Kierkegaard's Ethic of Cooperative Self-Becoming

M.J. Regier

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To the love of my life, Leanne, and to those through whom I owe my self.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Works by Søren Kierkegaard[1]

BA	The Book on Adler
CUP	Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'
EPW	Early Polemical Writings
EOI	Either/Or Part I
EOII	Either/Or Part II
FT	Fear and Trembling
PF	Philosophical Fragments
REP	Repetition
SUD	The Sickness Unto Death
SLW	Stages on Life's Way
TDIO	Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions
TA	Two Ages
UDVS	Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits
WA	Without Authority
WL	Works of Love

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Works by Paul Ricoeur

CR	The Course of Recognition
FM	Fallible Man
FTA	From Text to Action
HHS	Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences
OA	Oneself as Another
PA	Philosophical Anthropology
SE	Symbolism of Evil
TNI	Time and Narrative Vol. I
TNIII	Time and Narrative Vol. III

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[1] Unless otherwise noted in the text, each of these is from the collection *Kierkegaard's Writings* edited by H. Hong & E. Hong.

Acknowledgements

I would be remiss if I did not thank my parents for all their support throughout my academic odyssey. Their unwavering interest in my philosophical pursuits—and acquisition of books—has been continuous from the first time I plundered a Kierkegaard book from my father's personal library. Their sustained encouragement has made this possible and I appreciate the various ways that they have left a mark on my work. I would also like to thank my sisters who provide nothing but encouragement and love, who always cheer for their brother's success, and who clamber over each other for the opportunity to be the first to say a nice thing about my writing. So too I would like to thank my friends who patiently nodded along while I talked incessantly about this project and were kind enough to say it sounded interesting and was clear enough that no follow-up questions were necessary.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Leanne, without whom this thesis would lack heart. Your willingness to listen to me prattle on endlessly has been—and will continue to be—greatly appreciated. I cannot give expression to the depth you have given this thesis, and while I can thank you, even that falls short of what you deserve.

Thank you all for making this thesis a possibility through your continued support, encouragement, and friendship.

Michael Regier

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide an account of Kierkegaard's ethics that resolves some of the ambiguities arising from his theory of the stages and reorients them through the lens of contemporary ethical theories. To reformulate his ethics we must first understand the ethic that he is advocating. His version of the Christian neighbour love ethic is primarily articulated in *Works of Love*, and his explicitly Christian ethic represents his primary ethical commitments (Chapters 1 and 2). However, this ethic is itself an extension of an implicit ethic developed in his pseudonymous literature located within the humourist and religious stages (Chapter 3). This forces us to draw a distinction between the ethics of Judge William in *Either/Or* (often wrongly attributed to Kierkegaard as his statement on ethics), and the distinction between religiousness A and B, namely non-theological and Christian aspects of the religious stage respectively. Thus, our primary concern will be situating Kierkegaard's ethics within religiousness A, without falling back to the ethical stage or leaping too far into Christianity.

However, there is major problem that must be addressed by adopting this approach: namely, that Kierkegaard gives relatively minimal structure to religiousness A. To resolve this problem, we will adopt two lenses through which to understand Kierkegaard's ethic: narrative identity and phenomenology. We will therefore bring him into dialogue with critics Alasdair MacIntyre and Emmanuel Levinas (Chapter 4). While each provides one of these lenses respectively, it is finally by bringing Kierkegaard into dialogue with Paul Ricoeur that we can resolve the ambiguities, as well as adopt each of the lenses (Chapter 5). When viewed through the lens provided by Ricoeur, we can then finally see Kierkegaard as an advocate of an ethic of cooperative self-becoming that is not grounded in theological arguments, but is immanent to human existence and interpersonal relationships.

Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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Introduction

Søren Kierkegaard's ethics have been subject to examination, assessment, critique, evaluation, re-assessment and every other permutation of intellectual and academic scrutiny—so why is this new investigation necessary? Although there have been a variety of expositions of Kierkegaard's ethics, these have not always been undertaken in productive ways, as key concepts and ideas that Kierkegaard employs have been overlooked in favour of the expediency and accessibility offered by deferring to what Kierkegaard terms the 'ethical stage.'[1] While our goal in this present examination is also concerned with Kierkegaard's ethics, we hope to take a fresh perspective, focusing primarily on what he terms the 'religious stage,' the stage where his ethical commitments are often published under his own name. This approach offers a renewed interpretation, which will not only elevate ethics within the context of Kierkegaard's broader authorship, but will also transform our understanding of his authorship in relation to his ethics. Our goal is, primarily, to argue that an implicit advocacy of an ethic of cooperative self-becoming is evident in Kierkegaard's works, one possessing secular roots despite theological overtones in the language used to describe it. To be clear, our goal is not to deny or distort the theological *telos* of Kierkegaard's *oeuvre*, but rather to suggest that he was attentive to the possibility of living an ethical life without being Christian.[2] Furthermore, our contention is that limitations in the philosophical language Kierkegaard draws from necessitated a circuitous, and at times counter-intuitive, approach to expressing his philosophical commitments, leading him to default to using theological vocabulary. However, with the advent of phenomenology and hermeneutics and an attendant renovation of the concept of subjectivity, a language suitable to articulating Kierkegaard's ethic is now available to us.

It would be helpful, before moving too deeply into our discussion, to place this contribution within the context of other presentations of Kierkegaard's ethics. For the sake of brevity, we will use George Stack's *Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics* (1977) as an example. While Stack commits an error common to analyses of Kierkegaard's ethics, his book remains helpful in developing an understanding of Kierkegaard's ethics in spite of that error. This error results from treating the 'ethical stage' as the central description of ethics in a Kierkegaardian model—it is common to find the so-called ethical stage either elevated to the pinnacle of ethical existence, or merely conjoined with the religious stage as an 'ethical-religious' stage. This has the apparent

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[1] While we attempt to rectify this in our reassessment of his ethics, we must acknowledge that we are limited in our scope and a full treatment of the theory of stages is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, we do try to amend this by providing an alternative account of the stages that *i*) is felicitous to Kierkegaard's exposition separating and advancing the 'religious stage,' and *ii*) disentangles the terminology of 'ethical' and 'religious' from their colloquial meanings.

[2] This is evident in the distinction he draws between religiousness A and religiousness B, where the latter is 'decisively Christian.' This distinction will serve as our primary focus in the final three chapters.

advantage of making Kierkegaard's position more accessible and intuitive, but invites a multiplicity of issues, as the ethical stage is not in fact the stage wherein ethics is activated, but rather the stage where contentless ethical structures are designed and uncritically assented to—structures that can be (and Kierkegaard contends are) put to unethical ends.[3] This requires a reorientation and transformation of ethics, achieved through the movement into the religious—where the hollow ethical systems are replaced with an interest in living an ethical existence. It is for this reason that we will favour the sphere of the religious stage over the ethical stage in our examination of Kierkegaard's ethics.

Stack nonetheless appears to be conscious of his problematic use of the ethical stage, as he directly states, "Kierkegaard presumably held that the religious mode of existence... was the 'highest possibility' for man" (Stack 1977, 85-6). However, despite recognising that the ethical stage is not paramount in Kierkegaard's existential schema, he brackets out the religious stage's pre-eminence in order to commit to an argument in favour of the ethical stage as representative of a Kierkegaardian ethic. The ease of playing on the terminological ambiguity has the drawback of undermining Kierkegaard's broader argument. By reducing and simplifying his ethic to the hollow ethical structures found in his articulation of the ethical stage, recognisable ethical formulations Kierkegaard himself is critical of can be attributed to him—this serves a purpose both in positive presentations of his ethic (aligning it with earlier ethical systems) and critical evaluations (suggesting that Kierkegaard does not consider ethics important—the suspension, or merely replicates the ethics of others— Kant in particular). This arbitrarily limits the breadth of the ethic and incorporates into it a variety of internal inconsistencies—as we will briefly discuss below (*§1*). That such an error is common is not entirely surprising, as Kierkegaard is frequently indirect and misleading in his writings—the goal of which is appropriation, not mere acquisition, of its content through rigorous personal engagement.[4] However, this strategy gives rise to a variety of ambiguities in his theory of life stages that present difficulties when trying to dissociate his ethics from either its theological presuppositions, or from the terminological ambiguity in the naming of the existential spheres (an ambiguity resulting from borrowing that terminology).

To avoid the pitfalls that Stack, among others as we shall see, falls into, we will first clarify how we are employing the stages in the forthcoming argument and explain why we favour an interpretation that clearly delineates and separates the spheres of existence. Our intention is to restore pride of place to the religious stage as the stage of true ethical existence, as it is within the religious stage that ethics is transformed from ethical structures that are abstracted from lived existence, into a concern for alterity and subjectivity (concepts the ethical stage is antithetical to) (*§1*). We will then discuss Kierkegaard's concept of the 'self,' as it serves as the central unit of his ethic—each relating to subjectivity and alterity—and is therefore essential to understanding his ethic as an ethic of cooperative *self*-becoming (*§2*). Finally, we will provide a brief outline of the sequence of the argument, giving the main objectives of each chapter and providing an overview of the development of the argument as a whole (*§3*).

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[3] Kierkegaard has a sustained criticism of ethical systems that claim absolute or universal authority, but which are ultimately empty of ethical content. For Kierkegaard, these represent an interest in the past—in what has been considered ethical—and therefore a disinterest in ethics *qua* ethics (which requires attentiveness to present and future action).

[4] Kierkegaard is consistent in his criticism of philosophical arguments that are meant to be understood abstractly, and focuses instead on what he refers to as 'appropriation,' wherein the philosophical content of an argument on idea is put into context in the individual's life and can thus affect their existence.

§1 <u>Setting the Stage(s)</u>

Kierkegaard's theory of stages (or spheres) of existence is a topic of enduring interest and importance for those engaging with his works—in particular the philosophical works, as they communicate the spheres both directly (i.e., Judge William's distinctions between the aesthetic and ethical stages) and indirectly (through each characters' exposition through which we gain a perspective on their life-view). This theory of existential stages extends throughout his authorship and is also incorporated into his theological writings; these assume the stages in discussions of theological concepts, particularly ethics (as it is reasonable to presume his readers would read the pseudonymous texts alongside the theological ones, thus creating a dialogue between them). The clearest exposition of the stages is found in the *Concluding Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'*. Johannes Climacus, its pseudonymous author, specifies that "there are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious", along with two border territories: irony and humour (*CUP*, 501). The pseudonymous works are, as mentioned, *representations* of the spheres. The aesthete A, Judge William, Johannes Climacus, etc. all contribute to what George Connell calls an anthropology developed not with abstract concepts of categorisation, but concrete representations of ways of living one's life (Connell 1985, 44-5)—where the autobiographical nature of William's letters lend him a sense of lived legitimacy.[5] They are as paradigmatic of the spheres as they are fluid, showing a variety of traits common within each 'life-view' or disposition without providing clear and distinct proscriptions on what is and is not expressed in those spheres.[6] Understanding the stages is therefore paramount for interpreting Kierkegaard's philosophical and theological commitments.

It is important to attend to the terminology used in delineating the stages. As C. Stephen Evans notes, they are a conceptual tool (Evans 1983, 12), and are borrowed from G.W.F. Hegel's logical categories.[7] The terminology is not original to Kierkegaard and assumptions that the existential expression of the stages relates specifically to their titles is therefore misleading. Many mischaracterisations of the religious stage stem from the theological connotations associated with the term 'religious,' as do presumptions that the ethical stage represents Kierkegaard's final statement on ethics. Krishek describes the individual in the ethical stages as possessing, in essence, a "philosophical-rational state of mind", but clarifies that by this Kierkegaard implicitly means individuals maintaining a Hegelian worldview (Krishek 2009, 33n18). The characterization by Krishek points to a much greater nuance than the reductive interpretations make available, as each sphere relates to a set of dispositions separate from the implications of their nomenclature. Even where there are basic and broad connections to them (aesthetic/beauty, ethical/order, religious/faith), there is also a greater deal of subtlety than we can fully enunciate here, but which will be considered further in what follows.

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[5] Mark C. Taylor likens Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms to Hegel, allowing him to represent different shapes of "consciousness, form[s] of life, or type[s] of selfhood" by allowing them to be presented on their own terms; each pseudonym represents contours of the existential stages, which is to say the lenses through which we perceive and engage with our world (Taylor 1980, 92).

[6] The border territories further complicate this, as disentangling who is in what stage and whether they are 'between stages' can become a difficult task.

[7] For a more in-depth examination of this, see: Binetti (2007).

As the religious stage is our primary interest, we may ask what it refers to if we do not attribute to it a focus purely on theological belief and commitment. That it cannot be just adherence to theological doctrine must be the case because characters like *Either/Or II*'s Pastor and Judge William, and the Pharisees in the theological writings, are each religious and yet remain in the ethical sphere. Instead, we posit that in the religious stage the individual does not respond to or engage with the world *as they want it to be*, but *as it is*. The control that the aesthete and ethicist want to exert over the world by idealising it must be overcome by a recognition of the world as actual and therefore requiring response. This response is formulated through *faith*.[8] The religious stage is not one of theological presuppositions and foundations, but of existential reactivity— the individual's *responsiveness* to what is given in lived existence.

To briefly outline our interpretation of the theory of the existential stages: the stages serve to represent different dispositions affecting the way we interact with the world and other individuals—our interests, motivations, and goals are all included within this dispositional perspective. Each stage represents a lens through which an individual experiences the world—the aesthete idealises the world to render it beautiful; the ethicist idealises the world to render it ordered (i.e., intelligible, linear, and absolute); the religious individual accepts the world as it is and responds to it as such. The first two stages can therefore be said to intervene on the world—they seek to change it in accordance with their preferences. The religious disposition responds to what is given—this gives rise to the supremacy of subjectivity as the means of accepting the given without attempting to reduce it to one's own preferences. Each sphere also approaches action differently. The means and ends of ethical action are different for the aesthetic, ethical, and religious individuals; i.e., an ethicist is motivated by the preferred set of social norms that govern action and their ends are ethical self-righteousness (and the recognition of this by others) and reflection of a 'universal order.'[9] While Kierkegaard neither claims nor pretends to provide an absolute or complete outline of the stages (just as the spheres are not themselves absolute representations), the salient features of the stages can be identified and described (as we find in his authorship), thus revealing their separate natures.[10]

However, before we assume this interpretation's validity, we must first address alternative interpretations and determine whether they offer a compelling and persuasive alternative. There are two primary interpretations of the spheres of existence arising in discussions of Kierkegaard's ethics that are distinct from our own. The most common asserts the existence of an 'ethical-religious' sphere, wherein the aesthetic stage is set apart from the ethical and religious stages, which are reduced into a single stage representing the sphere where ethics is active.[11] The other interpretation either minimises the importance of the stages[12] or treats the ethical

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[8] Kierkegaard has a peculiar definition of faith, one deeply intertwined with ethics and therefore subject to further discussion and development throughout the course of our investigation—it does not have an *explicitly* theological purpose, despite its evident theological connotations.

[9] The religious stage's alternative to this will be the subject of our first chapter, and reverberations of it will be felt throughout the entirety of our discussion.

[10] Interpretations supporting this can be found in: Dunning (1985); Assiter (2009); Krishek (2009); Backhouse (2011); Hanson (2017); Mullen (1981). Walsh (2018) also recognises a distinction between the stages, but instead supports the 'ethical-religious' interpretation we will see below.

[11] Supporters of this interpretation include: Lillegard (2001); Marino (2001); Walsh (2018).

[12] This is a particularly problematic interpretive strategy, akin to reading Plato's *Symposium* under the assumption that each orator represents Plato's concept of *eros* equally.

stage as being the primary determinant when it comes to questions of ethics.[13] As a result, in both these accounts the stages are reduced to an equivalency, thus providing equal weight to Kierkegaard's works as evidence of his ethical philosophy (although, it is worth noting that here too the aesthetic stage is often overlooked or underrated). While there are benefits to these approaches—perhaps chief among them the possibility of avoiding the type of arcane discussion we are currently engaged in—they are both problematic for a variety of reasons. We will first discuss their beneficial features.

One key benefit is that both interpretations attribute to the ethical stage a major influence over the ethical commitments of Kierkegaard, thereby providing a means of avoiding the theological connotations of the 'religious' sphere. This clears a pathway to a secular account of Kierkegaard's ethics that can invalidate a strong divine command interpretation in favour of an alternative ground for ethics (often Kantian or Hegelian in its inspiration, as German Idealism inspires much of Judge William's life-view). They also afford greater leeway and liberality in utilising Kierkegaard's works—for example, William's copious letters become as valid a representative of Kierkegaard's ethical commitments as his named theological writings. There is a variety of other minor benefits, but these stand out as reasonable and helpful in constructing a Kierkegaardian inspired ethic.

However, despite these middling benefits, each interpretation remains deeply problematic. The most significant issue is their departure from the characterisation of the stages in the pseudonymous works, and from Kierkegaard's broader purpose. Not only does he specify a distinction between the stages, but he also posits boundary stages (irony and humour) that clarify the borders between stages. This authorial approach stands in stark contrast to the interpretations that minimise the differences in the stages, effectively taking them all as roughly equivalent representations of his commitments and asserting that his ethical *telos* is evident in each of his works—where this is most clearly exemplified by citing Judge William as a representative of these ethical commitments. By failing to appreciate the differences in the stages, a variety of internal contradictions arise, as in fact William's ethics (as with the bulk of his philosophical commitments) in fact stand in direct contradiction with Kierkegaard's own. Thus assuming the equivalency of the stages invites a reading distorting Kierkegaard's broader purpose, and limits the emphasis on subjectivity and selfhood (two concepts that are either underdeveloped by his aesthetes or undermined by his ethicists).

Moreover, the interpretation positing a synthesis in the form of an 'ethical-religious stage' has its own problems on top of those we have just mentioned. Foremost, it reduces the border between the ethical and religious spheres, the 'humourist stage' (within which one of Kierkegaard's most important voices, Johannes Climacus, claims to reside). By obscuring the border territory, it diminishes what Climacus has to say about the stages in the *Postscript* (which is often critical of the ethical stage), and once again misdirects attention away from the importance of subjectivity—especially in regards to sympathy, which Climacus intertwines with humour. Perhaps more importantly though, on a deeper level, it is based on a reading that fails to appreciate lines Kierkegaard draws between his middle and later authorship. Johannes Climacus fails to mention an

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[13] This interpretive approach is evident in: Elrod (1975); Stack (1977); Connell (1985); Turner (2001); Davenport (2001); Rudd (2001); Dooley (2010); Watts (2017).

ethical religious stage in his enumerations of the stages (*CUP*, 501, 572), and Anti-Climacus refers to it as a "category" set in opposition to the aesthetic stage—the use of category here highlights its distinction from the stages (*SUD*, 45-6).[14] A further clarification is found in the essays published under the pseudonym H.H., which are ethical-religious insofar as they contrast the ethical and the religious.[15] Thus while the ethical-religious perspective does introduce an easy route to a secular account of Kierkegaard's ethics (as William's *ethos* is secular), it does so by sacrificing *inter alia*: *i*) his critique of the ethical stage and the process of objectification that it supports; and *ii*) the importance of the religious stage and the appropriation of individual faith.

Both of these interpretations undermine or negate the importance of the religious stage, while simultaneously limiting the purpose of Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms. In the case of the former, the religious sphere becomes a mere add-on to the ethical—the very problem that elicited Kierkegaard's theory of life-stages. In the latter, we lose the authorial intention in splitting the authorship between philosophical and theological works, as well as sacrificing the seriousness of the critiques presented by Climacus and Kierkegaard in the *Postscript* and *Point of View* respectively. Diminishing the importance of the pseudonyms and what their perspectives add to the content of their works invites a mischaracterisation of the stages and a failure to distinguish between a work which is legitimately ethical (e.g., *Works of Love*) and one that is ethical only in the sense of representing the ethical stage (e.g., *Either/Or II*). We have noted the benefit of expediency, but this ultimately sacrifices Kierkegaard's intentions and his sustained critique of the ethical stage (and those institutions influenced by it, i.e., the Danish Christian Church). An alternative—and more felicitous—reading of ethical-religious can be found in Jeffery Dudiak's use of 'ethico-religious' when discussing the relationship between Kierkegaard and Levinas. Here it is not an ethical-religious *stage* but a reference to religious ethics, or an ethics of the religious stage (which aligns with Climacus' position, where ethics is related to becoming subjective, the task in which individuals in the religious sphere are engaged (*CUP*, 198)).

An additional deficiency in these interpretations is the alienation of the religious stage from ethics and thus a supposition that the religious stage is beyond, without, or against ethics. However, as John Davenport writes, "the idea of a religiousness beyond, or without, or 'against' ethics is thus in total contradiction to Kierkegaard's account of cumulative existential 'stages'" (Davenport 2008, 181). The stages build on each other, and while it is not an Hegelian synthesis of the aesthetic and ethical producing the religious, Kierkegaard suggests that the ethical stage (and therefore a concept of ethics, even if it is absent of actual ethical content) must be traversed prior to moving into the religious stage. To this end, we can note that Kierkegaard makes clear that ethics is only possible for individuals in the religious stage, as the ethical stage on its own has no ethical content, its concern being towards the past and not the present or future (*BA*, 129-30). By adopting an interpretation retaining the supremacy of the religious stage as separate and in opposition to the ethical stage,

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[14] From context, we can understand that both Climacus and Anti-Climacus refer to the 'ethical-religious' as the category of *choice*. What separates these stages is, among other things, the adoption of *personal* responsibility in the religious sphere—as responsibility always resides outside of the ethicist, thus legitimising the practice of unethical social norms (William), or neglecting to engage in ethical refinement because grace, and not personal choice, determines whether we can/will act ethically or not (the Pastor).

[15] The distinctions are as follows: the ethicist who can be put to death for their certainty in the truth, and the religious individual who cannot because they rely on faith—the ethical genius and the religious apostle. While the latter pairing has clearer theological presuppositions, the former can be given a secular reading without losing its primary implications.

we hope to restore to Kierkegaard a much more robust sense of the religious that has ethics at its core; we can therefore say that central to existence, for Kierkegaard, is ethics.

At the same time, it will be our task throughout the following argument to show that despite being the 'religious' sphere, a secular reading is not inaccessible. Despite Kierkegaard's use of theological language to convey his ethics, there is a way of interpreting his commitments that respects his theological commitments on the one hand, while also clarifying that his ethics extends beyond those theological commitments on the other. Emmanuel Falque, in *Crossing the Rubicon* (2016), provides a compelling argument for why probing theologically focused philosophy, like much of Kierkegaard's authorship, still offers compelling implications for our secular (philosophical) interests. Rather than accepting a division between philosophy and theology, Falque, alongside a number of contemporary French phenomenologists (Ricoeur, Henry, Marion, etc.), seeks to bridge that gap and examine the dialectic formed between these subject—a dialectic that I will argue is apparent in Kierkegaard's authorship.

A further benefit to this approach is that it fosters a social and political reading of Kierkegaard's texts (unfortunately, while we will have occasion to draw attention to it, this undercurrent will remain largely un-explored in our present investigation). On this reading, the critique of the present age is not grounded in a failure of society to be adequately theologically committed, but is an ideology critique of the adoption of the ethically vacant ethical disposition on a society-wide scale. Such an interpretation would help to correct inter-pretations of *Two Ages* that see both the revolutionary and present ages as aesthetic (as we find in Mark Dooley's treatment (Dooley, 2010)). It would also help in restoring the ethical foundation of the religious sphere, and clarify that Kierkegaard's position is one of mutual cooperation and a repudiation of isolated reli-gious reflection that abstracts from one's existential concerns.

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We believe that it is integral to appreciate and follow the delineations of the stages when interpreting Kierkegaard's writings. Therefore, we shall be approaching them with a focus on the religiously-minded works (i.e., *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Fragments* and its *Postscript*, *The Sickness Unto Death*, etc. alongside the named theologically-centred works) as the positive representatives of Kierkegaard's ethics, while the eth-ical stage will be set in opposition to these. Furthermore, it is our hope to adopt this interpretive lens throughout our investigation and thus develop an explanation that not only accords with the perspective granting the reli-gious stage primacy, but also affording a secularised approach to Kierkegaard's religious stage. Such an inter-pretation makes his ethics appreciable and practicable outside of Christianity, while also being useful in eval-uating and critiquing social and political institutions (even if this is not a direct goal of this present argument). With this stage-set, so to speak, we can attend to one of the religious stage's most important facets: selfhood.

§2 The 'Self' in Self-Becoming

Our contention is that Kierkegaard's is an ethic of cooperative self-becoming, wherein the focus is becoming a self through interpersonal ethical interaction—Kierkegaard's emphasis on becoming subjective *requires* a relationship with others, and engagement in helping them in their self-becoming (and in turn *being helped by them*). This requires, as a central feature of the ethic, a disposition to being 'self-giving.' Climacus

writes that the task of the subjective individual is to understand themselves as an existing person (*CUP*, 351); i.e., possessing personal passions, possibilities, imagination, finitude, etc., in time and in the world. To put it more succinctly: to become a *self*. Within the perspective of subjectivity, the realisation of selfhood has as its corollary the realisation of the selfhood of others—although he never uses the term, inter-subjectivity appears implied in this formulation. However, how does Kierkegaard define the 'self?' Is it something we are born with, something we grow into, or something developed through practice? These questions are essential to answer if we are to suggest that the self is the central unit of Kierkegaard's ethics—for there must be a self to become and a self to give. Integral to selfhood on Climacus' (indirect) account is a passionate interest in existence, not just existence as an idea or concept for us to think about or evaluate, but existence as the realm of lived existence in which we find ourselves, and to which we must react, respond, and become (*CUP*, 350). The first step in self-becoming is recognising myself as a unique, existing individual, and taking a passionate interest in my existence, which is to say becoming invested in what has been given to me and not reinterpreting it through an idealising lens, as we find in the aesthetic (beauty) and ethical (abstract systems) stages. Therefore, we have a partial answer to our second question: selfhood is not a birth right, but a process.

We may be getting ahead of ourselves though. What exactly *is* the self on Kierkegaard's account—especially in light of selfhood not being assumed upon birth. Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus,[16] presents the individual as a synthesis of our physical and psychical[17] existence—this is the "established synthesis" of the human being (*SUD*, 13). However, this synthesis does not itself constitute the self, as the self *relates* to that synthesis.[18] "Synthesis is a relation between two", the self represents a third because it is not reducible to either of these, nor is the self the singular 'human' produced by the synthesis of finite and infinite—it relates to that established synthesis, to *that* human who one *is* (*SUD*, 13). Furthermore, where the finite represents necessity and the infinite absolute possibility, "the self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical aspect of the categories of possibility and necessity" (*SUD*, 29). One's selfhood manifests within a bounded freedom forged in the dialectical relation between possibility and necessity.[19] We have a unique pre-established existence, but we reflectively realise that we are not constrained by that pre-established existence (capacities, interests, context, etc. contour freedom). Kierkegaard is therefore not advocating radical freedom, but a freedom dictated by our established synthesis and constrained by various contextual determinants (i.e., society, time period, social strata, etc.) We can thereby agree with John D. Mullen that freedom implies "*self*-controlled" (Mullen 1981, 44, my emphasis).

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[16] Of course, Anti-Climacus is not a repudiation of Climacus, but his decisively Christian parallel. Where Climacus describes himself (somewhat deceptively) as either a humourist or in religiousness A (which we will examine in detail in the latter half of our present investigation), Anti-Climacus is explicitly and vociferously Christian.

[17] The Danish term '*ånd*' means spiritual both in the religious sense and in the sense of mental faculties, much like its German counterpart *Geist*.

[18] A human being is considered by Kierkegaard to be an 'established relation,' established because it pre-exists the individual as a self—it already *is*, while the self must *become*.

[19] An immediate individual (i.e., A in *Either/Or*) does not have a sense of self because everything exists outside of them, which is why they rely on concepts like luck; they are given pure possibility and place constraints beyond their own agency—they imagine radical freedom (*SUD*, 50-1). A fatalist (i.e., William in *Either/Or*) lacks a self, because their overreliance on necessity precludes selfhood, as selfhood requires possibility (*SUD*, 40). To be a self requires both the recognition that we are agents (and therefore not governed by necessity) and that we appreciate our existential context.

Two key moods accompanying the arrival of selfhood are anxiety and despair, each relating to the difficulty of relating to the established synthesis appropriately. Anxiety manifests in the realisation of freedom and, conjointly, guilt.[20] Anxiety relates to agency: we have freedom but are responsible *for* that freedom. As Mullen noted above, this occasions self-control. Despair, similarly to anxiety, appears in the realisation that one's self relates to the infinite in the finite, the perpetual state of becoming one is incapable of avoiding, thus necessitating grasping at becoming *one's own* self (*SUD*, 18-9).[21] Anxiety is the response to being condemned to freedom, despair to being condemned to be oneself. Suffering and guilt are therefore consistent features of authentic individuality because, as Lee C. Barrett notes, individuals "experience themselves as having failed to enact the ideal perfectly" (Barrett 2013, 141). There is a disparity between who I *am* and who I *should* be; we can imagine ourselves in ways that we cannot bring about in the world thus occasioning despair. This failure we recognise as culpability and experience in *angst*. Anxiety is necessary to self-becoming because it reveals our culpability for our actions—that we are responsible (i.e., guilty) for what we will into existence. Despair is necessary because it properly orients our focus on existence—it is our existential becoming that we must be concerned with, not whom we imagine we could be or want to be. However, while Kierkegaard does indeed present selfhood in terms with negative connotations, highlighting how difficult and precarious self-hood is, it is not all *angst* and despair.

Love is also critical in self-becoming. Love is indicative of self-becoming on Kierkegaard's account because it edifies the individual—it 'upbuilds.' Love upbuilds in two important ways: through being loved, and by giving love. We are, by virtue of our creation, loved by God[22]—to whom our self relates directly. We then show that love to others through neighbour love (the subject of our first chapter). Despite its benefits to the individual, love upbuilds one's selfhood through acts of *self-giving love*—what we do *for others* provides our self with its definition. Self-becoming is therefore not inherently self-centred or self-interested, but cooperative with those others we meet; existence is not a task we undertake alone, and selfhood is only realisable through our interactions with and ethical actions towards others. As M. Jamie Ferreira writes, "we ourselves are built up when we build up another person" (Ferreira 2001, 140). Thus, love works alongside despair and anxiety in producing one's understanding of one's self—they each offer a means of relating to existence *as an individual*, they each contribute to the existential task of *becoming subjective*.

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We can now venture some preliminary answers to our initial set of questions. The 'self' in Kierkegaard's account is not a simple composite of the infinite (psychical) and finite (physical) aspects that constitute human existence, but relates to the synthesis of these attributes. This situates the self beyond a reduction to

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[20] Perhaps predictably, this is the subject of *The Concept of Anxiety*, penned by the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis. His interest is in describing *angst*, and its peculiarly individual foundation—guilt and freedom particularise individuals (although a section of his argument relates to defending this against the totalising view that makes guilt quantifiable and universally contributed to, thus offering relief from both freedom and guilt, and thereby anxiety).

[21] The individual who is "willing to get rid of himself, to rid himself of the self that he is in order to be the self that he has dreamed up" (*SUD*, 20). The greater consciousness of selfhood we possess, the greater our despair as we realise our limitations in comparison to an idealised self.

[22] Kierkegaard is, after all a Christian. It will have to wait until our discussion in the later chapters to see how this can be replaced in a secular context.

either of these, while retaining the possibility of expressing itself through each of them. To develop this in its Christian format, the self is positioned between one's established synthesis and God—between our createdness and creator. It is therefore our self that relates to God, not just the spiritual aspect of our human synthesis. We can also emphasise that selfhood is a 'becoming,' not a given nor something grown into. Selfhood *requires* passionate interest in our existence and expressions of self-giving directed towards others; becoming a self is an activity we engage in, not a process that passively happens to us. This is only a cursory glance at what it means to be a self for Kierkegaard, a theme we will return to throughout our investigation of his ethics. However, it is at least clear that the self is not a simple concept for Kierkegaard, and, like his ethics, requires attentiveness to the subtleties of its articulation.

§3 From Religiousness B to A

This investigation of Kierkegaard's ethics is concerned with revealing not only that it is an ethic of cooperative self-becoming, but that there is a secular version of his ethics implicit within his *oeuvre*. To make this argument effectively will require five key movements. The first two relate to Kierkegaard as a theological and philosophical author, while the latter three focus attention on his philosophical works and tying his ethics to contemporary (and secular) ethical debates as a means of revealing an implicit secular *ethos*. Our first interest is outlining Kierkegaard's ethic in its clearest exposition, drawing primarily on the theologically oriented *Works of Love* (*i*); and then testing the efficacy of that ethic and its theological presuppositions (*ii*). Following our theological interests, we will use an example of the ethic in practice to show that it is not as extreme as the Abraham case[23] suggests and is independent of a theological foundation—the goal being to show that Kierkegaard's ethic can be secularised (*iii*). We will then buttress the ethic with the contemporary philosophical language of Alasdair MacIntyre and Emmanuel Levinas to resolve the problems of secularisation (*iv*); and resolve the problems of using MacIntyre and Levinas by appropriating the language Ricoeur uses to describe his 'little ethics' (*v*). Our hope is that by following this path we can articulate Kierkegaard's ethic as an ethic promoting cooperative self-becoming as its *telos* using secular terminology. However, before turning to the argument in full, we will briefly summarise the key stages.

i) To provide an initial articulation of Kierkegaard's ethics, we will focus on *Works of Love* as his most clear and definitive statement of his ethical commitments, which will thus furnish us with the strongest account of his ethics. This is not to say other works will be left out, but our interest is in clarifying and articulating his ethical commitments and these are produced most vividly in that work. As it is our interest in this chapter to develop the ethic, it will primarily involve explication and interpretation, without raising any doubts or criticism concerning its theological foundations. This preliminary discussion will provide us with an overview of the structure, purpose, and implications of his ethic, while also providing us with the basics of how he

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[23] *Fear and Trembling* presents an extreme reading of the 'teleological suspension of the ethical' by utilising the *Akedah*. However, such an extreme example has led to the characterisation of Kierkegaard as opposed to ethics entirely, or in favour of a strong divine command theory, one privileging personal spirituality over ethics and social norms. We will see that such interpretations need not be the case if we place the suspension in the context of everyday lived existence, which is the context in which Kierkegaard's works are meant to be understood.

thinks an ethical life should be led—which is to say, we will outline the fundamental features of his ethic, its presuppositions, and its *telos* (i.e., selfhood, a God-relation, neighbour love, etc.).

ii) Following the preliminary exposition of the ethic, we will move to assessing its presuppositions. Drawing on the critiques of K.E. Løgstrup and Theodor Adorno as exemplary of the traditional criticism of Kierkegaard's ethics, we will highlight not only problems with the ethic's theological underpinnings, but potential structural deficiencies. Does his ethic advocate pure spirituality due to its theological motivation? Does Kierkegaard promote self-isolation because the individual is commanded to serve God and God alone? Is it a strong divine command ethic whose ethical viability is forfeited without a Christian foundation? These questions not only call into doubt the theological commitments underlying Kierkegaard's contribution to ethics, but also the ethical content of his ethic—is Kierkegaard's ethic *even ethical*? These questions will need to be answered, and answered affirmatively, before going on to suggest the possibility of a secular reading—for what is the point of a secular interpretation of an ethic that lacks ethical content, as some of Kierkegaard's critics have claimed?

iii) Having responded to the critiques and provided further nuance, depth, and contours to Kierkegaard's ethic, we will then transition to seeing that ethic in practice. By presenting an example of ethical action that is, on the one hand, not theologically grounded, and, on the other, representative of everyday activity, we can examine the ethic in practice and question whether it *must* be theologically motivated. By evaluating this, we hope to reveal a more precise distinction between 'religiousness B' (Christianity) and 'religiousness A' (a more nebulous, and, as we shall see, underdeveloped expression of the religious sphere). Positing a decisive rift between these two expressions of the religious stage will require us to develop religiousness A in such a way that on the one hand it does not fall back into the ethical stage (which, as we noted above, is problematic), and on the other hand does not rely too heavily on Kierkegaard's theological works for support. However, this potential secular account of the religious stage is not without deficiencies and ambiguities, largely due to its underdevelopment of this option in Kierkegaard's own works. Thus, to resist the attractiveness of a clear and comprehensive ethic, like that promised by both the ethical and Christian-religious stages, a similarly clear and persuasive account of the ethic of religiousness A is necessary.

iv) Perhaps the deficiencies and ambiguities do not preclude the viability of secularising Kierkegaard's ethic. However, the limited discussion of religiousness A in the pseudonymous works lends itself to dialogue with other ethically minded philosophers in order to provide a sufficiently detailed account. To that end, we will first place Kierkegaard into a dialogue with MacIntyre and Levinas, who each promote an interpretation of ethics sharing affinities with Kierkegaard's, while being presented through secular language.[24] MacIntyre's virtue ethics, and his interrelated concept of narrative identity, will provide a vantage through which to address the deficiencies in Kierkegaard's ethics, while Levinas' alterity ethic will provide valuable insights in clarifying the ambiguities. However, although helpful in their own right, we will see that significant divergences from Kierkegaard's philosophical commitments are required if we are to use the ethical systems of either

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[24] Of course each of these figures has their own entanglements with theology, and Levinas in particular uses the term 'religion' similarly to Kierkegaard's religious stage; nonetheless their ethics is not theologically based or motivated. Thus, while there may be worries that we are re-instantiating or subtly smuggling a theological foundation back into the ethic, our goal remains secular in nature and we approach both MacIntyre and Levinas as supporting secularly practicable ethics.

MacIntyre or Levinas as a support for the ethic of religiousness A. Thus, as our interest is not in sacrificing Kierkegaard's philosophical commitments but strengthening them, an alternative account avoiding that sacrifice and being sensitive to Kierkegaard's philosophical commitments is preferable.

v) Following the attempted resolutions to the deficiencies and ambiguities by engaging Kierkegaard in dialogue with MacIntyre and Levinas, we will pair Kierkegaard with Paul Ricoeur. His phenomenological hermeneutic—a more nuanced interpretation of narrative identity—has its own peculiar *ethos*, what Ricoeur calls a 'little ethics.' This ethic incorporates elements of the ethic found in MacIntyre's and Levinas' respective accounts, but extends beyond them in important ways (formulating a more robust, and existentially grounded, ethic). It is our hope that agreements can be uncovered between Ricoeur's ethics and Kierkegaard's, as well as broader agreements in their respective philosophical commitments. The aim of this investigation is not to suggest a full reconciliation between Ricoeur's ethics and Kierkegaard's, but to find key areas of agreement between their accounts. Moreover, by appropriating the language Ricoeur uses, we will argue that a re-articulation of Kierkegaard's ethics within a secular context becomes more vivid: we can discover a means of articulating the largely implied ethic of religiousness A and reveal its nature as an ethic of cooperative self-becoming.

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By following this argumentative path, we hope to unveil Kierkegaard's implicit advocacy for an ethic that does not rely on theological presuppositions but does not preclude them either; in fact, they can be embraced. Furthermore, we hope to highlight his ethic as an ethic of self-becoming whose focus is on the interrelationship between oneself and others—ethics is cooperative and manifests through practice (not abstract valuations or codices). Such an account will offer an alternative interpretation of Kierkegaard's ethic that rises above the devil's bargain of association with the ethical stage, as well as a purely theological ethic that resists transference beyond its Christian context. This is why it is important to not only retain the distinction between the ethical and the religious spheres, but also why it is necessary to recognise the separation within the religious sphere between religiousness A and religiousness B—for while they may share basic commonalities, they are not reducible to each other. It is our hope that within religiousness A we will find a secular life-view supported by Kierkegaard, one whose philosophical insights are thrust to the forefront, in a way that provides both a new lens through which to read Kierkegaard, and to interpret existence as ethical practice.

1| *Kierkegaard's Religious Ethics*

Love, in its plurality of meanings and connotations, is paramount and critical in understanding Kierkegaard's philosophy, as it serves as the animus of almost all of his writings. Love is the background, if not the theme, for many of Kierkegaard's pseudonymously authored works, including *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way*, and *Fear and Trembling*.[1] This focus is present throughout Kierkegaard's specifically Christian writings[2] and 'upbuilding discourses'[3] which were published under his own name—most notably *Works of Love* which will be a key text in the present discussion. As M. Jamie Ferreira points out, without *Works of Love* only a partial understanding of Kierkegaard's ethics is possible, as the pseudonyms only give a fragmentary picture of his ethics (Ferreira 2001, 5). *Works of Love* stands out from his other discursive works because it is cast as a set of 'deliberations'—the distinction between a 'deliberation' and a 'discourse' is subtle but important. By using the term 'deliberation' Kierkegaard is presenting the discourses in *Works of Love* as possessing a more rigorously philosophical style; *Works of Love* is meant to be as pedagogical as it is edifying (Ferreira 2001,

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[1] Examples of forms of love found in the pseudonymous literature include: erotic love and marital love, presented in *Either/Or*; we find various perspectives of love in 'In Vino Veritas,' importantly a discussion of erotic/romantic love in the Married Man's letter, and an example of failed love in Quidam's diary from *Stages* (a similar example of a failed love can be found in *Repetition*); we find familial love in Abraham's love for his son in *Fear and Trembling*. Additionally, the various expressions of love serve as exemplars of the stages, for example: the momentary erotic love of the aesthete is focused on immediate pleasurableness; the dutiful love of the ethicist is focused on love as a means of integrating individuals into universal social hierarchies, so that they can be acknowledged and validated by others; and the religious familial love that Abraham has for Isaac is expressed through the sharing of faith (sharing of faith through acts, we will see below, is particularly important in Kierkegaard's ethic of love). Ferreira clarifies that each form of love, be it erotic, familial, or friendly is permeated and transformed by a foundational neighbour love (Ferreira 2001, 93-4). Christianity does not alter the external signs of love, it transforms love entirely by shifting from loving particulars preferentially to loving each individual impartially (Ferreira 2001, 90). It is neighbour love that Kierkegaard's named literature often focuses on, and which, we will see below, serves as the ground of all loving relationships, and the foundation of an ethical life.

[2] Steven Backhouse examines the criticisms of a variety of figures who question the Christian nature of Kierkegaard's works (especially his later works) in his book *Kierkegaard's Critique of Christian Nationalism*, and he also considers whether Christianity played a role at all in his earlier works (culminating with Fenger who thought there was no truth whatsoever in Kierkegaard's journals and that he was seemingly never actually interested in Christianity) (Backhouse 2011, 29-31). Backhouse himself disagrees, arguing that to understand the politics of Kierkegaard we must understand his Christian perspective (Backhouse 2011, 32), as is the case with his ethics. To fully understand and appreciate them, we must read him as a Christian author.

[3] In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments*,' Johannes Climacus gives a brief explanation of the usefulness of upbuilding discourses. From his perspective, the pedagogical goal of an upbuilding discourse is not teleological in purpose (i.e., traditional teaching), where the pupil's knowledge is developed by accepting the pieces of information provided by the instructor—rather, the goal of an upbuilding discourse is to re-orient and transform the individual's appreciation of *their existence* (*CUP*, 273). The method is used to help the individual grow through the appropriation of a disposition, or set of dispositions, affecting their concrete existence, not leading them from one belief to another by acquiring knowledge about various subjects— it is not teleological because life is not linear (like learning), and neither is upbuilding.

