**Disunity and Paradox Oral Defense**

A timeless concern for the conscience of many religious persons has been to understand and if necessary, reconcile their morality with that of their world. Over the course of this project, I have given my answer to the concerns of a *kind* of religious life, that of incompatibility, where one experiences a tension between their interpretation of religious morality and the plurality of morals within their sociopolitical climate, and as a sort of cognitive dissonance. Incompatibility, as I defined it, is first and foremost experienced in concretion. Its archetypal expressions can be found in dilemmas of conscience such as the Abraham-Isaac Story, the interpretation of religious texts in opposition to the morality propagated by their popular culture, but one of the most prominent forms of the incompatibility is dialogue.

The incompatibilist conscience is faced with questions of commensurability, hospitality, and the unconditional acceptance of other beings in discourse. This ‘problem’ lends to questions such as ‘How do I and my religious community engage with moral otherness? Are my religious morals, passed down from the will of God, incompatible with the morality of pluralism? Further, does the sanctity of my faith command privacy from the other- the prayer, worship, and other religious modes- do these preclude others in my relation to God the Divine?

Most of all, the issue I have presented here sparks a drive toward the unity of these two moral systems, giving way to questions of resolution if not total reconciliation. For the incompatibility appears a choice, a separation of life paths. It is not a static question of ideology or logic, so much as it is a call to act and figure out the faith of their religion and the love one keeps for others. ‘How do I unify the will of God and my commitment to others, regardless of their belief or creed? Is it possible in discourse to bear my soul to the face of another in spite of all moral difference and the faith that may imply sheer incommensurability?’

The natural stakes for this issue reside in the experienced tension, but they are somewhat complex due to the number of variables. The incompatibilist must sort out their moral ideology, the psychological dissonance of being tugged in two directions, and of course a holistic labeling that ‘all is well’, ‘this disunity I felt is resolved’. The ultimate consequence is the integrity of the religious conscience. However, one less oriented toward an immanent practical dilemma like a trolley problem, but stepping to robust case studies like the Abraham-Isaac story and the face-to-face interaction. These offer more insight into the *location* of religious morality and what that means for the individual. This is the distinction I made between practice and conceptual practice- that is, the everyday empirical dilemma and a more meaningful, yet somewhat hypothetical scenario.

The incompatibility, as intimate, practical, and for conscience, engages the individual rather than society looming over them. ‘It is a problem of personal meaning for me’, and hence for resolution, I and the incompatibilist look to the existential sphere over the political sphere for answers. Because of our ideological considerations, we are searching for a more ‘fundamental’ distinction, a transformation of this life choice between the will of God and communion with the other, such that the incompatibilist may be authentic in their choice, partition the terms, or bring them together in unity.

But to be more practical for a moment, I think this problem is pivotal for comprehending the religious person and another, and likewise their communities. For any resolution affects dialogue with the other, much more so than the dramatic implications of say, religious violence, subjugation, or exclusion. In this interaction for example, the incompatibilist must resolve the nature of their faith prior to the spoken words. ‘In relation to God, what do I believe about myself, and what do I believe about the other?’

In the matter of the unified religious conscience, I put forward two models, unification of partitioning and unconditional unification. Unification of partitioning keeps religious and communal commitments separate. The faith privatizes the individual in an ineffable religious mode and partitions both the will of God and the other to different spheres, offering unification through recognition instead of reconciliation. The dissonance is addressed, but the tension remains. Unconditional unification is more straightforward. Unity is created with the insight that God resembles the other, much more than It resembles me. In this way, the spatial difference- the very incompatibility- is dissolved in the gaze, leaving a full on dialogue for the other, indifferent to the modes and morals following the faith.

Second, the most ‘fundamental’ terms of the incompatibility occur in the interaction with the divine. They are the privilege of the individual in a private, absolute relation to the divine and the humility of the individual in a public, yet equally divine relation to the other. The former is sometimes called interiority, the latter exteriority. One gives credence to the conflict between the ‘religious’ and the ‘ethical’, and the other dissolves any moral distinction.

