraction and repulsion in a tripartite of Kierkegaard, Weil and anticipatory grief, shedding light on all.

3. Anticipatory Grief

In the twenty-first century, we can see the rising popularity of death studies among different academic disciplines (Davies 2). Bereavement grief is no exception. Grief can be taken as a multifaceted phenomenon of one dealing with the death of the other. Most noticeably, it can involve emotions like sadness, relief, distress, and carnal reactions like tears or a loss of appetite. Anticipatory grief - a form of dealing with the upcoming death - has been ascribed the same qualities (Ivancovich and Wong 210). However, what will follow is not an attempt to make any claims about it as a psychological phenomenon, its causes or traits. The paper aims to explore anticipatory grief by engaging in what Douglas J. Davies calls a "complex task of 'interpreting grief'" (53).

To not be confined to the specificities but to nonetheless hopefully stay true to anticipatory grief, it can be framed by using parallels with bereavement grief as it is described by Kathleen Marie Higgins. Higgins sees grief as "an extended emotional trajectory" (11). Such a definition allows space for different emotions to be acknowledged in the singular body of the grieving person. It also expands the scope in which grief can be conceptualised. It is no longer only a normative medical or psychological phenomenon like prolonged grief is when treated as "unnecessary suffering" (Gravesen 2). Anticipatory grief is a highly personal experience that cannot be fully covered in a mere list of emotions or physical reactions.

It can be argued that anticipatory grief is an extended emotional trajectory in two concomitant ways. First, as already mentioned, the same range of emotions applies as in the cases of bereavement. Anticipatory grief is usually investigated in cases of terminal illness over a loved one. The griever starts feeling the loss before it has even occurred. They

experience the impending death not only as an abstract future possibility but as a concrete actuality that is to happen (too) soon. Second, metaphorically, the emotional trajectory spans from the grieving person to the object of loss. The inter-personality is accentuated in the definitions of grief that hold it to be a form of attachment to the dead (Gravesen 8). In cases of anticipation, this attachment is not a stable bond with the past image of a loved one but is lived through its breaking apart.

In the context of existentialist thought, some scholarly attention has been given to the first quality. Anticipatory grief has been considered in its effects on the personal meaning of life (Ivancovich and Wong 209, Gatewood 143). Similarly, in a religious framework, it has been questioned what the connection between religious beliefs and the experience of grief is. For example, religious belief may or may not lead to lower levels of death anxiety and a higher level of "grief-related growth"; however, the empirical links are still considered ambiguous (Feldman et al. 531).

Nevertheless, the second quality - that anticipatory grief is an expression of interrelation - opens up the scope of the use of the concept. The question can be not only about what anticipatory grief does to the individual but also how it functions in the interpersonal space. Arguably, just like any other form of connectedness, anticipatory grief exists within a bigger tension between duties for others and obstacles in their implementation. Here the work of Kierkegaard and Weil can be particularly useful since their religious understanding of love and attention can provide insight into anticipatory grief as a form of relationality. By turning to Kierkegaard, it is possible to explore in further detail how this emotional trajectory can be interpreted as an expression of love.

4. Søren Kierkegaard and Love

Kierkegaard does not directly address grief in the sense of an emotional trajectory. As will be discussed shortly, he only speaks of grief to denote the sentiment of understanding the vanity of our world. To understand grief in the normative sense (as a reaction to death), it is more beneficial to look at what it is perhaps an expression of, namely, love. Even though the eternal and divine love contrasts with grief in Kierkegaard's interpretation of the ontological structure of the world, it will be argued that anticipatory grief can be seen in the light of and in tune with his main focus - actual workings of love. For Kierkegaard, real love stems from the love of God, and its purest manifestation among humans is the love of one's neighbour. This chapter will walk through the main implications of the duty to love one's neighbour, how it relates to the love of the dead, and, lastly, prompts the need for anticipatory grief.

Works of Love present love as an essential component in the relationship between humans and God. Using the Bible as a reference, Kierkegaard describes real love as something born out of God's mysterious depths (*Works of Love* 27). Secretive is not only the inaccessible source of love but also love itself, which, as Kierkegaard writes in the preface, is "*essentially* indescribable" (*Works of Love* xxvi). Ultimately, the vagueness of approaching love might stem from the fact that God is love, and God cannot be rationalised (Strawser 17). As such, real love is infinite and inexhaustible. Since it arises from God and manifests among people, love binds together the eternal and the temporal (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* 24).

Judging by Kierkegaard's take on the Biblical Writings of Ecclesiastes, for him, the whole realm of temporality could be conceptualised as the realm of vanity (Williams 185). Vanity is the inherent quality of our world in how it contrasts with the eternal, which is the realm of goodness that is yet inaccessible to mortals (Williams 180). Grief, then, is the sentiment over the vanity that points to the eternal and discloses "the insufficiency of this world" (Williams 187). In other words, grief becomes an attitude over the mundane realm of

dissatisfaction and a moving factor that prompts hope of a better order. In terms of the construction of the world, it can be reasoned that while love is something that is born out of God, grief is the primary response to a world removed from God.