13-4). Lee C. Barrett notes that *Works of Love* necessitates an emotional approach because its topic requires appropriation and engagement—a neutral tone, or presentation as a philosophical treatise, would be inappropriate because neither of these styles adequately convey love (Barrett 2013, 93). Thus, by adopting the lens advocated by Ferreira and Barrett, we can recognise that *Works of Love* possesses a particular form for a particular purpose: to invite the reader to recognise a neighbour love ethic that is, in many ways, a radical departure from the ethics that constitute Kierkegaard's philosophical background (i.e., the idealist ethics derived from Kant and Hegel, to which Kierkegaard's ethic responds).

Within his theologically oriented works, like *Works of Love*, it is made clear that love reaches its highest manifestation within the specifically Christian region of the religious stage. Moreover, Johannes *de Silentio* in *Fear and Trembling* says that love itself is illustrative of the religious stage. For him, love is representative of the intimacy, immediacy, and individual nature of the religious—it is not discovered as a result of a discussion, nor does it have an abstract, definitive composition outside of individual experience, instead revealing itself naturally in its immediacy to the existing individual (*FT*, 41). Love is an existential emotion or disposition, not an abstract idea. Because love is intimately subjective, it is characterised by being both singular to the individual who feels and experiences it, but also shared by all individuals who experience it (albeit with differences in accordance with individual differences). In turn, this means love cannot be conveyed by providing reasons to justify it or to prove its existence, [4] as even an endless list of reasons is not equivalent to the emotion and would only transform the feeling into an abstract concept separate from individual experience (for love is diminished when externalised—it becomes disassociated from the feeling, thus relinquishing the passionate and subjective emotional connections to others). The inarticulable nature of love, along with its spontaneity, reveals a close relation to faith (as we shall see further in *§2*), with each having, paradoxically, a sense of certainty that always remains uncertain. This connection to faith is critical, as it reveals the intimate relation between human love and its religious foundation.

The intertwining of faith and love is vital in Kierkegaard's view of selfhood, and more particularly, in becoming a self. Becoming a self, or becoming subjective, is the focus of Climacus in the *Postscript* and it is what he defines as the 'ethical' task—regardless of whether individuals act on it or not (*CUP*, 346). However, for Kierkegaard becoming a selfhood is realised through love. Love requires the individual to develop faith, and faith allows individuals to gain a deeper appreciation of themselves as a self (for faith initiates the God-relation that serves as the grounding point for the dialectical synthesis of the self). However, while elements of this are able to be achieved within the areligious Climacus' existential philosophy, Kierkegaard leaves behind Climacus and moves into the Christian context to provide selfhood its fullest expression. Becoming a self within Christianity leads the individual to adopt a self-giving disposition, where there is an infinite debt owed

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[4] The Young Man in *Stages* speaks of the utility of the phrase "inexplicable" as the proper starting point for the subjective view of love, as it is representative of the very nature of love as subjective and not able to be adequately put into words; each unique experience of love cannot be shared directly with another person (*SLW*, 35-6). Directly telling someone about why someone is lovable must at some point be curtailed, lest loving someone be reduced to loving the list of features that individual possesses.

to God, one repaid to God by expressions of love towards other individuals. It is within this self-giving disposition that neighbour love is displayed. Christian love, in Kierkegaard's account, serves as the foundation point for the ethical task of the existing individual, allowing the individual to become a *self* in its fullest expression.

The religious perspective central to Kierkegaard's understanding of love will serve as the focus of this chapter, and we will be examining how love is motivated and affected by what Kierkegaard terms the 'God-relation'. Furthermore, love is intimately interconnected with Kierkegaard's concept of faith; and more specifically faith in God's love (a central, if not *the* central, idea in his view of Christianity) which is given by God not only to the Christian individual, but also to be shared by individuals with each other. It is therefore fundamental to understanding oneself, and, perhaps most importantly, it provides the means of becoming a self in order to follow the command to love others '*as yourself.*' This entails acting with love towards others, or being self-giving. Understanding the religious foundation of Kierkegaard's presentation of love allows for a clear assessment of how it functions as a form of neighbour love in the Christian sense. It is this neighbour love ethic articulated by Kierkegaard that we will be examining in this chapter, with *Works of Love* being our primary guide.[5] Finally, in this chapter we will be examining the specifically Christian category of sin, and the possibility of sympathy with other sinners, which offers the possibility of reconciliation. To summarise, we are interested in six major features that help define the ethic: the God-relation (*§1*), faith (*§2*), self-becoming (*§3*), self-giving (*§4*), neighbour love (*§5*), and sin (*§6*).

As the aim of this chapter is to articulate Kierkegaard's position and examine the links he draws between love and religious commitment, we will not critically examine the way he uses Christianity to underpin his account—considering these criticisms will be the work of the next chapter. Adopting this largely expository perspective will allow us to better view the rich tapestry constituted by Kierkegaard's various presentations of love, before moving on to assess potential problems with it .

§1 The God-relation

Kierkegaard suggests that it is only within a Christian context that the God-relationship is recognised and appropriated by the individual, and it is only with the God-relationship that love in its fully Christian sense can be practiced. The God-relation refers to the individual's recognition of God as the creator and foundation of their existence. While loving does not exhaust the God-relation, it is an expression of the individual's connection to their absolute *telos*. When expressing love individuals are expressing their *telos*, expressing their God-relation; what matters in love is the relation to the absolute *telos* and in effect, the expression of love to each individual particularly (marriage is an example of this) (*CUP*, 456). Within the context of *Works of Love*, the God-relation has several different connotations: God as an equalising 'middle-term' (*§1.1*); God providing a *telos* (*§1.2*); and God's infinite love (exemplified by the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf) as imposing an infinite debt upon us (*§1.3*).

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[5] The specifically Christian understanding of love Kierkegaard's that named works presents stands in contrast to much of the pseudonymous presentations of love. The pseudonymous works are not properly Christian (with the exception of Anti-Climacus, and perhaps H.H., in Kierkegaard's later authorship), but reach only what Johannes Climacus calls 'religiousness A.' While we will occasionally take glimpses at elements of religiousness A in this chapter, they will be in service to the Christian-religious sense which Kierkegaard advocates for in his own voice. However, in the latter three chapters we will be engaging with religiousness A directly and explicitly.

§1.1 God as a Middle-Term

God as a middle-term has several important features: grounding neighbour love in the equality of individuals before God—as each individual is equal before God, and only in the God-relation is there a revelation of this *absolute* equality (*i*); [6] casting God as the absolute judge to whom we are accountable, rather than relying on the relative criteria of human distinction (*ii*); loving forth the love of others (*iii*); legitimising the command to "love others as yourself", by vesting it with divine (and thereby unquestionable) authority (*iv*). Therefore, neighbour love reaches its zenith in the God-relation because it forces the recognition of *all* other individuals as equally a neighbour and therefore equally 'owed' love.

(*i*) *The Equality of Love*: Kierkegaard is clear that without a relation to God as its root, love has a tendency to slip into self-love,[7] or group-selfishness, which denies the neighbourliness of all individuals and privileges those who are related to the group or are reflections of themselves and their preferences. This group-selfishness is derived from self- and/or group-interest and rewards the preferences of that group with an ethical validity denied to those who fail to conform to those preferred criteria (*WL*, 123). This is clearly problematic, as such an institution will inevitably seek to maintain *itself* instead of promoting love or care (even when neighbour love is the presumed interest). Alongside this is the issue of not displaying love in a self-giving way and recognising each individual as worthy of love regardless of personal preference—it is a position that eschews humility, taking pride in its institutions and the benefits it brings to the self-lover. So, with God as a middle-term, we recover the possibility for humility, as the individual is placed into a position under God as authority, and thereby equal with others.

Sylvia Walsh emphasises the importance of the spiritual equality of each individual before God, an equality which no human can bestow upon another, and goes on to say that as a result of this equality we are channelling God's love when we show love to others, with love becoming the expression of equality (Walsh 2018, 88). We can see, then, that without the God-relation, not only is equality between individuals lost, but so too is the expression of equality through acts of love. The alternative to this, love without the God-relation, often defaults to preferential love—especially in the aesthetic and ethical stages. On Kierkegaard's account, without a God-relation the equality between individuals becomes obscured and preference becomes the

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[6] Kierkegaard's notion of an individual being "before God" plays a central role in revealing the inherent equality of individuals, as it is "before God" that earthly distinctions disappear (*WL*, 253). While Kierkegaard sees individuals as equal, he recognises that this does not necessarily carry over into the world of finite distinctions. In *The Sickness Unto Death* we find that finite differences are nullified when an individual stands before God, where their existence as a self is discovered not in their earthly distinctions, but in their relation to themselves and to God (*SUD*, 50). Without a God-relationship, individuals rely on their own distinctions, which often conform to personal opinion and preference, often denying the equality arbitrarily.

[7] Self-love is generally employed by Kierkegaard negatively, but it is not necessarily negative. Self-love is the natural predisposition that each individual has to love themselves and it is why the commandment to love others "as yourself" is important (*WL*, 17). The negative side of self-love is selfish self-love: loving *only* that which is a reflection of oneself or reflects personal interests. Ferreira gives special attention to this (Ferreira 2001, 31-36), as she sees proper self-love as a key component of Kierkegaard's interpretation of Christian love, in contrast to those who think all self-love is inherently wrong or selfish. Additionally, her interpretation highlights the importance of caring for the whole person based on *their* needs not what the lover is willing to address. For our purposes, we will generally be referring to self-love with its negative connotations to distinguish it from cooperative self-becoming, which incorporates the positive aspects of self-love that Kierkegaard promotes.

norm—recasting our neighbour as who we *choose* to love (*WL*, 70). Without the God-relation we are unable—or perhaps unwilling—to find a common equality between ourselves and others, leaving us dependant on our own particular interests or desires to guide who we see as a neighbour and, therefore, who we should act with love towards. Barrett sees the equality in Kierkegaard's view of love deriving initially from God, but goes further by claiming a mutuality of desiring *to love* and *to be loved* (with God also participating in this desire) (Barrett 2013, 198-200). This deepens our sense of equality by adding a dimension of mutual sympathy—we have a longing *for* love and a longing *to* love, which we can recognise other possessing as well.

(*iii*) *The Criterion of Love*: The qualification of being 'before God,' for Anti-Climacus, introduces God as the criterion against which the human self is compared, and provides the ethical *telos*—this *telos* is aimed towards becoming 'like God,' where Christ revealed the criteria we must strive to express (*SUD*, 79-80). This can be viewed as the imitation of Christ, but in a more generic sense it is the need for the human to understand the limitations of human institutions or systems as a criterion,[8] our inherently myopic lens privileges what we are used to. This *telos* provides guidance on how to become a self that is not content with finite reward, but seeks self-becoming through love as a reward. This reflects Kierkegaard's assertion that God as a middle-term provides an absolute *telos* instead of a relative one.

By adopting a God-relation, love's expression is directed towards those who are *given* rather than those who are *chosen*. This means that love takes on the characteristics of being adaptable, limitless, and unending—love requires openness and fluidity, not constraints, especially not those that come from human (and therefore relative) directives. Love, when properly enacted, opens the individual to each individual they interact with, and welcomes each individual with love and care (*WL*, 164). This formulation of love focuses on the importance of the alterity of each individual, requiring individuals to treat each individual they confront separately and according to their specific needs, reflecting "Christianity's essential view of the human race, first and foremost to regard the mass individual, every one by himself as the single individual" (*WL*, 139). We can recall, once again, that for Kierkegaard, love, when rooted in Christianity, is both initiated and maintained by God. Without God as the central pillar of love, Kierkegaard is sceptical about the way love is to be determined: is it individually? Democratically? Accidentally? (*WL*, 120-1). In his view, without God the duty to love loses its eternal foundation and becomes merely human, and therefore subject to change, evaluation, and/or self-interest: it becomes preferential. Without the God-relation, there can be no absolute *telos*, and without the appropriate absolute *telos* the individual cannot properly orient themselves in the world, nor can they become a self, and thus are unable to participate in their ethical task.

(*iii*) *The Debt of Love*: While the ethical task Kierkegaard outlines relates to the individual becoming a self, there is another important feature of it: helping others become a self (we will see a more developed explanation of this below). The importance of the God-relation to self-becoming means that helping others become a self is folded into our own ethical task of self-becoming. Kierkegaard's discourses are themselves

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[8] It is this problem which calls for the suspension of the ethical. In *Fear and Trembling*, *de Silentio* posits that Abraham "had a higher *telos* outside [the ethical], in relation to which he suspended it"— in the case of Abraham, and the Religious individual, the *telos* is not the ethical valuation of his society and culture, but something higher (it is not placing a 'more universal' over one's 'particular universal' but instead placing a higher *ethos* over the contemporary *ethos*) (*FT*, 59). When there is a conflict between doing one's social duty, or following cultural norms and showing love for one's neighbour whatever form that may take, it is love that must be chosen.

in service to this purpose. Ferreira clarifies this by noting the pedagogical style of *Works of Love*: "*Works of Love* is maieutic in two senses: it employs the living strategy of maieutics and it helps us to understand how love itself is maieutic" (Ferreira 2001, 16). Love is, Christianly, for others; and Kierkegaard's work is itself a work of love because it is for others—it is meant to inspire a revelation and transformation within the reader, not merely to provide information (Kierkegaard's goal is to provoke internal change by revealing a choice to the reader, thus not forcing change externally by providing a system of demands or list of tasks). The change Kierkegaard is attempting to initiate relates to aiding others in finding their God-relation through upbuilding; to help others place God in the foundational spot of love and thereby love forth the love necessary for self-becoming.

When God is located as the foundation of love it does not cause a change in the nature or value of inter-personal relationships, nor does it deny validity to intimate relationships because there is an element of preference in them. The God-relation transforms *all* relationships as love itself is transformed; when love in its truest sense is practiced in these relationships, they become examples of acts of self-giving rather than acts of self-love or self-satisfaction (*WL*, 147). When the individual enters into an absolute relationship with God beyond the ethical, they enter into a transformed relationship to the other, to whom they have an ethical duty—not just with God as a mediator, but directly to the neighbour—because they are expressing the ethical in their action in such a way that it is not abstracted from the world, or mediated through an intermediary figure to whom the debt of love is owed (*FT*, 70). Our debt of love is owed directly to others because it is only through that debt that we can help others discover their own God-relation and take up the ethical task. Thus, God, despite being a 'middle-term,' serves less as intermediary and more as an impetus to inspire the ethical transformation of ourselves and others.

(*iv*) *The Command to Love*: Repositioning God as a guide shifts God into an indirect position, conditioning inter-personal relationships rather than determining them. God underlies the love exhibited by and shared by individuals (just as the God-relation underlies an individual's selfhood without determining it). To reinforce God's position in human love, Kierkegaard emphasises the God-given command, 'you shall love,' as representative of the perpetual, unchanging requirement to love others that possesses an unquestionable source (*WL*, 49). So, while love may have a variety of permutations, and what it means to show love is situational, contextual, and relative to the individuals involved, the *requirement* to love is constant and never vanishes (the infinite 'debt' of love). Corollary to this, love that does not derive from this divine command is prone to degrading into jealousy, hate, or other unsavoury emotions towards others because it lacks the stability of the eternal—we have seen a hint of this previously, as love lacking the God-relation becomes preferential and fails to recognise the equality of individuals as neighbours. "There is no evasion or excuse" when one is confronted with the 'you shall': the individual cannot hide from it—everyone who is confronted with it must acknowledge it, and act on it (*WA*, 9).

§1.2 Divine Command

For Kierkegaard, neighbour love in its fullest form derives from the God-given command—a command we previously found Barrett noting is superfluous, given the desire to love and be loved that Kierkegaard

attributes to human nature. If we cannot be commanded to love, perhaps the command is to *support* the extension of love to others, beyond those for whom our love comes naturally. Therefore, we may instead interpret the command as an exhortation or invitation from God, one providing absolute legitimacy to our actions—an interpretation strengthened by the individual's decision to *accept* the command, rather than being coerced. A result of this call from God is the requirement to love their neighbours equally and without preference. Within this command there is an important element which has not yet been given attention, and that is the place of reciprocity in loving relationships. Love that is derived from preference places demands on others: either they must be or become lovable, or must return the love they receive if they are to be considered 'worthy' of love (*WL*, 223).[9] Within this definition of love there are external criteria that others are measured against to decide whether love should be given to them, and those who do not meet the criteria are 'justifiably' denied love. By contrast, Christian love neither demands nor expects reciprocation, nor does it require others to make themselves lovable. The Christian love Kierkegaard advocates requires the individual to embrace faith, for it is only through the disposition of faith that the individual can presuppose that the love they extend will be extended by others, and that love can be kindled in and 'loved forth' from others through acts of love towards them (we are once again reminded of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*, where his act of faith, occasioned by a command, secures and heightens Isaac's faith—symbolising love).

Kierkegaard does not see this command as directed towards 'everyone' in terms of generation, nation, or community, but towards each individual separately: each individual is the 'you' that shall love the neighbour (*WL*, 98). The command, to love the neighbour, when understood as an invitation from God, does not possess a singular definition that can be applied to each individual at all times, it cannot be put into action by a nation, nor is it a feature of social or philosophical progress. It is a command that requires each individual to learn and develop how best to bring their own love into the world; the command, like God, becomes a guiding force that is underlying rather than overbearing, necessitating the arousal of an individual's passionate interest in recognising and actualising love. If duty is given primacy (as in the ethical stage), passion is subverted and actions cease to be motivated internally, replaced by an external motivation to follow the command *because* it is a command—in such cases it is not love shown, but bare obedience.[10] As Climacus points out, the Living Word is not unchanged over time, it exists in moments and is changed as it lives, no different than is true for living beings—it is present and therefore indemonstrable and unobjective (*CUP*, 40-1). The commandment to love others does not change, but its application does because it varies relative to the individual practitioner. Once

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[9] By embracing love in its fullest sense, the individual can be built up through love's capacity to nullify preference. This is even true in extreme cases: individuals who love in accordance with the 'command' would happily love a deceiver and consider it a victory to sustain their loving relationship (maintaining the faith that by giving their love they will build them up and draw love forth from the deceiver—the command provides *courage* for constancy in love). However, the lover who loves in a purely human sense will feel ashamed for having loved a deceiver and will seek to remove their entanglement with them, viewing them with scorn or hatred and therefore unworthy of continued love (*WL*, 228).

[10] Obedience here should be understood as obedience to abstract laws independent of the passion of love. However, obedience, properly understood, is obedience to the love commandment as we see in *Without Authority*: "this enormous danger, that a *human being* is placed between these two enormous powers and the choice is left up to him, this enormous danger is what entails that one must either love or hate, that not to love is to hate… that *the requirement of unconditional obedience would be grounded in love*— this he cannot get into his head" (*WA*, 34; my emphasis). Obedience independent of the individual's passions loses its relationship to God's command to love—love is reformulated as a set of instructions, rather than an embrace of the initial impulse that serves as the underlying foundation for love.

again, individual passion is the central feature of Christian love, and both acceptance of the command and the individual's passion must be aligned (passion alone is not enough, just as duty alone is not).

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Thus, a strong interpretation of the language of the command, as Kierkegaard occasionally utilises it, is at odds with many of his other statements on love, and introduces ambiguities;[11] for example, he casts love in the form of a duty: love is a "task and demand" (*WL*, 25). However, from other discourses and writings on love, it seems clear that we should not confuse the sense of duty implied here in "task and demand" with its explicit use in the ethical stage, exemplified by Judge William—thus falling into the problem of subverting passion to duty, or substituting passion with duty. In *Works of Love*, the individual's duty is not given a final-ised definition or set of instructions (it is 'to love'), nor is the duty derived from, or rewarded by, social rela-tionships or structures (as found in the ethical stage). In the Christian context, the 'duty' to love is not motivated by social requirement, but is animated by the individual's conscience and guided by the command as exhorta-tion or invitation—this is outlined in the discourse 'Our Duty to be in the Debt of Love' (*WL*, 171-196).[12] There is a distinct lack of normative or objective standards contained in God's command, so the individual is left to constantly strive to exhibit love ever more without an end-goal in view (at no point has one 'loved enough')—this in turn means that judging the success of fulfilling the command to love others becomes im-possible because the results are not indicative of whether an individual has loved or not and cannot be stand-ardised.

§1.3 The Infinite Debt

We can see Kierkegaard's continued insistence that internal motivation is necessary for love to be considered Christian love. Fundamental to the intentionality is the recognition of an unpayable debt of love derived from God's loving us (*WL*, 173). Kierkegaard clarifies his usage of the term debt in order to contrast it with the traditional passive accrual that can be tabulated and recouped by a lender, arguing that the debt of love can never be repaid because it is infinite—because love is a task that cannot be completed, the debt can

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[11] The ambiguity resulting from Kierkegaard's shifting use of language makes his commitments somewhat difficult to pin down. This may be reflective of his broader philosophical approach, as it forces the reader to be attentive to shifts in language usage—it initiates reflection and through reflection individuals gain a deeper understanding. However, it could equally be a result of the difficulty of transposing his religious commitments into a coherent, practical *ethos* without falling prey to secularisation or abstraction; a result of the ongoing evolution and refinement of his commitments breaking from earlier works; his later commitment to a Christianity focused on suffering and submissiveness to God, etc. Regard-less of the reason for it, the ambiguity persists and the interpretation advocated here will be sympathetic to Kierkegaard as an *edifying* author.

[12] The *Postscript* can give us some added context here: "love is continually striving, that is, the thinking subject is exist-ing" (*CUP*, 92). Furthermore, while there are results in a person's life, these cannot be interpreted as end-points but as reinforcement for continued striving. The objective person falls back on achievements to avoid striving: they settle for lower goals; the subjective individual continues to strive because *it is their life* (*CUP*, 85). Ferreira, commenting on *Works of Love*, also emphasises the need to strive, regardless of consequences (Ferreira 2001, 60). In the ethical stage the result is what is approved of or disapproved of; intention and motivation are suspended in order to judge the act, and this judgment is *then* applied to the individual. The context and intention behind the action take secondary roles, reducing the individual to an arbitrary actor instead of an engaged agent and therefore the proper focus of ethical evaluation (*FT*, 62). Outcomes are tinged with the accidental; it is the act and its attendant context and intention that one must focus on.

never be squared. Additionally, the lack of objective standards or values attached to the command means that the repayment of the debt cannot be determined; it is for God and those we seek to love to judge. However, while the debt is revealed to us through our God-relation, through our understanding of the display of infinite love shown by God towards us in the sacrifice of Christ, the debt is repaid to God through actions towards others (Ferreira 2001, 120). We have seen already that God does not serve as the intermediary in human relationships, but a guide, and we can uncover that guidance here: acts of love directed at other individuals parallels the act of love God performs by offering reconciliation.[13]

The debt of love also means that individuals must remain engaged in actively pursuing ways of repaying their debt, which means welding their intention to show love to active expressions of love towards others (*WL*, 181). It should be noted that an individual seeking to pay off their unpayable debt through acts of love is not acting in a self-serving way, as the infinite debt is taken on by the individual of their own volition; the individual must decide to understand themselves as constantly in a deficit of love to God and to others, which motivates them to act to show love whether that debt can be fulfilled or not. Debt is a "propelling power" of love which, along with the stabilising command, serves as a constant reminder of the need to be loving and to be cognisant of our intentions (*WL*, 181)—to be thoughtful about *why* we act out of love: whether it is to repay a finite debt we self-servingly seek to absolve ourselves of, or an infinite debt we choose to bear throughout our lives to help us remember to show love to all others. The risk of falling away from the latter and into the former is ever present. Here, again, we can see Kierkegaard reminding the Christian of the impossible demand of the task of living the Christian life of love—an impossible demand that the individual *chooses* by embracing a Christian life.

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Kierkegaard thus casts Christian love emanating from the God-relation as both over-demanding and indefinite. There is no defined set of rules or actions that can be objectively outlined, instead love is to be practiced situationally and contextually with a focus on striving to put others first and address their needs with love (*WL*, 110-1). Furthermore, within the perspective of a Christian ethic, if loving the neighbour is made a doctrine with set rules and guidelines it becomes prone to privileging difference; a person better versed in the rules gains superiority over the one who is not (Climacus makes a similar argument about doctrinal Christianity[14]). However, if Christian love remains existential, as *de Silentio* presented it, it is equally possible for everyone to practice, with expressions being relative to individual capacities. Thus, where duties mediated by society have a general and definite structure, and can direct actions by providing clear guidelines, Kierkegaard understands the command to love as lacking a structure that can be exhausted. Each individual must find through their God-relation ways of showing love within the particular situation(s) they find themselves in (this

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[13] Kierkegaard's rhetorical approach to the desire of God and an eternal happiness serves to "encourage his readers toward humility, thankfulness, and dependence" because they are reflective of the attitude we should take as individuals before God (Barrett 2013, 87-8). However, the individual is not only before God, but face-to-face with others, so the dispositions advocated here are valid beyond one's God-relation, extending to each of the individuals we relate to. Thus, the debt of love is 'repaid' not through our relationship to God, but through the practice of love in the form of acts of love directed towards other individuals.

[14] Cf: *CUP*, 377.

requires the individual to have exercised both faith and intentionality). A key contrast that Kierkegaard makes between this and defined duties and laws is in regards to preference. Above, we briefly saw how preference, or more specifically preferential love, is the *bête noir* of Christian love because the individual chooses who they want to view as a neighbour and therefore who they want to show love to (and how it should be shown); they have not formed a God-relation and are unable to recognise the equal worthiness of each individual with regard to love. He sees each of these as manifestations of individual preferences, and love based on preference seeks out what *it* finds lovable, rather than finding lovable what has been given. This is symbolic of failing to recover a God-relation, and therefore a failure embrace *faith*.

§2 Faith

Kierkegaard has a very peculiar and unique understanding of faith, with his concept of faith possessing the requirement for one to *choose*[15] to appropriate a faithful disposition: to decisively embrace faith is foundational to entering the religious stage—the paradigm being the faith of Abraham, the faith that what is given will be returned. However, faith has a much deeper meaning within the Christian-Religious stage which grounds Kierkegaard's interpretation of neighbour love. This specifically Christian faith plays the decisive role in Kierkegaard's philosophy and ethic of love, not only because the God-relationship; it is important because, as Climacus states in the *Postscript*, faith "accentuates the actuality of *another person*, not one's own" (*CUP*, 588; my emphasis). For Kierkegaard, faith is a *disposition* towards the external world, and more specifically towards other individuals, and thus not a purely internal disposition despite being intimately connected to one's own selfhood. Therefore, the individual with faith who builds themselves up in love will be drawn to the presupposition that love also resides in others—their faith leads them to the trust that the love they express towards other individuals resides within others and will be returned through acts of love (*WL*, 206-7). The individual with outward-oriented faith does not pursue only preferred love. The love derived from faith is not a contrasting or comparative love (i.e. who loves best/most);[16] instead faithful love is cooperative

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[15] That faith is related to choice is implied throughout Kierkegaard's works and the attention he pays to, and importance he invests in, the category of choice in both pseudonymous and named works. Among the most clear statements of this is the denial that faith precedes individual existence. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard puts in the mouth of Climacus: "faith pertains not to essence but to being" (*PF*, 87) and "to be born with faith is just as plausible as to be born twenty-four years old" (*PF*, 96). Faith requires individual engagement with existence through decisiveness (Abraham's show of faith through decisiveness exemplifies this). For Barrett, "whatever faith is, it must be a mode of passionate subjectivity... faith is the embrace of a way of living even when the validity of that way of living is objectively uncertain" (Barrett 2013, 260). Faith relates to 'how' an individual relates to what is absolutely good (i.e. God), not to knowledge, and requires the individual to embrace, through choice, decision, etc., faith as a passionate existential disposition. Subjectivity itself requires choice; we see this put negatively by *de Silentio*, where he notes that when one accepts fate they negate their own choices, as fate determines individual actions, and replaces the 'how' or 'why' underlying the individual's decision to act (*FT*, 93). This recasts the individual who relinquishes choice as an object of their fate, rather than a decisive subject who takes an active role in self-becoming. Climacus confirms this, discussing that the leap into faith is constituted by the decisiveness to exist, the decisiveness of subjectivity (*CUP*, 295). Without that decisiveness, the individual is unable to embrace subjectivity, their God-relation, or faith.

[16] Kierkegaard exclaims: "comparable things are nothing to rejoice over" (*WA*, 39), and so faith, if it is reduced to a comparable achievement or possession becomes nothing to rejoice over. Faith should not be viewed as a source of pride. Barrett points out that faith is not a work, and therefore not an achievement we possess; the life of Christian faith is not meant to be understood as an attempt to achieve something, but as a way of living life well (Barrett 2013, 282). So we are not able to take pride in faith because faith is not a possession or achievement particular to us. If we view faith as

with the love of others, its expression nurtures the love of others, and brings individuals with faith into a communion with others.

Faith, for Climacus, is understood as an infinite interest in the actuality of another individual, which stands in distinction to the ethicist who, despite coming close to faith, remains infinitely interested in themselves and their own moral standing—what could be considered bourgeois morality—and thereby fails to make the choice of faith (*CUP*, 324). This description of faith, reflective of Kierkegaard's own descriptions, embraces paradox and treats possibility and actuality as co-equal, with neither being greater nor lesser than the other (because the concern is an actual concern about a possibility, but the dialectic retains these rather than collapsing them in synthesis). There is a like-for-like when love is presupposed by faith, so, when the individual practices love and promotes love in others, faith replaces the need or predisposition to *demand* direct reciprocation because what is given will be returned (by the individual we show love to, by another, by God, etc.). Having faith that other individuals feel and desire to express love therefore requires an internal change in the individual; it requires the choice to embrace faith (*WL*, 208). Christian love therefore builds up by encouraging inwardness, with the faith that the one who receives love will have a parallel inward transformation. Paramount to the religious stage is that an individual "only becomes an essentially human being in the full sense of equality" (*TA*, 88) and "if the individual is unwilling to learn to be satisfied with himself in the essentiality of the religious life before God… if he is unwilling to learn to be inspired by this as supreme because it expresses equality before God and equality with all men, then he will not escape from reflection" (*TA*, 88-9). Reflection institutes levelling as an alternative equality, an equality that does not value alterity, but demands common purpose that is externally legitimised. The reflectiveness that fails to reach the religious is trapped in the ethical stage, where faith fails to reach its highest expression.

Before accepting the interpretation of faith proposed by Kierkegaard, we should briefly examine his counter-point to faith: certainty. In *Fear and Trembling*, *de Silentio* compares going "beyond faith" to going "beyond love", as looking for certainty in something rooted in subjectivity. In his view, this reduces the individual to an object of discourse rather than an existential being—they become something definitive to be spoken *of* rather than something *in process*; something that *is*, rather than something *becoming* (*FT*, 37). In *Without Authority*, certainty is often associated with hubris and pride, depicted by the Pharisee who is certain of his social standing, and his moral and spiritual superiority thereby assuming a role of authority and casting his eyes down over others (*WA*, 127). The pride he derives from his self-righteousness leads him to deride and despise those he sees as spiritually beneath him—his certainty in his own standing produces within him the illusion that he is in a position to make judgments about other individuals. However, that position is, according to Kierkegaard, God's alone.[17] In *Works of Love*, certainty is tied to abstract knowledge, and, because love is

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something comparable with others, we show a favouritism towards ourselves—we examine how others compare to us and to *our* standards (Ferreira 2001, 106). Such a faith embraces arrogant self-interest and effectively makes oneself the focal point of attention and criterion for existence, thus attempting to minimize or negate the alterity of the other.

[17] The illusory feeling of pride and hubris derived from feeling holier than others arises because of the irony of Christianity, which is that the highest is attainable by every individual, it is common, and denies the intuitive notion that one gets closer through knowledge, outward expressions of piety, claims of moral rectitude, etc. (*CUP*, 294). The certainty felt by the Pharisee undermines his own standing by being an ironic certainty, because the only thing he is certain of *is the illusion*.

experienced, there can be no certainty of feeling love nor abstract knowledge of being in love without it being subjectively perceived in its existential practice (*WL*, 31). Love cannot be known directly like a piece of information, but is *felt*. The sense of certainty we have about our feelings is distinct from the certainty (we think) we have about the world, history, etc. In the latter case, we consider something certain if it is 'objective,' which is to say true for everyone at all times. Certainty of our emotions and dispositions, like love, requires subjective apprehension of their associated passions and feelings, and, while there may be commonalities, the experience and expression of emotions are inherently personal. So, while love can be expressed aesthetically through poetry or philosophical discourse, no matter how concrete such an expression may seem, it remains only an approximation of love itself, an illustration of love, and is always distinct from the actual, existential passion of love felt by individuals.

Uncertainty in loving Christianly produces the same risks that are hallmarks of the faith that Kierkegaard locates in the religious stage. As the highest engagement with existence, the religious stage can be understood as entailing risk, where "even in faith the only certitude the individual has is a 'subjective' certainty" (Stack 1977, 50). The lack of certainty essential to faith has the power to inspire anxiety and fear in individuals—it is a heavy burden to face uncertainty, but to approach love with faith "forbids despair" (*WL*, 55). The individual who embraces love in tandem with their faith perseveres in the face of risk, and maintains their faith regardless of tribulation; the individual does not harden their heart or love despairingly (or hopelessly), but remains open and loving regardless of the response their love receives (*WL*, 57). The greatest risk in this venture is losing love or faith, for to lose one is to lose the other, and, alternatively, to sacrifice one is to sacrifice the other. Kierkegaard emphasises the need to venture in and act out of love despite fear of danger or failure, and to continuously strive, for the real danger is imagining an end to one's expressions of love (*WL*, 306-7). As Climacus warns the reader, achievement is not the focus of existence, it is striving in *self-becoming* (*CUP*, 135). This creates a double-edge to the risk of love: renunciation of a love motivated externally by love unreturned and leading to the hardening of one's heart, shares similarities with an internally motivated renunciation when a person feels they have loved enough and do not need to continue striving because they are confident that they have reached love's end. In each case, there is a feeling that the love an individual has given to others has received no concrete benefit, and the lack of achievement they feel leads them away from loving in the future.

This uncertainty reveals another facet of faith-based love. Because there is no reward for our expressions of love, it creates a concern that acts of love have been unsuccessful. However, the trust in receiving back what is given engendered by faith serves as a mollifying principle—it encourages the individual to perpetually practice love despite not being able to know directly whether their expressions were adequate (but always with the knowledge that even their best efforts will always be infinitely small before God—reflecting the Lutheran influence against meritoriousness or entitlement to salvation through works,[18] but without sacri-

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[18] We should be aware that Kierkegaard does not necessarily agree with Luther entirely on this point. Barrett argues that Kierkegaard was critical of both Augustine and Luther as producing a sense of grace that does not encourage striving, but instead a lowering of the need to strive (a lowering of the 'taxes') that provided comfort that Kierkegaard saw as not

ficing individual effort (Ferreira 2001, 18)). The individual must be self-conscious and honest in the interpretation of their actions to see how they can better show love in the future. Once again, faith is required to overcome the anxiety of risk and spur the individual into the *attempt* to practice love as best as possible, because it is a task that appears impossible to carry out over the course of one's earthly existence—how can an individual be expected to recognise, let alone enact, both the infinite simplicity of equality *and* the infinite importance of that equality within a finite existence (*WL*, 90)? Faith is requisite if we are to carry out this ostensibly impossible task—"it is both too little and too much" for us to act out of love for our neighbours in the world, yet it is the "highest" a person is capable of doing (*WL*, 95). Kierkegaard was cognisant of the difficulty of the task he was outlining, acknowledging the impossibility of being able to *fully* exhibit the neighbour love for which Christ serves as the pattern—but, while failure is an option, giving up is not, so the individual must strive to express and live love as best they can. Kierkegaard did not fail to appreciate that some people would be unable or unwilling to understand his conception of love, and he sees them as lacking faith and therefore standing outside of Christianity (*WL*, 175). For them, love becomes another good fortune in life that is not their responsibility, but is provided to them from outside themselves. However, even if these individuals wilfully deny embracing faith and love within themselves, they are still to be loved by the Christian who must retain the faith that love resides within them.

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Therefore, love, practiced in this way, is 'faithful'—it is predicated on faith, an expression of eternity within time. To illustrate this, Kierkegaard uses the example of a young girl who loves with all her heart, but whose love diminishes over time when it appears she will not gain her beloved (*WL*, 285). When love is predicated on faith, it presupposes love in the other, and so there is no forsaking shared love—love abides, and time provides occasion for its return, no matter how much time has elapsed. If love is maintained by either of the partners it abides in forgiveness of the one who lost their faith in love, and they await love's return, with the faith that love resides within the other. Placing faithful love outside of temporal constraints provides love for one's neighbours with its unchanging nature; it is not preference, nor expectancy, in fact the love of one's neighbour transcends any particular neighbour and extends to each individual (this does not mean one does not, or should not have preferences; it only means that one can always discover new neighbours, friends, lovers) (*WL*, 76). There is an openness to others, so 'neighbour' is broadly construed—love extends to everyone, which means we must remain open to everyone and to the relationships that *could* be, not just those which

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properly Christian (Barrett 2013, 62). So, while he agrees with Luther's critical assessment of works-righteousness, there remains the spectre of it in Kierkegaard's emphasis on works and striving. It was important to Kierkegaard that we can never fully accomplish what God has invited us to do (loving infinitely and completely unconditionally), but that we must strive and try to nonetheless, which means simple grace could never be enough for Kierkegaard. In addition, Barrett stresses the passivity that derives from the predestination of grace, which ties into the fatalism of Kierkegaard's Ethical stage, and sees the past as determinant of the future (Barrett 2013, 258). This was a difficult point for Kierkegaard to deal with, as without predestination there is works-righteousness and the very meritoriousness which he, alongside Luther, is critical of— but with it you can have the robust sense of grace but also a relaxation of the need to strive (Barrett 2013, 259). Ultimately however, the criticism can be put, somewhat flippantly, as striving is hard, predestination is easy and, as always, Kierkegaard emphasises the hard way.

currently are or might be.[19] Love, in its proper configuration, is continuous and unceasing; *love always seeks to love more*.

So, while faithful love is primarily directed outwards we can see that it is also intimately personal. Before engaging in loving relationships, individuals must first have a concern about their self, about their inwardness—about their faith. A person unconscious of their own self-identity cannot help others find theirs; an individual must already practice faith if they are to engage in truly loving relationships with others, because that relationship will be one of cooperatively promoting faith in and through the love of others: "a person who does not know himself cannot promise love out of sincere faith" (*WL*, 149-150). If the God-relationship is not discovered, the synthesis producing a human being's self is not possible, and if an individual does not know who they are as a self, they cannot help others to find their own self (as this is cooperative, the individual only finds their self through their relations to others). Self-becoming is therefore the root and foundation of love, and develops out of the individual's faith that there is an eternal love that exists within themselves and others.

§3 Self-Becoming[20]

In order to be able to properly practice the Christian love Kierkegaard is outlining, the individual must be in a state of becoming; there must be the realisation of a sense of incompleteness, derived from the adoption of the uncertainty of faith, which in turn compels the individual to strive in their self-becoming—this means striving alongside other individuals through the practice of Christian love which nourishes both lover and beloved. This approach to self-becoming is only accomplished through faith and active self-giving love that serves as the proper foundation for inter-personal relationships. Once again, this requires engagement on the part of the individual, as "what the lover does, he is or he *becomes*" (*WL*, 262, my emphasis). As love manifests in an individual, their self-consciousness is enhanced—represented by a heightened awareness of opportunities to practice love, and how they can improve on previous failures (*WL*, 312).[21] Self-becoming is progressive and relies as much on failure as it does on the resiliency of faith in overcoming failure. Loving another inspires within individuals a sense of earnestness that reveals the deficiencies in their acts of love, providing them with a context to understand their sinfulness (but this also occasions forgiveness—both self-forgiveness and for-giveness from others). Part of self-becoming is earnestness, which includes self-accusation—openness in eval-uating one's personal failures (independent of the failures of others). Self-accusation allows for responsibility to be taken for one's actions (or inaction) and allows for the individual to improve themselves in their own

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[19] We are not to focus on whether it is likely someone will show us love, or will meet our preferences to show them love. As Taciturnus makes clear: "faith is by no means partial to probability" (*PF*, 94).

[20] Cf: *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* by John Lippitt for a more exhaustive account of the paradoxical role of self-becoming in practicing neighbour love in Kierkegaard's philosophy.

[21] We are reminded of the dialectical synthesis of the self. Reflection is an important element of self-becoming, but requires the individual to be active in order to have something to reflect on. We understand ourselves better by becoming more inward, by reflecting on who we are and what we have done—but this in turn should lead us to new projects and new activities in the world, armed with a better sense of how to act. Failure should not be viewed as a deterrent to future action, but as a guide to self-improvement because failure hinges as much on personal capability as it does on the acci-dental features of concrete existence; decision and intention are components of acting, and the outcome resulting from the action following decision and intention have accidental features that makes them unreliable as far as judging an action is concerned (*CUP*, 340). Consequences cannot be the only measure of success, however result-based we would like, or are inclined to be.

self-becoming (*WA*, 132). Honesty is considered by Walsh to be the fundamental attribute that Kierkegaard emphasises for the Christian individual, as it is only honesty before God that elicits grace (and only with honesty towards ourselves that we can become a self earnestly) (Walsh 2018, 132). Internally driven change is key to self-growth, and becoming self-critical allows the individual to better show love outwardly through recognition of progressively better courses of action promoting love/care for others.

Internally motivated change transforms love into a matter of personal conscience,[22] where the individual is interested in improving their expression of love. The discourse 'Love is a Matter of Conscience' (*WL*, 136-152) emphasises the role of self-becoming in love. In it, Kierkegaard discusses how an individual who does not know themselves, or who cannot act out of *being* themselves, will be unable both to grasp the faith required to show love and help others in discovering and deepening their faith and love. Alison Assiter stresses the notion that we must love ourselves to love others, so if we do not take care of our needs we will be unable to help others with their needs (and this is more substantial than just surviving to help others, extending to how we relate to ourselves—do we take care of ourselves, do we have a sense of self, etc.) (Assiter 2009, 99). The unique, personal emotion of love reveals the individual *as* an individual, and to exemplify this it is stressed that love "never comes to dwell upon itself or to compare itself with love in other men or to compare itself with the deeds it has accomplished" (*WL*, 174). This echoes Climacus' view that inwardness does not require competitive or comparative external expression; these serve only to invite mistrust, jealousy, and envy by leading the individual to feel a (self-deceptive) sense of superiority or inferiority (*CUP*, 414). Love accentuates the individual's singularity by placing demands on each individual uniquely, so it cannot be placed into comparison with the love of others, the deeds of others, or the status of one's love; love must be continuously practiced and unfold in accordance with individual striving lest the individual fall into self-deception of having accomplished their task. Comparison with others leads predominantly to pride and vanity—to contemptuousness: to assume that one is superior to others (or to strive to be superior to others),[23] is to relinquish love and to locate the self as conditional to others (*WL*, 179). Love that is comparative is not love, as love can have no comparison, as it has no strict definition or criteria. "The very moment you judge another or criticise another person, you judge yourself" (*WL*, 220). Love should therefore be understood as cooperative rather than comparative or contemptuous.

