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Prompt: To what extent is influence immoral

Death and Rebirth of the Soul

Influence serves as a compelling force that contains the power to transfigure individuals and their psyche. Specifically, it controls individual behavior both subconsciously and consciously through the manipulative compelling of actions and thoughts. As a transmutative force, it is a restrained microcosm of the cycle of death and rebirth. It subtly transforms the psyche of the individual by permanently altering it and incarnating it differently, through changed thoughts, actions, and ideas. In essence, the human psyche is shaped by a multitude of interplay between, most prominently, thoughts, desires, and actions; influence, by impacting these primary factors, deconstructs the human psyche and rebuilds it in an intricate yet destructive process, forming as a metamorphosis of the psyche.

Knowledge is deeply interconnected with influence, as influence is often actualized through the communication of knowledge through language. Foucault's idea of knowledge-power as inseparable terms, beautifully illustrates the dynamic between power, knowledge, and influence. Influence itself, is a branch of power manifest. The control and communication of knowledge itself is also a form of power manifest. Thus, knowledge-power as a medium for transmuting the human soul through influence is intrinsically and inherently immoral, by artificially shaping their inner-most world, their psyche.

Influence as a force for the metamorphosis between the present-self and the future-self is inherently immoral, by both deconstructing the current-self and manipulating the future-self. The original sin, of Adam and Eve, was a consequence of the Fallen One's influence. The lure of sin, the spread of pride, by the beautifully deceitful and misleading words of Lucifer, tempting the initial two humans to disobey God and transcend their position of authority, proved irresistible. Lucifer, through his temptations, extinguished the existence of a sinless Adam and Eve. His influence reincarnates them, reshapes them, into their sinful versions. Essentially, any influence on a "perfect" creation, a creation shaped by God, described as "good", destroys the teleological balance between the natural and the artificial. The organic becomes artificial; the old psyche dies to be reborn into a new psyche; the sinless becomes sinful; the pure becomes perverted, so on and so forth. Through an Aristotelian lens, the soul of an object or person, the perfect form of that soul exists in the plane of forms. When that soul is manifest into the plane of reality, the influence of reality will pervert the form, even if it is initially "perfect", into a distorted perversion. Thus, influence itself strips the pureness of the soul and wiles it in filth, leading to a disconcerting and abominable mockery of the organic, perfect, psyche, through a process of death and rebirth.

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However, it could be posed, couldn't influence lead to good? Is there no such thing as moral influence? Oscar Wilde, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, conjectures through the character of Henry Wotton, "There is no such thing as good or bad influence. All influence is bad, because to influence, is to give a part of your soul to another person". Influence is intrinsically immoral simply because it is the divine act of parting with a portion of one's soul in the sacrificial act of leaving it with someone else. Kierkegaard, in *Fear and Trembling*, argues that man prescribes meaning of the finite by understanding it through the lens of the infinite, an absurd antinomy that perfectly captures the human condition. In a sense, the infinite depth of the soul, is translated into the finite through the intimate process of practicing influence, exemplifying the raw condition of the human psyche. The idea of "moral influence" can be explained as a conflated term of "ethical influence". The ethics of influence can be dissected through various ethical frameworks, including a consequentialist and utilitarian framework that would support the ethics of influence in a diverse range of situations. However, the morality of parting with one's soul, imparting it on another's soul, and forcing the other soul to embark on a journey of metamorphosis, of death and rebirth, is not only inconsiderate, but cruel. No one has the right to force that change in anyone else, and in doing so, disrupt the balance between the organic and the artificial.

Previously, all the examples discussed were of the way external influence shapes the human psyche and condition. However, could our own psyche influence our own soul? The ultimate pursuit of life is in approximating towards the form of our own soul. In reaching an asymptotic relationship with our soul, we pursuit towards our "perfect", original teleological state. The issue arises when pragmatic considerations of what it means to live is explored. Specifically, the physical world, a bombardment of the senses, the complex social structures ready to socially exile outcasts, and the world created from fiction, Yuval Noah Harari argues, crucifies any individual that attempts to escape from influence. Even language itself, shapes how information is processed, and knowledge is actualized. Thus, to partake in society, to communicate, and to exist, is to be influenced. As a consequence, the human soul is a fragmented vessel for everything it has experienced, with every influence serving as a subtle enforcer of reality's harsh reverence for subjecting individuals to its demands. The individual psyche, if remained pure enough, thus, holds the power to reassemble the soul through the process of self-actualization. Rather than ridding itself of all influence, it seeks to divert influence towards intentional streams that make up the river that is the human soul. In a way, the psyche mimics the power of transmutation held by influence, to almost alchemically approximate the human soul towards its original state. In essence, the inner-psyche accumulates external influence and purges itself of the influences that do not align with its organic, perfect form of soul, translating the finite, once again to the infinite in a reversed process. Through this approximation, it converges towards the point of its "true self".

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Therefore, the intrinsic immorality of influence which holds immense power over the developing psyche of individuals, permanently altering their soul, finds resistance, through a developed, internal psyche, which holds the power to cleanse its' soul through the pursuit of self-actualization towards its perfect form. Thus, the impossibility to escape influence explicates the absurd state of existing in this reality but empowers individuals with the transformative force of transmutation to negotiate truth and meaning in an apathetic reality.