However, most of Kierkegaard's focus is not on the cosmological and overarching descriptions of the world but the particulars. The fact that Kierkegaard chooses not to describe the essence of love points to how he does not consider ontology or epistemology as primordial; instead, he is looking at the phenomenology of human actions (Strawser 19). Grief as the sentiment over vanity is not so illustrative of the general workings of the human realm; to look at how grief manifests and what it means, it is needed to narrow down the focus to the lived reality. Specifically, considering love (as far as that is possible considering Kierkegaard's position) is what will allow a deeper understanding of different human connections, including grief, without disregarding the overarching background sentiment of grief as a response to vanity.

To get closer to the meaning of love, Kierkegaard uses a Biblical metaphor of knowing a tree by its fruits. He proposes that we recognise love by looking at how it manifests (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* 28). Of course, the common denominator in the workings of love in the human realm is still God, and that is what makes it extraordinary and connected to goodness: "without love, the good life is inconceivable, and … without God, humans would be unable to love" (Minister et al. x). A person lives well by actualising the unknowable potential of love (Krishek, "Love as the End of Human Existence" 3). That is, as a fruit coming from the mysterious depths of God, the love we act out is essential to the good life. Goodness is such not only in the moral distinction of good versus evil but also in the most practical terms: the failure to love leads to an "unhappy life" (Krishek, "Love as the End of Human Existence" 7). Thus, the act of love is needed to live a good life in experiential terms.

Even though Kierkegaard does not provide a conceptual definition of love, it is possible to get closer to its meaning by looking at the most profound type of love - that of one's neighbour. According to Christian teachings and consequentially to Kierkegaard, everyone is obliged to love one's neighbour as themselves. The duty is especially significant in considering the moral aspect of love. As per the instructions received by Christ, one should not conceptualise each person as a neighbour but *become* a neighbour to all. It is essentially about one's positioning. Only God loves in the total sense - humans can only use what has been given to them and channel it further (Andic 26). In human terms, we are fundamentally detached from the source of love, yet it has to be regarded as something to be directed, lived out as a task. The limitations of the transcendental love within the confined human realm only emphasise the workings of love, the "actualisation of that potential" (Krishek, "Love as the End of Human Existence" 5). Particular situations of love become of utmost importance.

This divine command to love one's neighbour as oneself has several implications. Firstly, the object of true love is all people with no exceptions (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* 58). A neighbour is an open category that connects all people, and it cannot be defined by proximity. Rather, neighbourly love contrasts with the preferential love of lovers or friends. While preferential love is not something wrong, it is steeped in temporal sensuality and, as such, could not be perfect. Secondly, love is a duty. Loving humankind with no exceptions is an obligation (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* 36). In being a duty, real love is made eternally secure (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* 44). The pagan forms of love contrast with the infinite as insufficient and relate to anxiety since one could never be certain of their future (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* 26). Thirdly, real love is essentially selfless. In the rigorous Christian delineations, love for the close people is self-love (Krishek, "Two Forms of Love" 597). For Kierkegaard, even though the self should not be in complete denial - as that would infringe the instruction to love the other *as yourself* - it should never be the focus.

The focus should be on the infinite - the pure love that is best revealed in neighbourly love. Real love is a directionality that does not seek reaffirmation and gratification that one finds in, say, erotic love.

For Kierkegaard, recollection of the dead is another form of real love. It is, in fact, exemplary because it is the most selfless, faithful and freest act due to no possible reciprocity. A question can be raised on what grounds are recollection and real love precisely related. Seemingly, the relationship between the living and the dead is not only non-reciprocal but, in a strict sense, impossible. The dead are non-beings and, as such, cannot be actants in the process of love. Nevertheless, for Kierkegaard, the ontological state of the dead is not clear-cut nonexistence but is more paradoxical (Stokes 259). In a way, the dead exist only in the conscience of the one who remembers: "One who is dead is no actual object; he is only the occasion that continually discloses what resides in the one living" (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* 347). While the object of love in being an occasion cannot love back, it is essential to remember that love in the human realm is about the participation in the flow of love that starts with the divine. The remembrance actualises the potential of love; it is one's positionality between God and the dead.

Looking at the discourse on grief throughout history, Janni Dahlgaard Gravesen and Regner Birkelund even see Kierkegaard's understanding of the act of recollecting the dead to be a conceptualisation of grief (4). In grieving, a person mourns a connection that has been lost and reiterates the love for the dead person. The most common manifestations of grief raise a question about its value. As mentioned, the significance of the recollection of the dead lies in its pure and selfless nature. Yet, it might still not go along with the main principle of neighbourly love of being equally directed towards all - grief is selective and tends to be based on proximity. While there exists general recollection of the dead (for example, many cultures have days dedicated to the dead), the objects of grieving - even when we talk about

the dead in the generic sense - for each person are first and foremost those of proximity: erotic, platonic love, and friendship. According to Kierkegaard, these are the connections that must be "dethroned" against God's infinite love (*Works of Love* 59).