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[22] The individual acts out of their own conscience, they must strive to be involved and conscious of what they do, how they act, and their motivations. The goal is not external recognition or favour, but to act out of love because they desire to do it for others (this includes God), which makes love, and ethics, a matter of inwardness that has no definite external compulsion, but instead is derived from the individual's choice to embrace a life of faith and love amongst others—choosing to accept God's invitation "to love" (*WL*, 137). God is revealed through a love that is not coerced or seduced from the individual, and we are to practice love in this way—even if there is no clear, tangible benefit to showing love, as love occasions self-fulfilment (Barrett 2013, 202). By avoiding the need for recognition when showing love, we realise that while faith is not the only route to greatness and glory, it is the route to the greatest glory (which is self-understanding, not the accolades of others) (*FT*, 20). Self-becoming requires the individual to be self-aware and self-conscious of their actions and intentions, and it is the attentiveness to one's relationships which is truly great—even if it is only the individual themselves who appreciates it.

[23] Pride and vanity have negative forms for Kierkegaard as well. A person can be proud of their self-denial or self-hatred, consumed with their inadequacies in comparison to others. The danger is not only placing yourself above others, but also reducing yourself to a figure of pure sinfulness who is undeserving of love (this will be discussed further in the following section).

Christianity, on Kierkegaard's interpretation, speaks to *individuals*, not to groups of individuals as a *totality*. Each human being is called individually to become who they can be through love and bring forth the 'fruits 'of love through action (*WL*, 31). Kierkegaard is constant in his presentation of love as directed outward towards our neighbours, towards others; however we can see that there must be a solid foundation of one's selfhood for love to become potent. When he uses the term love 'builds up,' he notes that it is suggestive of height, but he also draws attention to the fact that height, when building, implies the need for depth, as building higher requires a deeper, more robust foundation (*WL*, 201). The individual must therefore develop their introspective capacity, their inwardness, in order to gain the depth of self which allows them to ascend to loving with faith, and nurture and build themselves up. Upbuilding is therefore concurrent with inward depth. Kierkegaard is explicit that anything that does not build in love is not "upbuilding" (*WL*, 205). Self-becoming requires upbuilding because it is through the process of upbuilding that we develop our self-understanding and the ability to love in ever more constructive ways (constructive to ourselves and to those we enter into relationships with). As Ferreira says, "we ourselves are built up when we build up another person" (Ferreira 2001, 140).

For Kierkegaard, the most important lesson for the individual to learn is: "to understand oneself in one's longing for community" (*WL*, 153). He was acutely aware that humans are not solitary beings, but communal ones: "love and companionship first take something from a man before they give" (*WL*, 153). We must be mature and humble enough to be willing to give something of ourselves when entering into a community before we receive anything in turn—we must give up demands, pride, expectation, etc. when we enter into loving relationships. Assiter discusses a 'minimal agency' position, wherein the individual can satisfy their needs independently of others, but she points out that this is illusory because, as a human being, we depend on others in a variety of ways by our very nature, and without others there would arise within the individual no sense of self-respect and no way to truly care for themselves because their self-awareness would be severely limited by a lack of others (Assiter 2009, 103-4). For this reason, Kierkegaard grounds his ethic on loving others as we love ourselves; we in turn cannot love ourselves if there are no others to provide the baseline of love.[24]

However, faith instantiates a reciprocity such, that while the individual gives, they have faith that what they give will be returned. Thus, communities are formed when individuals give freely to each member of the community. The Christian is not to live a life of seclusion, nor are they to spurn the things they enjoy in life, but these cannot be construed by the Christian as representative of life, nor should love be reduced to immediate passions (whether these be art, speculative thought, or any other finite interest) (*WL*, 61). Love is love of the neighbour first and foremost, and the works one engages in should reflect this—the Christian, one who practices unconditional neighbour love, understands this and apportions her attention and love in accordance with her participation among others in everyday life. Assiter proposes that we develop our moral attitude through learning to love well, which improves our ability to love those close to us, but also allows us to draw

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[24] As we saw in §1, the individual does not grow as a lover amongst humans by loving God and God alone. We cannot love ourselves like we love God; and to love God as ourselves would be to make God human. So, even though the God-relation is central to Kierkegaard's view of faith and our relation to others as equals, it is not definitive or exhaustive of our capacity to love—it is not enough to love God, we *must* love our fellow *existents*.

more people into a relationship of care (even those we would otherwise have seen as enemies) (Assiter 2009, 125). She argues that it is not about creating abstract principles which we then learn to apply to more and more people, but about learning how to care for those close to us (including ourselves) and then as we mature that care will naturally be extended to others.

The cooperative element of self-becoming is also evident in the discourse 'Love Seeks Not Its Own' (*WL*, 247-260).[25] This discourse presents self-becoming as a task embedded in the context of community, where the individual grows as a self by helping and being helped. Expecting help fades into the background of the loving relationship because the one helping expects nothing in return, and the one who is helped does not necessarily recognise the help given. Individuals who seek reciprocation, recognition, or remuneration for their efforts are effectively acting out of self-love. The interpersonal focus of self-becoming means that faith itself becomes the social disposition *par excellence*. Additionally, the individual cannot hope in the way Kierkegaard defines it without love and faith, as his peculiar definition of hope requires love as an impulse for action in order to hope for future possibilities (*WL*, 239).[26] Therefore, hope is itself a manifestation of love as hope is only ever hope for others and is an interest in the well-being of others that serves as an example of love. Hope in this context is not passive but active, and an element of the communal foundation of love, reflecting the individual's faith: Kierkegaard's Christian faith presupposes that the self-becoming of the individual will be reflected in their neighbours—hope is *for* others to engage in self-becoming and arises through actively showing love in order to upbuild others.

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Therefore, shifting focus to outwardly giving love allows individuals to gain a sense of self that does not ebb and flow; love provides constancy to character. Even if self-understanding progresses through introspection and reinterpretation of prior action through an ever more sophisticated understanding of love, they retain their *self*. Thus, while looking beyond earthly gain is a difficult proposition, not unacknowledged by Kierkegaard, it is not an impossible undertaking, and is required when forming ethical relationships with others. This is the case because earthly distinctions distract us from sharing the love that is due to all human beings—as each individual possesses an inherent equality under the aegis of Kierkegaard's Christianity—but to expect equality in earthly institutions is a position Kierkegaard does not commit to. Instead, he takes a more pessimistic view, arguing that it is not a temporal possibility to overcome all the inequalities of the earthly, but the desire to strive to overcome these inequalities is both "a pious wish" and an "enormous task" that individuals are encouraged to undertake through works of love (*WL*, 82). It requires hope and faith; faith in my actions and hope for others. The importance of this to self-becoming is that we are not to view ourselves with an identity entirely distinct and alien from others. This means we should not provide earthly distinctions with

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[25] An indirect presentation is found in *Stages.* Eight paths converge on a single point, yet the point of convergence remains a solitary place (*SLW*, 16). This could be read as a reference to one being solitary even when there seems to be many; the convergence is not a bringing together of the paths into a single one, but instead a point of connection shared by each of the individual paths—none being reducible to the others.

[26] This form of hope requires the individual to be attentive to both temporality and eternity to help the other to find love within themselves; hope is a task and like any other task it requires action (*WL*, 233).

undue importance and value that alone determines individual meaning, nor let these features cloud our judgment or define us in contrast to others. Nor should we use earthly distinctions as a means of choosing who we do and do not want to love, or who is and who is not deserving of being loved. Most importantly, though, we cannot allow our earthly distinctions to prescribe our displays of love; we must remain cognisant that we are individuals with an essential equality, but unique in our earthly existence, our experiences, emotions, etc.; equality as *subjects*.

§4 <u>Self-Giving</u>

As a person grows in Christian love, as they become a self through the practice of neighbour love, they are to do so with a focus on their neighbours, which is to say: others. We have seen that faith is outward-facing and directs the individual towards others, but here we see how faithful loving transforms love into expressions of self-giving. Love is edifying for the individual and is upbuilding, but primarily through the edification and upbuilding of others. So, despite an individual's benefiting from love, upbuilding does not arise through a self-centred focus, it arises through self-giving—it is what we do for others that defines us, not what we do for ourselves.[27] Barrett notes that Kierkegaard shares ties to Augustine, as each of them understand self-fulfilment in self-giving (Barrett 2013, 178). Self-becoming is therefore not self-centred, it is cooperative and dependent on how we interact with others. Kierkegaard is clear that within his ethic of love, it is the person willing love of others who is a good practitioner of neighbour love: "the one who forgets himself when he is most preoccupied, at the moment that to himself is the most precious, and thinks of another, that one loves much" (*WA*, 141).

Loving without expectation of reciprocation is central to self-giving compassion. Human love often leads to mutuality which means an expectation (or demand) for reciprocation, and stands in direct contrast to the Christian love which is founded on self-giving (*WL*, 124). Therefore, immediate erotic love can never be wholly reflective of the Christian concept of love that Kierkegaard is evoking because it arises first out of personal desire, not interest in the other *as an other*; self-love, or love of one's preferences (loving who we *want* to love) is problematic because it ignores the ethical task of loving the neighbour, instead seeking those individuals who are preferred who will return love in the same preferential way (*WL*, 25).[28] It is also possible for an individual to appear on the surface to be loving, "one can perform works of love in an unloving, yes, even self-loving way, and when this is so, the works of love are nevertheless not the work of love" (*WL*, 30). When love is practiced in a self-serving way, instead of a self-giving way, it is not truly love—intention plays a significant role in possessing a loving disposition, which, again, requires earnestness on the part of individuals—the honesty to evaluate whether or not they have been self-giving.

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[27] This stands in stark contrast to the aesthetic and ethical views of self-definition, where the individual is defined by their passing interests, or arbitrarily chooses who they are and/or are defined by their social functions respectively. In the religious stage the individual only becomes herself through her relationships with others—what you give and the actions you take define who you are.

[28] This is related to the concept of 'resolution' in the religious stage, where the resolution must guide the erotic love in order to provide it with the consistency of the eternal (*TDIO*, 63). This resolution would find itself within the broader conception of love, as it is the resolution which introduces the infinite into the finite by fusing personal desire with personal passion. In immediate erotic love the personal desire for the other is what is given primacy, not the recognition of the reciprocal love between two individuals who have the need to love and be loved.

The active nature of Kierkegaard's Christianity requires individuals to be self-conscious and attentive to the fact that making promises and commitments is not enough. After making any promise or commitment individuals must follow through—or earnestly try to follow through (*WL*, 105-6). In taking on commitments, especially the commitment to repay the unrepayable debt of love, the individual staves off 'busyness' or aimless action by adding a purposefulness to those actions by passionately pursuing them as reflecting the ethical *telos*—in relation to loving, this is a commitment to self-giving love of others that is never finished. Furthermore, promises cannot be put off indefinitely and demand action to realise that promise; the promise to love those we may not have a preference for cannot be put on hold until we find them worthy of keeping our promise to them.[29] However, individuals must be careful when making commitments and not confuse making the commitment as having greater value than following through on it, or as praiseworthy on its own (*WL*, 101). This can be difficult to overcome when the action is in the future and the commitment is; in the present moment, because the difference between following through on it and not following through on it is less significant at the moment of the commitment—this is further exacerbated if the individual, deceptively, assures themselves of their good intentions in making the commitment. Failure is a possibility in Kierkegaard's account, but it is not an *option*, or failure becomes self-serving; failure is justified only as an occasion to learn how to better practice self-giving love in the process of self-becoming.

To love in a self-giving way is also difficult when intentions are not earnestly reflected upon, hence the need for self-becoming prior to self-giving—*there must be a self to give*. Even if the individual sacrifices everything, if it is only so they will be recognised for doing so they are doing it out of pride—they are trying to display an excellence of their own character and gain recognition or praise for their actions (*WL*, 133). The example set by Christ (and therefore the foundational example for a Christian act of love) was for love to always be for the other's gain without demand for reciprocation by the one showing or practicing love (*WL*, 107). Christian love requires, *demands*, self-giving without expecting, seeking, or demanding reciprocation from others, and seeks only to benefit others. C. Stephen Evans is attentive to the individual's need to remain incognito when it comes to being religious, because to be conspicuously religious flirts too close to taking on a self-righteous disposition, or imposing a religious view onto others (instead of allowing them to choose for themselves) (Evans 1983, 205). While self-giving is exemplified in Christ, who according to Christianity gave everything of himself for others (for each individual individually), it should be kept in mind that Kierkegaard does not view his example as one which can be fully replicated by humans—Christ was the *God*-Man (to borrow Climacus' phrasing), and had a capacity to love which was limitless, a capacity that human beings lack; Christ's example is the impossible goal we must strive for—his infinite sacrifice out of love for humanity exhibiting the infinite debt of love each individual owes but which the lover can never actually exhaust.

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We can conclude this by noting that the self-giving individual strives to evoke a love that is not only victorious in them, but victorious in others; they seek to share their love and grow in love alongside those who

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[29] This is paralleled in *Without Authority*, where the individual must be active and not wait until they feel 'worthy' to seek forgiveness (*WA*, 155).

they show their love to (*WL*, 309). Individuals love forth love; love encourages the love of others/inspires love within others (*WA*, 137)—by being loving ourselves we bring forth love in others, so we must bring love into the world if love is to gain a foothold in the world. Self-giving love is therefore our primary method of interacting with others, and places the needs of others above our own—which is key to the cooperative self-becoming of the previous section, as it is through helping others become selves that we engage and re-engage in the process of becoming a self. The impossibility of completing the task is ever present in the infinite demand chosen by the Christian lover; it is not a deterrent from striving because the task cannot be completed, but instantiates a desire to *try* to bring love into the world infinitely, to *act* to express love more perfectly, to repeatedly *strive* to find one's place as a loving self among other loving selves. To become a self requires other selves to whom we respond and make our self available.

Love is characteristic of our existence *for* others (*WL*, 211). Kierkegaard occasionally speaks of the need for self-renunciation in our existence for others,[30] but there appears to be a particularity to the idea when employed in the context of love. Love's self-renunciation stands in contrast to infinite resignation, as subjectivity and passion is necessary for self-giving love: Christian love *requires* the individual to be engaged in being *their* self in order to give of themselves, to love others 'as your*self*.' Love is boundless and requires the individual to willingly give themselves, through their love, to everyone—to renounce their direct personal interests and preferences in order to accept and love *all* others. We are imperfect beings and we have a propensity to allow ourselves to give only preferential love (*WL*, 65); it is the task of the one who practices love in Kierkegaard's formulation to attempt to overcome this. In this context, self-renunciation as self-giving is not the same as secular resignation seen in the pseudonymous writings; it is not an attempt to give up one's desires, longings, and plans to be appreciated as wise and pious or to abstract oneself from existence (*WL*, 188). It is not resignation and retreat from the world—in *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard encourages individuals to "*let go with passion*", without hesitancy or uncertainty (*TA*, 43-4)—but this is renouncing one's preferences, pride, and hubris in order to see the neighbour in each individual given in the world; self-giving allows individuals to discover their neighbours as those others encountered in the world.

§5 Neighbour Love

Since we exist for others, live among others, and practice love towards others, we should know who these others are: our neighbours. At this point we have seen how Kierkegaard's concept of Christian love affects the individual internally and how the love that is inwardly nurtured is projected outward, but we have only had brief glimpses at the definition of neighbour and who counts as a neighbour in the above discussions. Backhouse understands Kierkegaard's neighbour to be the important unit of his social ethics, presenting the

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[30] The first discourse in *Without Authority*, "Look at the Birds of the Air; Look at the Lily in the Field", has an unmistakeable feeling of resignation that suffuses it—but this is not necessarily the case, as it can also be read as a call to readiness, to be prepared to help others when we are needed instead of being purely focused on oneself (*WA*, 7-20). Despite the emphasis placed on self-resignation and giving up on one's own projects, it might be better to understand this through the matrix of self-giving love emphasised in *Works of Love*. What is resigned or renounced is not the passions of the individual, but the impulsiveness or the desire to seek out projects that will yield finite goods (money, social recognition, etc.) instead of projects that are aligned with their passions or which show love to others.

neighbour as a concrete other who is to be shown concern, rather than an abstract co-national (Backhouse 2011, 215). This casts neighbours not in a category, 'neighbour,' but as each individual to whom we are to relate—each individual must therefore be approached differently, but always with love.[31] Kierkegaard is clear that individuals are not isolated, they are members of communities and love is meant to be shared with those we engage with—whether they are sought out, or come into our lives by chance. Furthermore, actions are not performed within a solitary context, they have an effect on individuals, institutions, etc. (*FT*, 90).[32] Relationships of love on an intimate level, like marriage or friendship, are the most obvious expressions of love in an individual's life—but, while there is an element of preference in these relationships they must first and foremost be a love for one's neighbour (*WL*, 141). These relationships require the same foundation of love as any other social relationship, which means growth of the self through the relationship to God and with the equality we share before God; marriage is cooperative self-becoming just as it is self-giving.

While Kierkegaard does not present us with an absolute disavowal of preferential love, these relationships are rendered difficult because they are supposed to be founded on neighbour love and not on personal desire. This produces a tension when the need to love everyone equally comes into conflict with the possibility of loving some more than others; this tension is never given adequate attention, and Kierkegaard's discourses in many ways lead the reader to be dissuaded from intimate inter-personal relationships. In effect, neighbour love takes absolute precedence and must apply to all who fit the classification of 'neighbour' and, while we have already had occasion to get a sense of the all-encompassing definition that Kierkegaard provides, it is worthwhile to investigate his concept of neighbour more closely. Kierkegaard is very critical of circumscribing the definition of neighbour, and specifically refers negatively to the Pharisee who attempts to avoid showing love by narrowing the definition of who counts as a neighbour, and therefore who he must show love for (*WL*, 37). The Pharisee seeks to create an endless inquiry into what the category 'neighbour' entails, in order to obscure the need to love *everyone* as a neighbour (*WL*, 104). To justify not loving everyone, he creates arbitrary distinctions that deny certain human beings the designation 'neighbour.' But, as Backhouse states: "bookshops

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[31] John D. Mullen's interpretation of Kierkegaard's definition of neighbour argues that humanity is not the neighbour, it is each individual we have a relationship to that are our neighbours (humanity as a whole is not what we relate to because it is an abstract idea, a category) (Mullen 1981, 152). We find agreement with this in Backhouse's account, where he says "it is not group but only neighbours who can be single individuals" (Backhouse 2011, 193). As such, our ethical duties are to our neighbours and not to abstract groups of people (so the responsibility for an action rests on us, not on another group which governs us, i.e., a government which supports unethical treatment needs to be critiqued, not heeded, even if critiquing it is unpopular or worse).

[32] Within the context of Kierkegaard's religious stage, this means that an individual, despite undertaking their task individually, must have reflective cognisance of how it will affect the lives of others. This is evident in Quidam's diary where he focuses too much on projecting his insecurities onto his beloved and fails to account for her feelings relative to his choice, thus making a non-decision and justifying it by constructing for her a sense of solace in his lack of action. A similar situation can be found in *Fear and Trembling*, with de Silentio responding to it by saying "however noble this conduct is, it is an offence against the girl and the reality of her love" (*FT*, 91). Severing the relationship in order to avoid the fate of a potentially bad marriage is ultimately a decision accounting only for himself (this can be understood as ethical, as he is seeking to place what he sees as a universal concern, for financial well-being, social standing, etc., over each of their happiness and without taking her feelings into account). In so doing, he fails to see her as an actual individual— for de Silentio, the religious individual must take her into account, denying silence to Quidam and demanding he reach out to her and include her in his decision (*FT*, 92). This retains the marriage's possibility, as promised, but each member has the opportunity to participate in the continuity of their love.

and libraries devote much space to the subject of defining national identity and cultural allegiance. There is no shelf mark for 'neighbour'" (Backhouse 2011, 197).

Kierkegaard calls individuals "small minded" who seek to deny love to others by precluding them from being 'neighbours'. Small-mindedness seeks its own and creates distinctions in order to love only that which reflects itself—this is, at its core, self-love and self-preservation that seeks to deny love to those who are not reflections of oneself (*WL*, 254-5). Implicit in this is a denial of individuality, which the Christian lover embraces.[33] The individuality of others is an affront to the small-minded individual's individuality and so it must be negated. Additionally, small-mindedness recasts God into a figure commanded or made demands of, a figure buttressing and justifying preferential love. In *Fear and Trembling*, *de Silentio* portrays a similar structure. He presents ethical systems as claiming universality, which is to say they apply at all times and in all places; those ethical schemes do not take into account particularity, but stand above that, with duties owed to the ethical standard itself, not to individuals (so love of the neighbour, when acted out in the ethical sphere, is not enacted with the goal of expressing one's concern for their neighbour's well-being, but a concern for one's standing when measured against the normative standards of the ethical scheme chosen by the individual) (*FT*, 54). Here we can see how preferences can be formulated into ethical structures that take on universality and provide justification for those preferences—in adopting these, the individual renounces their individuality by relinquishing their connection to love which is central to self-becoming. Ferreira is clear that we love others particularly and separately, but that we are to begin by loving them as a neighbour first—we should not take advantage of our intimate relationships any more than we do any other loving relationship (Ferreira 2001, 91). The Christian lover loves others as individual *selves*, and thus loves them for *their* individuality—and their individuality is in turn loved by other Christian lovers (*WL*, 251-2).

Kierkegaard's disavowal of preference is true of its negative form. Enemies are also to be embraced, as 'enemy' is an earthly distinction, so even those who we might want to view as enemies (rightly or wrongly) are still due love because they remain *neighbours* (*WL*, 79).[34] This has clear theological underpinnings that are necessary for appreciating the difficulties in the actual practice of this dynamic, one that blends itself into the overbearing and impossible nature of the task of loving as a Christian. For Kierkegaard, loving the neighbour means that we must seek new ways to reconcile ourselves with those we feel antagonistic towards (no matter the difficulty). We must strive to maintain faith when performing works of love towards such individuals, as

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[33] This is reflective of an incomplete sense of self, because they have not discovered how to be a self in the way described by Anti-Climacus (and implicit in Kierkegaard's theological writings) and so they are unable to recognise the selfhood of others. This was the case in §2 where self-becoming is a collaborative, not individual effort. This incompleteness of the self can be developed by privileging either of the various polarities of selfhood (i.e. finitude/infinitude), which leads to the refutation of other individualities. Examples of this would be: assuming that other individualities are antagonistic to one's own by their very difference (as seen in aesthetic dispositions), or denying the validity of individualities as antagonistic to the universality of preferred social institutions and demanding submission by those individualities to that system (which can be seen in ethical dispositions). Each of these is symbolic of a lack of love, being self-interested and failing to presuppose the other as a subject. As Walsh notes, for Kierkegaard love is presupposed in others because God puts love in everyone, so to bring love out of others we must bring love out of ourselves first (Walsh 2018, 127). We must transform our sense of self to bring love out of others instead of trying to change them to suit our desired expressions of love.

[34] The earthly distinction here is not able to be given up in entirety, as we are earthly beings with earthly whims and preferences; no one is a "pure or essential" person lacking these features (*WL*, 81-2), but we must still show love equally to those we share our lives, and our world, with.

there is no guarantee of reciprocation or appreciation, and our predisposition to dislike our enemies can be difficult (verging on impossible) to overcome—but within a religious context the infinite strength the individual draws from their faith can help in such an overwhelming task. Within the context of Christian faith, earthly distinctions, even the distinction between enemies and friends, become like costumes: they are inconsequential and only reveal the role the individual plays, but the individual remains a self regardless of what they wear—and we must love the self, even if we do not love their fashion choices (*WL*, 95). However, Kierkegaard does acknowledge the ease of being deceived (especially wilfully), and when we allow ourselves to be deceived, we turn a blind eye to what shines through the costume: the other who we are to love in all their equality (*WL*, 96). Loving one's enemy requires the shift in disposition towards humility, towards accepting the neighbour in whatever form they arrive in our life; there is no illusion that such a disposition is easy to enact—but, then again, Kierkegaard never says that love, or being a Christian, is an easy task.

While it may seem commonsensical to draw distinctions between those we like and those we do not, and while we do have a predisposition to love those we want to while denying love to those we dislike, this has serious repercussions. For Kierkegaard, to deny love to another is to kill them spiritually, it is to remove both the possibility of their redemption and reconciliation, and your own *faith* in them to come to love; to deny love to another is to lose love within yourself (and "woe unto him" who loses love) (*WL*, 240-1). Even if someone appears beyond loving, they must still be shown love: it is only through love that an individual can become open to others and *believe* that they can be upbuilt (as love believes all things). Thus, even though someone may appear as an enemy, our love must remain constant as neighbour love is an abiding love, unlike other forms of love (Ferreira 2001, 185). We are not expected to blind ourselves to the end of an intimate relationship by assuming that 'love abides' and ignore separation, but to recognise that love continues to be owed to the other even after the relationship ends (instead of turning to hatred, jealousy, revenge, etc.). It is the incompletable task of love to see each individual as a neighbour who *can* be upbuilt through self-giving love[35]—each individual must be recognised as possessing an equal ability and possibility for self-becoming, a possibility activated through loving and being loved.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Thus, we can agree with Kierkegaard when he writes that "*neighbour* is what philosophers would call the *other*, that by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested" (*WL*, 37). Kierkegaard would go on to say that the category neighbour extends to *all* others, if it is limited it is self-love. A neighbour is not a neighbour in terms of their similarity to you or their difference from you, everyone is a neighbour regardless of whether they fit personal desire, preference, or provoke an immediate emotional response. Each individual is absolutely equal under God and therefore to be loved absolutely equally by the Christian individual (*WL*, 72). "In being king, beggar, scholar, rich man, poor man, male, female, etc., we do not resemble each other—therein we are

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[35] Helping to initiate upbuilding in another is not equivalent to forcing a change within that individual. Kierkegaard states that "love if anything will help him become another man" (*WL*, 168). Here, Kierkegaard does not mean changing the neighbour to suit our desires, or waiting for them to change to fit our expectations, but to help them become who *they* are (to aid in their self-becoming) through loving them. By showing them love they in turn can come to be loving—it is to see them in all their faults and remain loving towards them, to see the self, despite any changes, and remain loving towards them—not only loving the excellences and perfections that we desire to see in them (*WL*, 168-9).

all different. But in being a neighbour we are all unconditionally like each other" (*WL*, 97). To put it succinctly, each individual is a neighbour who is owed a debt of love. Neighbours are therefore not chosen—works of love prove not that you are *their* neighbour, but that they are *yours*. We must accept the neighbour, recognise them as a neighbour, and care for them as *our* neighbour (*WL*, 38). Alternatively, the one acted towards with love does not need to, reciprocally, recognize *you* as a neighbour, and therefore does not need to reciprocate the love given. It is an internal change that leads to the openness for recognising a neighbour, not an external one that gives set parameters defining 'neighbour;' intertwining of faith, self-becoming, and self-giving progressively reveals a more robust sense of our self and others as selves. This recognition leads to the adoption of the disposition to view all others as equally neighbours, and equally due a debt of love.

For neighbour love to be effective, the individual must remain engaged in the task of loving others. There must be a passion that motivates their love—a passion derived from the individual's passion to give love and become a self through self-giving love. Passion requires interest and investment, and when there is a lack of interest "there is ambivalence, there is temptation and it is all too easily the stronger" (*WA*, 33). Ambivalence towards neighbours we are expected to love means falling to the temptation to ignore our ethical task—if we lose our interest in others, we lose interest in ourselves (as members of a community of individuals who become selves cooperatively).[36] We allow ourselves to be tempted away from loving our neighbour when we fail to take an interest in showing others love, or when we embrace a limiting definition of love that allocates room for ambivalence towards those we would prefer not to love. The individual, if they are to truly be practitioners of Christian love, must be self-conscious of their intentions and motivations, and must remain attentive to others and their relationships with them—each neighbour provides an opportunity for the individual to transform their love, and grow as a person, and each opportunity should be grasped as there is no neighbour undeserving of love. Neighbour love, therefore, is the culmination of a self-giving love that recognises in others a parallel subjectivity discovered in self-becoming. Furthermore, neighbour love relies on having faith in the cooperative task of loving and becoming, and it is therefore the pinnacle exemplar of the ethical task that Kierkegaard sets forth because it incorporates not only the need to become a subjective, existential self, but also a self who loves others, somewhat ironically, *selfless*ly.

The God-given command to love one's neighbour, as Kierkegaard presents it, is the self's active love directed towards each of the selves they encounter in the world without demand for reciprocation and without denial based on arbitrary distinctions. It is only when viewing others in this way, as neighbours whose alterity is to be appreciated, whose love is to be nurtured and returned, and who is to be recognised as an existing individual engaged in becoming a self, that we can love *others* as we love *ourselves*—which, for Kierkegaard, is what it means to live an ethical life.

§6 Sin and Sympathy

Interwoven into Kierkegaard's concept of the self is the category of sin. Above, we have implied sinfulness, but it deserves an in-depth analysis in order to understand its perhaps unexpected relevance to his

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[36] This can lead to a static sense of selfhood, that you are what you are, and you become unwilling to change, to grow, or interact with new ideas. This is reminiscent of happy ignorance, where it seeks to maintain itself, and any attempt to reveal the ignorance is viewed as an assault on one's happiness.

ethic. While its spectre looms throughout his *oeuvre*, sin plays a decisive role in many of his later religious works, and is central to *The Sickness Unto Death* being closely intertwined with despair. However, while sin is a negative feature of self-identity, Kierkegaard puts it to a somewhat positive purpose. It is through recognition of our sinfulness that we recognise the sinfulness of others, and so too it is through our desire for forgiveness that we recognise that desire in others. Thus, it is from the shared nature as sinners that sympathy arises in Kierkegaard's Christian ethic. Assiter emphasises the importance of sympathy for Kierkegaard (Assiter 2009, 86), and with good reason because it is sympathy that grounds his faith-based approach to ethics, but prior to sympathy comes the need to reconcile oneself with one's sinfulness. This requires openness, and as Kierkegaard says in *Without Authority*, openness requires courage (*WA*, 182). There is also a need for earnestness, to recognise the lack of perfection within oneself which allows for the acceptance of the imperfection of others. We can recall Anti-Climacus' statement about the man who imagines himself to be happy, that "he is usually far from wanting to be wrenched out of his error. On the contrary, he becomes indignant, he regards it as an assault bordering on murder in the sense that, as is said, it murders his happiness... he is too sensate to have the courage to venture out and endure being spirit" (*SUD*, 43). The same is true for being forced to view oneself as a sinner, but becoming conscious of one's sinfulness is necessary if the individual is to take responsibility for themselves and work towards becoming ethical.

Sin does not begin as sin, in Kierkegaard's account. Sin begins as guilt. Guilt is only transformed into sin with a consciousness of God, so we cease to be guilty inwardly, and instead become infinitely guilty before God (*SUD*, 80). It is the God-relation that transforms guilt into sin—the same relation reveals both the fullness of our selfhood, and our sinfulness. Just as our selfhood is particularised in the God-relation, so too is our sinfulness. In a footnote, Anti-Climacus clarifies that there can be no generalisation of sin, and, despite the fact that each single individual is a sinner, their sinfulness cannot be collectivised into a category of 'sin'—so the concept of the 'sins of the race' is one which removes the actuality of sin from individuals and seeks to use it as a means of categorising and dividing humans (*SUD*, 120). A definition that makes sinfulness a general feature of a group of people alters sin into an abstraction; one benefit is that it makes feeling ethical easier by having the burden of sin shared by each member of the race (or group of people in general), another is that it is easier to make a judgment of another person by associating them with something that is either sinful or not.[37] This disperses sinfulness, so each individual does not question their own sinfulness, it becomes something external to them. If my sin is the same as the sins of others I can avoid culpability, so sinfulness is abstracted from me and does not alter or affect my existence. Sinfulness must, therefore, be considered intimately individualistic, with each individual being sinful, but not being able to reduce *their* sinfulness to the sinfulness of others.

But what is 'sin' for Kierkegaard? Anti-Climacus argues that it cannot be equated with ignorance, as in the Socratic definition. The Socratic definition is ambiguous, and to an extent arbitrary, because the 'what'

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[37] "Judgment is not made *en masse*" (*SUD*, 123). This is humanly impossible to do because it means seeking to understand each individual separately, so instead we focus on group attribution in order to avoid judging individually. Sin is avoided in order to focus on a more general sense of guiltiness. Individuals, if sin is to be what is judged, must be judged separately and in accordance with their own choices, or their responsibilities, decisions, and ethics is reduced to shadows in the background of judgment. We may be able to judge a system or institution this way, but not individuals who are a part of it (as such a decision removes the culpability of supporting institutions advocating unethical causes).

that an individual is ignorant of is indefinite. Here, Socrates is presented as an ethicist, but not a religious ethicist, because his concern, while nominally about the self, is not concerned with the self *as a self* (it posits sin as arising within us within time, through our decision, but sin, properly understood, is antecedent to the individual because it is an essential component of the original synthesis) (*SUD*, 88-9). Christianity transforms sin from a lack of understanding to "being unwilling to understand" what is right (in regards to the ethic of love, this means sinfulness is the unwillingness to love) (*SUD*, 95). Anti-Climacus locates this as the distinction between the Christian and Greek interpretations of sin, that the Christian acts knowing that what they do is wrong, where the Greek sees people doing wrong only because they do not know what is right (*SUD*, 102). The implication, then, is that within Christianity there is a greater emphasis on sin-consciousness and conscience as an intuitive understanding of right and wrong (deriving from the God-relation). So, for Kierkegaard, ethics is not learned, but intuited. Additionally, Kierkegaard warns against treating sin as something to be feared, something to cast our gaze away from; there is no need to exaggerate or present sin as greater than it is, because in doing so it only discourages us from confronting it (*WA*, 155-6). To overcome sin, one must adopt a loving disposition towards others and the willingness to forgive the sins of others.

The aversion to sin, while seemingly natural, directs the individual away from recognising their sinfulness, thus legitimising sinfulness by diverting attention away from it. Despair is the result of the first recognition of sinfulness. "First a man sins out of frailty and weakness… then he despairs over his weakness and becomes either a Pharisee who in despair manages a sort of legal righteousness, or in despair he plunges into sin again" (*SUD*, 82). Sin has a way of continuing itself through either justifying (the legal righteousness of the Pharisee) or ignoring (actively or passively) the existence of sin. To further illustrate this, Anti-Climacus employs Macbeth, saying "his selfish self culminates in ambition. He has now in fact become the king, and yet, in despairing over his sin and of the reality of repentance, of grace, he has lost himself" (*SUD*, 110). Despairing over sin leads to a continual need to grasp for novel justifications to maintain the illusion of ethical self-righteousness—success is based on one's ethical standing, so a person must constantly seek out 'greatness' in order to appear, or justify to themselves that they are, ethical. However, that very greatness is revealed to be hollow because its attainment does not occasion reconciliation, and they remain incapable of retrieving their self.

The intimately individual nature of sin signifies a need for self-transparency and inward introspection about their past, sinfulness, and future improvements. Kierkegaard says that "self-accusation is the possibility of *justification*" and continues by talking about the tax collector who "accused himself. There was no one else who accused him. It was not a civic justice that seized him by the chest… it was not the people whom he perhaps cheated who beat him on the breast… but he beat his own breast… he accused himself that he was a sinner before God" (*WA*, 132). Only the individual can know themselves and accuse themselves truly, and the individual who recognises themselves as a sinner is the individual capable of making amends because they identify not only that they have sinned, but they feel the desire for forgiveness from those they have sinned

against.[38] Humility and confession are steps in becoming a Christian self, and this is achieved through self-accusation which reveals the possibility of, and initiates reconciliation with, our past self—it is through self-accusation that we connect who we are with what we have done without seeking external justification (i.e., through quantitative assent, philosophical justification, appeal to 'greatness,' etc.). When we are reminded of our imperfection "it helps us to be kept in a continuous striving" (*WA*, 170). Without the remembrance of our own sin we cannot be guided towards ethical self-transformation.

To return to our discussion of love above, "love's judgment is the most severe judgment" (*WA*, 171), and this is so because "there comes a new sin, a new guilt… committed… by the lack of love" (*WA*, 172). To avoid this reduplication of sin, we must, with love, forgive others. Loving others entails the forgiveness of their sins as sinners ourselves, and, in the Christian-religious stage, to forgive is to have faith that forgiveness will be given in turn, just as giving love is to have faith in receiving love in turn—as we forgive the sinner, we open ourselves up to being forgiven. Faith once again instils the hope of reciprocity. "First you love much, and much is then forgiven you—and see, then love increases even more" (*WA*, 176). Even the "one who loved only little… can be forgiven" (*WA*, 177). Reciprocity is not an expectation, nor is it to be demanded, so the individual must continually hold onto faith, and practice loving forgiveness in order to maintain their hope for others or else they fall into the desire to receive reciprocation directly and fall away from faith and into self-love and a desire for certainty in love (*WL*, 348). There is an inequality in our myopic propensity to ignore our own faults, and see only those of others. Love must be practiced with faith and self-honesty to avoid finding fault, or choosing fault as the defining feature of others, lest we invite that same understanding of ourselves. Seeking the sins reproduces sin within ourselves because we adopt a sinful posture by positing ourselves as lacking the other's sinfulness (thus embracing pride) (*WL*, 350). Much as we have the faith that love is possessed by those we love, when we see only the sins of others, we are presupposing our own sin and replicating sin in the world. We must therefore be open to ourselves, and be as willing to forgive as we are to seek forgiveness (both to ourselves and others). We find here an occasion for sympathy.

Sympathy is required for Kierkegaard's ethic, and serves as the primary way individuals identify and are reconciled with each other. While the possibility of misunderstanding between individuals is constant, because each individual has a set of experiences which are wholly separate from that of any other individual, the seemingly total separation between individuals is illusory (*SLW*, 416-7). There is always a possibility of mutual understanding, and this possibility of understanding *should* be sought out—unfortunately, it often is not (an illustration of this is the infinite reflection of Quidam—the potential for him to come to an understanding with his beloved existed, but his own unwillingness to constructs between them an infinite misunderstanding that cannot be overcome). Haruki Murakami, in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, has the protagonist question whether it is possible

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[38] Forgiveness is something that, while it requires the decision to seek forgiveness (which, to a degree, entails self-forgiveness), is essentially practical. Kierkegaard says we can learn from the woman who was a sinner that "with regard to finding forgiveness she herself is able to do nothing" and "she did not wait until she felt worthy" (*WA*, 155). We depend on others to forgive us, but we cannot passively wait for the sin to be forgiven—forgiveness must be sought with the acknowledgment that we are sinners and that we require the other person to understand us as such.

> for one human being to achieve perfect understanding of another? We can invest enormous time and energy in serious efforts to know another person, but in the end, how close are we able to come to that person's essence? We convince ourselves that we know the other person well, but do we really know anything important about anyone? (Murakami 1997, 24)

While Kierkegaard follows that same line of questioning, he arrives at a sense of sympathy promoting understanding, and the bedrock of that sympathy begins with the recognition that "every human being is himself a sinner. Thus he does not relate himself as a pure one to sinners but as a sinner to sinners, because this is the common fundamental relation of all human beings to Christ" (*WA*, 84). Sympathy begins when we become cognisant of ourselves as sinful, and so we are no better than others—but we are also no worse, as each other person is equally a sinner. And so, the goal of ethics is not to overcome sinfulness, but to use it as an impetus for self-improvement, to inspire us to forgive others, to help others, and to love others.

"To have sympathy is an essential quality of being human; any resolution that disregards this is on the larger sense not idealising, and neither is it idealising if sympathy does not acquire its adequate expression" (*SLW*, 113). Idealising is becoming a 'true' or a 'positive' resolution—sympathy also roots resolution, so any resolution which does not take the other into account is not a true resolution (one cannot justify a resolution that seeks to negate another's existence or which actively seeks to harm another). This is reminiscent of the need to consider others when we make decisions, as decision do not occur in a vacuum independent of others. However, while sympathy is an essential quality, it is not one that is easy to foster because, like faith, it entails risking our self. As Kierkegaard notes, the only thing more frightful than sin itself is confessing that sin, to recognize it as a sin that has been (willingly) committed (*WA*, 139). In order to foster the sympathy that we can have with others, we must first force ourselves to come to terms with who we are and what we have done— effectively, confession is where we *become* ourselves because we connect who we want to see ourselves as with the things we have actually done (which means we relinquish pride, self-assurance, etc.). It also allows us to relate to others without wearing a mask; sympathy *discloses* our self. An individual with faith presupposes the love of the one we reveal ourselves to, that they will forgive us, that they will love us—just as we love them as they stand revealed before us. This sympathy is the sympathy formed by two incomplete persons who stand before each other *as* incomplete—but striving towards reconciliation.

Kierkegaard calls for those who wish to be sympathetic to "show your genuine sympathy by not claiming to be able to put yourself in the other person's place; and you who suffer, show your genuine discretion by not claiming the impossible of the other" (*WA*, 116). This helps to clarify our human limitations, advocating for the sympathetic response to be directed towards the other, that it is *their* experience that is important. Sympathy is meant to bring two unique individualities into a relation of love with each other by creating a shared sense of the need for care, for consolation, for understanding. The importance of sympathy cannot be understated within Kierkegaard's philosophy because of the focus on indirect communication and the impossibility of directly sharing experiences. Individuals must refine sympathy through the practice of loving their neighbour, but remain conscious of the fact that the root of that sympathy is the shared state of sin that is ever-present—this consciousness, we can recall, serves as the propelling force for self-improvement.

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Therefore, we can recognise sin and sympathy as central to Kierkegaard's religious ethic, as the inter-relation of sin and sympathy serves as the foundation for loving interrelations between individuals. Love, however, is essential for the awareness of sympathy, and the realisation that sin can be forgiven, that we do not need to become obsessed with, or, worse, disinterested in our sinfulness. It is also within the pairing of sin and sympathy that we see how Kierkegaard's ethic is meant to function. Instead of presenting an ethic of positive attribution (we become more ethical by performing particular actions), we find Kierkegaard presenting us with a system that fosters self-becoming amongst others which seeks to overcome an aspect of ourselves which remains: sin. Whereas positive ethics present the individual with a goal that is (at least seemingly) attainable, Kierkegaard's criticism of complacency when individuals believe they have done enough to be considered ethical is consistent with an approach accenting the sinfulness of each individual, a sinfulness that finds consolation amongst other sinners who are willing to accept and love the sinner, as the sinner loves and accepts them—sinfulness *occasions* sympathy.

Conclusion

Kierkegaard provides no clear-cut singular definition of neighbour love in *Works of Love*, and, like-wise, we do not arrive at one either. However, throughout our discussion above of the various aspects that contribute to neighbour love there have been some common features which will help guide us in understanding his ethic. Below are four of these guidelines to a Kierkegaardian ethic: *i*) equality, *ii*) vigilance, *iii*) inwardness, and *iv*) reconciliation. While not the complete list of concepts manifesting from our discussion, they will, alongside the aspects discussed above, provide us with guidance throughout our continued examination of Kierkegaard's ethics.

i) Equality: equality blooms not only from love derived from the God-relation and God's command, but also human sinfulness. Christian love possesses an equality regarding the capacity to love, it constitutes an attempt to escape from preference. The task set forth is to become loving towards all other individuals (*WL*, 70)—needing to love those who are sinful like us means we cannot be partial relative to *our* ethical apprehensions.

ii) Vigilance: we must be on guard for complacency or lapsed intentions leading to self-love.