The method to get to these models is experiential analysis based on the writings of Kierkegaard and Levinas. I fashioned a modest framework inspired from William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, where I suggest conditions for my definition of unification. Unification of partitioning was based on an exegesis of the Abraham-Isaac story within the proposed framework, and I establish the incompatibility as a conflict between the ‘religious’ and the ‘ethical’, where the will of God does not live in the ethical sphere. In dialectical terms, partitioning emerges when Abraham’s mission is negated and he returns down the mountain a changed man, one who has received the damning, redeeming knowledge of the leap of faith, and this lends to the religious mode of privacy- what I call the incommensurable being. In Levinas, an ethics to oppose this surfaces from the face-to-face interaction with another human being. The whispers of their otherness, strangeness, and alien nature answer my inborn, metaphysical desire for that which is not me, a feeling analogous to the incompatibilist’s desire to reconcile and commune with the world. In this way, the absolute otherness of God, derived from Otto’s interpretation of the holy, comes to resemble the other, for they are unknown, transcendent, out of grasp. Yet they command somehow a gentleness and love which precedes political civility.

Despite the essential positivity of this message, some qualms may dot the peripheral, and these objections appear implicitly throughout. The first is practical. With an abundance of categories, their burden is arguably too much for the project to bear. The ideological, psychological, and experiential strains of the incompatibility and how these factors condition unification provide a hefty amount of ambiguity. And these too are coupled with the existential strains of the either/or. It is unclear how the structure I proposed for unification comes together with the divisive either/or. The clarity at least can be settled I think by stating that the categories are more explanatory than necessary. They assist in nuance and uncovering *types* of unification, specifically partitioning. But the issue in my sights has always been this. ‘My religious convictions disagree with the multitude of morals in my world. A tension of interpretation, dialogue, or the exceptions to the great overlap of moral beliefs causes me to question this consistency. I interrogate this incompatibility, transform it, reduce it, and try to unify it if I can, by means of partitioning (which one could say is a unification of the conscience or being as opposed to ideological terms) or through a holistic approach. But it comes to me as a choice, for I have but one life to live for others, and the nature of my faith may condition how I regard the other in my moral system. Thus the content of the either/or at hand is filled by the transformations given in the incompatibility, but it remains always in experience. Yet the surge of the either/or may strike us with the force of a rote contradiction, the guise of a fundamental choice to be made right now.’

The second objection is about truth. Is this project concerned with stating such and such is the solution, or is *resolution* about living with others to the fullest, most aware extent? This is more difficult to resolve, since by the end of project, I set up an either/or about the nature of the individual in a state of faith (interior or exterior, the religious infinity for myself or the infinity for the other). The terms of the debate for this choice are there, but the truth of these two models is unexamined. Thus, one answer is that it is unfinished. However, I think it would be false to suggest out of hand that unification of partitioning, with its more daunting consequence, is harmful. They could be for two different kinds of lives, contexts of what is rational. What is important then is knowing how personal faith functions in the religious community and communities of abounding, exciting otherness.

Finally, the third threatens the project before it begins, and it is a question concerning system versus practice. One could argue that the will of God is above all and by a matter of deduction, conclude summarily that the omnipresent morality blankets the other. In which case, the lived reality of the incompatibility, how it manifests in practice, *reveals* the ‘actual’ reality of these divisive moral codes. Whereas, I argue, the lived reality triumphs and gives life to any moral distinction. My project depends on the incompatibility, in Kierkegaard and in Levinas, existing because of conceptual practice. What privilege does God give me in relation to others? None at all, or the capacity to kill. This revelation with the divine breathes life into moral monism and moral otherness. This qualm cannot be resolved in the scope of the project, but in a critique of deductive hermeneutics and pragmatic truth. However, I did claim and will repeat my suspicion about the incompatibility being accessed via deduction because I believe it serves as argument more than it assists living. For two different interpretations - one in a God away from community and a God in the face of the other- differ in the location of morality in the life of one, affecting ordinary action in terms of modality, religious activity such as prayer and communal worship, and dialogue, as opposed to pure argument.