Nevertheless, even though it is clear that we grieve people with whom we have a direct interest, that is not the only way. In the normative sense, grief requires a prior connection. However, it can be argued that the connection is preferential only if it has been set as such from the very beginning. When the duty to love one's neighbour is fulfilled to the fullest, the duty to grieve over them seems to be a natural next step. As has been noted by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben, the dead continue being our neighbours and, as such, put us in a position of infinite duty to remember them; in return, in performing that duty, "we *give* them the very phenomenality that makes them objects of duty" (16). Therefore, grief is an exemplary working of love not only in its selflessness but also in the commitment and execution of the divine duty.

Although anticipatory grief is not something in Kierkegaard's vocabulary, it can be analysed by relating it to the implications stemming from seeing grief as a form of real love. Some might oppose that anticipatory grief does not necessarily fit Kierkegaard's framework since it still has a chance of becoming reciprocal. In cases where a beloved person is about to die, they are still alive and reachable. There is an actual possibility of talking to them and saying goodbyes if they are conscious and close by (like in times of, for example, terminal illness), even though that is not always the case. Such moments might even work as examples of the lesser kind of love Kierkegaard talks about. It has a chance to be reciprocal, and it is also particular and object-bound. It seems like anticipatory grief over a beloved person does not contain the pure and exalted selflessness encountered in love for one's neighbour.

However, this counterargument against the applicability of Kierkegaard's concept of love goes against only a limited set of cases of anticipatory grief. A solution is to open up the

concept of anticipatory grief. In the same way grief (recollecting the dead) can be understood in terms of love for one's neighbour, anticipatory grief can encompass more than singular instances of breaking close-knit bonds. When anticipatory grief is conceptualised in Kierkegaard's neighbourly terms, it can become an even more exemplary form of love in how it is both selfless and universal. Again, when starting from the position of being the neighbour to all, it seems inevitable that one is in anticipatory grief about the human community in general. If everyone is loved equally, and anticipatory grief is an expression of love to be lost, all are grieved equally as well.

The concept of anticipatory grief, then, becomes moral on different levels. Not only do people abide by the duty towards the dead and the duty to love - in (anticipatory) grief, one learns how to love the living: "the specific circumstances of loving a permanently absent other brings to salience crucial features of how we should love the *living* and *present*" (Stokes 254). As an exemplary expression of love, anticipatory grief becomes a model - it teaches how to love unselfishly and unconditionally. It means that it is both an expression of love and a tool to learn how to love, a learned moral attitude that is reciprocally fuelling and perfecting itself. By grieving over the soon-to-be-lost person, one performs an act of selfless love and abides by the duty to love in an exemplary fashion. In turn, through engagement and implementation, the act of love gets perfected over time. Anticipatory grief as a form of engagement provides the framework that is perfected and can be applied in the love of the living. It is a form of engagement that teaches about the nature of love and discloses the duty that becomes clearer and harder not to abide. Thus, it is both: a way of teaching to love the living and a completion of the duty to love the dead.

Is the implication that one should grieve? It seems like a bleak conclusion if anticipatory grief is taken as an exclusively negative directionality towards the object of loss. Yet, it must be remembered that it is a form of love with a complicated and multifaceted

emotional tone. Dealing with death and loss is connected to pain, darkness and negative emotions. Kierkegaard, in a way, reminds us that anticipatory grief is multilayered, and pain is only one of the layers. In the Christian sense, the feelings within anticipatory grief also depend on the dualism of a human being. While the person is to be lost, the framework of eternal life after death is consoling and deems death only a natural step into the next world. Moreover, not only in the Christian framework but in general, through grief, we witness the value of life; grief "discloses in an almost overwhelming way the value of the other who has been lost" (Stokes 265). It can be argued that this value functions on a few levels: in cases of preferential love, the other is precious as the object of love, but also, in cases of neighbourly love, the other is valuable intrinsically and independently of any connections. There is almost this perpetual movement in which people are commanded to see each neighbour as valuable and are finally confronted with the value through grief.

In a sense, the disclosure of value is a small-scale model of Kierkegaard's cosmological understanding of grief. The cosmological grief for him, in how it points to the vanity of this world, prompts hope for a better one. In his analysis of Ecclesiastes 7:3, Kierkegaard writes that grief, unlike laughter, changes the heart in a positive way (*Upbuilding Discourses* 148). That is, grief changes one's understanding of what is important and helps to become a better person. Similarly, in anticipatory grief, the other human being is understood as more than mere factuality. In a way, the dissatisfaction with the ultimate emptiness and the meaninglessness of death opens up the griever, changes them from within and incites hope regarding the future of the dying other.

Overall, Kierkegaard discloses that when the love of one's neighbour is taken seriously, anticipatory grief becomes a universal duty that should not be shunned away from - it is a working of love. Love, a crucial part of a good life, begins in God and is fulfilled by humans. To carry it out, Kierkegaard chooses the model of the Christian duty of loving one's

neighbour as oneself. In it, one can selflessly position themselves to be a neighbour to all. In following this duty, the concept of anticipatory grief gets opened up. When no longer based on proximity, it can be applied universally and selflessly, creating a framework of moral relationality with the dying. Perceived in the light of Kierkegaard, anticipatory grief perpetually discloses the value of the other, teaches how to love the living and shapes the griever into a moral actant.