> The most ethical person is not the person who passes over his failings by thoughtlessly assuring himself that he is no worse than 'the others.' He is precisely the person who is sternest with himself; the most relentless in uncovering his ambiguous motives, who is not content with his ability to 'fool the others' and hence may accuse himself when no one else does (Evans 1983, 43)

The ethical person recognises themselves as sinful, averting their attention from this is self-love. Kierkegaard considers the self-lover to be so busy advocating for themselves and seeking their own rewards that they have no regard for others (*WL*, 262). The self-giving lover seeks not for herself, but this does not mean that she cannot be an agent for change, instead she advocates for both herself and others through advocacy on behalf of others.

iii) Inwardness: we must strive to become earnest and avoid self-deception—not only does inwardness reveal sin, but also the ability to forgive. Without inwardness, in the form of introspection, intentions can

become contingent and finite, creating justifications for withholding love by requiring assurance of reciprocation (*WL*, 301-2). While Kierkegaard maintains that we are not transparent to ourselves, he advises that we practice introspection in knowing ourselves better. At the same time, he also cautions against becoming lost in inwardness when decisive action must be taken—while we may use introspection to help in self-understanding, acts of love require engagement with the world, and with others through self-giving: one's inwardness must be paralleled by their outwardness.

iv) Reconciliation: love is relational, not abstract, and can only be understood within the context of person-to-person relationships. Fellowship and community—any 'us'—is explicitly neither contemptuous nor competitive (*WL*, 249).[39] For Kierkegaard, cooperative loving is the foundation for all relationships that bind individuals into intimate communion. These relationships do not demand or expect perfection and are grounded on forgiveness of sins. Intimate and preferential loves retain an inner tension that can dissuade Christians from engaging in them, but which afford the opportunity to practice and discover new ways of expressing love. As Walsh notes, the primary Christian qualities of faith, hope, and love are expressive, communicative qualities that draw us into relationships with others, rather than as qualities of an isolated individual (Walsh 2018, 134)—they encourage us to engage with others, to be social. On a social level, this shared mine/yours should form the foundation of social structures; diverting from the contemptuousness of casting others as imperfect sinners, we can be reconciled with them and with God.

Kierkegaard was under no illusion about the difficulty of his ethic. Not only does he consistently talk about the terror of confronting one's own sinfulness, the fear of opening oneself fully towards others in confession or when seeking forgiveness; he also speaks of the desire for something easier. Under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, he suggests that he "also wished Socrates was right, for it seems to me as if Christianity were too rigorous" (*SUD*, 92). The Christian ethic is one which is not immediately desirable—it is not an easy decision to make (which is why it requires faith). However, Kierkegaard is also aware that ethics is not necessarily meant to be desirable, and as Murakami points out: "what was lost was lost. There was no retrieving it, however you scheme, no returning to how things were, no going back" (Murakami 1991, 164)—once we realize that we are sinful there is no return to innocence, we must strive to improve ourselves or sink into infinite resignation. Despite the rigours of the ethic, Kierkegaard does not want the individual to despair, to see their sinfulness as unique and unforgivable, to feel that they are unworthy of love, that the loving disposition they take on is not enough—he seeks to draw attention to the practice of loving as transcending immediate gratification or reward, that it is in itself a reward, bringing to the individual their distinct selfhood among other distinct selves. He sets his ethic against that of the past, stating in *Two Ages* "the bleakness of antiquity was that the man of distinction was what *others could not be*; the inspiring aspect… will be that the person who has gained himself religiously is only what *all can be*" (*TA*, 92). No matter how difficult the road may be, everyone has the capacity to have sympathy, to become a self, to love their neighbour—everyone has the potential for ethical self-transformation through cooperative self-becoming.

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[39] This is further developed in the overcoming of egocentricity and pride that is inherent to the recognition of a 'mine' which must be abolished to become like Christ, the exemplar of love (however, it should be remembered that, while it is not clarified by Kierkegaard here, becoming like the exemplar is something to strive for but something human beings, flawed as we are, are woefully incapable of doing) (*WL*, 251).

We can see, therefore, that the rigorous ethic Kierkegaard outlines relies heavily on his commitment to Christianity—and his particular understanding of Christianity at that. As mentioned at the outset, the discussion in this chapter has been focused on presenting an account of Kierkegaard's religious ethic without delving into the problems arising from its theological commitments, but, doubtless, there have been numerous potential problems encountered throughout. Therefore, we must now turn our attention to addressing these criticisms, and assess whether this religious ethic of love has a solid foundation and philosophical persuasiveness.

2| *Kierkegaard's Christian Ethic in Perspective*

In the previous chapter, we examined Kierkegaard's ethic of neighbour love, retaining uncritically the centrality of his Christian viewpoint to its formulation. In our presentation we set aside any concerns, instead focusing on articulating an account of the structure and aims of the ethic. We will now turn to critiques of the ethic, particularly its Christian presuppositions. K. E. Løgstrup and Theodor Adorno will serve as central figures in our assessment of this critique.[1] From Løgstrup, we will be drawing from his 'Polemical Epilogue' to *The Ethical Demand*, its focus being *Works of Love*,[2] which takes aim at Kierkegaard's ethic by focusing on ostensible theological inconsistencies. Løgstrup charges Kierkegaard with designing a Christian ethic incorporating a contradiction between the proclamation of Christ to love the neighbour temporally and a more isolating Christianity focused solely on one's spiritual relationship to God. Adorno's controversial criticism of Kierkegaard's ethic as presented in *Works of Love* is delivered clearly and concisely in his essay "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love".[3] In this essay, Adorno evaluates Kierkegaard's Christian ethic in a way that is more charitable than Løgstrup, but still reflects similar worries about ambiguities inherent to Kierkegaard's commitments—most notably seizing on the asymmetrical relationship to others (and its potential to limit the capacity to have truly mutual interpersonal relationships with one's neighbours). Adorno presents Kierkegaard's ethic of love as promoting an emphasis on radical subjectivity, recognising among the positive qualities of Kierkegaard's ethic unobtrusiveness, mercifulness "even if one is helpless oneself", and fidelity (Adorno 1939, 415). These attributions place his reading at odds with that of Løgstrup who finds none of these in *Works of Love*—yet, despite these differences, their criticisms share commonalities.

Our interest in this chapter is to use Løgstrup's and Adorno's criticisms to delineate Kierkegaard's ethic and clarify some of its finer details. To do this, we will interrogate whether the ethic is problematic in the ways suggested by their criticisms, and how their criticisms reveal the contours of his ethic. Therefore, to assess the aspects of Kierkegaard's ethic which are the focus of these objections we will examine criticisms of the theological roots of his ethic and, more particularly, whether acceptance of a robust Christian God as central

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[1] Their criticisms of the ethic represent the main criticisms often levied at Kierkegaard. While there are a variety of permutations, their presentations of the critiques are as straightforward as they are effective.

[2] We will be focusing on the epilogue rather than *Controverting Kierkegaard* because it represents a more streamlined and focused criticism of the ethic. Additionally, despite being a relatively short piece by comparison, the epilogue addresses many of the same criticisms that Løgstrup expresses elsewhere.

[3] While our focus here is on the critique in "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love", Adorno is critical of Kierkegaard throughout his works (cf: *Negative Dialectics*, *Kierkegaard: The Construction of an Aesthetic*, etc.). It should be noted that Adorno's criticisms of Kierkegaard are subject to many criticisms themselves, but despite this have remained relevant because they draw attention to certain aspects of Kierkegaard's position which are ambiguous, or which can be made ambiguous by removing them from their context (as many of Kierkegaard's concepts rely on the much more robust structure of his *oeuvre*).

to one's existence is *necessary* to ground the ethic. To provide an account of this we will assess three major critiques of this position: God as a 'middle term' (*§1.1*); the ethic as a divine command ethic (*§1.2*); the isolation of the individual in their relationship with God (*§1.3*). While Løgstrup and Adorno will provide the substance of this discussion they are not alone in presenting criticisms of this kind. Furthermore, we should make it clear at the outset that there is a dual purpose to this probing. We are not solely concerned with critiquing Kierkegaard's position, but in addition are trying to uncover Kierkegaard's answers to these criticisms, and thus whether these criticisms do indeed diminish the ethical value of his neighbour love ethic, or whether instead his ethic is more nuanced, defensible, and transferable beyond a Christian context than his critics suggest.

§1 The Critiques

§1.1 God as a 'Middle-Term'

In his 'Polemical Epilogue,'[4] Løgstrup critiques Kierkegaard's idea of God as 'middle-term.' He argues that in Kierkegaard's account God is the authority for neighbour love, and that it is only in our relationship to God than we can know what love is (Løgstrup 1997, 220). The fundamental point of the ethical perspective Løgstrup here attributes to Kierkegaard is that "the work of helping one's neighbour to love God—and only that—is love of one's neighbour" (Løgstrup 1997, 221). This requires individuals to force their God-relation *onto* others, suggesting that conversion is the only manifestation of love, thus it is only when a person converts their beloved that they can say they have practiced neighbour love. Løgstrup, casting Kierkegaard in this way, seizes on the concept of God as a middle-term, which Kierkegaard employs to both assign absolute value to his ethic as well as assigning absolute equality between individuals (among other features we saw in the previous chapter (cf: *§1.1*)), to suggest that all relationships are directly mediated by God. Løgstrup interprets Kierkegaard's notion of God as a middle-term in its most literal sense. So, for example, the husband does not relate directly to his wife, but to God and through God to his wife, rather than the individual engaging in a genuinely interpersonal relationship with his wife. The God-relation, on this account, is given primacy and determines if and how individuals relate to others—effectively becoming a call for conversion (the neighbour must come to recognise *my* God as *the God* and develop a relationship with my God). Løgstrup then criticises this position as possessing three significant problems: it focuses on spiritual needs rather than temporal needs (*i*); it allows for, if not outright encourages, encroachment (*ii*); and it instrumentalises the relationship between the lover and the beloved (*iii*). We will fold into this discussion Adorno's critique of God as mediator and the problem of legitimate inaction (*iv*). Together, these four problems will elucidate the limits of God as a middle-term.

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[4] It is important to note that Løgstrup's critique of Kierkegaard is based on the interpretation of Kierkegaard found in the Danish *Tidehverv* movement, more specifically K. Olesen Larsen (who Løgstrup conflates with Kierkegaard in his epilogue). Olesen Larsen, a contemporary of Løgstrup, is charged with producing an ethic which fails to create direct links between individuals and others, so there is no ethical demand to help others (Løgstrup 1997, 240). It is this interpretation that influences Løgstrup's understanding of God as a middle-term, where God is given primacy over other individuals because of that mediating position. This is not the interpretation we utilised in the previous chapter, and so we will see some divergence from what we have been familiar with thus far.

i) The Problem of Spirituality

To support his reading that Kierkegaard's ethic is focused solely on spiritual needs, Løgstrup reviews the Good Samaritan parable. According to the teachings of Jesus, which are themselves supposed to be fundamental to Kierkegaard's Christian ethic, the focus of love for the neighbour should be helping others temporally (i.e., addressing physical needs) (Løgstrup 1997, 224-5). But, from the vantage point of Løgstrup's spiritualist reading of Kierkegaard's notion of 'helping the other to love God,' there is no actual help for the other individual, they are only sermonised at; the goal Løgstrup asserts is to convert others by proselytising rather than attending to temporal needs. Løgstrup then argues that this conflicts with the Biblical account, as the Samaritan did not preach, but attended to temporal needs.

However, Løgstrup is deceptive in his use of the parable. Kierkegaard not only discusses the parable in a positive way, he also expands on it in creative ways to reveal that the mercy shown by the Samaritan is not the *only* way of acting mercifully. While Løgstrup is indeed correct that the Biblical parable represents an individual helping another temporally and not just spiritually, Kierkegaard not only concurs with this, but offers the argument that the parable shows someone with the *means* to help. On its own, the parable suggests that mercy is the province of the rich and/or powerful because they possess the means of helping others. Kierkegaard's alternative depictions of parables often involve individuals who are incapable of providing temporal help and exemplify ways that mercy can be practiced even if, to quote Adorno's assessment, "one is helpless oneself" (Adorno 1939, 415). Kierkegaard clarifies throughout his discourses that mercy must be practicable by *each and every* individual, which means that spiritual help, if that is the only help one can give, is merciful. This does not mean that mercy is limited to *only* spiritual help, though. Temporal wealth cannot be determinative of whether one is capable of mercy, nor does temporal help rule out spiritual edification. It is hard to imagine the Jewish man, saved by the Samaritan, still despising him for being a Samaritan; temporal aid or mercy can itself be an act of *spiritual* aid—Kierkegaard's structure of human existence is formed around these two as intertwined. We can see that Løgstrup's assertion that the ethic is focused solely on forming a spiritual relationship between individuals and God is therefore misleading—the goal is not acquisition of converts,[5] but caring for the neighbour however we, as unique individuals, are able.

This mischaracterisation can be further developed by examining the relationship between the spirit and God in Kierkegaard's concept of the self. Spirit, *ånd* in Danish, refers to spirit in both a religious sense and as mental faculties, much like the German term *Geist*. When discussing spirit in the context of the human being, Kierkegaard implies that its functions are psychical, and clarifies its inseparability from one's physical form. This definition is explored in *The Sickness Unto Death*, where spirit is part of an established synthesis of spiritual and temporal existence which *together* constitute a human being (*SUD*, 14). This is deceptively absent in Løgstrup's reading, as, for Kierkegaard, the human being, and particularly their spirit, is not what relates to God. It is the human being's *self* which mediates between the established synthesis and what established the synthesis (i.e., God) (*SUD*, 26-7). Not only does *Works of Love* make it clear that temporal action

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[5] Such a view conflicts with his advocacy against any form of Christianity, or religion in general, that seeks adherents for oneself. Kierkegaard, under the guise of Climacus, states that Christianity's peculiarly individual nature means that adherents are not a reward and the goal is not to convert people through argumentation, but to promote faith through *praxis*, i.e., works of love (*CUP*, 581).

and help is required to show love, but the notion that nurturing the spirit is enough contradicts the structure of human existence supported by Kierkegaard. Therefore, helping another only in a spiritual sense cannot constitute a work of love because it does not address the neighbour *as a self*, and therefore cannot help another establish a God-relation.

ii) The Problem of Encroachment

The singular interest in the spiritual life of the beloved, and the need to force them to love God, leads Løgstrup to charge Kierkegaard with advocating encroachment. Encroachment is the attempt to determine for others what their needs are, thus proscribing their agency. If the goal of the neighbour love ethic is to, by any means, bring the neighbour to love God, this allows the individual to claim divine authority to determine what is best for their neighbour (Løgstrup 1997, 221). The purpose of spiritual development, in Løgstrup's interpretation, is to insinuate our God-relation *into* the other. If divine authority determines what is loving, then the lover acting on God's behalf *appropriates* that authority. For Løgstrup this is, in a sense, a positive feature of Kierkegaard's position, as it evades the "arbitrariness of the lover" as well as disregarding "how the beloved—selfishly—wants to be loved" (Løgstrup 1997, 220). Løgstrup grounds his interpretation on the perception that Kierkegaard is advocating that spiritual interiority should be privileged over temporal needs, and so the spiritual relationship with God is paramount for the lover, and must be forced on those they love as a neighbour.

This grasp at divine authority to provide absolute justification for determining what is good for the other then involves giving priority to self-denial. It both denies the human capacity to do anything without God's sanction, and the lover receiving nothing but scorn as their "aid" consists of unwanted sermonising (Løgstrup 1997, 225). The lover is called to deny their own self in order to focus their attention on the spiritual, and effectively focus on the spirituality of the others (thus eliding the self of their beloved). We must sacrifice ourselves as a self in order to love the neighbour and show our love for God by *making* them love God as well (Løgstrup 1997, 220).[6] We are not to make our self central in motivating action but deny our selfhood to let God work through us; God's authority legitimises forcing spiritual change on others. A further implication of self-denial's relation to encroachment and authority is that it denies the agency of the self, instead locating God as the agent working through the individual—God serves as a sort of 'sovereign expression,' which moves the lover to act in accordance with God's determination of what is loving. Relinquishing one's self allows the lover to create a distance between themselves and their actions. They become unquestionably ethical as their actions are derived not from their own human interests, but from God and God alone.

Appropriating divine authority in this way is symbolic of what Løgstrup terms 'ideological Christianity,' a form of Christianity which has "ossified", often developing into a state apparatus (Løgstrup 1997, 122). While Løgstrup does not directly charge Kierkegaard with advancing such an ideological Christianity—being familiar with Kierkegaard's vociferous rebuke of such uses of Christian doctrines—the implications of his interpretation suggest a Kierkegaard amenable to an 'ossified Christianity.' By interpreting God as a middle-

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[6] In contrast to Løgstrup's claim we can appeal to Deidre N. Green's feminist analysis of Kierkegaard's concept of self-sacrifice (2013). She argues that Kierkegaard's interpretation of self-love places limits on the self-sacrificial nature of love, suggesting that Kierkegaard adopts a more sophisticated understanding of self-sacrifice. This supports our own interpretation that has suggested Kierkegaard approaches love as self-sacrifice but with the caveat that the individual cannot sacrifice their *self*.

term literally, Løgstrup inserts into Kierkegaard's ethic a distance between the lover and beloved bridged by forcing them to become a Christian. It is only through coercion that one can relate to them Christianly because lover and beloved will then relate to each other through the mediation of God. It is through encroachment that lovers forge relationships, leading to the adoption of a static ethic rather than an ethic promoting becoming, creativity, and refinement—the ethic of cooperative self-becoming we articulated in Chapter 1.

However, against Løgstrup's reading, we find clear arguments that encroachment, self-denial, and any form of state Christianity are *bête noirs* of Kierkegaard's philosophy, theology, and, importantly for us, his ethic. Løgstrup's charge of encroachment is predicated on a reading overemphasising Kierkegaard's focus on a purely spiritual relation to God, but as we have seen this is not the case: it is the self—a relation to both body and spirit—not the spirit alone that relates to God. The self, therefore, is integral to Kierkegaard's concept of a God-relation, and so engaging in *self*-denial is counter-productive. Kierkegaard would therefore agree when Løgstrup claims that the self is denied when the spirit is privileged, and that claiming divine authority amounts to self-denial. By neglecting to draw on Kierkegaard's concept of self when examining his ethic leads to critical deficiencies in Løgstrup's critiques. However, there is a more fundamental ethical problem resulting from the claim of divine authority: pride. For Kierkegaard, as we have seen, one who is prideful cannot love their neighbour, as they are too preoccupied with loving themselves and to claim divine authority is symbolic of a great deal of pride, and thereby a lack of ethical striving. That Kierkegaard recognises assuming divine authority based on one's God-relationship as prideful serves as a repudiation of Løgstrup's claim that he favours this perspective—it is inimical to the humility central to his conception of a God-relation that *equalises* individuals.

If God as a middle-term does not provide us the authority to act as Løgstrup posits, what do we appeal to in order to justify the ethical validity of our actions—how do we tell our beloved that we know what is best for them, and how they should act? Simply put, we cannot. As Kierkegaard writes in *Two Ages*, ethical constraints are on the *lover*, not the beloved, even if the beloved requests constraint (*TA*, 109). Encroaching on the beloved to force them to act ethically, or claiming divine authority to justify one's actions, only reveals the individual's self-love and pride, and are therefore never indicative of love—even if the beloved asks the lover to hold authority over them, it remains unloving.[7] Therefore, even if we are asked to give our God-relationship to another we cannot, we must help them develop their own. Because we cannot force a God-relation in the way Løgstrup asserts, we can reaffirm that proselytising is not the goal of Kierkegaard's ethic. Barrett supports this, noting that Kierkegaard does not see Christianity as communicable through doctrine, only existential action—it requires subjective expression, not just objective explication (Barrett 2013, 385). Stephen Backhouse extends this point, noting that *Works of Love* "is interested in the *persistent existence of the 'other'*" (Backhouse 2011, 193; my emphasis). Thus, Kierkegaard's interest is for the other as a distinct self, reflecting the same subjectivity that I possess. Rather than encroachment, the ethical individual for Kierkegaard seeks "not to rule, to guide, to lead, but *in suffering to serve*" (*TA*, 109, my emphasis).

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[7] This plea to take ethical authority from the beloved is a problem Kierkegaard explores in his criticisms of the ethical stage, and we will see more clearly in subsequent chapters how important taking responsibility for one's ethical choices (and not off-loading them to an external figure or system) is to Kierkegaard's ethics.

We can see that Løgstrup's interpretation of Kierkegaard's ethic does not adequately appreciate its philosophical underpinnings,[8] which leads to a distorted theological characterisation—especially as it relates to others. However, the relation to others is only half of the picture. Løgstrup also charges Kierkegaard with instrumentalising others, where conversion of others proves our devotion to God, and therefore our ethical supremacy. It is not just forcing others to convert that is at stake, but *proving our devotion*. We can recall that in the previous chapter we found Kierkegaard denying that ethics is comparative, as comparison is inherently self-loving (most clearly exemplified by the proud Pharisee's self-loving spiritual-superiority). But, perhaps Løgstrup's interest is in the individual proving their piety to themselves and to God.

iii) The Problem of Instrumentalisation

Instrumentalisation may be seen to have two facets here: instrumentalising the beloved in order to show God our devotion, and instrumentalising ourselves as a body for God to work through—denying the selfhood of others, and/or denying our own. According to Løgstrup, we are meant to be scorned by those we proselytise and therefore gain nothing for ourselves, our recompense is self-satisfaction in having God work through us–although, in this structure the lover also understands themselves improving in the eyes of God with each convert, and such ethical actions are therefore actually self-oriented rather than other-oriented, or even God-oriented. Thus, the implication of Løgstrup's critique is that this position is contradictory: the ethic is God-centred when we proselytise, while also being self-centred when we proselytise. By centring divine authority within the lover, Løgstrup's interpretation of Kierkegaard blurs the distinction between the individual and God (itself part of Løgstrup's presentation of ideological Christianity), thus allowing the individual to justify any action as one which is in service to God, despite actually being in service to themselves. However, contrary to Løgstrup's assertion, Kierkegaard refuses to invest such authority in individuals. On Kierkegaard's account, no individual is the arbiter of the ethical value of their own actions lest they preferentially evaluate them (thus becoming ethically self-sufficient[9]).

Kierkegaard's neighbour love ethic is structured in such a way as to require ethical action to hinge on how our actions affect others. The ethical value of an action is determined by the *patient* of an action. To show love requires individuals to become invested in the other, to listen, to trust, and to tailor actions in accordance with the needs of *the other* rather than assuming what is loving—if the beloved does not feel loved, how can we say we have loved them? If the actor does not determine the ethical value of their action, their ethical stature relies on the *success* of their actions being understood as loving (but not necessarily on concrete success), rather than abstract self-evaluation of them. In this way, if the other does not find the actions I take to be loving, I cannot consider myself to have been ethical.[10] Thus, if I perform an action that I believe is loving

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[8] Kierkegaard advocated passing through his philosophy to his theology, and the philosophical concepts condition the theological concepts.

[9] Ethical self-sufficiency is frequently criticised by Kierkegaard and is a hallmark of the disposition taken by characters who serve as depictions of the ethical stage, like William or the Pharisees.

[10] We can illustrate this by considering ethical actions towards an addict. From a Kierkegaardian perspective, the individual who wants to ethically help them overcome their addiction cannot determine for the addict what the best course of action is and then demand the addict take that course of action. The addict, to overcome their addiction, must *themselves* be invested in overcoming their addiction and it is this investment which needs to be inspired in them. It is incumbent for the ethical actor to sympathise with the addict and find ways to help them without forcing change on them; the goal is not

but the other person feels hurt, I cannot console myself by claiming my action was ethical and they are in the wrong. I must seek forgiveness and reconciliation with the other—I must try to understand, *from their perspective*, what constitutes a loving act, even if from my perspective my actions appeared loving. This means we do not have the authority to determine what is right for the beloved (like forcing them to become a Christian), nor we can abstain from acting and become inwardly possessed, whether out of fear of failure or on the opinion that intention is sufficient, as this leaves nothing to be evaluated. Furthermore, this position entails ethical *striving* as it requires the lover to seek reconciliation with the beloved by revealing ways to live the ethic better, i.e., being more attentive to the beloved's needs, rather than resting on the laurels of past ethical actions. This orients ethical evaluation towards possible *future* actions, not past ones.

Not only does this other-centred approach deny the validity of encroachment, as we cannot determine what is best for the other, but it also removes the instrumentalising problem. We are not acting on our own authority, nor on an appropriated authority, but instead, as Kierkegaard notes in *Two Ages*, *serving* the beloved as the authority of their own needs. While this risks Løgstrup's problem of making love soft and catering to the lover's arbitrariness, loving the neighbour incorporates faith in the other's earnestness. This faith, as Anti-Climacus notes, is not an attack to be used on others but shared through sympathetic response (*SUD*, 87); we are to *listen* to the needs of the other, rather than *assert* them. Forcing another to love God is not an acceptable use of faith, and so it cannot be seen as the ethical aim of neighbour love—it is not an act of love, but an act of pride in one's own spiritual self-righteousness. It is only with faith that we can approach the beloved as a self and not as an instrument to achieve our own aims; and we must do so as a self and not as an instrument of an external force or we relinquish responsibility for our actions. To ignore or limit our responsibility provides the relief of dismissing guilt over a lack of feeling loved, but makes this a deficiency of the neighbour when it is a deficiency in our own faith.

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externally imposing change, but providing room for change of their own volition. Kierkegaard does not delineate specific actions that are and are not ethical, so ethical actions can include the 'merciful blow,' telling them that they need to change in a way which still shows respect for them as a self, but can also take the form of supporting them when they need it, providing safe injection sites, helping them access counselling, etc. The goal is not to override their capacity for self-determination, but to show respect for that capacity, while simultaneously helping them realise their self as independent from their addiction. What is key to this is *sympathising* with the other in order to determine the best course of action, hence the other-centric approach of Kierkegaard's ethic. This is why the other determines the ethical stature of our action, because they are the focus of the action, and if the action is not understood by them as loving then it is not loving—love is reciprocal, it requires a loving disposition on the part of the actor and a recognition of love on the part of the patient. The tree (a loving disposition), is therefore recognised by its fruits (loving action).

However, we may still be left with questions about a lack of reciprocity: what if the drug addict never feels loved by one's actions? Intuitively, we want to be able to label ourselves as ethical, but from the Kierkegaardian perspective this represents pride. While Adorno privileges the intentionality of the action in Kierkegaard, it is only possible to be ethical when another *recognises* an act as having been loving. So, the individual has not acted ethically *if they have not acted*. Importantly, that should not be understood as meaning that the addict is unable to later understand actions as loving, nor should it mean that there is no reason to *try* to be ethical in the future. Furthermore, it is not meant to be understood as indicative of a failure to ethically mature. If one earnestly has set out to be loving towards the addict, which is itself a sign of ethical maturity, and it is the development of the complementary skill of sympathy which aids in loving in recognisable ways. In this way, it is perhaps a matter of the fruit not having fully grown, rather than the tree bearing a different type of fruit, which leads to the misrecognition.

iv) The Problem of Legitimate Inaction

Adorno, indirectly critiquing the notion of God as a middle-term, is concerned with the problem of spiritual inwardness as a means of avoiding relationships. Where Løgstrup finds spiritual aid, encroachment, and instrumentalisation, Adorno finds a lack of concrete concern for others: Kierkegaard legitimises inaction. Even when an individual is powerless to use love to overcome the realities of hardship, Kierkegaard considers the inwardness of the *desire* to act as representative of love, effectively minimising the need for action (Adorno 1939, 420). Thus, actual concrete help is not necessary as the intention alone is enough (echoing, to a degree, Løgstrup's criticism that the individual must deny their own ability to actually do anything and leave that to God).[11] By validating inaction, Kierkegaard's ethic lacks genuine concern for the welfare of others, and privileges the interior life of the individual in their God-relation. This inwardness, from Adorno's perspective, is even more profoundly problematic as it leads to self-enclosure—insulating oneself from requiring a relationship with others—where there is a fine line being walked between love and hate, spiritual humiliation and spiritual hubris, which can culminate in an individual becoming so radically self-enclosed they are prone to casting themselves as "the sole ground of the world" (Adorno 1939, 417). Adorno sees spirituality as leading to permissible impotence, with the neighbour ultimately disregarded because there is no impetus for action. Self-enclosure is a means of justifying a lack of ethical activity, as the relationship directly to God alone becomes indicative of ethical stature.

We have already seen problems with reading Kierkegaard's ethic as relating solely to a spiritual life, and overemphasising spirituality cannot comprise an accurate depiction of his position. Nonetheless, Adorno's worry about spiritual inwardness and self-enclosure is worth examining a little more closely. Throughout his works, Kierkegaard does emphasise the importance of inwardness as critical in self-becoming, as inwardness or reflection, reveal the limitations of immediacy alone. However, 'inclosing reserve' (Kierkegaard's equivalent to self-enclosure) is cast as the opposite of pure immediacy and is, in effect, pure reflection (*SUD*, 63-7). It is resignation, and the subsequent inclosing reserve's pure reflection, which occasions a desire to exist abstractly, leading to a lack of concern for others and with suffering in earthly and temporal existence (*SUD*, 70). The self abandoned to resignation seeks avoiding the earthly by assuming that any earthly problem will be solved by eternity—their impotence, as Adorno's critique points out, becomes justifiable. Additionally, according to Anti-Climacus, inclosing reserve seeks to deny relationships where the individual is vulnerable before others, they seek to hide themselves from others and, if they find a confidant they see sharing with them as a form of death—they have relinquished their hiddenness (*SUD*, 67).

In *Without Authority* we see the requirement of openness vividly. Here, H.H. advises speaking in a *pathos*-filled way to others lest the individual fall prey to an inclosing reserve (*WA*, 56-7)—to reveal oneself is necessary to avoid self-enclosure. Inclosing reserve here refers to an inability or unwillingness to be recognised or sympathised with, a problem exemplified by Quidam in *Stages on Life's Way*. Within his state of self-possessed inwardness, Quidam becomes unmoored from temporal existence and cannot relate to his beloved as he lacks certainty that what he inwardly believes can be understood by her—Quidam lacks faith in his beloved's love, and so he cannot bring himself to maintain a relationship with her. Despite terminating the

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[11] Perhaps in practice, but from a Christian perspective, prayer *is* active, so Kierkegaard's point is consistent.

relationship over his lack of certainty, Quidam cannot consider himself guilty because he can justify himself relative to his own reflective inwardness—his impotence is legitimate, yet he cannot consider himself not-guilty because his own actions and decisions led to the failure of his relationship; he is blameless because it is his beloved's fault for not loving him, and yet it is his fault for lacking the faith to believe her when she said (and showed) that she did. Inwardly he is justified, but isolated, in much the same way that Adorno or Løgstrup casts the practitioner of Kierkegaard's ethic—importantly, though, Quidam is presented not as a positive case, but a negative one. Quidam is a figure who, in his prideful self-righteousness, isolated himself from his beloved and others in a state of obsession over his inwardness, unconcerned or unaware of the effects of his inwardness on the lives of others.

Adorno's critical assessment of self-enclosure parallels Kierkegaard's critique of inclosing reserve. Thus, Adorno's criticism that inwardness validates inaction or a disregard for the needs of others cannot be the goal of the ethic articulated in *Works of Love*, as self-enclosure is representative of an unethical existential state for Kierkegaard. Furthermore, there can be no expressions of love without tangible help for the other as the God-relation is expressed through *acts which show love*—thus, the importance of intentions does not pre-clude the necessity for action. While Adorno is correct that Kierkegaard sees the possibility of being ethical without the concrete success of an action, this does not legitimise inaction on Kierkegaard's account, instead encouraging action regardless of the uncertainty of success, while simultaneously maintaining the value of intentions. Concern must be shown for the neighbour, as "concern constitutes the relation to life" (*SUD*, 5), and from a Christian perspective, concern must be for upbuilding (upbuilding oneself, and upbuilding others), because "the loftiness of indifferent knowledge", like the direct doctrinal theology implied by Løgstrup's in-terpretation, is, "from the Christian point of view, a long way from being more earnest" (*SUD*, 6). We can see an important response to both Løgstrup's and Adorno's criticisms here: the sanctity of alterity means that conversion cannot be the foundation of Kierkegaard's ethic, and concern for the other in a temporal, existential sense is necessary—Kierkegaard is advocating for neither encroaching sermonising nor spiritually validated impotence, but supporting the alterity of the other by giving what we can: by becoming *self*-giving.

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We can thus see that while there are concerns about God's status as a middle-term which raise a num-ber of questions about Kierkegaard's ethic, there are also answers to those concerns. Not only does Kierke-gaard not advocate for an ethic that is stringently evangelical and desirous of adherents, but he is also not presenting an ethic denying the selfhood of either practitioner or patient; self-becoming is the *telos* of the ethic, after all, and self-becoming is a cooperative endeavour. As discussed in the previous chapter, God is much less active in the practice of the ethic, serving as a foundation that provides an absolute value independent of an individual's inward preferences—God as a middle-term removes the possibility of making authority claims based on the God-relation, and invests ethical judgment in the other. But, while God may not be as directly visible in the practice of the ethic as supposed by Løgstrup, the ethic remains rooted in the commandment from God to love the neighbour as ourselves, so we will now consider whether Kierkegaard is advocating a divine command ethic.

§1.2 Divine Command

Another potentially problematic aspect of Kierkegaard's ethic identified by Løgstrup and Adorno is the role of God as commander. Both Løgstrup and Adorno are critical of divine command ethics, and we have already had occasion to see an element of Løgstrup's criticism, as he sees the divine command requiring self-denial and encouraging encroachment, going so far as to suggest that this lends an "evil authority" to the individual acting on God's behalf (Løgstrup 1997, 230). Løgstrup also expresses concern over whether one can act in accordance with the command without it becoming mere obedience, a concern shared with Adorno. Adorno considers Kierkegaard's ethic to be founded on a reductive Lutheran view of authority, advocating for the acceptance of what is given (both in terms of neighbours and in terms of social context) (Adorno 1939, 421). Additionally, Adorno, like Løgstrup, questions whether love can be commanded at all. If love is a matter of law it becomes a duty, and falls prey to the same problems as Kantian ethics. Adorno charges Kierkegaard with reducing love to obedience to a set of formalistic rules when the individual privileges themselves with a special connection to God and can thereby independently justify their actions as ethical by referencing their own interpretation of those rules (Adorno 1939, 416). If focus is placed on an individual motivated by their own interior sense of justice, then the ambiguous ethic of striving we previously found Kierkegaard advocating for is actually much more formal. Adopting such a perspective would reformulate Kierkegaard's ethic into one that adopts the duty-centric structure of the Kantian ethic, an ethic to which Kierkegaard set his own in opposition. Both Adorno and Løgstrup are concerned that if Kierkegaard's is a divine command ethic, the ethic becomes one of duty fulfilment, rather than an ethic of self-willing love.

Our first question is whether Kierkegaard commits to the strong divine command position which Løgstrup and Adorno presuppose. Kierkegaard acknowledges that the command to love the neighbour is God-given in *Works of Love*, and promotes its connection to absolute ethical value through that divine connection. From a theological perspective, that he adopts this divine command stance is not really a problem, as it follows from his religious commitments. Gordon Marino's interpretation supports the criticisms, as he argues that Kierkegaard is an obedience theorist in accordance with divine command, and that we must obey those in positions of authority ("our father, worldly or other-worldly") (Marino 2001, 122). This is particularly concordant with Adorno's Lutheran reading of Kierkegaard, as any authority is divinely ordained. However, while Kierkegaard can be read in this way, the interpretation we have been following conflicts with this, as we have seen God recede into the background, rather than take a direct hand in ethical affairs.

So, while following Marino's interpretation, Adorno and Løgstrup's concerns pose a problem, if instead we follow an interpretation like Ferreira's:[12] we then find a Kierkegaard more welcoming to human agency, and focused on selfhood in ethical relations. In her interpretation, Kierkegaard understands and appreciates the limits of a divine command ethic, and the criticisms of Løgstrup and Adorno are minimised. The interpretation of Løgstrup, Adorno, and Marino relies on a strict and narrow selection from Kierkegaard's *oeuvre* for support, while also overlooking Kierkegaard's own criticism of ethics formulated around duties.

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[12] Cf: *§1.2*.

Not only have we already seen Kierkegaard denying divine authority being transferred to the individual, but also, throughout *Works of Love,* Kierkegaard takes great pains to disentangle actions from systematic ethical valuations so that there can be no certainty that an action will be loving. This makes the disposition (which influences motivation, intention, and chosen actions) and the response of the other the main determinants of ethical value—having performed a duty is not enough to constitute ethical action because it allows for self-justification and self-righteousness. As our critics note, when the duty to love is being carried out strictly as a duty the disposition is not love, but obedience. We do find characters like this in Kierkegaard's writings, most notably Judge William, but they are cast as negative examples, not exemplars of ethical actors. While we can find Kierkegaard discussing the divine command in *Works of Love* ostensibly in the strong sense, which may lend legitimacy to the strong interpretation of divine command, we also find examples that suggest that a less strong interpretation is also valid.[13] Furthermore, contextualising a strong interpretation of divine command by referencing Kierkegaard's philosophical authorship also raises questions. It conflicts directly with his strong advocacy for individuals as *agents* and his critique of abstract or impersonal rules guiding action (cf., *Either/Or II*'s lampooning of this position); it overlooks that his philosophy is premised on existential concerns and responding to one's existence contextually, not impersonally. Thus, an alternative approach to divine command seems more appropriate.

Ferreira's interpretation of Kierkegaard's interpretation of divine command, as we presaged, offers a more tenable position than we are left with in Marino's interpretation. As alluded to above, Ferreira argues that "there are good reasons for suggesting that Kierkegaard's ethic appreciates the limits of a divine command ethic and a simple ethic of obedience and is not properly subsumed under either category as such" (Ferreira 2001, 259). Ferreira's critical evaluation of charges of divine command ethics leads her to suggest that it is instead the inborn nature of humans to love which is important, and this renders the command either superfluous or part of our existential structure (Ferreira 2001, 40-2). In her account, we have an innate need to love and be loved,[14] which, as noted in the previous chapter, also has Biblical support and aligns with both Kierkegaard's religious commitments, as well as his more robust focus on human agency in ethical decision making. His fundamental criticism of the 'ethical' stage is that it is too duty-focused, and the even stricter obedience theory only replicates this problematic structure.

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[13] In the conclusion, Kierkegaard states that from the Christian perspective love is commanded (*WL*, 375), but the form of the command in *Works of Love* does not necessitate reading this in the strong sense. Kierkegaard notes that the poet is quite right "in saying that to command love is the greatest fatuousness and the most preposterous talk" in relation to erotic love (*WL*, 50), love which we are predisposed to, which is echoed later in relation to loving that which is ugly as well as the beautiful (*WL*, 373). In those examples the command is to love that which we do not have an immediate desire to love—reflecting his statement that the commandment strengthens resolve, provides wisdom, and "burns out the unhealthiness" of human love and helps to "rekindle it" when love would otherwise cease (*WL*, 43). The command is such that it provides support, or points to a deeper need to love beyond our immediate inclination, rather than being a command in the stronger sense of forcing us to act in certain ways. The openness of the command is revealed in Kierkegaard's early statement that the command is *to* individuals and not *about* something (*WL*, 14) and does not forbid love that is not grounded in the command, but encourages it under the aegis of the command (*WL*, 41).

[14] While this innate need to love and be loved suggests that the ethic Kierkegaard is advocating should come naturally, we must keep in mind that often it is our desire to *be loved* which is overwhelming. We are tempted to love ourselves and to seek out others to love us—we selfishly distort the innate need for love into various forms of self-love—occasioning the command as a guide to love others as ourselves.

However, while the interpretation we are advocating denies a strong divine command ethic, *Fear and Trembling* offers an interesting case where such a strong command plays a central role. While not a Christian work, it is an unmistakably religious[15] text and has important implications for understanding the role of divine command in Kierkegaard's ethic. In the *Akedah*, God directly speaks to Abraham and commands him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Kierkegaard, through *de Silentio*, presents this story in a positive light, revealing the importance of faithfulness to the command over prohibitions against sacrificing one's child. The command is one which is radical and challenging to Abraham, as he must decide between: *i*) his faith that God will return his sacrifice, Isaac, or abandon that faith; *ii*) the certainty of safeguarding Isaac by explaining the command; *iii*) appearing to want to sacrifice Isaac of his own volition thus obscuring the command; or *iv*) ignoring the command entirely (each of these alternatives are explored in the 'Exordium'). While a "disinterested", surface-level reading of this may appear to suggest that *de Silentio* is supporting Abraham sacrificing his child, such a reading ignores that the sacrifice was not the point. In fact, such a disinterested and dispassionate reading is itself criticised in *Fear and Trembling* (*FT*, 29-30. The recognition of this problematic reading within the context of *Fear and Trembling* suggests that *de Silentio* wanted to draw attention to its failure to reveal the implication of the narrative: that faith, in matters of ethics, should be prioritised instead of self-certainty. Self-certainty tries to ground ethics in universal (and therefore nominally disinterested and dispassionate) actions that are, somewhat ironically, chosen relative to personal interests and have clearly defined values and ends. Faith, on the other hand, embraces an interest in the other and opens us to practicing ethics even when we cannot be certain of the value—faith is in the possibility of better ethical practice, not pre-legitimised courses of action.[16] It is the contrast between faith and certainty which has more important implications for Kierkegaard's Christian perspective, and suggests a movement away from the more direct divine command we see in the binding of Isaac.

The divine command incorporated into Kierkegaard's ethic is not direct, as in the *Akedah*, so we must ask what it means for there to be an 'indirect' command. The indirectness derives from the need to find—seek out—the command (i.e., by *choosing* to appropriate Christianity as truth). Furthermore, the command must be able to be employed unconsciously, or Climacus' statement that even those who do not believe in Christianity are still required to fulfil their Christian duties becomes incomprehensible (*CUP*, 346). The command, as Ferreira suggested above, is woven into human nature. Anti-Climacus' confirms this, asserting that non-Christians can cultivate selfhood (although he argues they are distracted from fully cultivating it by despair). However, self-becoming reaches its apotheosis with a Christian context. When viewed from this perspective, we can agree with Ferreira that "it is strange (and sad) to think that we need to be commanded to do what we need desperately to do" (Ferreira, 241). It is indeed strange and sad not just that we need the command, but that we are unwilling (or unable) to practice something inherent to us without it—we *choose* not to act ethically when we choose not to be loving. Such an indirect ethic does not directly demand a sacrifice, as Abraham was, but presents us with a call to offer love even when uncertain of its reciprocation (itself a sacrifice, after a fashion).

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[15] In the sense of 'religious stage,' rather than a theological sense.
[16] We will see this echoed in Chapter 4 when discussing Kierkegaard and Levinas, as Emmanuel Levinas argues for a need for ethics to be grounded in the 'infinite' rather than the more certain 'totality.'

There is a risk in loving, and this risk radically questions our predisposition to assume the reciprocity of love—it forces us to question whether we should only care for those who care for us, only love those who love us, and only sympathise with those who sympathise with us—but then demands that we extend love to everyone.

Adopting Ferreira's interpretation, we can see that the command serves as an intuition, one which finds solace and guidance in representation (i.e., Jesus' command to love is equally as potent as His actual acts of love, and, similarly, we can understand the command when we see examples of selflessness and care for others). The command serves as a support when we are uncertain in our love for the neighbour (*WL*, 43)—it encourages constancy in the faith that our sacrifice, what we give of ourselves, will be returned to us as we discussed in the previous chapter.[17] Thus, while there are indeed elements of divine command within Kierkegaard's ethic, they are not overbearing or direct. It does not vest individuals with divine authority, nor does it override motivation. It is a command that, importantly, *we must seek out* rather than it seeking us out, and in seeking it we must also seek out opportunities to practice it. Furthermore, it does not insinuate God between interpersonal relationships. Kierkegaard writes in *Fear and Trembling* that when the individual with faith traverses beyond the ethical (stage), they enter into a transformed relationship to the other and their ethical duty is not owed to God as a mediator, but directly to the neighbour (*FT*, 70). Ethical actions can neither be abstracted from the temporal world, nor can they be mediated without losing their ethical content.

