

Duty vs. desire

Experience, Human Nature



The road to self-actualization is one filled with forks. One must constantly make decisions that affect character and one's ultimate destination in life. Some travel this road very consciously, making informed and well thought out decisions that they hope will lead them in the right direction. Others live haphazardly, not taking into account the possible consequences of poor decisions. Often times one of the most major forks is a decision between moral obligation and private passion.

Pressing matters of family or work may call one to put personal aspirations on hold for the sake of the whole. But does one necessitate abandonment of the other? Which way will lead to a happier life? Tom Wingfield, the disillusioned narrator of Tennessee Williams' Depression-era play, "The Glass Menagerie," must battle through this specific plight. He struggles to find the answer to the question of when desire overrides duty. All humans are blessed with a plethora of gifts, but all have one in common: life.

This being said, there is one common humanistic duty: the obligation to live that life in the most satisfying manner in the hopes of reaching fulfillment. However, the individual decides which manner is most pleasing to himself or herself, and one person's idea of a life well lived is wholly different from another's. This fact should not be disdained, but embraced. Diversity is what allows for unique and inspirational perspectives that can create new ideas and changes in society and culture.

Nevertheless, there are those that do not share this view, which leads to an all-too-common clash of wishes - between parents and children, subordinates and superiors, students and elders, etc. Tom Wingfield conflicts with his mother, Amanda, in this way. Her only wish is that her children, Tom

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and Laura, fulfill the classic American Dream of hard work and success. However, Tom has dreams of being a writer, and Laura is too painfully shy to even leave the house. Clearly there will be at least one person displeased at the end of the day.

The Wingfields live lives of short fuses hidden under good intentions - Tom and Laura do not wish to disregard their mother entirely, but they have their own wishes that she does not respect. There are daily battles over who has the right to decide the lives of the family. Tom rightfully uncovers the truth that in order to achieve true happiness in self-actualization, one must choose the paths one takes alone. As stated above, some people truly put thought into their decisions, while others do not.

This does not imply that the thought-out choice is the superior one. One can reflect upon an important decision for weeks, months, or years, and still make the wrong choice. If this is true, how is one supposed to make the proper choice? How does one settle on the fork leading to the happier life? The answer is blunt and cruel. Sometimes there is no "happier life." Many situations present themselves with no clear better choice. Tom debates his ever-growing desire to desert Amanda and Laura and live the life he feels he would enjoy infinitely more.

He convinces himself that this would be his happier life, and does leave in the end, but not without some unwanted baggage. Wherever he goes, he is haunted by guilt of leaving Laura behind. It is evident that even when one does all the right things, when one takes into account outcome and consequences, and still makes the decision alone, it is very possible that

there is no silver lining. One must simply do one's best to make the decisions one feels good about and live with them.