The whole structure of how love arises and has to be channelled by humans, according to Kierkegaard, directly parallels Weil's thoughts. For her, too, the movement of love starts in the depths of God, and humans have to abide by it selflessly. Nevertheless, while both philosophers start from a Christian position, Weil's take on the engagement with the object of love can help zoom in on what being a neighbour entails and, hopefully, illuminate anticipatory grief from another angle.

5. Simone Weil and Attention

Simone Weil's thoughts are captured not only in her direct uses and explanations of certain concepts but possibly even more so in the surrounding notions. That is perhaps because of her style of philosophy, where she seemingly looks at all things and phenomena as constituents of one far-reaching framework. Everything is connected to the extent that, for example, love cannot be fully covered without looking at the whole scheme in which each notion contributes to another. Instead of making a direct side-by-side comparison, this chapter will look at what might help expand the framework of love presented by Kierkegaard. To mediate a tripartite conversation with Kierkegaard and anticipatory grief, the main focus will be on the concept of attention and the adjacent ideas. The analysis will start with a short introduction to Weil's approach to love. Then it will move to attention together with its constituents, complications due to fatigue, and connections to force in the context of death.

When Weil talks about love explicitly, she uses it similarly to Kierkegaard because God is central to it. Both Weil and Kierkegaard see love as something outside human capacities; for him, it is born out of God, and for her, it is a miracle (Andic 26). She believes that in decreation - a way of renouncing one's ego - a person can make space for the love to flow from God back to God (Weil, *Gravity and Grace* 34). In such a scheme, a person becomes a vessel for love, but it does not mean that a person cannot love per se. It is that love is a very metaphysical notion. It is sometimes even argued that for Weil, "love is never really about the other human", and all forms of love are just forms of indirect love of God (Milligan 69). Real love is transcendental, but the workings of love are tangible. Thus, to see what love in the human sphere does and how it can be carried out, it is worth turning to attention - a closely related notion.

According to her, love for one's neighbour and God has "attention for its substance" (Weil, *Waiting on God* 36). In Weil's thought, attention is a method of approaching the world. People long for genuine concern and wish to be seen - in receiving attention, a person is accepted as truthfully as possible and, in that way, loved. In her letter to Father Perrin, she writes: "Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it" (Weil, *Waiting on God* 35). As can be seen, attention is inactive action that leads to extraordinary perception. Weil has called it a form of "negative effort" (*Waiting on God* 34). Even though it comes from a rigorously Christian standpoint, it is close to some forms of Buddhist thought (which Weil has admittedly been influenced by) that assign special importance to the stillness and the emptiness of the mind (Aaltola, "Confronting Suffering" 236). Through this pure stillness, love takes place.

Even though attention is a mode of "negative effort", that does not mean that it is virtually effortless. While it is somewhat opposite from, say, clenching one's muscles to see

or mentally forcing oneself to understand, it is nonetheless onerous. Attention requires so much from the giver that Weil saw it as a miracle for anyone to truthfully carry it out (Weil, *Waiting on God* 36). In fact, fatigue is proof of attentiveness, coming from human limitedness and our inability to be completely selfless. Weil saw fatigue as an inevitable consequence of giving attention and, in a broader sense, "a sign of connection and relation to the world" (Rozelle-Stone 144, 148). In a way, fatigue is the human equivalent of materials wearing out in friction.

The effects of fatigue, according to A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone, can be seen as dualistic. On the one hand, supernatural fatigue opens us up to be even more attentive outside the limits of the intellect (Rozelle-Stone 151). It decreates humans so that they lose layers of their egos and, in such a way, get a chance to confront things as they are. The supernatural fatigue also opens one up to divine grace, giving a chance for attention to be sustained. That is, through attention, one is fatigued, but in being fatigued - by letting go of any self-conscious efforts to act - one can come even closer to the stillness that gets to the truths of the world. On the other hand, the danger lies in the natural effects of fatigue. Natural fatigue tempts people to look for "facile resolutions" (Rozelle-Stone 152). It is not a comfortable state; instead, it is a form of complete exhaustion in which one does not necessarily have any energy left to do anything. Thus, the supernatural factor for Weil is of utmost importance in the schema of giving others attention because the consuming natural fatigue does not have any remedies.

Similarly to the supernatural fatigue, affliction also leads to the decreation that allows proper attention. According to Weil, affliction is different from mere physical or emotional suffering. Inescapable and overruling, it captures one's soul and makes a person a slave (Weil, *Waiting on God* 38). Suffering can be eliminated, but affliction is everlastingly present. For example, in terms of grief, Weil claims that the pain of the experience of the

death of a loved one belongs to the realm of suffering and not affliction (*Waiting on God* 38). That is because it comes to an end with a change of mind. Affliction is closer to death itself as it cannot be purged. Through this domination, affliction leads to a loss of self, allowing the emptiness within to be directed towards the world (Aaltola, "Philosophical Narratives of Suffering" 30). Thus, accepting one's affliction and emptiness allows a person to be more attentive to reality.