The transformation of the relationship is the openness to loving the neighbour unconditionally, which requires personal investment and faith, rather than adherence to duty (or else the love becomes conditional on the command). It is by embracing faith instead of certainty that ethical growth is occasioned as it opens the individual to the need for constant striving in ethical development. Not only does an interpretation which minimises the divine command appear more felicitous to the ethics characterised throughout Kierkegaard's authorship (despite, at times, the strong interpretation appearing to be endorsed), but it also reveals a congruity with the larger project outlined by Kierkegaard as it removes the guardrails of duty and thrusts the individual into uncertainty. However, we now find ourselves back with an intense focus on the individual, which leads us to the question of whether, in ethical striving, the individual is ultimately left isolated from others—do we become a self alone, or, as suggested in the previous chapter, together?

§1.3 Isolation

Løgstrup and Adorno each present Kierkegaard's ethic as advocating an isolating life separate and aloof from others. For Løgstrup, this is based on his absolutist and idealist interpretation of Kierkegaard, where the individual *either* has a relationship with God only, *or* relationships with other individuals—either completely spiritual and ethical or completely temporally interested and unethical. Adorno, on the other hand,

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[17] This is connected to the distinction between the choice of faith (religious stage) and the choice of fate (aesthetic and ethical stages); the choice of whether we embrace a life that focuses our attention outward to helping others to grow in faith, love, and self-becoming (even if it is not reciprocated), or whether we embrace a life that is self-loving and focused on the certainty of self-interested actions being beneficial to us. Rather than the command occasioning suspicion, as *de Silentio* presumes Abraham must have, it challenges us to question ourselves and our motivations. In a similar way, we are, in faith, meant to question ourselves instead of others—for example, I question my love for my beloved, not my beloved's love for me—because, while we can be introspective and attempt to remove the opacity in ourselves, we cannot do that with others and must have faith that they are well represented in their words and deeds.

focuses his attention on Kierkegaard's call to love the dead as revealing an unbridgeable asymmetry between giving and receiving, arguing that this is representative of the ethic in a wider sense, where we are to treat the living *as though they were dead*; disregard of temporal needs becomes the ethic's *telos* because we cannot help them. We have seen elements of these criticisms in the preceding sections: Løgstrup's worry about the spirituality of the God-relation obscuring temporal needs, and Adorno's worry that religious self-enclosure leads to abstention from acting in the world, as the individual is content to focus their energies on spirituality. Despite arguing from different perspectives, each thus arrives at the same result: Kierkegaard appears to structure his ethic in a way encouraging individuals to seek isolation to lead an ethical existence. We must therefore examine their respective criticisms in order to assess whether they adequately capture the structure and goals of Kierkegaard's ethic, especially if we are to reveal it is an ethic of cooperative self-becoming, not the isolated otherworldly ethic found in their respective interpretations.

i) Løgstrup

We return to Løgstrup and his concern that Kierkegaard's ethic is so spiritually focused on the individual's relationship to God and producing converts that it obscures the need for interpersonal relationships. The strongest expression of Løgstrup's critique is that

> *Works of Love* is a brilliantly thought-out system of safeguards against the other human being thrust into one's life—not least when the relationship with the other human being threatens to become intimate. Therefore, the relationship to the loveable neighbour is more important, from a Christian perspective, than the relationship with the unlovable neighbour. And therefore the relationship to God is never purer than in the hate of the loved one. (Løgstrup 1997, 232)

Kierkegaard's ethic "safeguards" individuals from close relationships with others and entrenches them in a relationship with God and God alone—going so far as to seek the *hatred* of the other (we have seen a more moderate version of this argument with Løgstrup's interpretation that the Kierkegaardian must provide unwanted sermons instead of temporal help, thus occasioning animosity).[18] This safeguarding leads Løgstrup to conclude that Kierkegaard sees passionate love as contradictory to love of the neighbour, as the only interest in neighbour love is that the neighbour comes to love God (Løgstrup 1997, 232-3). Løgstrup pushes this to its maximum, stating that on Kierkegaard's account neighbour love is entirely distinct from any other type of love, as God is included in neighbour love but no other forms; in this way neighbour love has no goal beyond forcing one's neighbours to love God, and therefore is concerned only with proving devotion to God by accruing converts (Løgstrup 1997, 223). Additionally, on this reading, Løgstrup sets Kierkegaard's distinction between Christianity and 'paganism' as one of spiritual against temporal help. Løgstrup argues that for Kierkegaard "there is a difference between helping our neighbour temporally and helping him or her to love God",

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[18] Løgstrup is not alone in this. Another example of this criticism, which takes more of Kierkegaard's writings into account, is levelled by Bruce Kirmmse. He specifically delineates Kierkegaard's later works as representing a commitment toward a Christianity explicitly opposed to worldly congregation, and argues this is incommensurable with Christianity, and that Kierkegaard goes too far in rejecting the worldly—importantly suggesting that the possibility of retrieving the world lay in the very Christianity of which Kierkegaard is an adherent (Kirmmse 2001, 204-6). Rather than project this across Kierkegaard's works as Løgstrup does, Kirmmse clarifies the shift in Kierkegaard's later authorship towards a more isolationist interpretation of Christianity.

so the only way to show Christian neighbour love is to provoke hatred through proselytising, as 'pagan' temporal love will not only be understood as good, thus suggesting self-interest, but will also not affect the spiritual life of the other (Løgstrup 1997, 225-6).

We can expand on this 'pagan' and Christian dichotomy by examining the way that Løgstrup interprets passion in Kierkegaard's works. On his interpretation, the isolationist Kierkegaard condemns viewing love through the matrix of natural love (i.e., friendship, romance, etc.) (Løgstrup 1997, 233-4). Løgstrup presents Kierkegaard as intermingling passion, zest for life, and selfishness which he interprets to be pagan attributes (Løgstrup 1997, 239). And, since Kierkegaard's understanding of immediacy includes a zest for life, it too is condemned as selfishness (Løgstrup 1997, 234). In turn, this means that the "*essence*" of natural love *is* selfishness, which means that expressions of passionate love are necessarily self-loving and therefore not to be practiced (Løgstrup 1997, 235). This parallels the distinction drawn by Løgstrup between spiritual Christianity and temporal paganism, where the immediate must be given up in favour of the eternal (God). Løgstrup sees a problem here because Kierkegaard would be aligning the Good Samaritan with the pagan, despite being used as an example of Christian neighbour love. So, not only does Kierkegaard obscure interpersonal relationships with his focus on individual spirituality for Løgstrup, but he also conflates Christianity and paganism.

However, Løgstrup's interpretation suffers from two major problems: *i*) he fails to recognise that Kierkegaard does not subscribe to an absolute and idealist form of Christianity solely focused on spiritual inwardness and the acquisition of converts; *ii*) Kierkegaard's distinction between Christian love for the other and pagan self-interest is not a difference of spirituality or temporal help, but a question of the security of selfhood, a distinction between faithfully helping someone as a self and certainly helping someone in a way that *you* prefer.

To respond to Løgstrup, we will first examine the problem of interpreting Kierkegaard as an idealist and absolutist, as this brings into question both the philosophical and theological underpinnings of Kierkegaard's ethic. We will approach this by highlighting how Løgstrup's reductive interpretation influences the definition of 'neighbour' employed to critique *Works of Love*. Løgstrup distinguishes neighbour love as its own category separate from any other form of love. Thus, his interpretation centres on the relationship between the spiritual individual and their neighbour as a spirit in need of conversion. In this way, the individual is to abstain from any temporal relationship, like marriage or friendship, in order to focus on others as neighbours, as 'neighbour' here refers *only* to the relationship between spirits, not whole persons (of course, we have already noted the problem with this interpretation above). However, Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* is not defining neighbour *relations* which are non-preferential, but an *ethic* which is non-preferential, meaning it can be practiced regardless of one's preference for the other. As an example, one's husband is a neighbour. He is not precluded from being a neighbour despite an alternative definition applied to him: husband. That one's husband is owed certain special duties does not infringe or distort the ethical task—these duties are undertaken under the aegis of neighbour love, so they are loved as selves *before* being loved as a husband. Special duties derive from our *relationship* to another and this does not override the necessity to love them as a neighbour

and participate in their self-becoming.[19] The theory of stages is instructive here. The Christian has passed through the ethical stage, which assumes these duties are absolute, but now recognises their legitimacy as *relative*. Løgstrup, by employing a narrow interpretation of 'neighbour,' deceptively creates a false equivalency to the relationship where only the love due to the other as a self is absolute.

There is a false equivalency conflating a *neighbour love ethic* and an ethic of *neighbourly relations*. The former includes those we have distinct and varied relationships to—neighbours we love as a self, and who elicit specific responses. The latter denies the specificity of our responses, instead demanding the same response to each person defined as a 'neighbour.' This equivalency is made to imply that Kierkegaard is advocating against engaging in intimate, passionate relationships and artificially creates an antagonism between our preferences for certain people and the non-preferential basis of having to love each and every neighbour; neighbour actually includes ourselves, as we are called to love our neighbour as we love ourselves—Kierkegaard's definition of 'neighbour' is therefore not congruent with Løgstrup's. Løgstrup appears to have missed Kierkegaard's definition of the neighbour as what philosophers would call "the other" (which means that we could also term the ethic an 'other love ethic'[20]) (*WL* (Lowrie), 18-19). Kierkegaard continues his description by *denying the validity of defining the neighbour in relational terms*; a person can possess a disposition to love their neighbour even when solitary. This directly contradicts Løgstrup's interpretation of the neighbour, suggesting instead that neighbour love is a *disposition* wherein the individual sets aside self-love to allow room for the recognition and love of 'the other'—self-love has room for only one self to be loved, neighbour love makes room for many selves. This room is extended regardless of our relationship; I cannot treat my husband as though he is not a neighbour because we have a special relationship.[21]

We may clarify Kierkegaard's position by recalling the way he structures existence. There is the human being, the original synthesis of finite (temporal) and infinite (spiritual), as well as the self which relates to that synthesis; crucially for Kierkegaard, the 'other' is an other *self*, not the human synthesis, much less an incomplete synthesis. We may have preferences related to the human as a synthesis (what is 'apparent' in a sense), but when it comes to the self we are to be non-preferential—it is the self which we love as a neighbour, a self which each and every individual uniquely possesses. So, we can have preferential loves based on aspects of the human person without it extending to loving them as an other self, and this is selfish love. Such preferences are transformed when our relation to the other is transformed in our God-relation and we can appreciate persons as others—as neighbours and selves—that condition our appreciation of their presence: we no longer

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[19] Special duties are not themselves the ethical task, but contribute to it. Our relationships determine which actions appropriately contribute to another's (and my own) self-becoming, and so the ethical task is *influenced*, but not exhausted or defined, by special duties.

[20] There are reservations here, as Kierkegaard also refers to the 'other' in philosophy as the "touchstone" of self-love, pointing to the use of 'other' as a philosophical term delineating the boundary between self and non-self. However, if we adopt the use of 'other' in the context of contemporary philosophy, where the understanding of otherness and alterity has been refined and developed, we discover an alignment with Kierkegaard's use of 'neighbour' as opposed to the concept of 'other' of which Kierkegaard was critical—they are other selves, not competitive selves or unrelatable selves. On Kierkegaard's account, other selves we are ethically intertwined with us, neither they nor we possess isolated ethical statures; all selves engaged in self-becoming require mutual cooperation.

[21] Similarly, it should not elicit the hate of someone financially stable when I give to someone who is not. A further example may be my siblings; if I express my love for them in the same way, they may not actually *feel* loved, they have their own selfhood that requires individual response. The equivalency of response Løgstrup asserts is reductive and fails to capture the existential reality of alterity so dear to Kierkegaard's philosophy.

see them as merely the human synthesis which we hold preferential attitudes towards, but as a full self separate from our own self. Rather than appreciating just the synthesis and making distinctions on what is skin-deep, we can appreciate the self behind the appearance and care for it—even if that self does not match our preferences. Loving the self is therefore necessary in neighbour love, not the self's relation to us.

Different forms of loving relationships can never be distinct and separate from each other as they are rooted in innate, God-given love—and we see this throughout Kierkegaard's writings, as he not only recognises a multiplicity of relationships including both intimate and neighbourly relations, including relations to our enemies, but he also writes from the perspectives of individuals in intimate relationships who could also be considered ethical (the Married Man in *Stages* comes to mind). It is not the type or definition of the relationship that occasions the need to show love (in the form of mercy, compassion, sympathy, etc.), but the very fact that the other is *human*, is a *self as we are ourselves*.[22] Kierkegaard argues that our preferences cannot determine ethical actions, that we must set aside preference in order to support the self-becoming of others—we can recall cooperative self-becoming here, as it is cooperative to help our enemy to gain a sense of selfhood just as much as it is to help my husband, best friend, or a stranger.

Interestingly, Adorno recognises this as a central feature of Kierkegaard's ethic, that "the one element of 'this man' which is of interest to the Christian is the human, as revealed in the person" (Adorno 1939, 415), where love grasps the universal only in love for the individual, but "without yielding to the differences between individuals" (Adorno 1939, 415-6). Each individual is important with respect to *their own* selfhood, leading Adorno to note that one is to love "the individual particularities of each man" (Adorno 1939, 416). This does not, as suggested by Løgstrup, entail preference, but instead a recognition of the inherent equality of the selfhood. Thus, to eschew the concrete individual before us in order to relate only to God would require us to eschew the very command being made to us to love the neighbour. Furthermore, to relate only spiritually to the neighbour is not loving them as another self and is therefore preferential (i.e., loving them *because* they have converted, which is the ultimate *telos* of Løgstrup's interpretation of Kierkegaard's ethic).

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[22] Such a multiplicity of relations includes relating in different ways to the same person, so, rather than defining the one you love as wife and only wife, she can be both wife and friend at the same time. How a person relates to their wife depends upon the context: i.e., when out with a group of friends your wife remains your wife, but you may relate to her as a friend so as not to alienate your friends; you may reminisce with your wife about your time working together and you relate to each other as (former) co-workers because she was not your wife at the time. Rather than obscure our relationships with others behind the term 'neighbour,' Kierkegaard is suggesting that we retain the underlying focus on the neighbour as an other regardless of the other relationships layered on top of it. To illustrate this, we can say that a wife remains a neighbour (in the sense of being an other), while remaining a wife, a friend, perhaps a peer, a confidant, etc. The importance of retaining the status of 'neighbour' is to avoid the collapse of the ethical relation to a preferential relation (i.e., a wife ceases to be an other who is loved, and becomes a pre-defined object, 'wife,' which is selfishly possessed). This also allows us to appreciate the distinction between the human synthesis and the self. The self is developed through a relation to the human synthesis (my actions are commensurate with *my* passions), while the human is defined by temporal or spiritual affiliations (I am six feet tall and recently supported x politician); we relate to the features of our human synthesis and give our self meaning through that relation, rather than those features directly defining us by virtue of their generality.

Drawing on the previous footnote, we can understand this to mean that we are improper in telling our beloved that we loved them *because* they are the beloved, just as we are if we tell them we love them for their accidental features (the features of their human synthesis)—imagine one's husband asking if he would still be loved if he was bald, or unintelligent and finding an adequate answer aside from 'yes' (especially if followed by a 'but'). In loving the other *as a self* we love them regardless of their accidental features (a list of lovable attributes is not representative of love, as love itself is "inexplicable" (*SLW*, 35-6)), and we love them for more than just filling the description of being the beloved, we love them for the certain *je ne sais quoi* that is their unique *self*.

Thus Adorno's view accords with the picture of Kierkegaard's ethic we articulated in the previous chapter, with significant emphasis on concern for others as a self that relates to both spiritual and material existence. We have, in part, addressed Løgstrup's assertion that Kierkegaard posits a distinction between paganism and Christianity where one cares for either another's temporal or spiritual needs by showing that Kierkegaard does advocate that the ethical Christian must be interested in each aspect of the synthesis by supporting their self-becoming. However, this leaves us to question what distinction Kierkegaard is drawing between pagan and Christian? Rather than relating to the temporal or spiritual well-being of others, it relates to the sense of security in one's own selfhood. For Kierkegaard's pagan, other selves are in competition with one's own, so they adopt a stance of self-interest to secure their selfhood: I cannot be certain my neighbour will preserve my selfhood, so I must preserve it. The Christian, by contrast, has faith in their selfhood and opens themselves to the possibility of other selves—they have *faith* that their selfhood will be supported by others in the same way they support the other's selfhood. In a sense, the Christian is able to recognise that selves do not need to be competitive, but must be cooperative and reciprocal.

An important consequence of this is its effect on relationships. Where the pagan predefines others relative to themselves and their interests, the Christian allows the other to define their own self. By determining their relationships relative to their interests, pagans allow preference to determine ethical duty, while the Christian owes an ethical duty to everyone, regardless of preference (cf.: n14)—the important self for the pagan is their own, while the Christian places importance on each self uniquely (including their own, as the individual is called to love others *as they love themselves*). So, the pagan vests ethical value in relationships that provide some tangible benefit to them, something the Christian cannot do, as they are called to give to their neighbour without entering into the relationship to demand something from them. Thus, my husband is *only* a husband to the pagan, while being *both* husband and neighbour to the Christian.

ii) Adorno

We will now address Adorno's concerns, and assess whether he offers a more compelling argument that Kierkegaard's ethic requires self-isolation than Løgstrup. We briefly examined Adorno's worry over inwardness legitimising inaction, as he argues that Kierkegaard still considers the inwardness of the *desire* to act as representative of neighbour love, and therefore action is ethically unnecessary (Adorno 1939, 420). This contributes to Adorno's charge that Kierkegaard is not adequately socially-oriented in *Works of Love*, as his preoccupation with inwardness removes the requirement for social action, and Kierkegaard is critical of worldliness until it comes close to disrupting the *status quo* (Adorno 1939, 421-2). Adorno reads Kierkegaard as a fundamentally conservative, Lutheran ethicist. However, the most problematic aspect of Kierkegaard's ethic of love, for Adorno, is its culmination in loving the dead. This reifies the relation to others in an abstraction where neither individual is viewed as living because love achieves nothing—one cannot help the dead, nor is there anything reciprocated to help the lover, which renders action meaninglessness (Adorno 1939, 427-8). By equating the living and the dead, Adorno charges Kierkegaard with implicit advocacy for isolation: the individual is encouraged to isolate themselves in their spiritual inwardness, as others are abstract entities with whom we cannot have mutual relationships.

However, Adorno's worry is predicated on a misleading interpretation of *Works of Love*. While Kierkegaard does indeed speak of loving the dead, the work of love is *remembering* the dead, with the justification for this being that as we love those we see, we should love those we *have seen* (*WL* (Lowrie), 280). In fact, Kierkegaard actually suggests that the way we show love to the dead is not to weep and lament over their death, but to love them as one who is asleep—as one who is living, but unresponsive. We can look to the Young Man in *Repetition* to see Kierkegaard portray viewing another as an abstract idea as Adorno casts Kierkegaard's ethic. The Young Man is tortured by idealising his beloved because he no longer relates to her as existing but as an abstract and ideal image (*REP*, 138-9). This recasts his beloved as an imperfect comparison that he cannot bear to relate to, and so his concern is for the retention of the internalised ideal—this leads him to eschew a relationship with her so his illusion is not disintegrated with the realisation that she is a flawed human being. A similar problem is discussed in *The Sickness Unto Death*, where we find resignation and the desire to exist abstractly leading to a lack of concern with others (*SUD*, 70). Far from advocating for viewing others as abstractions, Kierkegaard in fact calls for engagement with individuals. As we have consistently argued, his writings show a deep concern about the temporal existence of individuals, and his Christianity *accentuates* temporal existence (*CUP*, 292-3).

Without a relation directly to the other, the ethic breaks down into the very arbitrariness with which Kierkegaard charges idealist ethics—there needs to be the *reality* of a relationship, not just the appearance of one.[23] The self who exists in inclosing reserve has an aversion to engaging with the earthly, and seeks out diversions from actively participating in resolving earthly problems by assuming that such problems will be resolved either in eternity, or by external force (i.e., grace in *Either/Or II*'s "Ultimatum"); philosophically, and in the context of the Christian self, any focus on one's internal life requires focusing equally on one's external life: without the externality of decision there is no inwardness (*CUP*, 382). If the individual fails to act in the world, their inward decisiveness is stunted, they become unable to grow as a self because they are not engaging their selfhood, only an aspect of it. As focused as Kierkegaard can be on individualistic spiritual inwardness, he is not so committed to it that the temporal, social world we share with others is disregarded—Kierkegaard is well aware that without engagement in one's existence with others, our intentions are reduced to meaningless thoughts.

Adorno, at times, recognises and appreciates Kierkegaard's social philosophy, but does not seem to follow it to its conclusion: seeking an upheaval of the social order to replace it with one more equitable and promotes neighbour love. This is nowhere more apparent than his critical evaluation of modernity in *Two Ages,* which is anything but conservative. Adorno elides that recognition and replaces it with a worry over viewing others as abstract entities. However, sociality is integral to Kierkegaard's ethic, its *telos* being cooperative self-becoming, and forms the basis for ethical action. While Adorno is correct to point out that Kierkegaard locates ethical value in intentions, Kierkegaard is not claiming that intention alone is constitutive of ethical action.

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[23] This is because idealists, in his view, adopt an ethic reflecting what *they* want to see as ethical or which they *already* practice and treat that as absolute, thereby conferring upon themselves an ethical stature that has absolute authority—this is illustrated by Kierkegaard in *Either/Or II*'s Judge William. The goal of such an ethic is to cultivate one's own ethical stature relative to one's value system, rather than have concern for the ethical development of others (except in terms of gaining adherents to one's value system).

Like Løgstrup, Adorno fails to understand that Kierkegaard, while discussing intentions as ethical, is discussing the *failure of an action to reach its desired outcome*, not the *failure to act at all*. The rationale for this is that we live in a world where we cannot anticipate the success or failure of an action because of the natural randomness and accidental nature of existence that undermines certainty. Furthermore, to assume that an action must be successful to be ethical places too much emphasis on results, thus distorting the importance of acting for the right reason, and, even more critically for Kierkegaard, making contributions to others without recognition. It is far more noticeable when someone wealthy gives to charity, but does that make their donation greater than someone with lesser means donating what they can?[24]

Ethics, for Kierkegaard, is intimately interconnected with selfhood and selfhood incorporates both the spiritual and temporal while also demanding recognition of, as Adorno has put it, "the individual particularities of each" neighbour. Ethical value is a matter of individual responsibility, not circumstance, and disentangling these is important. Kierkegaard takes a more radical social position by advocating against situating circumstance as determinative of ethical possibility (i.e., he would be critical about claims that an individual who was born into a wealthy family has a greater possibility for being ethical because they can donate more money to charity). Instead, ethical valuation is intertwined with individual intention and decision—the problem being that these are, on the whole, rather opaque (even to ourselves). This requires the adoption of faith that others act on good intentions, thus limiting our ability to question them based on our apprehension of their motivations—we should not question whether someone gave for the right reasons, but have faith that they did. Trust must be extended to others that their actions are not an attempt hurt us; when their actions do, our response must be forgiveness, not condemnation. So, on a social level this supports social formations encouraging self-becoming and focusing ethical judgments around individual resolutions rather than their outcomes. Such transformations would allow for more direct criticism of the status quo, rather than preservation of it, as Adorno suggested Kierkegaard's position implies. If adhering to the status quo conflicts with loving the neighbour as a self, it is unethical for an individual to adhere to that status quo—ethical self-transformation manifests as a commitment to ethical social—transformation.[25]

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[24] One way Kierkegaard illustrates this is by discussing a story of a woman who is going to donate what little money she has been able to save, but, on the way to the church to donate it, she is swindled and upon reaching the altar she realises that she no longer possesses the alms she was going to give (*WL*, 317-8). The point of the story is that her commitment to the donation is, in part, what makes the action ethical—that she was pickpocketed is not her fault, so to condemn her for having been robbed when she would otherwise have given would locate ethical judgment beyond her capacity. To avoid ethics being a matter of circumstance, Kierkegaard incorporates the possibility of failure into his ethic. This is not to make all actions ethical, but to avoid ethics becoming a purely abstract calculus of results—it allows for the possibility of failure so that we can reflect and learn how to practice in the future; we may feel guilt over circumstances beyond our control, but circumstances beyond our control should not represent ethical failure.

25 We may note that there is a caveat to this, introduced in a later work of Kierkegaard's. In a pseudonymous essay, "Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?", Kierkegaard argues against the Christian allowing themselves to be put to death, despite arguing that a pagan would. From his perspective, the Christian would be causing the other to do something for which they cannot retrieve reconciliation, and, furthermore, the Christian can never be so certain in their understanding of the truth that it will outweigh the wrong that they are causing the other to commit. There is a concern on the part of the Christian to safeguard the ethical standing of their neighbour as much as their own. Socially, this may mean that the Christian is not as active in fighting against social injustice because they cannot interrupt the other by such a direct means (we see this in *Works of Love* as well, where the poor are not to directly confront the rich and try to claim an ethical superiority over them—a position Adorno sees as uncaring and callous).

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We have already seen Kierkegaard's advocacy of an ethical disposition, one affecting our relationships with others. Contrary to Løgstrup's charge, the application of the ethic is possible regardless of relationship, as the designation 'neighbour' does not exhaust our relationship with others. Providing a baseline of sympathy, care, compassion, but, most importantly, support in self-becoming is possible regardless of relationship status (that I have had more opportunities to act ethically to some neighbours does not add ethical quality, it remains quantity; *disposition* affects ethical value, not quantity).[26] So, rather than understand the ethic as a conflict between either retaining friends, enemies, and lovers or reducing them all to the category neighbour, Kierkegaard is advocating that we still recognize them as friends, enemies, and lovers, and beneath that descriptor recognise the neighbour; our preferences do not alter the ethical demand, thus we do not have to like someone to love them as a neighbour, allowing us to 'love our enemy.' Furthermore, others cannot be relegated to abstract entities we engage with as though they (and we) are dead without sacrificing the active component of the ethic, thus Adorno's critique loses its teeth.

By reducing Kierkegaard's concept of neighbour in a different, though parallel, way to Løgstrup, Adorno also fails to appreciate that the neighbour is not a predefined, abstract concept; it instead refers to others as concrete selves. The narrow and limited definition of 'neighbour' employed by Adorno and Løgstrup in their own ways refuses to acknowledge this nuance and results in a hollowing, reductive interpretation of the ethic supporting their spiritualist presuppositions by obscuring Kierkegaard's insistence on temporal action. Kierkegaard presents his ethic as requiring relations to our neighbour as an *other self*, but under Løgstrup's and Adorno's perspectives our relations to others are predefined by qualifiers like 'neighbour'[27] and those we relate to are denied the possibility of their own unique selfhood—this denial of the other's capacity to self-identify is representative of the nadir of Kierkegaard's ethic, as the ethic is committed to supporting and extending this capacity.

Conclusion

While there are concerns with locating God as the central figure in Kierkegaard's ethic of love, from a theological perspective it is entirely defensible. The theological commitments of Kierkegaard's Christianity do not undermine the ethic, nor do they undermine its structure in relation to other individuals. While both Løgstrup and Adorno are critical of Kierkegaard's advocacy of God's positioning, especially in regards to a possible isolationist commitment, it is a concern Kierkegaard himself shared. At issue for Kierkegaard was the possibility of using Christianity as a means of limiting self-identity, and even more problematically, denying

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However, the purpose behind this may not be indicative of conservatism, but on changing the *hearts of individuals*, not the structure of society; indirect changes to society by helping others love their neighbour is the proper social disposition.

[26] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* has a sustained critique of quantity as more valuable than quality throughout.

[27] This predefinition is not unremarked upon by Kierkegaard. While Kierkegaard advocates that loving the neighbour means loving each individual uniquely and separately, he also acknowledges that neighbour is not (at least traditionally) as neutral a term as it is often suggested. He uses an example of the Pharisee who wants to define his neighbour and in doing so delineate who he owes ethical duties to (which Kierkegaard frowns upon). By employing this example, Kierkegaard is showing a recognition that 'neighbour' does not necessarily mean non-preferential, nor does it necessarily mean given instead of chosen because we can define who our neighbour is, and so, following Løgstrup's reading, we would be replacing one type of preferential relationship with another.

others the possibility of self-identifying by projecting a social standard onto them. As we have seen, rather than use the God-relation as a way of overriding one's selfhood and the selfhood of others, Kierkegaard employs it as a means of forging equality between individuals in relation to God; no one can claim to have Godly authority over another, because each of us stand in the same relation to God. Furthermore, we have questioned the legitimacy of the criticism that Kierkegaard is a divine command ethicist. Again, from his Christian perspective this is not a problem, but on a more practical level the command itself does not seem to comprise the motivation for the ethic, but instead *supports* it—the individual is not directly called to act (as Abraham was), but finds within themselves the primordial desire to cultivate their own self and support the cultivation of other selves, with the command serving as guide and endorsement. From the Christian perspective, this reflects the primordial love imbued in us by God as creator.

A critical concern for both Løgstrup and Adorno, and important for our understanding of Kierkegaard's ethic being an ethic of cooperative self-becoming, is that the ethic promotes isolation, inaction, and alienation. However, as we have seen this is not the case, with each of their accounts lacking significant nuance in their understanding of both Kierkegaard's concept of self and neighbour. Each appeals to a more spiritualist reading of Kierkegaard that disregards the individual as a synthesis of both the spiritual *and* temporal, and in so doing each fails to present the individual as a full human, let alone a self. This is important because, as Johannes Climacus writes, "the humblest expression for the relationship with God is to acknowledge one's humanness" (*CUP*, 493), implying both the spiritual and temporal. So, contrary to the claims of both Løgstrup and Adorno, even an inwardly turned Christian is still human and must pursue human needs, and, since we are intimately related to others, we must satisfy the earthly needs of others as we satisfy our own—not because we can gain from them, not because we are certain our help will have the desired results, and not because we seek converts to our religion, but because others need and desire for *their self* to be loved just as we desire *our self* to be. Christianity, properly understood, stresses *temporal existence*, despite its relating to the spiritual (*CUP,* 292-3); just as a sacrament is an outward expression of an inward grace, loving the neighbour is an outward expressions of an inward disposition.

Thus far, we have been discussing Kierkegaard's ethics within a strictly Christian perspective, and arguing that adopting this perspective does not undermine his ethics, as critics like Løgstrup and Adorno have asserted. However, our interest is not solely with Kierkegaard's ethic as a Christian ethic, but as an ethic which is transferable beyond a Christian context—for not all readers of Kierkegaard will share or feel comfortable with the Christian outlook that he uses to inform his ethics. We must, therefore, shift our focus to a more secular reading of Kierkegaard and question not only if his ethics is transferable, but how. The intricate tapestry we have been weaving out of Kierkegaard's writings leaves us with the question of whether we can pull the Christian threads out without undoing the ethic entirely. To examine how to disentangle these various threads, we will attend to the distinction between religiousness B, the Christianity we have been preoccupied with, and religiousness A, the non-theological stage of the religious articulated in the pseudonymous works.

3| *Two Rival Expressions of the Religious Stage*

In the previous chapters, we have outlined Kierkegaard's Christian neighbour love ethic and evaluated criticisms of it. While we ultimately argued that Kierkegaard is able to answer these criticisms, the responses were based primarily on his unique interpretation of Christianity, and remained in the context of his Christian life-view—what he refers to in his philosophical, pseudonymic writings as "religiousness B". However, our interest is not solely with the ethic as a *Christian* ethic, but as an ethic transferable beyond its Christian context—which is to say, we are articulating his ethic as practicable and justifiable beyond one's theological commitments. To be more specific, in this chapter we are interested in examining whether Kierkegaard's ethic can be formulated in a way that does not require assent to theological doctrine. To answer this question within the context of Kierkegaard's authorship we must turn to his theory of stages and question whether there is within this theory a life-view consistent with his Christian life-view, but without the requisite theological commitments. While 'upbuilding' individuals to adopt a Christian life-view is without question the *telos* of Kierkegaard's philosophical and theological writings, it is not the only expression of what is deemed 'religious' as there is a stage preceding it: religiousness A. Religiousness A does not receive the same attention as religiousness B, Christianity, in Kierkegaard's authorship (nor in commentaries on it for that matter), but it may provide a solution to the question of whether Kierkegaard's ethic is viable beyond the appropriation of Christianity as truth.

However, we must first question the usage of the term 'religious,' as it obviously is a term loaded with connotations. In a colloquial sense we understand by religiousness that one embraces a religious creed or doctrine, and under such an interpretation there can be no secularisation of Kierkegaard's ethic.[1] However, we should recall that in the Introduction we discussed the difference between the names of the stages and their content: because they are not specific to domains or vocations, the stages do not directly refer to any specific affiliation of an individual.[2] The religious stage in particular should not be understood through such a myopic

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[1] Although contemporary philosophical has left this hard categorisation behind, unfortunately it remains a common interpretive lens when evaluating Kierkegaard's religious stage. Our hope is to reveal that such commitments are not baked into the religious stage, but are introduced in the appropriation of Christianity as truth.

[2] Just as an individual does not have to be, for example, employed by a law court or a professor of ethics to be considered an ethicist, the individual in the religious stage should not be thought of as being someone engaged in church life or a pastor. George Price commits to such an interpretation. He presents religiousness A as though it represents engagement in religious practice that is not decisively Christian (Price 1963, 183-8). However, as we have noted, the stages do not relate explicitly to their nomenclature, and so Price conflates the stage with religious expression which is problematic if we are to disentangle the stages. Religion can be, and is, practiced in each of the stages, albeit with distinct expressions, i.e., ethicists tend to express religiousness in a totalitarian and absolute way, demanding both that they be recognised as religiously authoritative, and their religious commitments as universally true and therefore free to be forced on others. Such an interpretation undermines the structure and dialectic that Kierkegaard produces by arbitrarily reducing the stage to its immediate connotations.

lens. If we understand the stages as life-views, dispositions affecting how we engage with existence, then the theological connotations of the religious stage serve to intensify the stage rather than being sufficient to define it—theological commitments are not constitutive of the religious stage, but augment it. While it is undoubtedly true that Christianity is the lens that Kierkegaard believes most felicitously captures the world, this does not preclude the possibility for other forms of belief (or non-belief) in the aforementioned religiousness A, which might still possess the same ethical content. Not only does the religious stage have the stage of the humourist preceding it, where there is definitely no requirement for religious affiliation, but it is also suggested in both *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Postscript* that religiousness A does not require religious affiliation either. It is this implication that we are interested in investigating, and so, in the following we will refer to doctrinal affiliation as 'theological' rather than religious, and keep religiousness as a reference to the stage and the stage alone.

Reading Kierkegaard outside of a Christian context is not a new endeavour by any means, and is sometimes executed very well and just as often executed poorly. Both Martin Matuštík (1993, 1996) and Jürgen Habermas (1989) present secular readings of Kierkegaard's categories, especially his writings on communication, with each arguing that a theological reading is not necessary in order to understand and utilise Kierkegaard's communicative philosophy. However, each of these is quite focused on one aspect of his thinking, and as Steven Backhouse notes, they each reinstate the *Sittlichkeit* which Kierkegaard's concept of the individual is meant to rebuff (Backhouse 2011, 207). Alison Assiter also transposes Kierkegaard into secular terminology, and while she recognises the importance of his religious thought, she downplays the theological dimension underwriting his philosophical and ethical views (Assiter 2009, 65). She correctly notes that ethical thought is aligned with what Kierkegaard calls the 'religious' but she notes this does not necessitate the individual being explicitly religious in a theological sense. Assiter's recognition of the importance of the religious stage to ethics helps separate her secularisation from more problematic interpretations,[3] many of which either divert attention from the religious stage to the ethical stage, or collapse the religious stage into the ethical stage—blurring the divisions and allowing for contradictory ethical commitments to be attributed to Kierkegaard. We will return to these interpretations in *§3*, but for the time being our attention will be on interpreting the pseudonyms who employ and describe religious concepts, and/or discuss the religious stage.

Johannes Climacus, author of the *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (along with an unpublished journal) is a pivotal figure in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship and will be an important guide throughout our discussion. Importantly, as C. Stephen Evans clarifies, Climacus is not himself a Christian—he appears to know about Christianity, but he does not speak with Christian authority or purpose. Thus, while we can understand him to present a religious (or humourist) life-view, it is specifically not Christianity that he presents (Evans 1983, 23). The centrality of Climacus to our discussion is made further credible when we keep in mind the closeness of his philosophical views to Kierkegaard's own. Evans argues

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[3] As we discussed in our introduction, these include both the interpretations that assume an 'ethical-religious' hybrid, and those which reduce the stages to an equilibrium and adopt the ethical stage as Kierkegaard's statement on ethics.

that they could be seen as indicative of Kierkegaard's philosophical views, given that Kierkegaard had considered putting his own name on those works (Evans 1983, 8). Johannes *de Silentio*, author of *Fear and Trembling*, is similarly religiously unaffiliated, and yet the content and focus of his book is directly religious—both in a theological, and a philosophical sense.[4] Jeffrey Hanson notes that going to church (*FT*, 39) is "the only overtly religious detail that finds its way into *Silentio*'s characterization" (Hanson 2017, 108). This contributes to Hanson's argument that *Fear and Trembling* does not make a specifically Christian argument, but nonetheless is compatible with a Christian world-view. Hanson constrains secular readings by noting that, at least from Kierkegaard's position, faith requires a revelation from God (even if Christianity is not adopted from the outset of that revelation, as there is the possibility of retrospectively reflecting on faith and realising the revelation as a Christian revelation from God) (Hanson, 2017, 3).[5] Hanson's constraint on the secular reading is valuable for understanding how the secular religiousness A can then become the theologically committed religiousness B, without collapsing the entirety of the religious stage into B; A is conditioned, retrospectively, with the appropriation of Christianity as truth, thus revealing that the individual was already in B without appreciating it. While each of the pseudonyms has Christianity in mind in their writings, they both represent the possibility of participating in the religious stage, in becoming a knight of faith, without explicitly requiring the appropriation of theological faith.

Before moving too deeply into this discussion, it is worth taking a brief pause and asking a question: why not adopt a rigidly theological perspective, one embracing Christianity, if that is the final goal of Kierkegaard's project? While we do not deny that this is indeed Kierkegaard's aim, it also does not solve the problem that we are interested in here. Adopting a doctrine based on theological assent is not, in itself, constitutive of the religious stage. Such commitments are present in each of the stages, where it is the disposition engendered by the stage that determines how each individual's commitments are expressed. Judge William in *Either/Or* is very transparent about his Christian beliefs, yet he is not a representative of the religious stage, but the ethical stage—his expression and relation to his theological commitments do not reflect religiousness. Similarly, we have just discussed two figures who stand in an opposite position to William—namely Johannes Climacus and Johannes *de Silentio*—both being associated with the religious but neither being theologically aligned (at least not explicitly). This suggests that there is a way of living the religious life of faith independent of doctrinal or theological commitments; the possibility for a sense of religiousness which is open to spirituality (in a broad sense) but does not *require it*: religiousness A. Thus, theological commitment is neither necessary nor sufficient for an individual to be in the sphere of religiousness. To further clarify the distinction we are drawing between religiousness and theological commitment, we can look to an example in the *Postscript*: monasticism.

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[4] Dunning views *Fear and Trembling* as a representation of religiousness A that distinguishes, from an ethical perspective, the ethical and religious stages (Dunning 1985, 124). However, while the argument of the text represents this distinction, he situates *de Silentio*, its author, within the ethical stage. This would situate *de Silentio* into a position similar to Climacus, as each would be discussing a stage subsequent to the one within which they have their existence.

[5] We can find parallels to this retrospective understanding in both the ironist and humourist stages: the ironist, when they become ethical, realises that they had a sense of the absolute which occasioned their choice to accept it; the humourist, upon moving into the religious stage, realises that they possessed faith, they just needed to make the leap from doubt. This would also reflect the oft-quoted notion that life is understood backwards, that is, in retrospect.

Climacus is critical of monasticism (*CUP* (Hannay), 325-60), although he does admit to a respect for the monastic life. For, while monks are closed off and abstracted from the world, they do not close themselves off from themselves; the emphasis on inwardness is remarked upon positively, but the lack of outward action in parallel to inwardness, due to their absconding from the life of the wider social community, renders the monastic life ethically impaired (*CUP* (Hannay), 267). This criticism reveals doctrinal devotion, and spiritual inwardness does not entail religiousness or engagement in the ethical task to become one's self. Monasticism encouraged inwardness, but at the expense of 'outwardness,' with the individual relinquishing as many possibilities for temptation in order to live a life of pure devotion—but without temptation, devotion becomes too easy. Monasticism, therefore, was not religious, in the sense of the religious stage, despite having theological commitment as its central concern. In fact, it had the requisite resignation, but not the all-important faith attendant to it. Because it was not a religious endeavour, Climacus argues that it was left prone to the rise of 'mediation,' philosophical reflection, which he sees as both a repudiation of monasticism in secular Protestantism and a secularisation of theology (*CUP*, 401-2). Monasticism shows that theological commitments are not a necessary condition for religiousness because even an individual whose life is committed to their theological beliefs is not necessarily in the religious stage, while an individual in the religious stage (or near to it) can be either theological or non-theological.

These two criticisms suggest that theological commitments, no matter how devotional and individualistic, are neither sufficient nor necessary to be definitive of religiousness for Kierkegaard. Not only are individuals who have theological beliefs not necessarily religious, but also institutions that are theologically grounded or focused are not necessarily religious[6]—theological commitment is necessary for religiousness B, but it is unclear whether it is similarly necessary for religiousness A, while being a Christian is not a sufficient condition for either religiousness B or A. While having an inward spirituality or theological commitment is suggested by Kierkegaard to be either common, or requisite, within the religious stage, they are no more common than in either the aesthetic or ethical stages. Furthermore, the agnostic (at least) Johannes Climacus presents himself at the edge of religiousness in the humourist stage (but notes that humour is the medium through which religiousness can be properly communicated, so he may well be considered religious but using the guise, the *in cognito*, of humour (*CUP*, 531-2)). This is important for further distinguishing the terminological problems associated with interpreting the stages, and the need to be attentive to each pseudonymous author's commitments and how they influence their perspectives. For our task, this leads us to ask: if it is not theological commitment that constitutes religiousness, what does?

Reconstructing the religious stage directly preceding religiousness B poses some difficulty as it is not only treated very minimally, but it is also spoken of only within the context of the pseudonymous authorship. Therefore, we must take care interpreting the works and interpreting who it is that represents the religious stage, and whether they represent a stage which is Christian, religiousness A, or otherwise, as their own commitments may help reveal legitimate commitments for the stage they are meant to inhabit. Thus, to make this position viable, distinguishing between religiousness A and religiousness B will be of significant importance

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[6] Kierkegaard's explicit and sustained critique of the Danish Christian Church is a testament to this.

to reconstructing religiousness A, and questioning whether religiousness A is *necessarily* theologically motivated in the same way that religiousness B is (*§1*). To clarify this, we will examine a situation that calls for an ethical response and test whether a theologically derived response is necessary or if the ethic Kierkegaard advocates can be applied without these commitments—before distinguishing B and A, we must first determine whether A is ethically viable. If religiousness A is indeed capable of responding ethically, what does it look like compared to religiousness B and how does it replace the theological assumptions (*§2*)? Finally, we will look at two potential problems: that religiousness A is just Kierkegaard's so-called ethical stage, and that religiousness A has internal problems requiring a return to the ethical stage or the embrace of Christian theology (*§3*).