Moving from the first-person experience of affliction, it can be seen how the affliction of others calls forth attention. In discussing compassion, Weil writes that charity "does not discriminate"; rather, it is found in certain places instead of others because the abundance of affliction calls for more empathy (*Waiting on God* 76). According to Weil, the afflicted do not need some justice implemented in their name, but they ask for their pain to be noticed and acknowledged (Thomas 145). It could be argued that attention is what notices affliction in the first place and allows the charity to follow. Some people suffer (more), so we care about them; if attention is the mode of approaching the world, it only makes sense that affliction should urgently draw our attention.

In the process, giving attention to the afflicted would not leave the giver unchanged. From the beginning, attention cannot be offered from wrong motives, as that would be against the genuine nature of the action. For Weil, the reasoning behind a good act matters; she believed that there is "something horrible whenever a human being seeks what is good and only finds necessity" (*Waiting on God* 77). In her work, necessity is the way life unfolds in by the laws of gravity rather than grace. It is not what one should align themselves with, even when the consequences would be positive. Our illusory reality is composed of necessity, but one's ultimate goal is to go towards the realm of true God's grace. Finding necessity, in this case, can mean obliviousness to higher motives. If we take attention to be given from pure heart, this contact with the affliction of others means that one agrees to suffer together.

There are no longer protective layers in real genuine attention. So, for Weil, the contact with an afflicted stranger would end in her own pain (*Waiting on God* 25). When one is really attentive to the pain of the others, there exists no possibility of not being pained as well.

If attention is taken to be a mere state of open eyes, it initially does not seem to resemble love. Yet, attention proves to be an exemplary form of love considering the motive and consequences. It can be seen how both love and attention, at least in part, rest on purity. For example, similarly to Kierkegaard, Weil saw the relationship with the dead as exemplary because it was not directed to the future and, thus, free from illusions (*Gravity and Grace* 66). According to her, the dead cannot be loved in the image of the future, and we can only wish for them to have lived - which has indeed been the case. Both future and immortality are illusions that humans treat in an escapist way. If one does not succumb to seeing the dead in an illusory way and still loves them, this love is pure. Thus, Weil's understanding of love for the dead reaches the same conclusion as Kierkegaard. While for Kierkegaard, the value of remembering the dead comes from the impossibility of reciprocity, for Weil, it comes from the lack of temporal illusions.

To look at anticipatory grief, it is fitting to consider the role of temporality in further detail. In theory, one could argue that Weil would disagree with the concept of anticipatory grief because it is, in a way, a sentiment tinted with unrealistic expectations about the future. When a person is (in a general sense) diagnosed to die, we might deem it unfair, as seemingly their life could have equally continued on. Anticipatory grief might look at the upcoming death against the backdrop of an alternative life, disconnected from actuality. For Weil, time as a whole does not exist outside the boundaries of the presence (*Gravity and Grace* 52). Thus, grieving over the future would seem pointless and illusory. There is no right lifespan, no predetermined correct timing for death. One must accept the reality as it is, and grieving in

that sense is a pointless sentiment. Nevertheless, that would be a shallow reading of anticipatory grief, basing it merely on the temporal sentiment.

Here, it is relevant to introduce Weil's concept of force, which can be seen as the connecting point between affliction, attention, and death, allowing seeing anticipatory grief as more than a sentiment based on illusion. In her essay on Homer's *Iliad*, Weil touches upon a few aspects of war that are true not only of the narrative world but are also acutely applicable to our lived reality. For Weil, the *Iliad* is a mirror of our world, and its main hero - force - can also be traced in the lived human reality ("The Iliad" 183). Force, which should not be understood as something originating in humans, governs the world and subjects people (Weil, "The Iliad" 184). She writes: "It will surely kill, it will possibly kill, or perhaps it merely hangs, poised and ready, over the head of the creature it *can* kill, at any moment, which is to say at every moment" (Weil "The Iliad" 185). Force as absolute and destructive power is like a small-scale violent manifestation of necessity, and this connection allows seeing necessity as the "ultimate force" (Levy 35). Thus, force is closely connected to violence, but it is more than that - it is a dominant might subjecting people.

Bearing in mind the connection with necessity, phenomenologically, force is an illusion. Force gets perceived as this terrible power because it contrasts the (actually illusory) sentiment of the equilibrium of justice (Levy 33). In essence, things are the way they are, and conceptualising some happenings as occurring due to force is only a way of making sense of it all. However, even though force is not an independent actant per se, it is still tragic. In part, the tragic nature of force rests on how the relative existence subjects people. This can be observed through a parallel with time. Time is illusory in being a part of the larger illusion of necessity, which is fundamentally different from the real realm belonging only to God. Nevertheless, people are subjected to time (Weil, *Gravity and Grace* 52). It is a paradoxical

situation in which people must obey that which does not exist in the pure sense because, in the lived reality, there is no other way.