§1 <u>The Sphere of Religiousness</u>

We have already had occasion to meet two of our primary guides in this discussion: Johannes Climacus, and Johannes *de Silentio*, but there are a variety of pseudonymous authors who also serve as representatives of religiousness whose religious affiliation is either denied, dismissed, or left unspoken. These include Frater Taciturnus and the Married Man[7] from *Stages on Life's Way*, and H.H—the author of two 'ethical-religious' essays. There are two other important exemplars of religiousness: Socrates, who appears to be associated with religiousness A in *Philosophical Fragments*, and Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*. While we will include Abraham in our discussion, Socrates introduces so many ambiguities that it is difficult to place him within Kierkegaard's theory of stages, and so he will be set aside.[8] None of these figures place themselves, or are placed, in the Christian-religious stage, and we will therefore be relying on these figures to furnish us with an understanding of religiousness A. To gain a sense of what we are talking about we must first examine some commonalities between the two forms of religiousness, and following this, we will delve into a discussion about how they are different and why these differences are important.

The primary motivation for focusing on the religious stage is its relation to ethics. It is within the stage of the Christian-religious that Kierkegaard's theological, and ethical, works are written, and we find in the pseudonymous writings a concurrence that the religious stage is the *only* stage that allows for genuine ethical action (even when they do not assume a Christian point of view). It is this preoccupation with ethics that serves

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[7] The Married Man is often misidentified as Judge William (Climacus even associates the two). However, there are very clear differences in the style and content of their respective letters, as well as clear distinctions in the introduction of the letters. For the sake of brevity we will use the latter to exemplify this: Victor Eremita is denied his 'right' to publish the letter despite having the right to publish William's, and the Married Man is identified as William Afham in *Stages*, while Judge William is only ever Judge William—this seemingly innocuous difference is important though, as it distinguishes between a single individual, and a representative of authority; one is a *self*, the other a *functionary*.

[8] Socrates, while seemingly presented as the example of religiousness A in *Philosophical Fragments*, is never explicitly referred to within that stage. Furthermore, he is elsewhere considered to be an ironist and in the *Postscript* is an ethicist (*CUP*, 503). The connection to the Socrates found in Plato's, Aristophanes', and Xenophon's works is also somewhat ambiguous, with Socrates often serving as a recognisable figure for Kierkegaard to use, rather than referring to the historical figure himself. This would not be uncommon in Kierkegaard's *oeuvre*, as he often re-writes myths, legends, Biblical parables, etc. to highlight and accentuate certain concerns he is trying to convey. An alternative approach may be to accept that Socrates is an ironist, becoming associated with religiousness A because irony parallels humour. The relationship between the humourist 'stage' and religiousness A is not only found in their focus on immanence, but also in the negative aspect of faith: doubt. The implication of this is that religiousness A's faith is predicated on doubt, rather than on a positive perception of God and revelation.

as a connective tissue between religiousness A and B, and their twinned response to the ethical stage's contentless ethic reveals their parallel purpose. Each stage of the religious argues that the ethical life-view offers a temptation to resist the ethical demands of the religious stage, especially personal responsibility in caring for others. The ethical stage tempts in two primary ways: interpreting ethics as abstracted from one's own life, and viewing ethics as a matter of personal and isolated interest. Within the ethical stage, the individual adopts a set of abstract ethical principles that allows them to measure themselves against others. This shifts the focus from ethical striving (striving to improve one's ethics in practice) to accruing ethical standing in order to attain a sense of self-righteousness or ethical/moral superiority. Rather than questioning ethical prescriptions when they come into conflict with other precepts, the ethicist assumes the correctness of the one which best represents their interests (as we have seen in the case of the Pharisees earlier)—this is especially true of the precept to care for/love each neighbour, as this precept can be overruled (i.e., we find women deserving less ethical treatment than men in Judge William's ethic (cf: *E/OII*, 311-6). The temptation, we can say, is to view ethics in relation to subjective interests, while also assuming an objective basis for them: my preferences happen to be the unquestionably and universally correct ones.

Interlude: An Imaginary Re-Construction

Before developing these concepts further, we will set up an example to clarify the ethics of the religious stage in practice. This example, an 'imaginary re-construction,'[9] will draw on an historical figure, but in order to clarify the argument will have certain elements bracketed. To set the example within the context of our discussion, we will first note that many of the ethical principles we have already had occasion to discuss in Chapter 1 from the Christian perspective are evident in the pseudonymous works, which helps to clarify that Kierkegaard does not see Christian revelation as revealing the limitations of human ethics, but that it is in the conflict within human ethics that a higher *ethos* is revealed. Our example will draw on this revelation of ethical limitations, and sketch the ethical response of the religious stage *in toto*. Thus, our example will be grounded in a conflict of ethical duties, one that occasions a suspension of the ethical in the revelation of the need for a higher ethos. To put it more succinctly: we will be constructing an example of a knight of faith paralleling Abraham, but lacking the explicitly theological and extreme character of his journey to Mount Moriah.

Our proposed knight of faith will be Rosa Parks, with her Mount Moriah being her decisive choice not to relinquish her seat to a white person. As noted, we will be reconstructing this example in order to highlight the tensions we are discussing—rather than an in-depth recounting of the historical event and it's context (as important as these are, they remain beyond the scope of this discussion); instead we will be using a relatively simplistic rendering of the story bracketing her theological commitments[10] and thematising the tensions between the ethical duties placed on her within a secular context. Our goal is to present her decision as a possible

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[9] This terminology is lifted from *Stages on Life's Way* where Quidam's journal ("Guilty/Not Guilty") is an 'imaginary construction' of Frater Taciturnus—an experiment meant to illustrate the interplay of the stages in the life of Quidam. We subtly alter this to 're-construction' because, rather than being fully imaginative, we are drawing on a historical example with some modifications.

[10] Rosa Parks was indeed religiously Christian (cf: Reed & Parks, 1994). However, understanding her actions if we bracket these out, or present her as not *decisively* Christian and therefore within the sphere of religiousness A, allows us to investigate whether theological commitment is *necessary* to practice the ethic.

representative of the ethics of religiousness by casting the decision as a suspension of the ethical, and question whether this *requires* the theological commitments of the Abraham story.

Rosa Parks' decision to remain in her seat could be understood as a teleological suspension of the ethical because it represents the suspending of two ethical imperatives. Her decision to remain seated displays a suspension of the social morality that holds that segregation is just, as well as a suspension of the presupposition that all people are equal, which is also held as a central tenet of her society, in a way that was taken to be consistent with the justice of segregation. The former is suspended by her action, which silently calls into question its justification in the face of the precept that all are created equal—in fact, the two cannot both be just. However, while it clear that the social morality is being suspended, there is also a suspension of the precept that all people are equal within her society. The latter is suspended in the recognition of the distorted reading of equality: separate but equal does not actually entail equality. This reveals a limitation to the idea that all people are equal and this limitation motivates the decision to remain in her seat—the distorted interpretation of all being equal (but with separate expressions of that equality) must be suspended if it is to be overcome. Parks cannot understand herself as equal to the white person if she is being asked to relinquish her seat to him, and so this contemporary upholding of the precept must be suspended in order to open the possibility for a reading that would more faithfully represent the precept. Parks has no certainty that she will receive the equality and freedom that is just even if the presupposition of equality claimed by human institutions is suspended, as this may only reveal the limitations of those institutions; her suspension calls into question the presupposition of equality.

This suspension does not require a specific command from God, as we find in *Fear and Trembling*, nor does it require theological commitments (as it is two secular ethical systems that are in conflict and being suspended within a secular context). However, it does entail *faith*,[11] in a similar way that Abraham's task does. It requires both a leap and occasions sacrificing something which is all-important to Rosa Parks:[12] her own freedom. To address the latter, her goal to attain a higher equality and freedom (not just for herself, but for others) must be sacrificed within the moment of her refusing to give up her seat. There is not only no assurance that the freedom she is demanding through her actions will be realised, but what freedom she currently has is placed at the sacrificial altar because of the legal repercussions of her actions. Just as when Abraham places on the altar what is most dear to him, there are equally no guarantees that her sacrifice will lead to the result she has faith in realising; the higher freedoms she is acting for are not guaranteed by her actions. Furthermore, she has no foreknowledge of whether her action will have the desired effect (social change), nor that it will be

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[11] Faith and trust are intimately connected in Kierkegaard's works. Faith represents a transformation of trust, a trust that cannot be broken. For example, we find this in the faith that our actions will be recognised as loving by the beloved; we *trust* in their recognition. Faith is an intensified form of trust because it is directly tied to inwardness; my faith does not hinge on my trust being secured. Thus, faith does not represent or require theological backing, but is related to our ability to trust others in this intensified manner.

[12] 'All-important' is key, as it is not just that Abraham loves his child, but that he loves *Isaac*—or else there should be a similar drama for Ishmael (but there is not). Therefore, it is not the willingness to sacrifice a child that is important in the drama of the *Akedah*, but the sacrifice of what Abraham sees as all-important: the child promised to him.

understood as more than just her being tired or an act of unprincipled rebellion.[13] Her decision is a *statement* with meaning extending beyond the action itself and requires faith, *trust*, that it will be recognised as such.

She also exhibits the double-movement of resignation and faith central to the movement into the religious sphere: she resigns her freedom (both physical and judicial) but has faith in the restoration of those freedoms transformed (i.e., without the limitations of segregation). This connects the sacrifice of what is dear to her with the leap, the actual decisive choice not to move despite the limited power she has to cause change. While we can look back into the past and see the justness of her actions, and the role it played in the larger fight for civil rights, there was no certainty that it would acquire the recognition that it did, nor have the lasting inspirational effect that it has had. It is not difficult to posit a sense of 'fear and trembling' within Parks, having made a decision for which there was no security, thus occasioning faith, faith that her principles are more just than the prevailing system. In an *Exordium* to this story, we may find an example where she imagines herself remaining in her seat, recognising the injustice of her present system, but, fearing legal reprisal or social stigmatism, moves to the back infinitely resigned to the system and content to be understood as conforming to the ethical demands of her society, content with the limited freedom she has, and content with the possibility of change at some point—thus stopping short of faith and returning to the ethical life-view. This would represent the failure to make the leap, the failure to grasp and act on faith in a more just *ethos* in favour of the certainty of ethical resignation (even if the ethic resigned to is unethical).

That Rosa Parks made the leap of faith and *acted* is what is considered ethical on Kierkegaard's account—the successful result of one's decision is partially influenced by accident, but resolutely acting on the *intention* remains central to ethical action. Furthermore, the lack of security that we find in her relinquishing her freedom is mirrored by a lack of security in terms of understanding. While her sacrifice may be understood in hindsight, within the moment its justification is beyond the scope of the social *ethos*. Thus, while not as dramatic or radical—although her actions were radical within her own time—as Abraham's laying Isaac on the altar, she nonetheless makes a sacrifice with the faith that what is sacrificed, her freedom, will be restored in an intensified/heightened form. While Rosa Parks was not acting in complete isolation, her choice reflected her own contribution to the growing civil rights movement, a contribution unique to her, and one which required faith, both in the success of her actions and that her actions would not be misunderstood. Just as one misunderstands Abraham by imagining that his action is universalisable and not a task peculiar to him, one misunderstands the example set by Parks by assuming that to fight for civil rights is only expressible through refusing to give up one's seat. What is important is not how radical the action is, nor whether the action can be reproduced or replicated to the same effect—what is important is its foundation: faith in a higher *ethos*.

Jeffrey Hanson writes, "faith is not just the readiness to sacrifice; it is right and important to concede that the knife is in Abraham's own hand, but the mechanism of loss is not the decisive issue in faith. *Faith demonstrates itself in the readiness to receive back what is given up*, and the exact mechanism by which loss

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[13] "People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in" (Parks & Haskins, 1992, 116).

is suffered may therefore not be the most important issue for the knight of faith" (Hanson, 2017, 83, my emphasis). It is not a set of actions that indicate faith, nor the dramatic, radical, or historical significance of an action. It is in the readiness to receive back what is sacrificed (this is exemplified by forgiveness: we must be ready to receive forgiveness to forgive others). This is true in the case of Abraham, whose willingness to sacrifice Isaac is not done out of blind obedience to God, but on the faith that Isaac will be restored and his relation to Isaac transformed. We also see this in the example of Rosa Parks, where the sacrifice of her freedom in the face of legal and social reprisal is done in the faith of a restoration of freedom transformed: a freedom more reflective of the equality which has been interpreted through a distorted lens. We can agree with Hanson when he stresses that "it is preferable on the whole to seek out interpretations that conduce to admiration and application of Abraham's story as told by *de Silentio* to the reader's own experience" (Hanson, 2017, 83). By reconstructing Rosa Parks' decision within the context of the suspension of the ethical, we can see how the ethic of religiousness can be active and underlying within courses of actions that arise in everyday life but which are not religious in any theological sense.

The necessity of having faith as exhibited in the example is important in understanding what Kierkegaard means when he speaks of faith in relation to ethics. Rosa Parks need not be in religiousness B (possess faith in Christian truth) to have acted in the way that she did, but her actions do indeed reflect religiousness (she could be cast as a knight of faith[14]), and so we see how religiousness A and B share an ethical expression. Furthermore, the example set by Parks is an example not only drawn from life, but drawn from *everyday* life; her decision to remain in her seat on the bus as radical as it was, is not as shocking as Abraham's willingness to place Isaac on the altar, but ethical actions are not always so extreme, in fact, often they do not appear extreme at all.[15] Hanson's suggestion that we should interpret *de Silentio*'s Abraham in such a way as to reveal its application within everyday life is instructive in revealing the intertwining of ethics and faith at the core of the religious stage; assuming one's own righteousness is a temptation of the ethical stage, while ethical striving represents a transformation of the ethical—both one's own and beyond oneself—through faith. The example of Abraham shows the extremity of the ethic of faith, much like pointing to an extremist political group to describe one side of the political spectrum, but our example of Rosa Parks provides a more moderate position, that one's actions do not need to place the lives of our children on the line to gain ethical importance for Kierkegaard, and that ethics is necessary and practicable within everyday life. One does not need to walk to

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[14] We can further this point by noting the importance of the sacrifice of her freedom, that when she acted she did not act flippantly, or out of a sense of boredom (as the aesthete might) but with a clear intention and an understanding that she was making a sacrifice. We can easily imagine that there would have been 'fear and trembling' as she made the decision, but her resolve allowed her to act despite that. Her willingness to sacrifice is also indicative of the intensifying of self-consciousness, of the arising of subjectivity and a sense of self; it was not only a decision that she made for herself of her own volition, but one which was made in the form of a 'resolution' (an important aspect of choice in the religious stage as outlined by the Married Man). In becoming a (potential) knight of faith, Rosa Parks was thrust into a decisive situation, which she *chose* to act on, she resisted the temptation of generality (the ethical and ethical resignation), and made a willing sacrifice for a seemingly impossible goal. This required her to suspend the ethical, to find room for a transformed ethic, and, in hindsight, we can find the restoration of freedom, a freedom transformed, as a result of her (and other civil rights proponents') action.

[15] This is particularly true to Kierkegaard's emphasis on hiddenness: one's actions do not need to be outwardly *seen* as loving, or ethical, what is important is that they *are*.

Mount Moriah to illustrate the interrelation of ethical practice and faith, as ethics is occasioned daily, whether in our everyday social interactions, or on our way home.

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With this example of the ethic of the religious stage in mind, we can return to our main discussion, but with a deeper appreciation of the relationship between faith and ethics. Our example is in agreement with Evans' claim that religious existence requires one to exist ethically, but this does not necessitate being theologically or doctrinally religious (Evans 1983, 139). Hanson uses the term "second ethics" to describe the necessary change in ethics between the ethical and religious spheres (Hanson 2017, 6-7), an idea shared with Evans (Evans 2004, 52), and in concert with Davenport's much stronger interpretation of a higher-ethics "that transcends all common moral codes sanctioned by tradition, government, culture, or even natural reason in general" (Davenport 2008, 169).[16] This concept plays a pivotal role throughout Hanson's book *Kierkegaard and the Life of Faith*, serving as an important statement on the reinvention of ethics after the suspension of the ethical; the religious stage does not dispense with ethics, but transforms it. Hanson is therefore correct to say that Kierkegaard is less concerned with positing a rift between ethics and religion or advocating that being unethical is valid if it is justified by faith, but instead is advocating that the life of faith "should alter the entirety of our lives" (Hanson 2017, 1-2); the religious disposition affects existence. We can further define who it is that is engaging in ethics by looking at Assiter's claim that Kierkegaard's presentation of Abraham represents a simple human being who is "flawed and dependent" (Assiter 2009, 75). The focus on the ethical life in the religious stage is evident in each of these accounts, but if we combine Hanson's and Davenport's arguments about the 'reinvention' of ethics in the religious stage with Assiter's "flawed and dependent" individual we find the basis for the ethic of cooperative self-becoming we favoured, but without its previous theological foundation. Once again, we find that religiousness is not grounded on theological presuppositions, but on the way we understand and engage with the world: as flawed, dependent individuals who have an interest in the self-becoming of both ourselves and others.

As alluded to in the Rosa Parks example, while religiousness is linked to ethics, it is not a divine command ethic.[17] While on a surface level it may appear that the supremacy of a divine command ethic is central to the story of Abraham, in fact that is not what is at stake in *Fear and Trembling*. *De Silentio* is not advocating for placing a divine command ethic over all other ethics—although Davenport's higher-ethics is grounded on this reading. *De Silentio* lacks religious affiliation, so we can presume that he would place little stock in divine command beyond the Abraham story. Instead, the requirement is recognition of the need for a second ethics when previously absolute ethical demands come into conflict and/or reveal themselves as relative. This is resolved by either adopting a disposition of infinite resignation (the ethical stage) or faith (the religious stage); infinite resignation here is absolutising a relative ethic (Rosa Parks relinquishing her seat),

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[16] It should be mentioned that Davenport presents a much more extreme position than we are supporting, as he advocates a divine command ethic. While substantially this picture of a higher ethic that transcends previous ethical evaluations is agreeable, the picture that Climacus paints of religiousness A does not require that transcendence to be beyond human comprehension or understanding, but instead the higher ethic could be rooted in our common humanity.

[17] A claim we have argued against in the introduction and Chapter 1 within an explicitly Christian context as well.

whereas faith recognises the relativism of each and reaches for an alternative (Rosa Parks decisively acting in opposition to *Sittlichkeit*)—rather than her actions leading to the substitution of one ethic for the other, it initiates a new ethic by drawing each relative claim into a relation with the other (highlighting the inequalities within society revealed the limitations of the ideal that all are created equal, thus allowing for a transformation in understanding how all could *actually* be treated equitably). What is important is not that the knight of faith is given a divine command or has a specific and complete understanding of what the higher ethic needed is, but that she is thrust into a decision where there is no certainty that the course of action will *fully express* the higher ethic and no certainty that the actions undertaken will have the success aimed at; and yet she acts—ethics, therefore, become a matter of *striving*.

Our Rosa Parks example helped elucidate the ethic of the sphere of religiousness as disconnected from divine or theological commitments (although they are obviously not precluded from the religious stage). However, we have yet to fully articulate the non-theological religiousness A. Hanson, at times, uses "faith" and "Christianity" interchangeably, stemming from his recognition of the *telos* of Kierkegaard's corpus—notably when arguing that a rhetorical approach is insufficient to show Abraham's faith (Hanson 2017, 72). But, Abraham's faith cannot be Christian, as Christ had not yet come into the world.[18] Abraham is indeed religious, and possesses religious faith, but that faith is distinct from the faith of religiousness B and what is highlighted in *Fear and Trembling* is not his theological commitment, but his commitment to a transformation of ethics (faith in his God's command as ethical); in our secular account of Rosa Parks (bracketing out her actual Christian beliefs) we find ethics as the central concern, with her action being motivated by a recognition of the relativity of her contemporary social ethics and ideals and the need for transformative action. The transformed ethic that is indirectly communicated in her action is as viable within religiousness A as it would be within religiousness B, and so the central feature of the religious is the ethic itself, not the theological commitments that intensify or alter ethical demands.

As Climacus notes, Christianity is reflective of an approach to existence that provides a rich and profound qualification to one's faith (*CUP*, 353-4). For Climacus, Christianity does not necessarily need to be *the* faith of the subjective person, but becoming a Christian *enhances* one's subjectivity by intensifying one's faith. Understood this way, it is not inconsistent for Abraham to be the father of faith without being a Christian. This is because there is the religious, and the Christian-religious (*CUP*, 299). The former is what is elsewhere referred to as religiousness A. Here we see it being invested with its own stature as a legitimate representative of the religious stage, distinct from each of the previous stages (the aesthetic and ethical) as well as being distinct from religiousness B. Religiousness A is not Christian, which requires both theological commitment and the disposition developed in the religious stage, but does incorporate the *pathos* of religious existence (suffering, guilt, etc.) and is thereby a distinct part of the religious stage despite lacking theological commitment (*CUP*, 555).

However, while religiousness A is distinguished from religiousness B in the *Fragments* and *Postscript*, Evans is right to point out that religiousness A and religiousness B can be difficult to disentangle because they are not distinguished in *other* pseudonymous works (Evans 1983, 42). We have already sketched out the shared

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[18] This is of central importance to the paradoxical-religiousness of religiousness B.

ethic of the religious sphere and it will now be our job to tease out the distinctions between religiousness A and B to furnish ourselves with a clear understanding of what exactly religiousness A is and what it lacks in comparison to religiousness B. As stated, we will be relying primarily on Kierkegaard's pseudonymous literature to develop our understanding of the religious stage, as it will provide us with both a non-Christian perspective of the religious and point us towards the borders between a theologically-neutral religiousness A and Christianity. The importance of making this distinction will be to highlight certain ethical implications arising in religiousness A that are not evident in religiousness B, and *vice-versa*.

§1.1 A versus B

We have, of course, already discussed many of the contours of religiousness B as it relates to selfhood, community, and ethics. To further develop this, we will now highlight that religiousness B is focused on the paradox of a transcendent God entering into time and creating a standard of judgment within time—this is the historicity of Christ as a *theological* historicity wherein everyone is equally contemporaneous with God, regardless of their distance from that historical point of departure. The primary focus of *Philosophical Fragments* is to outline and clarify that the truth of Christianity is independent of theological or philosophical truth; it is not an argument to be accepted or declined, but requires the individual to, with faith, appropriate a Christian disposition—it asks the individual to have faith in the absurd paradox that God became man, and that the word of God (as presented in the Bible) is directed at each individual. This is contrasted with the Socratic model, which is implied to represent the ethical sphere, as it relates to an interest in speculation *on* Christianity, rather than an interest *in* Christianity. However, the term religiousness B, and its prior manifestation religiousness A, are not introduced until the *Postscript*, which takes pains to separate each from the ethical stage's point of view. Where religiousness B is interested in a transcendent God who entered into time, religiousness A is cast as 'immanently religious.' But, what exactly is meant by immanent in relation to the religious, and how does immanence affect the religious ethic we have been advocating throughout this thesis? To answer this, we will briefly examine two significant distinctions within the religious stage: transcendence/immanence (*i*); and sin/guilt-consciousness (*ii*). By no means will this alone be representative of all the differences between the two forms of religiousness; but nonetheless, they are central features that will aid in clarifying and separating these two expressions of the religious sphere. Thus, while the Rosa Parks was designated a knight of faith, she may not be Christian-religious.

a) Transcendent vs. Immanent: In religiousness B, the absolute is outside the world and offers a criterion independent of existing beings (i.e., Christianity posits God outside the world, and existing beings, humans, relate to God as wholly transcendent). Focusing on transcendence situates judgment outside of the world, and therefore the absolute is unknowable, inaccessible, and requires heightened faith; Christianity offers a religious criterion beyond commentary or criticism from a human perspective. In religiousness A, by contrast, absolute value is assigned to existence and to existing beings—it is immanent to the world. To explain this, Climacus states that "religiousness A, which is the individual's own pathetic transformation of existence… has to do with the purely human, in such a way that every human being, viewed essentially, must be

assumed to have a share in this blessedness and finally becomes blessed"[19] and there arises a "sympathetic humour" between the individual in the religious stage as well as those who are not, where "the earnest lies in the fact that the religious person does not let himself be put out by comparing himself with others" (*CUP* (Hannay), 489). Religiousness A is a specifically human form of religiousness, but, like religiousness B, retains 'hidden inwardness'—the idea that others do not know whether you are religious (in regards to both the sphere and theologically), and likewise you do not know whether others are (we can recall that Rosa Parks is only a possible example of a knight of faith because we cannot be certain). This necessitates two facets of faith: faith that you can, through indirect communication, communicate your hidden inwardness (i.e., through action), and faith that others have their own hidden inwardness which they indirectly communicate through their actions. Hidden inwardness compels us to try to understand others in order to understand their actions, rather than assuming intentions or purposes. This faithful disposition extirpates the need for comparison, because there is a trust that your hidden inwardness mirrors the hidden inwardness of others—occasioning sympathetic respon-siveness.[20]

Religiousness A thus "has only universal human nature as its presupposition" and the disposition to-wards a universal happiness is expressible within that stage (*CUP*, 559), while religiousness B requires a transformation of the world by God's entrance into it—it requires the revelation of a God who was, but is no longer, in the world. Evans describes the "immanent" religious stage as "human consciousness and experience apart from supernatural revelation" (Evans 1983, 12) (importantly adding that it is also independent of cultural institutions (Evans 1983, 138)), and therefore distinct from religiousness B's foundation on a particular theo-logical revelation while still remaining religious.[21] This helps disentangle religiousness A and B, but we should be careful not to disentangle them entirely. While religiousness B has a transcendent source commanding neighbour love, we find an indirect call in religiousness A, as "religiousness A is the dialectic of taking to heart; it is the relation to an eternal happiness that is not conditioned by a something, but is the dialectical taking to heart of the relation itself, conditioned alone, that is, by the taking to heart" (*CUP* (Hannay), 465). It is investment in the relation of "taking to heart" that is important. It is not an intellectual endeavour, but one intimately connected to our emotions—it is the "pathetic transformation of existence". Within this we may strike a balance: love of others in religiousness B is occasioned by revelation and grounded in transcendent authority; love of others in religiousness A derives from human sympathy, and taking that sympathy to heart.

The unknowable transcendence of religiousness B is therefore only partially evident in religiousness A through the hiddenness of inwardness. For Climacus this unknowability is just as ridiculous as it is

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[19] The Hong translation presents a less theological rendering of 'blessed,' translating this passage as "every human being, viewed essentially, participates in this eternal happiness and finally becomes eternally happy" (*CUP*, 581). I use the Hannay translation because the theological overtones are more in keeping with the overall advocacy of religiousness B, but I present the Hong translation here to note that reading it without such strong theological connotations is legitimate.
[20] This is found in *Fear and Trembling* as well.
[21] We can again illustrate the independence of religiousness A from theological institutions by referring to Climacus' example of the pagan. For Climacus, the subjective individual who praises an idol with passionate subjective inwardness is truly praising God (*CUP*, 201). This accords well with Evans' statement that "the religious life can perfectly well be carried on without any special 'revelation' or religious authority, and it does not depend upon some particular historical religion being true" (*KFP*, 13). What is important is impassioned subjectivity—"taking to heart".

> with something that can be understood, to listen to obscure superstition and rhapsodizing about its incomprehensibility, the converse too is just as ridiculous: to see attempts, in connection with what is essentially paradoxical, attempts at wanting to understand it, as though this were the task and not the qualitative opposite, namely, holding on to the fact that it cannot be understood, in case understanding, i.e., misunderstanding, ends up by also confusing all the other spheres. (*CUP* (Hannay), 471)

This is the common problem in trying to transpose Kierkegaard's view of Christianity and religious concepts into secular accounts. The desire to understand the paradoxical nature of religiousness collapses it into the ethical. The incomprehensibility of the paradox can be contrasted with religiousness A's human foundations. Climacus, discussing religiousness A, says that "admittedly speculation keeps to immanence even if it has to be understood as something other than Hegel's pure thought; but speculation must not call itself Christian. That is why I have never called religiousness A Christian, or Christianity" (*CUP* (Hannay), 470) and later adds that "religiousness A, which is not speculation but still speculative, reflects upon this distinction by reflecting upon existing; but even the decisive definition of guilt-consciousness is still within immanence" (*CUP* (Hannay), 478). Thus there is a way of speculating, which is to say thinking philosophically, in religiousness A, but this is because it does not reach for the transcendent, it is content with the human—with developing an understanding of subjectivity. However, it is clear from the reference to Hegel (a subtle denial of religiousness A as equivalent to the ethical stage) that this speculation cannot be about pure thought, cannot be interested in pure abstraction, and must relate to the actuality of human existence and experience.

By removing the necessity of revelation and decentring transcendent absoluteness, in the "immanent sphere" authority is either "utterly unthinkable" or "transitory" (*WA*, 99). This statement by H.H. is in reference to the paradoxical-religious sphere, and he refers to Kierkegaard's *Upbuilding Discourses* as a positive statement of the authority of transcendence as distinct from the authority of existing individuals, which suggests he may be referring to the two expressions of religiousness. However, this appears to blur the line between religiousness A and the ethical stage. We can perhaps make this distinction clearer by noting that in the ethical sphere authority exists within the individual's *choice* which they cast as absolutely authoritative—but is, in reality, transitory (i.e., *Sittlichkeit* changes as one's society changes). This suggests religiousness A as the alternative: authority is "utterly unthinkable". This would accord well with the great difficulty in moving into, and remaining in, the religious sphere, and in particular religiousness A. It would mean there is no guide or affirmation like that found in the transcendent command; we saw this above in the Rosa Parks example, where we argued that while there are no guarantees that her actions *fully* express the higher ethic which she intuitively seeks to bring into the world, she must still continue to strive to manifest that ethic. While we may have an intuition of how things *should* be, even those actions which most appear ethical may fail to meet the mark. This intensifies the need for faith: faith that our striving will lead us to better expressions of the ethic, and faith that others are examples, or will follow our example of striving. This latter aspect of faith suggests a greater emphasis on alterity in religiousness A, as it places our common humanity at the heart of ethical authority and entails a greater faith that others not only inhabit this stage but seek to actively communicate it.

John Wall, discussing Levinas' concept of transcendence, can help clarify how immanence and alterity are intertwined, rather than exclusive: "Otherness is not purely Transcendence but also immanent, meaningful, disruptive to the world as it happens to be concretely. Its claim is not general or abstract but particular and

singular. It makes not just a religious but also a worldly moral demand" (Wall 2005, 129). Religiousness A, or immanent religiousness, does not therefore lead to a diminished engagement with others because it lacks a transcendent command to love, but instead reformulates the relationship to others as a relationship to other selves reflecting *our* self despite being separate.[22] By making immanence central in religiousness A, it is the commonalities of being subjective that are emphasised, despite differences in tasks and separate existences— we are accountable to other subjects rather than a transcendent other (God) and so our ethical striving is to meet the needs of others (including our contemporaries, our predecessors, and our successors) rather than to live up to an external command. Alterity and subjective existence become critical elements of the ethic, while sympathy opens us to mutuality so we can express and refine our self-becoming in cooperation while support-ing theirs.

In a similar vein, Merold Westphal notes that Anti-Climacus is ambiguous when discussing the alterity that serves as the ground of the self, as it is sometimes referred to directly as God, but elsewhere is referred to by different names, with Westphal arguing that this "leaves it open to the reader to explore understandings of the eternal different from the biblical God" (Westphal 2010, 48). Two alternative grounds discussed by West-phal are Nature (aesthetic) and Society (ethical, and, more specifically, related to Hegel's philosophical sys-tem) (Westphal 2010, 49-50); but each is unsatisfactory as they are impersonal, reliant on pure necessity/ab-solute freedom, and do not lead to the self, one circumventing selfhood in favour of categories of external designation (*moira* or the crowd respectively). An alternative, without God, could be *others*, as in other indi-viduals directly, rather than society. This would align with those authors in religiousness A (as well as Kier-kegaard himself) who address their writings to "the single individual". Society can be critiqued as a corrupting influence on the individuals comprising it, but individuals who have been corrupted can be offered reconcili-ation while the abstract 'society' cannot—alterity extends to the other as a self, rather than to institutions or designations that are then applied to individuals.[23] Both Wall and Westphal offer us a compelling replacement to the transcendent call of God, the immanent appeal of the other: the voice of the neighbour.

b) Sin/Guilt-consciousness: Sin- and guilt-consciousness are intertwined in Kierkegaard's existential philosophy and his ethics, with the primary distinction being sin's requirement of *divine revelation*. So, while religiousness A shares a consciousness of culpability with religious B (Llewelyn 2008, 79), it is not the height-ened consciousness of sin. In the religious stage, sin and guilt are particularised within the individual ('quali-tative'), rather than being generalised ('quantitative'). So, the religious individual recognises sinfulness/guilt as generated within themselves, rather than passed down to them, or a totality they contribute to;[24] it is through one's own actions that sinfulness is posited.[25] My guilt, my sinfulness, is my own and reconciliation is only

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[22] In *§3* we will explore the problems that arise in religiousness A because of this lack of authority and the lack of moti-vational thrust when the revelation of the command to love the neighbour is absent.

[23] This is reminiscent of our response to Løgstrup's false equivalency. It is the 'self' of the other that occasions ethical responsiveness, not their relational designations—I owe my ethical duties to the other's self and thereby avoid circum-scribing ethics relative to my relationship with another.

[24] Cf: *The Concept of Anxiety*, where investing the categories of sin and guilt with a *qualitative* definition is the central concern.

[25] In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis argues that sin came into the world through the *intention* to sin, it is not Adam's having made a mistake or an accident that initiated sin; sin was brought into the world through Adam's intentional actions

possible through personal atonement: making amends. Thus, sin must be understood subjectively: I am a sinner (qualitative), not we are all sinners (quantitative)—this is the most painful recognition though, because it forces the individual to take responsibility for sinfulness (*CUP*, 224). We can draw a contrast here: the Pastor in *Either/Or* is sinful because humanity is and he participates in the total sinfulness of all humans, thus reconciliation is only possible through God's dispensation; alternatively, the religious individual is sinful through *their* transgressions and must, *in tempore*, make amends. The Pastor does not advocate ethical striving because overcoming sinfulness is beyond his power; the religious individual must strive because sinfulness is *their own fault*. Admittedly, within the Christian-religious we are unable to expunge ourselves of sinfulness without God's help, but this does not exempt us from the need to strive.[26] However, while this example shows a distinction between the ethical concept of sin as universal, and the Christian-religious concept of sin as particular, it does not elucidate religiousness A's concept of guilt.

Religiousness A's guilt is often presented in such a way that it appears to be a secular version of sinfulness—a recognition of our fallibility and our propensity for failure, but lacking divine revelation of the possibility for *complete* reconciliation; where transcendent religiousness offers an eschatological forgiveness of sins, immanent religiousness must strive for an impossible forgiveness while existing. This is further complicated, as God (in religiousness B) must be the highest court in relation to our guilt, which forces us into introspection and earnestness (*CUP*, 530); we must strive to be honest to ourselves to understand our failings because we are always in the presence of a God who sees through us. But, when that God is absent, it is up to us to motivate our own self-openness, our own earnestness: we must become our own judge (and see others as judges), rather than casting ourselves as the judge of others. It is because of this need to be self-open in guilt-conscious that we discover our self, our subjective identity is retained in guilt-consciousness (*CUP*, 534)—we discover that *we* are guilty in particular, and in our own particular way. It is our self which is guilty, and our self for which we must seek forgiveness. While the revelation of sinfulness makes us accountable to God, in religiousness A we are accountable to ourselves *and* to others in our need for forgiveness: we must make amends to those we wrong, including our own self—even if those we wrong are sinful themselves (as we sympathetically trust in their striving for forgiveness).

We can therefore understand why Climacus says that "guilt is the most concrete expression of existence", because it results from one's immersion in existence, and is related to the suffering which results from the misrelation between the finite and infinite (in the self) (*CUP*, 528). Our failures highlight our self as a misrelation: without a concept of sin, there is no possibility for the forgiveness of sin, and so guilt is constantly reminding us of our misrelation. This is intensified when the individual recognises their guilt and relates it to an "eternal blessedness" as this qualitatively changes the nature of guilt into eternal guilt, because any guilt is more guilt than an eternal happiness can abide (occasioning the need for forgiveness of sin) (*CUP*, 529). While

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(*CA*, 29). So, not only is sinfulness particularised to us, but it also relates specifically to our decision, to our *agency*. This makes it qualitative, because it is a quality inherent to us, rather than something outside of us which we contribute to (we do not add to the problem of sin, but reintroduce sin into the world through our decisions and actions).

[26] We find ourselves reminded of the tension of Kierkegaard's theological commitments that resists a grace-based salvation, despite acknowledging that grace is indeed the only way to actually receive full remission from sin.

"eternal blessedness" has an eschatological and theological tone, we can understand it in the context of the secular as contentment. But such a contentment is tainted in the recognition of our guilt: we do not deserve contentment if we are guilty. Religiousness A must continually strive, but lacks that final reconciliation promised by religiousness B.[27] Guilt does not, therefore, represent a lesser form of sin, nor does it require sin, but augments our self-understanding by drawing attention to our ethical failures, and is immanent because guilt (while functionally impossible to overcome) manifests in the world and must be responded to *in tempore*—the individual in religiousness A strives to make amends in the world as they are not absolved of their guilt by a transcendent Other.

So, like sin, guilt is also qualitative because it is a quality affecting individual existence. From the first moment that the individual willingly acts unethically, guilt is brought into the world and, no matter how minor the ethical lapse may seem to be, it fundamentally changes the individual (*CUP*, 533). Furthermore, like sin, it is the recognition of our own guilt that allows us to form sympathetic (and mutual) relationships with others. We are neither more nor less guilty because we are qualitatively guilty, meaning there is no ethical or moral superiority. This is characterised as painful because having to view oneself as guilty reveals the need for atonement and diminishes our egoism, thus we try to hide from guilt by fleeing to the ethical, which quantifies it to render it manageable. The effect of such a retreat is either removing our culpability or suggesting the possibility of being less guilty than others—in the ethical stage, extending amends to those who appear more guilty is considered unnecessary because they are in no position to judge or demand amends. However, if we are equally qualitatively guilty there is no such barrier to making amends (even if this lacks the absolution provided by a transcendent God). Therefore, religiousness A incorporates 'qualitative guilt' as distinct from the 'quantitative guilt' found in the ethical stage.

For Kierkegaard, without this sense of qualitative guilt we cannot interact with others as equals, we cannot approach them with love because we presume that we are not guilty ourselves. If we cannot sympathise with the guilty because our pride and self-righteousness intervenes, we become unable to truly show them love, care, and respect—we cannot show comfort to one seeking it if we place them beneath our own ethical superiority. Forgiveness, the expression of care and comfort *par excellence*, is made possible through the recognition that *we* need to be forgiven as well—guilt-consciousness reduces our pride and self-righteousness and opens us to others both in seeking forgiveness and becoming willing to forgive.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

We can draw from these distinctions how the ethics of the religious dispositions are affected by commitment (or lack thereof) to a transcendent God. In religiousness B, not only is there a clear guide and judge beyond our frail humanity, there is also the possibility for ultimate forgiveness, for reconciliation. However, despite lacking this, the immanent sphere does not lose any of its ethical rigour. In fact, it gains a certain intensity in its emphasis on continuity in ethical striving and the need to be scrupulous in reconciliation with

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[27] Hence Kierkegaard's view that those in religiousness A will slip into religiousness B; religiousness B offers the final reconciliation, a reprieve, from the intensity of the ethical demand evident in guilt-consciousness. That is not to say that religiousness B is easier, Kierkegaard is clear throughout his writings that Christianity should never be easier, but it provides a guide and a support lacking in religiousness A (as shall see more clearly in §3).

others. The danger, as we shall see below, is that the level of intensity is so much that it may drive the individual into ethical resignation, denying the particularity of guilt-consciousness for submergence in the comfort of universalised guilt. Alternatively, and this seems to be an implicit goal for Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms, the appropriation of the truth of Christianity will become necessary, which will retroactively reveal the true meaningfulness of guilt-consciousness as sin-consciousness, and add both an intensity (a more clear sense of having chosen to sin, and thereby culpability for sin in the world) and a telos: forgiveness of sins. While this is only a brief and cursory overview of two important distinctions between the two forms of religiousness, that they are distinct and that these distinctions affect the expression of the ethic of self-becoming is significant; additionally, we can see that the theological underpinnings of religiousness B are not necessary for immanence or guilt-consciousness, thus affording space for a secular version of the religious sphere's *ethos*.

§2 Religiousness A

We have, to this point, given an example of the ethic in practice and found that it did not *require* theological commitment, and examined distinctions between A and B, revealing that A merits independent articulation. These initial steps were necessary to show: *i*) A shares B's ethic; and *ii*) it is independent of B. The ethical structures previously discussed are retained in religiousness A, but with unique features due to the absence of a Christian worldview[28]–thereby lacking explicit, positive support of the ethic (e.g., the need to love having been implanted within us by a loving God, or the supportive guidance of the Bible to love our neighbour as ourselves, etc.). Therefore, it is the ethical substructure from which the stage *in toto* manifests (thus allowing A and B to both participate in the ethic) that we hope to expose in this discussion.

However, we must first summarise and extend our clarification of the differences of between A and B. Within religiousness B the eternal is transcendent, but entered time, thus creating the paradox that the eternal is both within and outside of temporal existence, thus creating a tension within us that draws us to the eternal in the world, while keeping us mindful of the eternal judge outside of it. In religiousness A, on the other hand, the individual becomes aware of possessing the eternal within them through existence (and by reflecting on existence in inwardness) (*CUP*, 573) and the individual in Religiousness A transforms themselves in accordance with their relation to the eternal; by recognising the eternal in reflection they are able to transform their existence as an expression of that relation (*CUP*, 574). Importantly, this does not reduce the eternal to something finite, as Climacus argues speculative thought attempts, but stresses existence as the means of relating

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[28] We must stress that being a Christian is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for religiousness as a whole, and it is a very particular type of Christianity that Kierkegaard has in mind. For those who are not Christian there is religiousness A which "can be present in paganism, and in Christianity it can be the religiousness of everyone who is not decisively Christian, whether baptised or not" (*CUP* (Hannay), 466). This seems to suggest that one need not be theologically invested in order to practice religiousness A, as it is the disposition with which they approach the world that determines their standing (which makes sense in the context of the stages). It should also be stated that 'paganism' for Kierkegaard does not relate to any specific form of theological religious belief, but refers to anyone who is not "decisively Christian" (i.e., theologically Christian *and* in the stage of Christian-religiousness), which would allow for those who have no theological commitments to be included within religiousness A.

to the eternal in time. The eternal in time can be seen in infinite possibility,[29] the restoration of ethical possibility recognised through faith; infinite possibility is required for movements like the teleological suspension of the ethical, which requires faith in infinite possibility in order to be properly undertaken.

The immanence of religiousness A is derived from its concern with the 'human,' and necessitating the discovery of the eternal within the human—but what exactly does this mean? Sharon Krishek helpfully defines religiousness A as "a religious consciousness that takes into consideration only that which is in the realm of human will and powers alone" (Krishek 2009, 49). This clarifies that the 'religious consciousness' is secular, and the concerns of the religious stage are specifically related to human action (and therefore not theological in essence). Thus, we can understand that, when questioning the eternal nature of doubt (whether a beginning, or something preceding a beginning) Johannes Climacus wonders, "did it state something people had always done without being conscious of it? Was it something immediately inherent in human nature?… if no one had ever explained what it is to wonder, every human being would still have done it" (*JC*, 151). Climacus is suggesting that there are certain features inherent to being human, but is unsure whether philosophy, with its basis in doubt, is one such feature—is doubt universal (philosophical) or particular (eternal)? The Married Man in *Stages* indirectly offers us a possible resolution to this. He explains that, for the bridal couple, the command to love each other by the pastor is comical, as this is an attempt to transform love into a duty—a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of love (*SLW*, 111). As in the case of the philosophical appropriation of doubt, when love is appropriated into a universal, is made a duty, it loses its importance to individuals (this is true for theological duties as well (*SLW*, 100)). Doubt, as a particular facet of the individual, is related to the eternal as it not only precedes us, but is not ours alone, as every human has access to it. The value of doubt is that it leads to faith, as "doubt is conquered not by the system but by faith, just as it is faith that brought doubt into the world" (*Papers & Journals*, 166); infinite doubt reveals the relativity of the ethical stage and points towards infinite possibility, freedom, and faith.

If religiousness A is concerned with the human, and locates the eternal within the human, it would appear that the requirement of a transcendent God becomes unnecessary in this expression of the sphere. While we have suggested that this is the case, we have yet to explain how this can be considered 'religious,' as the common perspective implies at least some broad sense of spirituality at play.[30] However, while spirituality is not precluded, by grounding religiousness A in the human as a self, Kierkegaard's pseudonyms seem to imply that religiousness is distinct from spirituality, instead focusing on revealing the eternal within the structure of the self—it is not about one's relation to an eternal God or belief system, but the relation to what it is that is eternal within the individual, what it is about the self that introduces the infinite into the finite. Our interest must therefore be: reconstructing what is important about the sphere of religiousness that makes it worthwhile to use in constructing an ethic (*§2.1*), and how religiousness can be practiced independently of theological commitment (*§2.2*); in other words, what does a non-theological religious stage contribute to ethics and how can it contribute without the presuppositions of Christian-religiousness?

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[29] The eternal in time has a variety of manifestations beyond infinite possibility, as we have also seen the eternal guilt of the individual, and the need for continual striving without an end.

[30] This appears to result from linguistic limitations, limitations resolved in a variety of ways in contemporary philosophical debates (i.e., Emmanuel Levinas uses 'religious' as the category of the 'infinite,' in opposition to finitude and totality).

§2.1 The Importance of Religiousness

Of primary importance in retaining the religious stage, and locating within it the possibility of an ethical life, is to remain true to Kierkegaard's authorial intentions. While we are departing from those intentions by suggesting that religiousness A is an alternative to religiousness B, it is not a stretch to highlight their similarities and suggest that depictions of religiousness A do project the image of an ethical life. It conforms to his philosophical works, at the very least, as these present religiousness without specifically requiring Christian assent. The reasoning for this is at the heart of religiousness is, as has continuously been repeated: faith. "The life of faith not only suspend and reinvents the ethical but also suspends and reinvents the aesthetic, providing a complete picture of how the knight of faith realises in a new way the demands of both goodness and beauty" (Hanson 2017, 1). Faith transforms the whole of life in religiousness regardless of whether one is in the heightened Christian-religious or not—what is central is that humourist doubt is overcome through the double-movement of resignation and faith, giving up expectation and appreciatively receiving and reacting to what is given. Faith also nourishes other important aspects of religiousness: selfhood, an interest in self-becoming, and privileging *quality* over quantity.

The centrality of faith to Kierkegaard's works cannot be overstated, especially outside of a theological context. Faith does have its own connotations though, and these are generally intimately theological in nature. However, faith takes on a more neutral appearance in Kierkegaard's *oeuvre* referring not only to theological faith in God, but also faith in possibility and freedom despite the allure of expectation and determinism in the ethical stage. Climacus argues that faith must be kept distinct from intellectual doctrines and retain a relational foundation (*CUP*, 326-7), as faith is not doctrinal, but relational (*CUP*, 326). Westphal, arguing for a somewhat similar stance, writes, "since God is personal, faith cannot be a merely cognitive relation to some physical, psychological, or metaphysical facts. It is a relation of person to person, of I to Thou" (Westphal 2010, 41). Faith is both relational and active. While Westphal discusses faith within the context of a theological reading, we can easily see from the latter sentence that what is actually important in faith is the relation between the I and Thou; what is important is the relation between two existing subjects. This relation is not solely expressed outwardly, but also inwardly. We must relate to ourselves with faith, which manifests as self-openness and earnestness, each being difficult to practice but necessary despite that difficulty.

Furthermore, in relating to ourselves we relate to our finitude, our ethical frailty, and our uncertainty about existence. Without the guidelines provided by the reified systems of the ethical stage, we appear to stand at an abyss. This is where the leap of (or into) faith[31] is required—faith does not provide a solid and certain landing ground, but assures us of the possibility of solid ground: we may land with grace or we may fall down, but the outcome is less important than the commitment. We may also view a graceful landing as causing us to miss out on an opportunity to be helped up by a neighbour, so the faltering landing may reveal the care the neighbour has for us. *De Silentio* provides us such an example of the disposition of faith being of greater value than the outcome in a short story about expectation and receiving what one is given as a gift (*FT*, 39-40). In

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[31] Backhouse considers the category of the 'leap' to possess "non- or pre-Christian" connotations (Backhouse 2011, 117-8), so we need not fear that we are falling back into theological commitments.

the story, a husband talks about how his wife may be preparing him a special meal beyond his means. However, the lack of an expected hot meal does not lead his disposition to change, for him to be disappointed that his expectations were not realised, because it is not *what* he eats, but *how* he eats. Hanson comments on this by writing, "what he expects is ongoing intimacy with his wife" and so he does not "believe *in* the meal; he believes *in his wife*" (Hanson 2017, 109), and, continuing, he states that "if dinner is perfect for him, that's because his wife is perfect for him (Hanson 2017, 111). This shows both that faith is *relational* not doctrinal and that faith is unperturbed by outcome: it is in how we relate to others and to existence, not what we receive and our successes that is important. Again, we can see in this example a non-theological faith, a faith in the other person. We can, perhaps, venture to cast this non-theological faith as an intensified form of trust, one which is extended even in cases where that trust has previously been broken.

We may be getting ahead of ourselves though. While the contours of faith reveal that it is not explicitly theological in nature, we still have not asked who has faith, and whether we all possess faith naturally. If not, when do we? Climacus provides an answer to the first question: "to be born with faith is just as plausible as to be born twenty-four years old" (*PF*, 96). So, faith must be nurtured. But, how does it arise? We have already suggested doubt about the ethical sphere's absoluteness as the origin of faith, but when do we begin to doubt? Hanson argues that doubt arises when the individual recognises that the ethic they live by is not the ethical ideal, "the reality of who I am ethically is not what I should be" (Hanson 2017, 42). The recognition of ethical limitations within the institutions we exist in, and their failure to reflect the ethical ideal, leads to doubt (this is why Climacus cannot accept philosophical doubt, as it is merely intellectual, not existential). This sense of doubt leads us to the forked path of infinite resignation and embracing faith: infinite resignation places the eternal outside the individual and adopts an eschatological hope for forgiveness of ethical failures beyond the individual, while faith projects the possibility for forgiveness (which requires infinite possibility, as our failures seem beyond human forgiveness) into the world through actively making amends. Faith does not resolve our doubt or extirpate it, but offers the world back to us in spite of that doubt.

Hanson offers three transformations of the knight of faith's relation to existence: *i*) the disposition to the world and the reconciliation between hardship and life as a gift, to be embraced with *pathos* rather than adopting a stoic acceptance of an impersonal fate; *ii*) relationships to others are transformed through a focus on *deepening* the relationship rather than merely continuing or maintaining it (a true repetition, rather than a banal repetition); *iii*) "faith inculcates in us simultaneously an awareness of our own profound proclivity toward evil and an openness to being loved and forgiven despite our own wickedness"—our sense of self is changed by a recognition of the possibility of reconciliation despite our shortcomings (Hanson 2017, 2-3). Faith thus transforms each facet of the knight of faith's existence: our relation to the world, our relation to others, and our relation to ourselves—a demonstration of how faith is relational *par excellence*. But who is this knight of faith?

The 'knight of faith' is the term used by *de Silentio* to describe an exemplar of the religious stage, drawing a contrast with the knight of infinite resignation.[32] Abraham is the central example of a knight of faith,

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[32] The knight of infinite resignation refers to those who do not make the double movement of resignation-faith, but only resign themselves from achieving their task within the world and so they resign infinitely.

although *de Silentio* is careful when attributing the status of knight of faith, cautioning that Abraham is only a *possible* knight of faith. Abraham becomes a knight of faith when, in teleologically suspending the ethical, he *i*) denies the absoluteness of both ethical demands being made on him: he clearly makes himself an exemption from the ethical demand not to commit murder (and in particular infanticide), but also questions the absoluteness of the command to sacrifice, and thus relinquish, Isaac; and *ii*) holds onto the faith that what he is sacrificing will be restored to him in this life. Instead, he adopts the disposition of faith that while he is willing to sacrifice Isaac, he will not have to be parted from him (*FT*, 115). That he denies the absoluteness of not sacrificing a child is clear from his actions of bringing Isaac to Mount Moriah and lifting the knife. However, despite his obedience to the divine command, he is not in full obedience of it in a way representative of resignation—Abraham does not accept that the command is absolute or else he would not have faith that Isaac will be restored to him, as Isaac cannot be both sacrificed and remain with Abraham. So, while Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac, his willingness is not mere obedience, but obedience with faith that the result of his actions will be, essentially, in opposition to what is commanded: that Isaac will not be truly sacrificed. What makes Abraham a knight of faith is that he embraces the openness of possibility and approaches his task not with resigned obedience that Isaac will be taken as a sacrifice, but with faith that expectation (the loss of his treasured son) does not annul possibility (the restoration of that son).

The knight of faith must act on their own volition (as Abraham does) and have faith in what they are doing regardless of the outcome (Abraham does not know whether the command will be rescinded); we saw this in the Rosa Parks case as well, thus supporting our assertion that the knight of faith can have secular representatives. What is important is having faith that one's actions will succeed, but without *requiring* success to justify faith. So, in suspending the ethical, the knight of faith is suspending certainty and justification that their actions will indeed express the ethical ideal. This does not mean that the knight of faith forgets or eliminates the ethical but that they are solitary and alone in their task and must take it up—the ethical certainty promised by the ethical sphere is suspended and replaced with faith in the realisation of the ideality of ethics in time—much like Rosa Parks refusing to relinquish her seat. This remains true when we evaluate Kierkegaard's ethic as one of self-becoming: undertaking the task of self-becoming is set apart from universal activity and the comforts of the universal (i.e., what has clear justification, what is *expected*) must be shunned for infinite possibility (*FT*, 76). The goal in self-becoming is not to become the self we are expected to be, or the self endorsed by social institutions, but to have the faith to become the self that we *are*, the self we understand ourselves to be when, with inwardness and earnestness, we open our self to ourselves—when we have the faith to be open to others (and ourselves) when it is more secure to be closed to others.

A "crucial reminder" from Hanson is that "the faith of our contemporary knight of faith is less to do with what he does or what happens to him and more to do with *how* he does what he does, *how* he reacts to the stuff of his life" (Hanson 2017, 110, my emphasis). The knight of faith is the individual in the religious stage who has embraced their faith, but the knight of faith is not necessarily theologically Christian (as Abraham is not), and so the 'knight of faith' may just be the designation of the individual in religiousness A, similar to, but setting them apart from, 'Christian' as the designation of an individual in religiousness B. If faith is relational, rather than doctrinal, and relates more explicitly to the realisation of the ethical ideal in time, then

it should be accessible to those who have no theological commitments just as much as it is for those who do—ethics is not for the theologically committed alone (or else there would be only the Christian-religious and not a religiousness A prior to that). We will therefore see references to this knight as such a designation throughout our discussion of religiousness A, as we did in our imaginary re-construction.

Thus, we have a sense of what faith is, namely the overcoming of doubt in loving the ethical ideal by embracing infinite possibility in the face of uncertainty; and we have a sense of who it is that has faith in the immanent religious, namely the knight of faith. We also have previously discussed the relationship between the faith of the Christian-religious and ethics, but is this relationship still viable for a knight of faith lacking theological commitments? Edward Mooney argues that "faith is 'higher' than social, civic, or rational morality. But not because it provides grounds for overriding ethics… Faith is 'higher' because for someone having weathered its ordeals, it can be felt, retrospectively, to have transformed and completed a moral outlook all-too-familiar yet finally provisional. Faith enshrines space for a new ethics" (Mooney 1991, 92). This echoes previous notions of "higher" or "second" ethics. From this perspective, the teleological suspension does not annul ethical value, but suspends it in the moment—this can be illustrated by an example of suspending the imperative to be truthful. You are hiding a Jewish family in your home and an agent of the state comes and asks whether you are hiding a Jewish family and thus thrusts you into an ethical dilemma: *either* follow the *Sittlichkeit* (it is the just and ethical action to turn them over to the state) or *Moralität* (it is always unethical to lie) and hand them over *or* suspend the ethical and protect the Jewish family;[33] what we find in suspending the ethical is space for a transformed ethical relation to others—our ethical obligation to preserve the life of the Jewish family is given a higher priority than our duty to the state and/or abstract moral duties. However, it must be stressed that this occurs within unique contexts, so, for example, lying does not become *always* ethical—it is only suspended within that moment.

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[33] With hindsight, we may think this example is too simplistic: who really thinks we should reveal the family being harboured? But this example is not trivial and is not without its precedents and merits. The *Sittlichkeit* in 1930 and 40's Germany supported handing over such families, and if one adopts an accompanying *Moralität* asserting that lying is always wrong, the person harbouring the family cannot lie about it. Each of these moral systems claims universal justification: *Sittlichkeit* is justified because the state is greater than the individual and represents a more rational ethic; *Moralität* is justified because it is purely rational and legitimate at any time and in any situation. Accepting either of these as possessing universal justification will lead the individual to delivering the family to an almost certain death (and the individual can feel ethically distanced from that death, as they have discharged their ethical duty/duties). Perhaps the individual recognises that what they are doing will lead directly to the death of the family, but because ethics demands their sacrifice to the state authorities the individual resigns themselves to this duty.

This is not to say that the social ethic of Nazi Germany is the social ethic *par excellence*, nor one that has been replicated since, but instead to reveal that social ethics is *relative* despite appealing to claims of ethical universality. This is representative of the empty 'universal' ethical structures we find Kierkegaard critique as part of the ethical stage: in this case they are filled with as unethical and immoral a content as can be imagined. However, while of a different nature, we find a similar empty ethical structure filled with an unethical content in the example of segregation. In this case, the social ethic entails duties that we recognise, in retrospect and from a different social ethic, as unethical, but which gain justification through the same mechanisms of *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*. If we accept that the duties expected of our state represent a universal ethical system, then we provide the same justification to other states which have made the same claims. Much like assuming the radicality of sacrificing a child as indicative of Kierkegaard's faith *in toto*, this example represents the radicality of the demands of *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*—in each of these cases your task may be beyond the ethical, but it is a question of whether you resign yourself to your duties, or have faith in *overcoming unethical duties*—a faith we saw in Rosa Parks.

George Pattison argues that it is faith, or hope,[34] that should be seen as providing the answer to the ambiguous nature of life: the faith, or hope, that we are indeed acting out of love (something which is seen retrospectively—judged by God, or by those who remember us) (Pattison 2015, 215). The teleological suspension in the previous example is indicative of this, as it is occasioned by the ambiguity of which conflicting ethical precept has authority. The ethical importance of faith is discovered in how faith "accentuates the actuality of another person, not one's own" (*CUP*, 580). This is further developed in a footnote where Climacus speaks of the religious individual being insecure about their own salvation, while feeling secure about the salvation of others (*CUP*, 389). The faithful individual approaches others not in judgment, but in repentance—the faith of the other is not in question when we interact with them, our own is. Thus, faith reveals that we must seek forgiveness from others through making amends, that our actions towards them must show love and care *to them particularly* and not simply be universal actions pulled from an abstract source (for forgiveness, as previously noted, is particular and not universal). Ethical action, undertaken with faith, requires proper motivation, intention, and decision with others as the primary beneficiaries—we do not set a standard for them, but live up to what they deserve.

This attempt to 'live up to' the needs of others attempts to make amends, but, as with all things related to Kierkegaard's conception of faith, has no certainty of success. Not only do we not *know* what someone needs, but can never be sure that we have *satisfactorily* met those needs. The knight of faith is left to act with the faith that their actions will be loving despite guilt-consciousness suggesting this as an impossibility/beyond the reach of our finite aims—the knight of faith's task is one which has no clear sign of success. There are always improvements to make, always amends to extend to others, always new tasks to engage in to show love/care for others. Faith is therefore a rebuff against cynicism, an embrace of the possibility that what *appears* impossible can be overcome; expectation does not preclude alternative solutions. However, there must be a clear break between what is possible and what is probable. "Faith is by no means partial to probability" (*PF*, 94), and the cynic is distinguished from the knight of faith because they remain within the ethical, conflating the probable with the possible (*CUP*, 232-4). The importance here is that the knight of faith acts without the assurance of probability, the possibility of success is enough to buttress the choice. We will see below (*§3.1*) that the ethicist is concerned with what is probable because probability implies certainty.[35] Climacus

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[34] There is an important distinction to draw between faith and hope, and while it is extraneous here, we will briefly outline the distinction implicit across Kierkegaard's writings. We find in *Repetition* the statement that "he who will merely hope is cowardly" (*REP*, 132), and that "hope is a beckoning fruit that does not satisfy" (*REP*, 142). Anti-Climacus says from a Christian perspective any sickness that leads to death is not the sickness unto death, because death is just a "minor event" within an eternal life and there is hope in death (i.e., for Quidam, the pastor in *E/OII*, etc., all hope is placed beyond life in the otherworldly as they are ethically resigned from the world) (*SUD*, 7-8). Kierkegaard's own usage often presents hope as hope-for-others, writing in *Works of Love*: "'Love hopes all things,' but to hope all things indeed means to presuppose that love, even though it is not seen—indeed, even though the opposite is seen—is still present in the ground, and that it is bound to show itself in the erring person, in the misguided, even in the lost" (*WL*, 221). Here, hope is distinct from faith, but changes in relation to faith, which we also see in *Two Ages*: "it makes a difference whether the genuine individuality of the love affair is formed by hope or by recollection" (*TA*, 50). Hope is active when wedded to faith (i.e., hope that love exists within the other, or hope that love given will be reciprocated), while recollection is past-focused and results in passive hope (i.e., hoping to return to how a relationship *was* and not engaging with how it *is*).

[35] Anti-Climacus describes the over-reliance on certainty as a "philistine-bourgeois mentality lack[ing] every qualification of spirit and is completely wrapped up in probability" (*SUD*, 41).

goes further, critiquing 'probability' when it is taken as a form of belief or faith, for it annihilates faith by replacing it with approximation—it makes faith redundant. This is why faith exists within the religious sphere and not the ethical. The knight of faith must act, regardless of ostensible impossibility; the individual relying on probability considers statistics and decides whether action is necessary, prudent, or valuable.[36]

Lest we think that the knight of faith is disconnected from the world by their interest in infinite possibility, we will clarify that faith is not so simple. Hanson, discussing this very issue, highlights that *de Silentio* is clear that faith is not naïve optimism, but a recognition that in the face of failure it is not because the goal or aim is impossible, but that it is merely humanly impossible, in the sense of being beyond immediate understanding or machination (Hanson 2017, 119). When an action is undertaken, it is not undertaken to naïvely grasp for an abstract idea, but instead to transform that idea through the recognition that the success of the undertaking may be "under conditions that [one] could not have expected" (Hanson 2017, 121). Hanson relates this to an explicitly Christian context, based on the notion that all things are possible for God, but within the secular context of the knight of faith we may understand it as the recognition that we cannot assume what a future will look like. We cannot perfectly understand and plan an idealised world, we must be content to continue to aim in the face of failure or seeming impossibility towards realising that world—we must strive despite the human predisposition to shrewdly give up in the face of overwhelming odds/perceived impossibility. Again, Rosa Parks is instructional here: she did not *know* the effect her decision would have, but retained faith that her action would contribute to realising a higher *ethos*. It is not that the knight of faith is naively acting, because this would mean they lack commitment, or are disinterested in the outcome; faith invests the individual in their actions because faith highlights one's actions as effecting and affecting others.

Faith is not itself exhaustive of the religious stage, but constitutes the necessary movement from the ethical, and the transformation of one's relation to existence. This transformed approach to existence manifests in every facet of an individual's existence, enhancing and intensifying it. Another central feature of the religious stage, as we saw in Chapter 1, is a transformed relation to our *self*. We can recall that the self is the relation that relates itself to the original human synthesis of infinitude and finitude—the intensification of inwardness recreates our sense of self and reintroduces possibility within the constraints discovered in the ethical stage. Where the self is determined by chance in the aesthetic stage, and necessity in the ethical, it is determined by the individual's responsibility to choose (and to choose ethically) that arises in the life of faith. Furthermore, the inward recognition of one's own selfhood, one's own subjectivity, occasions the recognition of the subjectivity of others, thus requiring our ethical engagement with other subjects. Because this requires faith, Kierkegaard, especially under the guise of Anti-Climacus, locates selfhood as only truly achieved in the religious stage.

What religiousness A lacks in Anti-Climacus' picture of the fully complete self (the Christian self), is a creator to relate to. The Christian, by having a transcendent God, is able to reconcile themselves with others who were created by God, as well as find an antidote to despair because the individual in the Christian-religious stage finds repose in their relation to God. Lacking a creator to relate to, the individual in religiousness A does

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[36] We see this in *Stages*: "a person can shut his door on the poor, and if someone should starve to death, then he can just look at a collection of statistical tables, see how many die every year of hunger—and he is comforted" (*SLW*, 480).

not have such a clear path to reconciliation, thus the struggle to relate to others intensifies and the antidote to despair is absent. So, we are left with two difficulties in self-understanding when the knight of faith immerses themselves in the task of becoming a self: *i*) despair is constant and cannot be overcome (as a person can never come to terms with a creator they do not know and therefore can never find repose from despair); *ii*) we relate to humanity (as a genus) as generating us and ground ourselves in our humanity (the seeming suggestion in the formulation of immanence). While lacking the resolution of the Christian-religious, these do not undercut or reduce the viability of religiousness A, instead revealing that within a secular context ethical striving becomes paramount because of the absence of a given *telos* and guidelines.

We have previously mentioned that the self is revealed in religiousness A through guilt-consciousness. Guilt is also what points to the eternal in us—just as we posit infinite possibility, we posit guilt infinitely. "In the suffering of guilt-consciousness, the guilt at one and the same time alleviates and festers, alleviates because it is an expression of freedom" and festers because it is a reminder of our fallibility (*CUP*, 534). Guilt is symbolic of our freedom because it reveals our ability to choose, to will, and in particular, to will both ethical and unethical actions. This recognition forces us to be ever conscious of our guilt. Stack describes Kierkegaardian guilt as comparable to "the debt that an individual owes to what is best in himself" (Stack 1983, 124); corollary to this, the debt is owed to those we fail when we do not live up to being the best in ourselves for *them*. Guilt-consciousness directs our attention to both our infinite possibilities, and the finite nature of actuality: we can aim towards an infinite good, but the ability to realise that good is limited, and it is in relating to these that the self becomes manifest; I relate to the infinite and the finite aspects of myself, while also relating to the infinite and finite aspects of what I *do* and how what I do affects the world I inhabit. Inwardness reveals that I am inextricably linked to that which is infinite (possible) and finite (actual) about myself as I express myself through existence—I am both the original synthesis (actuality) and how, as that synthesis, I exist in the world (possibility). This tension between possibility and actuality nourishes guilt-consciousness in both its positive and negative aspects, and serves as a motivation for continual ethical striving.

The particularising nature of guilt, as related specifically to the individual who reintroduces guilt into the world, points us towards the task of becoming our self, and becoming a self is the central task of the religious stage. As Westphal puts it, "formally the task is to become a self; materially it is to become oneself" (Westphal 2010, 47). It is not enough to think about oneself in an abstract sense, but to express that self in existence: "the task is to gain proficiency in repeating the impassioned choice and, existing, to express it in existence" (*CUP*, 410). It is the insertion of the infinite, the possibility of becoming my self, into finitude, the actuality of my self in lived existence, through faith that allows for the recognition of the self as more than either the infinite *or* finite—it is a recognition of the eternal as key to the self; we are not a *what*, but a *how* expressed through existential practice (*CUP*, 411), where projecting the infinite into everyday life is a necessary component of self-becoming (*CUP*, 86). To illuminate what exactly having the 'infinite' in everyday life means we can refer to Evans' discussion of subjectivity. Subjectivity cannot be exhaustively expressed in actuality because there is always more to the individual than what can be outwardly expressed (Evans 1983, 283). However, "subjectivity demands outward expression" (Evans 1983, 284), so continued striving is necessary because of the essential incompleteness of our projects (Evans 1983, 67). The incompleteness of these

projects is the impossibility of realising the ethical ideal, but striving towards it—the infinite inspires our actions, even when it cannot be realised. Guilt, arising from the misrelation of our aims and their outcomes, forces us to accept responsibility for our failures and make amends—guilt returns us to our tasks, inviting us to reengage in them to rectify our wrongs.

The self advocated by Climacus reflects the broader authorship's emphasis on the self not as something given, or assumed, but something *earned*—our original synthesis is given to us (we are born in a particular time and place, with particular features, etc.), but we must *choose* to engage in projects disclosing our self. As George Connell argues, Kierkegaard rejects the idea that the self is a substance and that self-identity is a given, instead advocating that self-identity is a task (Connell 1985, 17). It should be unsurprising that striving to become a self is incorporated in the works of the pseudonyms, as it is necessary for ascending to the Christian-religious stage. Becoming a self is a task lacking the requirement of being Christian, as Christianity *transforms* one's relation to one's self by providing a transcendent ground for the self. Our secular presentation of religiousness A would allow for self-becoming because it is not predicated on theological commitments, but on an earnest openness to oneself and accepting responsibility to make amends for one's guilt; selfhood precedes appropriating Christian truth.

Furthermore, the knight of faith must "discover the comic, not for the fact that the religious man differs from others, but for the fact that, though most heavily burdened by bearing the eternal recollecting of guilt, he is just like everyone else" (*CUP* (Hannay), 464). Thus, despite the individual's infinite guilt, they are not alone in that consciousness. "In religiousness A there is sympathy with all human beings, because this religiousness relates to the eternal, as every human being essentially assumes he can, and because the eternal is everywhere, so that no time is involved in waiting, or in sending, for what is prevented, by being historical, from being everywhere at once, and about which countless generations through no fault of their own could remain unaware of its having been" (*CUP* (Hannay), 491). What binds the knight of faith to others is the common experience of guilt-consciousness, of discovering that one is guilty and has brought guilt into the world.[37] However, instead of letting this guilt becoming crushing, humour reveals the possibility of sympathising with others who share this guilt-consciousness—the knight of faith is not alone in striving, but strives among others. In this way, the knight of faith does not draw attention to themselves, but blends into the rest of humanity, as they are, in fact, no different from anyone else, as no one is excluded from attaining faith (*FT*, 38-40); from attaining a self.

Assiter, showing how this sympathy creates a bond between individuals, draws Kristeva and Kierkegaard together in their critique of self-love (Assiter 2009, 129-30). She presents Kristeva's position as critical of the *androgyne* of Aristophanes because the one who selfishly, or egoistically, loves themselves is, truly,

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[37] Bringing guilt into the world does not, however, mean that it is justifiable to continue to act in a way that brings guilt into the world. H.H., in his first essay, is interested in the question of guilt and what right an individual has to cause others to have a guilty conscience if they put that individual to death for the truth (*WA*, 68-9). While we may bring guilt into the world, *we are not to make others guilty through our actions*. We are responsible to others, but we are also responsible for the effect our actions have on others. The antithesis to this is the Socratic position, which sees the individual only having responsibility for themselves and not others (*WA*, 75). This reflects the ethical disposition, where the individual is self-interested and the truth they make absolute is placed above the guilt of the other; self-righteousness triumphs over responsibility to and for the other.

incapable of love because love, properly understood, is always directed outwards towards others; similarly, for Kierkegaard the egoistic self-lover is incapable of loving their self as they cannot discover their actual self without loving relationships with others.[38] The self-lover loves a minimal sense of their self, because without the relational faith of the religious stage one cannot relate to selves (one's own, or that of others) in the fullness of that self—the egoist loves what they *prefer* about themselves and deny or obscure the rest. Furthermore, it is only in loving the radically other, the radically unknown, that it is revealed to us how to love the parts of ourselves that are unknown to us (Assiter 2009, 129). Additionally, Assiter notes that understanding others is not a purely rational endeavour (which should be recognised through the implications of 'love'), but instead that it is both emotional and rational; we relate to the other as a whole person, not just as a mind (Assiter 2009, 129-30). This points to the requisite *pathos* of religiousness A and its emphasis on passion. The outwardness of our love must reflect the inwardness of passion—we must be passionately interested in others to love them in a way that is not just self-loving or self-interested. The inability to understand the other is reflected in the need for sympathy, rather than understanding; the knight of faith does not *know* what the other person is feeling, but can *relate* to them.

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To close our discussion of non-theological religiousness, we will briefly discuss an underlying aspect to the above discussion: the importance of *quality*. We have directly and indirectly accented quality in our discussion of faith's transformation of our relation to existence (i.e., guilt). The qualitative change is a change in disposition towards existence, and is therefore intimately personal, leading the knight of faith to be unconcerned with outward recognition of faith (their own and others), as it is the existential expression of that faith that is paramount (*CUP*, 508). The competitiveness of outwardness is a competition of quantity, a desire to prove by way of demonstration that one has accrued more than others. But,

> imagine a lover. Is it not true that he would be capable of speaking about his beloved all day long and all night, too, day in and day out? But do you believe it could ever occur to him, do you believe it would be possible for him, do you not think he would find it loathsome to speak in such a manner that he would try to demonstrate by means of three reasons that there is something to being in love... (*SUD*, 103)

The quantity of reasons given to explain "being in love" is not sufficient, as being in love represents a change in *quality*, not quantity—it seems silly to think that there is a threshold at which point there are sufficient positive qualities to make one fall in love with another, instead of there being a moment of recognition, or realisation of a qualitative change in the feelings towards the beloved.[39] This change in attitude from an interest in accumulated value to a qualitative disposition affecting our understanding of values attends the welcoming into the life of faith, and the qualitative transformation underpins what it is to be in the religious stage.

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[38] Cf: John Lippitt's *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self Love* (2013) for a more thorough account of what Kierkegaard views as proper self-love and what is considered improper, or egoistic, self-love. As Lippitt's account shows, there are ways of loving oneself that align with Kierkegaard's view of neighbour love, as we must love ourselves to love others (as discussed previously). This is in agreement with, among others, Assiter and Green.

[39] We also saw this in our discussion of Løgstrup's criticism. Helping one person more than another does not increase the *quality* of the help, but the *quantity*. Being in a close relationship does not change the *quality* of loving acts by a knight of faith, even if there is an increased quantity of them.

§2.2 Kierkegaard's Non-Theologically Religious Ethic

The preceding sections outlined the justification for recognising that religiousness A is not only a legitimate and separate form of the religious stage from religiousness B, but that it shares, albeit with subtle differences, features of religiousness B while at the same time lacking its theological commitment. In many ways, this has thrust religiousness A into a much more intense version of the religious, especially its lack of resolution in the form of forgiveness of sins. Additionally, while the intensity has increased, it has also opened space for religiousness A to be accessible to those who are not theologically committed to Christianity, or theologically-committed at all. This is in keeping with the description of religiousness A in the *Postscript*, where Climacus himself agrees, suggesting the over-demanding nature of the disposition when he writes that "my own opinion is that religiousness A (within whose boundaries I have my existence) is so strenuous for a human being as always to be task enough" (*CUP* (Hannay), 466). This strenuousness is the continuous attention that must be paid to the ethical task, the task of bringing the infinite into the everyday: the task of becoming a self. But, how do we cast this ethic without its foundation in the love command?

An interpretation offered by Davenport presents an "*aretaic* love ethics", wherein abstract and universal rules are rejected in favour of "singular responses to unique situations" each expressing love (Davenport 2008, 171). This would incorporate both the teleological suspension, as well as the need to show love in unique ways to unique others; this also reflects the Rosa Parks case, as relinquishing one's seat is not the only means of prompting social transformation. However, our interest here will primarily be to argue how the ethic of religiousness A is similarly preoccupied with cooperative self-becoming—this requires not only the flexibility of an *aretaic* ethic, but also an emphasis on the relation between my self and other selves. We have seen the importance of developing a sense of self within the religious stage, but we have yet to develop how we ethically relate to other individuals, and how that relationship dialectically intensifies my selfhood and theirs. The *telos* of ethical action is not only effecting my own ethical self-transformation, but others as well. We will therefore incorporate interpretations offered by Hanson, Mooney, and Grøn to augment the *aretaic* interpretation and clarify its use within the context of an ethic of cooperative self-becoming.

While self-becoming, or becoming subjective, is the task of the religious stage, it is a task which, gradually, recedes into the background. Climacus notes that as the individual engages in the task to win an eternal happiness (striving to make amends for one's guilt, i.e., through self-becoming) they become more immersed in existence, and the task no longer occupies one's mind, actively pursuing it does (*CUP*, 527). This is why the preamble to a task and its end are similar: each is inactive. So, "compared with the totality of the task, to carry out a little of it is a retrogression, and yet it is an advance when compared with the whole task and carrying out none of it at all" (*CUP*, 527). This, ultimately, leads us back to guilt-consciousness. By engaging in the task, we no longer have a sense of it as a whole; we are left only with a sense of the immensity that lies before us to complete it. This is deceptive though, as the task, despite now being incomplete, requires us to invest ourselves in working towards its completion—the guilt of leaving the task incomplete drives us to

continue striving, while our finitude means it will be imperfectly completed (if completed at all). Self-becoming becomes an infinite task: the infinite within the finite. But, the need for forgiveness of our guilt, for failing to live up to the ideal, means we are not striving alone.

As was important in religiousness B, the relationship to others is integral in defining the knight of faith as a self. I am not just conscious of my own guilt, I am guilty and accountable for and to others. As Hanson helpfully clarifies, the meaningfulness of one's life is bound up with others (Hanson 2017, 113). We are not to make others guilty through our own self-righteousness (cf: "Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?"), so our concern cannot only be with ourselves and our ethical standing, but must include that of others. Each individual is connected to all other individuals, and all other individuals are connected to the individual; each person is intimately a part of the human race, and takes part in the human race as a totality, but each forms a distinct part of it—this is especially true of sin, but is equally true of theologically-neutral guilt (*CA*, 26). Our guilt, while singular to us, is paralleled in every other, and so when striving we are not guilty among the guiltless, but guilty among others who are guilty. Faith furnishes us with trust that others are striving for forgiveness, to make amends for their guilt. This impels us to trust that others approach us in this way; each reaching out with sympathy, rather than expectation. "Faith is driven by a determination to regard the giver before the gift, to allow the character of the gift to be configured by the love of the giver rather than to question or malign the giver on the grounds of some aspect of the gift that he happens to find distasteful" (Hanson 2017, 110). The other, as a self, is the concern of the knight of faith, and they are as prone to failure as the knight of faith, which requires openness to being forgiving (an openness requiring the recognition of one's own need to be forgiven).

The humility of the knight of faith, their recognition of their fallibility and the readiness to forgive the fallibility of others, resembles, in part, the love of the neighbour discussed in Chapter 1–the need to recognise others as neighbours and strive alongside them in seeking reconciliation. While full reconciliation is beyond the immanence of religiousness A (because it lacks the absolution offered by an authoritative and transcendent God), we can still understand the sympathetic love that arises between individuals without adopting the theological commitments. We noted Davenport's *aretaic* ethic, but we can also turn to Assiter to help in constructing the ethic, as she posits that "for Kierkegaard, the self is needy, dependent and loving rather than autonomous and self-interested. Kierkegaard also offers an ethical view that is based on the notion of loving oneself *and* others, these others including strangers" (Assiter 2009, 3, my emphasis). Mooney also presents a compelling interpretation; he argues that faith relates to a "capacity to care" rather than a claim over the other (Mooney 1991, 53-58). What is relinquished in each of these interpretations is the notion that the individual has full control over themselves, let alone others. This lack of control requires us to care for others, to—as we so often see in Kierkegaard's works—*sympathise* with them. To further elucidate this, we can turn to Arne Grøn, who writes:

> The other is given to us to be seen, and yet, in a critical sense it is up to us to see her. The question to ask oneself is what it means to see the other as the other: in herself, beyond our seeing her. This is, I would claim, what is at stake in seeing the other as our neighbour. Seeing the other is in an important sense about not identifying her. Although she is given to us, she is not to be taken as what we take her to be. (Grøn 2010, 93)

Continuing, he says, "the question is how we show ourselves in seeing the other" (Grøn 2010, 94). The emphasis here is on allowing the other to be their own self, to give them space to show their self to us, rather than projecting a self onto them—we must allow them to tell us who they are, rather than seeking to define them.[40] The sympathy is the attempt to communicate with another without assuming the standpoint of fully understanding them. The question asked by Grøn is how we express ourselves to the other: do we express ourselves by making a claim over them ("I know your needs", "I know what is best") or do we express ourselves through compassion and care ("how can I help", what do *you* need"). This reflects the reactive nature of the knight of faith, that they are not idealising actuality, but reacting to the actual *as* ideal—and an important part of actuality is the actuality of others. The sympathy engendered in these theologically-neutral interpretations accords with the emphasis on sympathy in religiousness A's immanence; our shared existence as humans provides us with both the tools and the capacity to sympathise with others.

The Married Man in *Stages* also emphasises sympathy, providing it a central character, writing: "to have sympathy is an essential quality of being human; any resolution that disregards this is on the larger sense not idealizing, and neither is it idealizing if sympathy does not acquire its adequate expression" (*SLW*, 113). Sympathy is at the root of any resolution, a resolution being the crystallisation of passion around which the self forms, and any passionate interest failing to take others into account cannot be a true resolution. Others must be considered in our own self-becoming, because it is not a becoming-against, but a becoming-with. However, to have sympathy a person must first have an understanding of themselves and an understanding that the state of dread they find themselves in is not beyond what others can feel, nor is it less than others feel (*CA*, 48-9). Our sympathy with others is grounded not in shared createdness, but in our shared sense of vulnerability to failure, our finitude, and our need to strive against that frailty—it is our mutual human existence grounding sympathy and the need for ethical relations with others. Drawing from the Married Man's insights, our sympathy towards others should be paramount to our engagement with the world, should motivate and ground relationships with others; our central concern must be alterity.

We can further draw from the wisdom of the Married Man to illustrate how our sympathetic relationships with other affects our self-becoming. He states, "what I am through her she is through me, and neither of us is anything by oneself, but we are what we are in union" (*SLW*, 93). Not only is this a statement about the love that he and his wife share; it also points to the equality in contributing to each other as a self—the Married Man's self is dependent on his relationship to his wife, she contributes to it, and he contributes to hers. They cooperatively help shape each other's lives through their love for each other.[41] Their relationship is indicative of why Hanson states that marriage is the "paradigmatic ethical relationship" for Kierkegaard (Hanson 2017, 113), and that what Kierkegaard speaks of in loving relationships is that the lover wants to see their beloved *grow* in love, to become a better exemplar of loving others (i.e., becoming a more loving daughter,

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[40] For example, another is a neighbour in the sense of 'other' not neighbour in the limiting, colloquial sense employed by Løgstrup.

[41] While beyond the scope of our immediate interests, we can note that this is quite distinct from Judge William, whose identity is formed from his own personal decisions, and his wife, while helping to him to reflect his absorption into society, is not treated as contributing to his sense of self (who she *is* is less important than her role as *his* wife).

sister, friend, etc.) as this is indicative of the transformative power of love (*SLW*, 161-2). We want our continually evolving love to encourage those we love to express love in a similarly growing way. As we share ourselves through care for others, we hope to nourish the caring self we know resides in others (because it resides within ourselves) and have faith that it will be expressed by those we care for (or those who follow our example).

It is not only in marriage that we see cooperative self-becoming though. In *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus notes that the pupil offers an occasion for the teacher to understand himself, and vice-versa (*PF*, 24). By seeking to teach and improve the pupil, the teacher becomes self-reflective and must be sympathetic to them—if the teacher fails to do so, the pupil will not learn sufficiently (but even here the teacher may learn something about themselves: that they need to improve their teaching skills, be more attentive to their pupil's needs, etc.). The broader point of this is that we learn about ourselves by relating to others. This dialectical, cooperative self-becoming means that helping another grow does not make them a debtor. Despite what the teacher has imparted to the pupil they cannot make a claim on them, but a debtor to the pupil for what the pupil has revealed to them about themselves (*PF*, 24). Each remains in debt to the other, thus requiring them to continue in service to their counterpart. Just as the relationship between the Married Man and his wife sees each of them growing alongside each other in love, and improving in love beyond their relationship (thanks to Hanson's insights), the teacher and pupil improve each other through their interactions. Neither of these examples requires a theological foundation, but each is innately human and practicable in our day-to-day life, further revealing that religiousness A can be described without reference to theological concepts or requirements.

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Religiousness A offers enough of a foundation for practicing the ethic of cooperative self-becoming without relying on the theological backing of religiousness B, and there are a variety of interpretations and passages supporting this reading. Not only is self-becoming incorporated in a theologically-neutral guilt-consciousness, but the attendant sympathetic responsiveness to others reveals that we do not need a command, or a common loving creator, to relate with other individuals. And, while there is no doubt that relationships of passionate love, like the Married Man and his wife, are not precluded in religiousness B, they serve as a clear indication of the cooperative self-becoming rooted in care for others that is operative in religiousness A. So too Rosa Parks, whose decisiveness showed a care for others and herself. Her sympathy with others who received unequal treatment is evident in her choice, and this decisiveness aimed, with the intense trust of faith, towards the realisation of a higher *ethos*, one which respected the selfhood of those who had, up to that point, their selfhood (and attendant rights and freedoms) marginalised, including Ms. Parks herself.

However, in carving out this niche of secular religiousness we may be left with burning questions about whether it is still legitimate to call this a form of 'religiousness' or whether this is just a covert return to the ethical stage, a stage that legitimises a secular mentality but also does not preclude spirituality. It is this question we must now turn to.