What is more, force is tragic in how it connects to death. As Weil puts it, there is a difference between death awaiting in the future and death being the future ("The Iliad" 201). According to her, this idea of death as the future is repugnant and unnatural to the human mind. It can be encountered when, for example, war makes a soldier face the idea of inevitable death at every possible moment, overruling the experience of living (Weil, "The Iliad" 201). The force turns a soldier into a thing - a corpse with a soul yet no future (Weil, "The Iliad" 183). The theme of enslavement to (something near to) death brings us back to affliction. Arguably, with force, the affliction of a dying person reaches the highest point. Seemingly, it does not matter if it is lung cancer that follows the person in every step or war as long as the afflicted do not succumb to the illusion of imaginary cosmic injustice done to them. They know death not only from the temporal perspective; it is present in how the body cannot function the same due to chemotherapy or wounds. Death as the future does not get posited against the possibility of life. Subjected to force, a person is in a constant affliction and is, in that sense, cleared of the illusion of future or past.

Due to force, the need for attention and anticipatory grief arises. The affliction of those under the force ultimately calls for attention from the witnesses. The sight of death, according to Weil, evokes a bodily response of shudders and horror ("Human Personality" 91). Yet, that sight has to be engaged with, taken up with attentiveness. When looked at from afar, affliction can be mistaken with lower forms of suffering and evoke only pity (Weil, "Human Personality" 91). However, for Weil, pity is not enough. It is a form of reaction that comes from looking from a distance without a deeper concern for what is witnessed. In contrast, when the afflicted bodies are paid attention to, the person paying attention is so affected that they get sucked into the affliction and become afflicted themselves. The whole

experience is too extreme for one to be left unchanged. The pain can be seen as a mark of real attention where one genuinely decreates themselves into the affliction bound relationship. With all the emotional tones, anticipatory grief can be conceptualised as the attention given to those who are pressed down by force; it is attention marked by the affliction, proving its genuineness. Anticipatory grief could fall into the trap of seeing death from the perspective of life, but force and the accompanying affliction shift the perspective - death as the future is no longer illusory and genuinely calls for attention.

Weil provides a vast theoretical framework where anticipatory grief can be approached from the perspective of attention, bringing it closer to what Kierkegaard would perhaps see as a working of love. In Weil's terminology, anticipatory grief can be conceptualised as a mode of attention towards those who are bound to be subjugated - and already are so - by force. As a mode of pure perception, attention opens up the perceiver to the world. The person becomes directly responsive to the affliction of others and partakes in the affliction. Just as necessity causes affliction, the force causes the affliction of those facing death, which means that in anticipatory grief, one takes the role of being subjugated by force together. This, in turn, clears one of the temporal and selfish illusions and allows one to be an authentic participant in the human community. Nevertheless, while attention gives shape to anticipatory grief and places it within society, it does not give straightforward commands. To look at how attention and love get implemented, the next chapter will delve into the path and the accompanying obstacles of carrying out the task of loving the dying.

6. Reflection on the Difficulties in Loving the Dying

Both Kierkegaard and Weil offer frameworks in which anticipatory grief can be conceptualised as an ethical approach towards the dying. Nonetheless, even though insightful, the task of grieving might be difficult to materialise. If the goal is to fulfil the implications

reached by both theorists, how do you put the imperative to grieve into practice? Is it possible to do so in a secular setting? This chapter will provide an attempt at a symbiotic reflection on the implementation of grief by using the conceptual tools provided by Kierkegaard and Weil interchangeably. In particular, it will be looked at how human limitations and the absolute dependence on the divine can hinder the exertion of the duty to love the dying. The chapter will start with a discussion on the issue of human agency in initiating the emotion of grief. Then, it will address the problem of directionality and how to deal with abstract cases of affliction in connection to the broader issues in ethical debates. After looking at the demands of anticipatory grief and the fatigue that comes from its implementation, the chapter will end by reflecting on the limits of the approach.

First of all, since the emergence of anticipatory grief is directly dependent on God, it can be questioned to what extent a human being is responsible for initiating (and whether they have any power to initiate) it. As a morally exemplary attitude, anticipatory grief has been proven to be something one should act out. Yet, tracking down the origins of grief, the agency of the human actant can be doubted. Looking at Kierkegaard, it is seen that anticipatory grief is born out of love, and in turn, out of God. This is exemplified in Weil's position, as she claims that humans can only channel the love given by God. Echoing some of the concerns in the more eminent free will debate, here, too, it might be challenging to see how one can both be left as a vessel to the love flowing from God and at the same time grieve, that is, be a moral actant.

From within the religious framework, Weil's concept of attention proposes a specific version of compatibilism, where stillness in accepting the rule of God is accordant with active moral responsibility. With attention, one is an actant in the openness to the flow of God. From outside the religious framework, such openness perhaps could not qualify as an action. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard can provide an alternative angle to approach the same question of

agency that would also work in a secular framework. In talking about how love directly depends on the object of love, Kierkegaard states that the "emotion is not your possession but the other's" (*Works of Love* 29). That is, one never literally controls love. That is not to say that humans do not have control over their emotions but that emotions are not isolated rational decisions as some other moral acts might be more like.

As such, the question of initiating anticipatory grief is misleading - even if it is a moral attitude, it cannot be conceptualised in a fully active sense. It is a complex emotional trajectory that depends on external factors, making it impossible to speak of an independent agent who can start grieving by the matter of will. Rather, as anticipatory grief is born out of love - and it is not only the true love of God that one is subjected to but any love in general - it has to be accepted with genuine openness and fulfilled in carrying out the emotion. While positionality is not a source of grief as such, it is a mode of behaviour that gets one to grieve authentically. In writing about being honest with one's emotions, Kierkegaard states that to "cheat oneself out of love is the most terrible deception" (*Works of Love* 23). In a way, any form of striving to grieve would be like cheating oneself in love - it would not be authentic. Seemingly, love or grief are not some exercises that can be performed out of command. Anticipatory grief is impossible to force; it should be carried out by genuinely positioning oneself to be attentive to the outside world and the internal emotions that would inevitably match reality.

Imagining that one is in a position ready to be attentive and to grieve, a question arises about how that is compatible with the rest of one's life. Caring so thoroughly about everyone who is about to die would perhaps leave no space or time for life itself or for caring about the living. Kierkegaard's aversion to preferential love frames us in a way that love is deemed to be monotonously directed to all, disregarding the circumstances. Following such logic, anticipatory grief would be endless since all living organisms face death at one point or

another. Here, Weil's ideas on force and affliction can attune anticipatory grief not to be overpowering and life-consuming. She helps delineate the direction of anticipatory grief: attention follows affliction. Attending to everyone equally in the sense of being a neighbour to all does not mean an endless and monotonous stream of attention towards all; it means that in that position, one cannot discriminate against any cases of affliction. No matter the distance or prior relations, anticipatory grief arises in response to the affliction of the other. With careful attention, anticipatory grief can be localised and, thus, more realisable. One does not have to be suffering constant and never-ending grief but be ready to grieve when affliction makes it necessary.

In carrying out the universal postulate to grieve over those in affliction, a problem can arise from the fact that some of them are abstract entities. Often, we know that there are forms of affliction out there that we do not know the name of. How can attention be brought to the unknown? The problem exists in cases where affliction is certain yet abstract, for example, in distant tragedies. Say, we are presented with the fact that in a war X, hundreds are dead, and thousands are facing death. People in affliction yet far away from us are abstractions as long as no direct contact is made. Seemingly, it is impossible to genuinely grieve over humans behind those plain numbers as there is no tangible conceptualisation or a body that could act as an object; also, it is humanly difficult to care about that which is unknown. We can neither have ontological objects of attention - which is needed, as otherwise, the attention goes nowhere - nor the motivation.

Looking at this concern from Weil's perspective makes it possible to form an answer that is perhaps of even broader ethical applicability. This difficulty in caring about abstract entities connects to some of the objections raised against approaches based on care ethics. For instance, in arguing for empathy as a basis of moral action, Michael Slote admits that we need "immediacy or vividness" for "empathic appeal" (23, 26). Distance, either spatial or

temporal, puts care ethics in danger as it creates partiality and hinders the perspectives of universal empathy. Nevertheless, while it is impossible to grieve over (and inherently care about) an abstract object in the complete sense, a person loves the other the moment the abstract is disclosed as something real. The task of attention, then, is to tackle the abstract, make sense of it, get to know it, and reveal it as much as possible. Weil shows the need to broaden our circle of concern, reducing (and hopefully - getting rid of) the distance endangering care ethics. Readiness to love in anticipatory grief alone is not enough when faced with abstraction because, without activation, it would remain hypothetical positionality. Therefore, there needs to be an active movement and engagement with abstraction to disclose the suffering. The moment one gets to know of someone's affliction - through attention - has to be turned into a moment of becoming their neighbour.

The problem is not necessarily that people cannot disclose abstraction, but that attentive anticipatory grief is a demanding task. Following Weil, it can be said that people escape the truth of war in the "illusion that war is a game" ("The Iliad" 200). Distant witnesses can abstract the dying into numbers; they take up the opposite action than disclosure since real attention is difficult and uncomfortable. The main obstacle, then, is not that it is impossible to love the abstract (that is indeed true as far as it is undisclosed) but that people in practice engage with the abstraction and even produce it themselves. The fault would lie in, for example, one looking at a video of innocent civilians being held hostage with ticking bombs mounted on their chests on social media and instantly dissociating from that image or pretending that their reality has nothing to do with the reality of the victims. Radical asceticism and unwillingness to react to the cries for help are, arguably, other forms of active abstraction and escape from the duty of anticipatory grief. Weil's attention discloses the reality if one is willing to sit through its terror. In knowing it, being a part of it, there is no way not to become a neighbour as that will be illuminated as the only possible choice. While

it is impossible to grieve over a conceptual person, it is necessary to grieve over someone crying for help - attention and love provide the tools.

Considering that attention is activated and directed, fatigue becomes a further problem. As seen in Weil's thoughts, the fatigue that comes from unconditional attention is draining. One of the dangers of fatigue is that it tempts one to take an easy route and turn back to illusions. The other is that it exhausts the person to the point of not being able to be attentive anymore. Fatigue is tangible in situations of prolonged attention towards affliction. For instance, when a catastrophe occurs, people get an immediate impulse to do something - to care, donate, cry, and grieve. Yet, when the horror of a situation steadily continues over time, attention from the public vanes, and with it, grief, too. That is, genuine attention lasts until it fatigues people - that is the moment when they have to turn away to sustain themselves. Fatigue here points to our limits. Seemingly, without the intervention of God's grace, there are no solutions to be perfectly attentive. When transferred to a secular setting, anticipatory grief could not be sustained to the fullest.

As discussed, anticipatory grief starts by positioning oneself to be a neighbour to all. In that positionality, one has to be attentive to be ready to grieve over those who face the terror of force. Genuine attention solves the question of how to grieve over the unknown. While it does not remove the veil of abstraction that shrouds the dying person, it helps to not miss out on the available details and does not allow to succumb to the temptation of looking away and producing the abstraction yourself. By looking at fatigue, it becomes clear that the thoughts of Kierkegaard and Weil are undetachable from God as the power source which allows the flow of love in the first place. Nonetheless, anticipatory grief, be it with the help of the supernatural (and as such - perfect) or without it (meaning, existing within a finite moment of genuine attention), exists as an emotional trajectory that should be realised. Writing a letter to Joë Bousquet, Weil claims that: "no true effort of attention is ever wasted,

even though it may never have any visible result, either direct or indirect" ("Friendship" 281-282). That is, attention, even when not taken to the absolute fullest, even when stopped by fatigue, is not useless. Therefore, anticipatory grief that is attentive to the dying is an ideal that must be sought and carried out to one's limits.

7. Conclusion

On the whole, anticipatory grief is a form of loving the dying that can be understood and enriched by relating it to Kierkegaard's moral framework of love and Weil's thoughts on attention. When put plainly, anticipatory grief is an emotional trajectory of reacting to the inevitably near death of a loved one, but parallels drawn with thoughts of Kierkegaard and Weil show that it can hold more meaning. Anticipatory grief can be a moral attitude born out of love and, through attention, directed to those who are deemed to die in affliction. Moreover, by illuminating the need for anticipatory grief, the frameworks of Kierkegaard and Weil are reciprocally affirmed as able to accommodate shapes of love and attention that are not inherent to the thought systems. Thus, anticipatory grief displays the depth and relevance of their philosophies and is, in turn, enriched by them.

Kierkegaard's thoughts disclose how anticipatory grief can be seen as one of the workings of love. For him, love is born out of the depths of God and has to be realised selflessly by each person to live a good life. Due to his critical stance on reciprocity, the love of one's neighbour and the recollection of the dead are exemplary forms of love, underlining the need for selflessness in genuine love. When the universal duty to love the neighbour is carried out to the fullest, anticipatory grief becomes the response to the upcoming death of the other. In this framework, anticipatory grief acts as selfless love that is not contained in temporality. Thus, it is a moral working of love that has to be carried out to continue participating in God's stream of love and to live a good life and realise its value.

Bringing Weil into the conversation, it is possible to display more concretely the possible constituents of Kierkegaard's scheme of love. Specifically, Weil's concept of attention can be a mode to become the neighbour who loves the dying. Attention, as a way of openness to the world, discloses reality and allows one to be aware of the affliction of others. This way, attention is the tangible substance of divine love. Taking us a step further in the direction of corporeal human action, attention also reveals the more bodily undersides of anticipatory grief. In grieving over those who are about to die (or, in Weil's terms, are under the subjugation of force), a person agrees to be in affliction together. That is because genuine attention removes the possibility of being indifferent or illusional. Therefore, starting from the same position as Kierkegaard, Weil also sees anticipatory grief as a valuable component of life yet emphasises how it is an authentic form of living rather than a duty to be fulfilled.

Anticipatory grief, then, is not only a set of emotions that arise and wane - it can also contain moral layers that shape it. The emotions do arise (following the religious framework - from God), but it seems to be one's positionality that influences the exact manifestation of anticipatory grief. Even though it cannot be forced - just like love, it can be directed - just like attention. In the movement of love, the value of the dying other has the chance to be clarified, or, in cases where the dying other is nameless, at least given a chance not to be turned away from. This mode of conceptualising grief is limited in its direct dependence on God. When taken to the secular, it faces the problem of human limitations in the shape of fatigue. Yet, the fact that Weil offers an answer to fatigue only in supernatural terms should be respected since trying to strip off the religiousness of Kierkegaard or Weil would not do any justice to their profound thoughts. At the same time, anticipatory grief has proven to be a concept that can be expanded, which opens possibilities for further research, perhaps then already bringing the religious into conversation with the secular from the very beginning. Nonetheless, even when staying with Kierkegaard and Weil, the illuminated task of anticipatory grief can serve to the

very least as an ideal in different contexts, as it offers a universal path of love and attention in the face of death.

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