§3 <u>Religiousness A: A Return to the Ethical Stage?</u>

In a word: no. While the ethical stage is often utilised as the secular alternative to Kierkegaard's Christian ethic (drawing heavily from *Either/Or* and borrowing from Kierkegaard's broader authorship, often in direct contradiction to what is espoused there, for support), it not only constitutes a wholly separate stage, but is one which has significant problems relative to Kierkegaard's conception of ethics, thus leading to a distorted image of Kierkegaard's ethical commitments. We must therefore look at the problems of using the ethical stage in place of the religious, which may in turn reveal problems with utilising religiousness A. We discussed in the Introduction that the criticism of the 'ethical stage' misleadingly suggests that what Kierkegaard is critical of is ethics as such, but it bears repeating that this is not accurate. As a brief reminder we can recall that: *i*) Kierkegaard's religious (and 'humourist') works are preoccupied with ethics; *ii*) he uses Hegel's philosophy, and German Idealism in general, as a key exemplar of the ethical stage and believes that there is a lack of concern with ethics in this philosophical milieu (as ethics, for Kierkegaard, is related to the future, and Hegelian reflection is interested in the past); *iii*) there are significant issues limiting the ethical interest and content of Kierkegaard's ethicists' commitments, namely their myopic self-interest. We can help alleviate some ambiguity by comparing the ethical stage to the distinction Levinas draws between ethics and politics, where idealism "reduces ethics to politics" and "the Other and I function as elements of an ideal calculus… they play the role of movements in a system" (Levinas 1969, 216). Under this formulation, Kierkegaard's 'ethical' stage could be understood as the 'political' stage or the stage of 'totality'—which is fitting considering its opposition would be the 'infinite' stage of the religious (which does indeed focus on restoring the infinite to existence).

Thus, if we want to find a non-Christian ethic in Kierkegaard's philosophy, turning to the ethical and sacrificing the religious stage is not a compelling choice. However, we must still show and clarify that there is no good reason to return to the ethical stage, as he conceives it, as it is ethically unattractive (as tempting as it may otherwise be) (*§3.1*). In addition to this, we must also look more closely at religiousness A's problems. Thus far, we have associated it heavily with religiousness B, despite distinguishing the two and provided it the more solid footing of religiousness B. However, if we decisively break religiousness A from religiousness B without returning to the ethical, we find religiousness A in a tension between two stages that offer competing, and potentially attractive, alternatives to the ethics of the stage of immanent religiousness (*§3.2*).

§3.1 Problems with Returning to the Ethical Stage

Endorsing the ethical stage as a viable source for Kierkegaard's ethics is immediately problematic. Its primary proponent is Judge William, and, as Kirmmse notes, William is not only a straw man, but he does not represent Kierkegaard's final word on ethics (Kirmmse 2001, 191-2). He is meant to represent a view of ethics that *appears* attractive, but is ultimately empty of content. That William is not a stand-in for Kierkegaard's position is also clarified by Gordon Marino, who states, "anyone who has browsed through, much less written an introduction or two on Kierkegaard knows well enough that if you must equate Kierkegaard with the author of *Either/Or*, do so with all trepidation, for more than any of his many pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard held this, his bestseller, at a distinct arm's length" (Marino 2001, 115). Not only does Kierkegaard distinguish

himself from his ethicists in his theological writings, but in his pseudonymous literature and in his self-commentary *The Point of View*. The ethical stage does not comprise Kierkegaard's ethical commitments because it does not comprise an ethic, as Kierkegaard conceives of ethics, at all. Its focus on replication of universals is less concerned with how we relate to others, a central tenet of his ethics, and more concerned with accruing personal ethical standing—it is focused on depersonalising oneself and others to become abstract, to become objective (in the sense of becoming an object). As Mark Dooley points out, by depersonalising individuals through objectification, the *Lebenswelt* is disenchanted and subjectivity fades behind abstract passionless reflection (Dooley 2010, 174-5).

The "passionless reflection" Dooley is discussing appears to refer quite specifically to someone like Kierkegaard's Quidam, a figure who, in infinite resignation, failed to move to the religious stage from the ethical because he lacked faith; but this is a deceptively simple reading. This very same passionless reflection can be found equally displayed in the writings of Judge William and the sermon of the Pastor. Each is less interested in existence and passion, and more interested in reflecting on the impersonal, abstract forces governing existence—for Judge William this is the absolute system discovered and endorsed in his 'choice,' for the Pastor it is the eschatological hope for God's grace because existence does not offer ethical possibilities for overcoming sin. Both of these are examples of 'speculation,' which Climacus distinguishes from religiousness A, because speculation disregards existence:

> for [speculation], to exist becomes having existed (the past), existence a vanishing and annulled moment in the pure being of the eternal. As abstraction, speculation can never become contemporary with existence and therefore cannot grasp existence as existence but only afterwards. This explains why speculation wisely keeps ethics at bay, and why it becomes ridiculous when it tries its hand at it. Religiousness A accentuates existing as actuality, and then eternity, which in the underlying immanence still sustains everything, is lost to view so that the positive then becomes recognizable in the negative. For speculation, existence has vanished and only pure being is. For religiousness A there is only actuality's existence, and yet the eternal is constantly hidden by it, and present as hidden. (*CUP* (Hannay), 478)

The ethical stage, with its focus on 'speculation,' is set at odds with religiousness A because the ethical stage is not interested in the task of religiousness: becoming subjective. However, there is an undeniable allure to the ethical stage, and it is often presented as a temptation—this may come as no great surprise, given how religiousness is so difficult: who wants the "strenuousness" of subjectivity when they could have the comfort of objectivity? This comfort of objectivity is grounded in many elements of the ethical stage, but we will provide a brief overview that touches on only a few ethically-relevant elements and how these fail to manifest in religiousness A: ethical certainty (*i*); ethical self-sufficiency (*ii*); and quantitative interests (*iii*).

The first of these is the ethicist's certainty of possessing a grounds on which to solidly, and more importantly *unquestionably*, base one's choices and decisions. The preoccupation with the past, including the past of one's choice being projected against the future, means that legitimacy is not related to how one's activity affects other individuals, but whether it properly replicates a standard. This is the reason why William

is a judge,[42] because judgment takes a central role in the stage. The ethical stage is concerned with arbitration, abstract and impersonal judgments determining the ethical worth of action in relation to previous valuations; *Sittlichkeit* is legitimate because it pre-exists the individual, *Moralität* is legitimate because it is abstracted from existential practice but governs it. Davenport suggests that Kierkegaard holds the Kantian 'universality' of morality and a focus on acting on the good (without the focus being on the consequences of those actions)—but he acknowledges that acting out of duty is within the ethical, the extremity of the ethical, as "absolute resignation" (Davenport 2001a, 79). Acting out of duty is, in Kierkegaard's account, not properly ethical, as it means the reason for action is dislocated—his ethics is not one of abstract universal principles governing action, but a disposition to react to the needs of others with love and/or care, where the consequences matter not because of the binary success/failure, but as the revelation of the possibility to better understand how to act ethically in the future—failure is symbolic of the need and occasion for ethical improvement.

In contrast to the ethical stage, the person in religiousness A is less concerned with historical objectivity and certainty because the focus is on their expression of existence in the moment (*CUP*, 578). They are ethically focused and the ethic of the religious stage is not based on or conditioned by previous practice, but the moment when ethical action is required. We have already seen love (passionate love in the case of the knight of faith) as an example of an ethical relationship, and we can turn to love as a way of distinguishing between the ethical and religious stages. For the knight of faith, love, especially mutual love shared between two partners, is not an historical phenomenon—while it is a phenomenon, the 'objective' element of it is of less importance than the subjective emotions shared by each of the partners (*CUP*, 54). The ethicist is concerned with objective validity, so love requires objective signification like the marriage certificate (William emphasises recognition at the marriage ceremony as recognition of the absorption into the universal (*E/OII*, 88-90)); the knight of faith is concerned with how that relationship affects themselves and their partner. This reflects the broader ethical importance of the other in the religious stage, as love is not acquisitive but cooperative.

A second aspect of the ethical stage distinct from religiousness is ethical isolation. Where the individual practice of abstract morality offers the ethicists the possibility of being ethical independently of others, this is not the case in the religious stage, and especially religiousness A. The dissociation from others can be seen at its extreme in Climacus' critique of Hegel's philosophy of history. In an extended footnote, Climacus is critical of the exclusion of Chinese scholars or individuals in the writing of Chinese history because it lacks the voices that would have an interest and are affected by the actuality of that history (*CUP*, 150). He writes, "whoever holds the cross blesses himself first" to critique the overrepresentation of Germans in the method of the world-historical process because they are elevated in their own world-historical system (*CUP*, 150)—they are self-justified because *their* perspective is assumed to be absolute, so passionate interest is superfluous. Westphal helps to reveal the deeper problem at work here, arguing that when a society absolutises itself, it

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[42] Even if we adopt the alternative interpretation of 'assessor' we find the same connotation of being in a position of judgment. Assessor adds another dimension to our understanding of the ethical stage, as it has a much closer association to assessment of objects whether material (i.e., assessing land), or immaterial (i.e., assessing land claims). If we use this term to describe him we can bolster the 'objectifying' lens of the ethical stage much more explicitly. However, it is much more common to see him referred to as a judge, and we will follow that convention.

places its own 'Reason' (its *Sittlichkeit*) as absolute and in that form 'Reason' becomes "ideology in the Marxian sense", engaged in "the self-congratulatory, self-legitimization of the language game that goes by this honorific title" (Westphal 2010, 45). The disdain for scholars who may have a passionate interest in their subject matter may not seem immediately relevant to ethics, but it represents the deep-rooted sense of individual self-justification relative to a preferred 'absolute' norm; it reveals the legitimisation of isolation, where considering the effect on others is extraneous when one knows absolutely that they are in the right.

To illuminate the ethical implications of this we can defer to *Stages on Life's Way*. Frater Taciturnus notes that guilty/not guilty is, for the religious individual, reserved for introspection—I judge myself as guilty—in contrast to the ethical position that guilty/not guilty is projected onto the world as an evaluative tool—I judge others as guilty (*SLW*, 463). The projection of guilt onto the world is a way of creating ethical competitiveness and supports proud self-righteousness (as we have previously seen in the case of the Pharisee).[43] It also posits the possibility for expunging one's guilt. However, Climacus is clear that thinking we can fully make penance for our guilt is only an attempt to finitise it, as guilt must be understood as absolute (eternal) for the knight of faith (*CUP*, 549-50). If guilt is posited as finite it can be removed from the individual—they can see themselves as guiltless—and therefore to have striven enough; this in turn allows them to view the guilt of others as a debt to themselves—others must atone for *their* guilt. As we have seen consistently in our discussion of the ethics of the religious stage, recollecting one's guilt is the only true penance and retaining guilt-consciousness is a result of earnest inwardness (*CUP*, 549-50). By keeping guilt internal to the individual we are constantly oriented towards making amends to others, to viewing ourselves as a debtor who must act ethically to make amends to others.

We can also turn to Evans who draws a clear distinction between the ethicist and the religious individual in regards to ethical-orientation. In his account, this distinction manifests in relation to their "infinite interest:" for the former it is themselves, for the latter it is others (Evans 1983, 42). Ferreira, concurring with Evans, accentuates the importance of otherness to Kierkegaard, that love is about the recognition and respect for otherness, not an attempt to turn others into another 'myself' (Ferreira 2001, 8). Each of their views reflects what we have seen throughout our discussion of the religious stage: it is concerned with alterity, with holding otherness as sacrosanct, and placing ourselves in the position of needing to work *for* and *with* others. In religiousness A, becoming subjective is not the only task of the individual, helping other individuals in their self-becoming is also necessary. The self-interest of the ethicist contributes to their lack of interest in ethics as conceived by Kierkegaard; not only does it place emphasis on adopting a system of ethics that is self-legitimising, but it also shifts focus from a qualitative understanding of ethics to a quantitative one—that ethical standing is something one can accrue.

This brings us to our final distinction: quantity and quality. The qualitative transformation we have discussed in regards to the religious stage, quantity, on the other hand, serves to underpin the ethical stage. The ethicist is acquisitive and interested in what can be externally evaluated (i.e., being seen following

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[43] Judge William is an example of this as well, as he positions himself into an ethically-superior relation to the aesthete—he is in a position to directly tell the aesthete how to live, or how to be ethical, because he assumes his own high ethical stature. His concern is ultimately not to upbuild the aesthete, but to have the aesthete replicate his life-view.

rules/manifesting the universal: William's emphasis of the marriage ceremony being an example of this; reducing everything to sameness or generality; another common example used throughout Kierkegaard's authorship is the reduction of everything to a monetary value). Within the ethical stage there are appeals made to superficialities in order to buttress the abstract (yet concrete) categories of inwardness, to the extent that guilt and sin need physical appearances to clarify their power, when in truth they are immaterial and relate to selfhood (*CUP*, 248). For the ethicist, there needs to be something quantitative, something measurable in order to show someone's ethical stature; William's wife is a possession necessary to fulfil the social duty of marriage, and symbolic of his absorption into society (she is *his* wife and nothing more).[44] We have already extensively discussed the importance of the qualitative transformation, so we will instead offer an example to show the disdain Kierkegaard shows for quantity as indicative of quality to illustrate the distinction between ethical quantity and religious quality:

> Imagine a lover. Is it not true that he would be capable of speaking about his beloved all day long and all night too, day in and day out? But do you believe it could ever occur to him, do you believe it would be possible for him, do you not think he would find it loathesome to speak in such a manner that he would try to demonstrate by means of three reasons that there is something to being in love… what a priceless anticlimax— that something that passes all understanding— is proved by three reasons… "reasons", after all, lie in the realm of the understanding… do you believe that a lover would ever think of conducting a defence of his being in love, that is, admit that to him it was not the absolute, unconditionally the absolute, but that he thought of it as being in a class with arguments against it and on that basis developed a defence; that is, do you believe that he could or would confess that he was not in love, inform against himself that he was not in love… he is something that is more than all reasons and any defence: he is in love. (*SUD*, 103)

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

There are a myriad of reasons beyond the ones we have briefly discussed here that further disentangle particular religiousness A from the ethical stage. These cannot rely on religiousness having some unique theological perspective either, as theological commitment is not precluded from the ethical stage—in fact, it is within the ethical stage that theological beliefs are reified most strongly and are disfigured from beliefs into facts. Rather, the distinction is in how the individual *relates* to their existence, both in regards to their self and other selves. Once again we find the stages serving to distinguish different dispositions that affect our relationships, rather than referring explicitly to the domain from which the stage takes its name. We can recall that Climacus calls faith 'relational' rather than doctrinal, and so the irreconcilable natures we find at the core of the ethical and religious stages is, above all, a difference of relation, a difference in how existence is approached—and of greatest importance to our interests here, it is the transformation of how we approach existence ethically that most clearly delineates the ethical and religious life-views. Thus, while each of them offers the potential for a secular ethic, religiousness A not only reflects Kierkegaard's ethics more closely, but offers

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[44] Judge William's interest is in accumulation—i.e., accumulation of ethical virtue—as accumulation is socially verifiable and recognisable. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, writes, "there is, under the conditions of an accumulating society, no other unifying bond available between individuals who in the very process of power accumulation and expansion are losing all natural connections with their fellow-men" (Arendt 1975, 157). This helps to explain why Judge William is alienated from his wife on an emotional/passionate level—his feeling for her is refracted through the prism of accumulation, she is distorted into an object for him to possess and to put on display, not another human being to whom he has a natural (i.e., passionate) interest.

a more compelling approach to ethics than the ethical stage. Religiousness A is not a return to the ethical stage, and we have no need to defend or promote the ethical stage.

§3.2 Ethical Tensions in Religiousness A

As we mentioned at the outset of the previous section, there is an interest in utilising the ethical stage to present Kierkegaard's ethical commitments thus eschewing his religious stage (and its theological connotations). However, as we have seen, this cannot be done, as his ethics is incompatible with the disposition of the ethicist—so what makes contorting the ethical stage to fit Kierkegaard's ethics so enticing? One possible answer is that its name suggests that it is relevant to ethics; but we have seen this is not an accurate portrayal of the spheres. Another possible answer is that it is more clearly secular; but we have seen that this is also not necessarily true, as the theological and spiritual commitments are refracted through the lens of each stage, not representative of the lens itself. We also find a hybridisation in the form of the ethical-religious, collapsing religiousness A into the ethical life-view in order to blur their distinctions and grasp at the best of both worlds; but this is also problematic as it discards Kierkegaard's clear delineation of the stages and relies on a dubious interpretation of the category of the ethical-religious.[45] A final possibility, and one which seems most appropriate, is that it provides answers to problems present within religiousness A and, despite the issues with the ethical stage itself, does not require the theologically aligned religiousness B. We must, therefore, look at *why* a return to the ethical for a secular account of Kierkegaard's ethic is so alluring to interpreters by taking a critical eye to two deficiencies and two ambiguities of religiousness A because of its lack of theological presuppositions. The deficiencies are: a desire for completion *i*); a desire for clear and authoritative rules *ii*). The ambiguities are: a relationship to the absolute/transcendent *iii*); defining the relation to others *iv*).

i) *Desire for completeness*: Religiousness A lacks a statement about a natural *telos* to human existence, a lack made apparent when placed between the ethical and religious stages. Each of its neighbouring existential spheres posit an orientation for an individual's life. The ethical stage presents the *telos* of life to become a reflection of the universal, or absolute—Judge William exemplifies this, choosing his contemporary social milieu as absolute and reflecting that milieu, forgoing his own passions and interests to live the life proscribed for him is the *telos*. Religiousness B emphasises eternal blessedness and absolution from sin by a loving God when one lives an authentically Christian life. The Christian life-view has much clearer guidelines insofar as it positions God as absolute, and the Bible as articulating how one ought to live—the *telos* of life is to live as the Bible commands. Religiousness A, without such clear guidance or relation to a universal or absolute ground, does not provide any relief, or a sense of resolution to the striving individual.

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[45] We see the pairing used most explicitly in H.H.'s Two Ethical-Religious Essays. If we look at the content of the essays we see that H.H. is not reducing the ethical-religious to a single life-view, but is investigating the distinction between the way that the ethical and religious respectively evaluate life. We find the ethically charged essay "Has a Man the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?" where the ethicist can be put to death for the truth because she has no ethical duty to the other and can be certain of their relation to the absolute truth, where the religious individual is in the opposite position and she cannot allow others to make themselves guilty on her part. We also find the more intellectually-focused "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" which questions the relation to the Absolute and absolute knowledge, arguing that the genius (the ethical) does not have a true relation to absolute knowledge because they are finite and grounded in particularity and their authority rests in themselves, while the apostle (the religious), being divinely ordained or inspired, speaks with divine authority, not their own. The essays are not representative of a coalescing of the two stages into one, but a means of discrimination between the respective dispositions.

It should be stressed that Kierkegaard does not seem to fully endorse a *telos* outside of religiousness B; Christianity is the only true answer for sinfulness, anxiety, and despair. Anthony Rudd advocates that by being human we have a natural *telos* which we must, at some level, be aware of (Rudd 2008, 182), while Wietzke adds to this that such a *telos* provides a rationale for transitioning between the stages (Wietzke 2015, 98-9)—this makes sense within the overall purpose of Kierkegaard's authorship: becoming a Christian. Thus, we can understand this natural *telos* as active within both the ethical and Christian-religious stages. There is the *telos* of the world-historical, and there is the eschatological *telos* of the return of God in the world and the forgiveness of sins. We find no such final end for the knight of faith, who is left to seek the eternal in immanence, which is to say, seek the infinite in the finite. The teleological pull of the absolute in both the ethical and religious stages is attractive as it not only provides a criterion of judgment but also a clear roadmap towards the absolute. The knight of faith does not possess a clear notion of the absolute, so there are questions about the grounds of their ethics, as well as the possibility for successfully discharging their ethical duties—is there light at the end of the tunnel towards which we are drawn?

ii) Desire for authority: We have alluded to the fact that there is, at the core of religiousness A, an absence of authority, and in the introduction to this chapter we drew explicit attention to its minimal representation in Kierkegaard's works and commentaries on his works—thus, religiousness A is often condensed into religiousness B, or downgraded to the ethical stage. We also mentioned that Kierkegaard's *telos* is religiousness B and he believes that, once in the religious stage, religiousness B is inevitable. Significantly, this minimal treatment of Religiousness A directly impacts its authority structures—the ethical and Christian-religious each claim to have an unquestionable, universal, and absolute authority, while religiousness A lacks such claims. We have previously had the opportunity to discuss the role of authority in forgiveness: God can provide forgiveness of sins in a way that others cannot because the transcendent status provides an elevated moral position; similarly, within the ethical stage there is authority vested in those who serve as representatives of the universal system (i.e., a judge like William, a Pharisee, or anyone else who takes on a sense of self-righteousness or moral superiority). These structures are not found in Kierkegaard's writings, and may be absent in Religiousness A.

Is this deficiency of authority a problem though? Marino sees Kierkegaard as presenting a need for something beyond ourselves to judge, and that we cannot be in the position of authority because we cannot overcome ourselves alone (Marino 2001, 124-5). Such an external authority is manifest in both the ethical and the Christian-religious stages. The ethical stage claims clear, abstract, and universal rules, while religiousness B has the divine command (however maximally or minimally an interpreter wants to view it). While this desire for some overarching system of judgement is apparent, Kirmmse notes that Kierkegaard had a "lack of fundamental interest in the problem of reason and ethics as he had inherited it from the Enlightenment, i.e., the project of constructing a rule-based rational morality as a product of human self-legislation" (Kirmmse 2001, 195). If we accept Kirmmse's interpretation, returning to the ethical stage to resolve the lack of authority cannot be a legitimate answer to this problem as it represents a return to the Enlightenment ethics to which Kierkegaard responds. Furthermore, we have also seen that the ethics of religiousness B is present in religiousness A, even though it lacks the authority structure.

An absent authority structure does not necessarily constitute a problem though. H.H. writes that in the "immanent sphere" authority is either "utterly unthinkable" or "transitory" (*WA*, 99). So rather than investing authority in the transcendent as we find in religiousness B, there is no singular authority in religiousness A. This is ambiguous, but retains the need for continual striving; without the clear authority structure we lose a sense of guidance and support, which is quite attractive, but that does not mean that our ethical striving becomes invalidated, only that it becomes more strenuous and requires a greater investment and commitment—we may be grasping in the dark, but we blindly find walls and obstructions (although not always without stumbling). Furthermore, we have discussed ways of resolving the deficiency without requiring specific rules or commands, offering sympathetic reactivity as constitutive of religiousness A's ethic. This represents a similar ethical structure to religiousness B, but without the divine command to love the neighbour. The deficiency of religiousness A is thus not problematic because it does not have a clear statement (or a calculus) of what to do, as being plastic and able to flexibly respond to the needs of others appears to offer positive ethical repercussions. So, perhaps this tension is really a problem of lacking an 'absolute' foundation?

iii) *Relating to the transcendent*: We again find religiousness A caught in a tension between its closest neighbours in regards to transcendence. The ethical stage claims to know the absolute intellectually, while religiousness B claims to know the absolute through the paradox of the God-man—each claims that a relation to the transcendent is possible, and necessary, within their life-views. It is religiousness A alone which lacks such a claim, instead positing a relation to the eternal within each individual. It is clearly much more attractive to situate ethics within a context of a transcendent ground, whether it is society, state religion, a set of abstract universal moral precepts, preferred ethical valuations, or a divine command. Possessing a transcendent ground confers legitimacy beyond the merely human to the ethics of both the ethical and Christian-religious stages, and clarifies to whom ethical duties are owed, to whom we are accountable, and how we may find remission of our ethical duties (not to mention having a source to point to). Connell distinguishes between these two claims to transcendent authority by arguing that the Christian-religious individual keeps in mind their relationship to God in such a way that God transcends merely being the law one is obligated to follow; they become conscious of their choices and adopt a more critical view of their actions because they must reflect on it in a higher relationship than whether it conforms to social law/mores as in the ethical stage (Connell 1985, 165-6). Connell does not deny that there are clear guidelines shared between these stages, but shows that they are different in magnitude. Absent a relation to the transcendent, religiousness A is once again stranded in the dark—but perhaps we may find the hand of our neighbour reaching out to us, to help guide us, as we help guide them.

iv) *Relating to others*: Another feature that is offered by both the ethical sphere and religiousness B but is lacking clear enunciation in religiousness A, is the disposition we are to take to other individuals. In the ethical stage, because our ethical stature is isolated to how we practice the social ethos, we stand in a relation to others based on what is demanded by an abstract set of rules. Additionally, because of our independent ethical valuations there is the possibility of viewing oneself as possessing an ethical standing higher than that of others, and thus the possibility that others are under our judgment. Religiousness B, on the other hand, posits an equality of ethical stature for each individual under God. Within this view, each individual is infinitely

sinful in relation to the transcendent and does not have ethical or moral superiority over others—so neighbour love is love of the other as an equal, rather than a competitive desire to be *more* loving than one's neighbour. Religiousness A is defined as relating to the human, and this suggests a much closer affinity between one individual and another. However, while there is some clarity about the shared immanence of human to human relationships, and the sympathy this engenders, the ethical relation to the other remains somewhat ambiguous when compared to the straightforward descriptions of its neighbouring stages.

When the Christian God is removed as the ground of the ethic of the religious stage *in toto*, we must put aside the possibility for it to be categorised as *neighbour love*—a uniquely Christian concept. Within religiousness A there is no command, no call to love the neighbour as you love yourself, so while we have been assuming this structure, it cannot be claimed to truly be active within the theologically-neutral religiousness A. Furthermore, absent a recognition of a creator, the dialectical relation to God dissipates and so too does the compulsion for radical self-openness. Radical self-openness, as Anti-Climacus presents it, derives from our inability to hide from God in the way we can hide from ourselves and others, thus we must adopt a disposition of earnestness with ourselves; why hide from ourselves when we cannot hide from God? Here we see both how we should relate to our task (earnestness with our self in both our successes and failures), as well as the importance of an authority that we are accountable to (that motivates our continual inward earnestness). Each of these contributes to our relation to alterity: if we cannot be open to ourselves, how do we open ourselves to others? And how do we relate to others ethically if not as neighbours? When we find that hand in the dark, do we recoil from it, do we thrust it away lest it pull us back, or do we open ourselves to faith and trust it?

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Obviously, the ethical life-view is not an attractive alternative to the religious life-view, particularly when it comes to ethics. Despite its promises of clear rules, an absolute authority, and the possibility of escape from our guilt to see oneself as ethical, these are all ultimately hollow promises. Alternatively, we can understand why Kierkegaard would be an advocate for religiousness A possessing a momentum towards religiousness B: there is a gravitational pull towards the absolute, towards a sense of certainty (although only a faith-based certainty), and the possibility of reconciliation in the form of forgiveness of sins. While the ambiguities and tensions are not necessarily problematic, they undermine the overall attractiveness of religiousness A as an ethical alternative; without such a clear relation that draws us forward, how can we be sure that we are properly oriented in the dark so that we can even begin our task? More importantly for our interest, though, is finding an answer to whether this orientation is recoverable without turning to theology? Religiousness A, and the knight of faith, while having the same recognition of the need to care and support others, finds themselves without an anchor that can hold them in that recognition; they are alone with their eternal and infinite guilt-consciousness; they are disoriented in the dark and left to stumble. And yet, they are not alone. The knight of faith, despite their guilt-consciousness being particular to them, shares that with others and is united in sympathy with others, and it is on this foundation that the missing components of Kierkegaard's ethics may be discoverable.

Conclusion

We must concede that religiousness A is indeed an ambiguous disposition, especially when we make our departure from theological presuppositions (Christian ones in particular). While not problematic on its own, this does, as stated, undermine its effectiveness as an ethical disposition because there are a variety of missing or obscure aspects, namely: desire for completeness, desire for authority, a relationship to the transcendent, and a defined relation to others. However, given the analysis and reconstruction of the stage above, we can perhaps find a structure for the ethic to help articulate it in nuanced language and resolve the deficiencies and ambiguities. We must therefore shift our strategy from Kierkegaard as a lone ethical thinker, to a cooperative one—a transformation that seems quite appropriate. It will be the goal of the following chapters to examine possible ethical systems that would conform to Kierkegaard's, without collapsing back into the ethical stage, or requiring religious assent. This will require us to retrieve: a foundation which can help provide a motive and sense of accountability; a sense of community that cooperatively strives in mutual ethical development; and that provides the need for radical self-openness (both to oneself and to others).

4| *Developing the Ethic of Religiousness A*

The present chapter will follow directly from the problems arising from the previous chapter, namely the deficiencies and ambiguities inherent to religiousness A and the need for a stronger foundation upon which to graft Kierkegaard's secular ethic. As discussed, this will require us to meet several features required by ethics: a desire for ethical completeness, a desire for robust authority, a relationship to the transcendent, and a clearly defined relation to others not rooted in the Biblical command to love one's neighbour. Engaging with each of these problems will provide key insights into how Kierkegaard's religiousness A can possess a relation to something with absolute value, that does not require theological assent, a necessary move if we are to avoid his worries about mistaking relative value for absolute value.[1] The aforementioned limitations in the literature surrounding religiousness A (which risk collapsing it into religiousness B, or worse: the ethical stage) means that refiguring Kierkegaard's ethics will require us to forge a dialogue with other ethically minded philosophers. While such a dialogue can be had with other ethically-minded philosophers, we will be focusing in this chapter on two: Alasdair MacIntyre and Emmanuel Levinas.

Each of these two thinkers is associated with Kierkegaard through their critical assessments of his works, most especially his ethical works.[2] However, despite their critical posture towards Kierkegaard, each of them has been subject to a variety of comparisons with him, as there are numerous areas of overlap in their respective philosophical commitments (cf: *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre* (eds. Davenport & Rudd, 2001), *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (Westphal, 2008), *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion* (eds. Simmons & Wood, 2008)). While aspects of their perspectives deny reconciliation, it is often the case that the distance posited by the critiques is less broad than suggested. Furthermore, much of the interest in connecting Kierkegaard to MacIntyre and Levinas respectively helps reveal how their approaches to ethics either share important commonalities that mutually help in understanding each other, or reveal deficiencies in their respective ethics resolved through the interrelation. Our concern is to try to provide answers for the deficiencies and ambiguities discussed in the previous chapter. MacIntyre's focus on immanence makes him suitable to consider the first two (the deficiencies of completeness and authoritative rules), while Levinas' focus on transcendence within immanence makes him ideal in addressing the latter two (the ambiguities of our relation to transcendence and other individuals). Our hope is that considering these problems through the lens provided by each of these figures will allow us to ultimately provide a practical and viable account of Kierkegaard's ethic.

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[1] A problem that underlies the deficiencies and ambiguities, but which will only receive direct attention in the conclusion.
[2] Although, as we shall see when discussing MacIntyre's critique this is a little misleading.

While there is an expectation that MacIntyre and Levinas will fall short, the contribution of their perspectives in interpreting Kierkegaard's ethic will open a pathway for us to approach Paul Ricoeur in the next chapter. The respective positions of MacIntyre and Levinas are not necessarily reconcilable with each other (let alone Kierkegaard), but perhaps the provisions of each will allow us to discover meaningful overlaps and a more cohesive foundation for Kierkegaard's ethic. Thus, while our goal is to provide an answer to all four problems outlined in the previous chapter (the desire for completeness, the desire for authority, a relationship to the transcendent, and a defined relation to others), I will argue that MacIntyre and Levinas are limited to being able to address only two each, and that even where they can provide a resolution to those problems there are still limitations in what they can offer.

While there have been a variety of attempts to show the commonalities between Kierkegaard's ethics and those of MacIntyre and Levinas respectively, our contribution here will thus be more restrained. For our purposes, we need only briefly address the basic premises of their ethics and draw on the work that has previously been done to connect these figures. However, where much of the previous work in connecting these three has been focused on defending Judge William's (ethical stage) ethics against MacIntyre's criticisms and *Works of Love* (religiousness B) in relation to Levinas, we will be approaching each of them from the perspective of religiousness A and the ethic we outlined previously. In order to examine how their respective accounts contribute a new interpretive lens to assist in understanding the ethics of religiousness A, we will look at them in turn: briefly discussing their ethics (*§1.1*, *§2.1*) and whether their ethics and Kierkegaard's are really as different as the critiques suggest (*§1.2*, *§2.2*). Together, this analysis should help to reveal how they can contribute possible resolutions to the deficiencies and ambiguities we highlighted at the end of Chapter 3.

§1 MacIntyre

Alasdair MacIntyre will be our first candidate to provide answers to the deficiencies in Kierkegaard's religiousness A. MacIntyre draws on a variety of different philosophical positions (along with his own theological background), and has a history of being placed side by side with Kierkegaard—at times productively, and just as often critically. MacIntyre offers us a perspective that can incorporate a similar theological lens to Kierkegaard's, but without an emphasis on the *necessity* of being a Christian. It is MacIntyre's ability to elide the problems associated with such a heavy-handed approach that makes him an attractive co-operator in designing the ethic of religiousness A (which, as previously discussed does not deny the validity of Christianity, but is not '*decisively* Christian'). However, before we can declare that MacIntyre can provide the necessary support religiousness A requires, we must first briefly examine what exactly his ethical commitments are (*§1.1*), and how he and Kierkegaard's respective approaches to ethics can be integrated in a productive way (*§1.2*). As suggested by our second concern, not only are we hoping to draw parallels in regards to ethics, but also their broader philosophical commitments, as these not only reinforce their ethical positions but affect their view of the ethical disposition of individuals—to put it more directly: we are interested in both how they construct their ethics and how they believe individuals engage in ethical action.

§1.1 MacIntyre's Ethics

MacIntyre's *After Virtue* presents a novel approach to virtue ethics, and, in part, this resuscitation of virtue ethics is in response to Kierkegaard's repudiation of enlightenment ethics in *Either/Or*. MacIntyre's critique of Kierkegaard is known best from its presentation in *After Virtue*, where it plays a significant role in the movement from the abstract ethics of the enlightenment to the emotivist ethics of the modernists—the "criterionless choice" of Judge William in *Either/Or*.[3] He has a similar criticism in an earlier work as well. In *A Short History of Ethics*, he presents a critical assessment of Kierkegaard's ethics as lacking structure, and as arrayed against rationalism (but while recognising that Kierkegaard is not arguing against rationalism *per se*) (MacIntyre 1966, 215-8). In MacIntyre's view, Kierkegaard is critical of the movement initiated by the Aristotelian revival leading directly to Hegel's positing a rational foundation for Christianity, and in response Kierkegaard discarded a rational foundation of ethics in favour of choice, meaning there could be no objective test to determine whether an action is ethical or not (MacIntyre 1966, 215). Backhouse interprets MacIntyre as advancing the view that Kierkegaard places blind faith over reason, stating that he saw Kierkegaard as "trapped in an inescapable dilemma of basing truth on subjective passion" (Backhouse 2011, 115). This presents Kierkegaard firmly within the emotivist camp and in opposition to any form of ethics that can be shared. However, while his criticism 0f what he believes constitutes Kierkegaard's ethic plays an important role in formulating his ethics, MacIntyre's criticisms are not robust and fail to accurately address Kierkegaard's ethics—the ethics of the religious stage. We need not provide an exhaustive rebuttal of MacIntyre's critique, as this is not only extraneous, but has been done elsewhere (cf: *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*).

Important to our discussion is MacIntyre's illumination of the roots of Kierkegaard's ethic and its entrenchment in Kant's moral theory. MacIntyre argues that at its core Kant's moral theory has a problem recognising contradictory or unethical ways of living—or avoids recognising them—and, by failing to address these problematic ways of living, Kant ultimately allows for inconsistencies to be spuriously cast as universalisable (MacIntyre 1984, 43-6). It is here that MacIntyre traces the origins of emotivist ethics. Though it may seem contradictory to suggest that emotivism developed from Kant's impersonal moral system, MacIntyre explains that egoist maxims can be consistent and acceptable within Kant's overall evaluation of ethical actions—even if they are nakedly immoral (MacIntyre 1984, 45-6).[4] Judge William, serving as an exemplar of the ethics of German Idealism, borrows his ethic from Kant (along with Hegel), thus appropriating the same problematic emotivist structure but heightening it by removing the necessity of a rational and impersonal foundation. Rather than universalisable maxims, William considers his choice of what is ethical to constitute a retroactive rationale—he chose that ethical system because it always was *the* ethical system. With this background in mind, we will now provide a brief overview of how MacIntyre's virtue ethics is structured and how virtue ethics offers an alternative to abstract enlightenment ethics, as well as to the absence of absolute value

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[3] In brief, the criticism is structured on the idea that the Judge chooses arbitrarily what is good and bad—it is arbitrary because there is no reason for his choice, the necessity for '*the* ethical' retroactively transforms the choice into the reason (MacIntyre 1984, 42-3). The result is that we cannot rationally develop moral theories or norms, so everything devolves into choice and risk, two deeply personal and untransferable features.

[4] "I can without any inconsistency whatsoever flout it; 'Let everyone except me be treated as a means' may be immoral, but it is not inconsistent and there is not even any inconsistency in willing a universe of egoists all of whom live by this maxim" (MacIntyre 1984, 46).

in modernist emotivist ethics. However, a thorough accounting would be beyond the scope of this project, so we will instead be focusing on two key aspects that serve as primary elements of MacIntyre's ethics and which may prove to have parallels within Kierkegaard's philosophy: narrative identity (*i*); and what constitutes a virtue (*ii*).

i) *Narrative identity*: "We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourself part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others" (MacIntyre 1984, 213). Our role as 'main character' implies a narrative dimension to our self-understanding, and it is this self-narrative that forms the central core of MacIntyre's interpretation of virtue ethics. This brief quote also points to an attendant aspect of narrative: its inherently social foundation. Jeffrey Turner helpfully clarifies that MacIntyre is implying 'tradition' as a direct influence in this quote—as morality is intimately bound up with tradition (Turner 2001, 42-3). We find here an argument that narrativity not only provides a structure within which to understand ourselves, but also connects us to the stories of others and to broader social conventions. Furthermore, it is the stories that ground those traditions, the stories of others, which provide boundaries to our self-narrative. It is, therefore, within a narrative framework that ethics is situated in MacIntyre's account, so, we must first understand what MacIntyre means by 'narrative identity.'

On MacIntyre's account, the benefit of narrative is that it plots a human life along familiar lines, like those of classical dramas.[5] An important element in these dramas is the sense of a 'quest.' Plotting our lives in the form of a quest allows us to comprehend the ends of various actions, to have a concept of what is 'good' about a good life, and in turn to be able to share one's perspective on what is good with others, thereby discovering common goods and contributing to and benefiting from those common goods (MacIntyre 1984, 218-9). Seizing on this notion of a quest at the heart of one's life-story, we can agree with Kathy Behrendt that MacIntyre assumes a strong teleological position in his account of narrative (Behrendt 2015, 196-9); not only does narrative orient one's life, it allows for it to be interpreted relative to a moral and thematic quest for the good (although MacIntyre does not fully explicate what the quest entails[6]). Additionally, it is the intersection of a variety of narratives that serves as the context for the quest, allowing the individual 'authoring' their narrative to assume roles in the narratives of others. Rather than this having a homogenizing and reductive effect, placing the individual into a subservient role in the lives of others, it allows for an enhanced capacity to share one's life story, and understand the life stories of others in turn. This function of narrative allows for the examination and understanding of how virtues and intentions lead to desired goals—especially the ultimate goal of living a good life (MacIntyre 1984, 213-4).[7]

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[5] Myths, dramas, novels, and other culturally significant literary forms serve as important foundations for personal narratives, providing the types of plots that we can utilise in constructing our narratives as well as allowing us to integrate our stories in our cultural milieu (MacIntyre 1984, 216). By borrowing these forms and styles we simultaneously absorb social contexts, cues, and an implicit recognition of social norms and customs—we forge narratives through our actions, but they are informed by the stories we grow up with.

[6] This is reflective of the weak normative structure of MacIntyre's ethic (Assiter 2009, 117). However, following *After Virtue*, this normative structure is strengthened by a greater focus on tradition as the arbiter of the good.

[7] As we shall discuss below, MacIntyre is a *eudaimonist*, and so living a good life is the ultimate *telos* towards which our life should be oriented.

MacIntyre posits that the narrative approach allows for three levels of context that provide insight to a human life: *i*) the intentions of individuals and how they are able to achieve certain ends; *ii*) the personal, as well as social, history of actions that are intentionally mirrored by an individual to achieve those ends; *iii*) the traditional understanding of the relationship between the ends and the actions that can be used to achieve those ends (MacIntyre 1984, 208).[8] Narrative allows for the interweaving of intention with valid courses of actions so that the initiation of the action and the result of that action can be connected and the purpose behind it understood. Furthermore, by reformulating action and intention in the form of a story, those actions are rendered intelligible to others by making intentions more accessible and replicable; the stories that we read, hear, and tell have an ethical dimension to them, thus furnishing us with legitimised actions that we can perform in the future. To clarify how this interweaving works MacIntyre draws from historical narratives like epics, which not only have the narrative component he sees as critical to understanding ethics, but also use that narrative as a foundation for articulating ethical activity.

MacIntyre notes two important features possessed by protagonists in epics: *i*) they are exemplified through not just the actions they take, but the sequence of events in which they are called upon to take those actions (their actions do not occur in a vacuum and they are not separable, or evaluable on their own); *ii*) they have an inability to look from outside in on their norms; rather they accept them and act on them, otherwise they would no longer be tied to the same norms that ground their actions (MacIntyre 1984, 125). Alongside these features, MacIntyre draws two major insights from the classical approach to epics and ethics: *i*) ethics is socially local and any attempt at a universal or objective ethic is illusory, as we act according to personal commitments within our socially local setting; *ii*) any ethical tradition must have a starting point with roots in a heroic tradition with both a narratively satisfying approach to justifying ethics and also patterns of actions to fulfil the duties those ethical systems require (MacIntyre 1984, 126-7). So, we can say that MacIntyre views epics as providing a sense of character derived from the sequence of actions rooted in socially legitimised norms, norms that are themselves derived from narratives that contextualise social traditions. Thus, individual narratives are not independent of broader social narratives, but formed through the appropriation of those narratives and an attendant appropriation of courses of action ethically justified by one's social milieu. But, while we may find rooting one's character in social mores agreeable, what is it that lends authority to the narratives we accept?

Epics also provide an answer to this. It is in the narrative history of early societies that morality and social formulations are codified, understood, and shared through the use of an heroic voice, one which has authority as a creator, and which is meant to be emulated through the reproduction of their actions and successes (MacIntyre 1984, 121). This is evident in early Greek myths and the much later Icelandic sagas, each telling stories involving social changes that are reflected in heroic characters and leaders. By presenting ethical actions as the actions of authoritative figures, epics also provide a normative standard for evaluating actions and social functions: how do we emulate our heroes, how can we appropriate their heroic attitudes/dispositions,

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[8] These actions will change depending on the social, historical, technological, etc. situation of the individuals aiming towards certain ends. Thus, an action is related to history in three ways: personal, social, and world, with the (working backwards) ends remaining constant, the actions conforming to social customs and traditions, and the personal intentions changing to achieve the goal of living a good life.

etc. Moral and social bonds are inextricably linked in heroic societies, hence leaders being vested with moral authority, thus the roles and duties to one's kin determine the relationships to friends and enemies: to whom one owes, what one owes, and the reciprocal nature of that debt (MacIntyre 1984, 122-3). MacIntyre contrasts this with the enlightenment view of individuals as distinct moral agents existing outside the bonds of a social structure. Where the classical conception of the individual is predicated on social arrangements and the standards set by their society (actions being of singular importance and inseparable from the analysis of the ethical character of the individual), the modernist approach lost this connection by disconnecting the individual moral agent, their social context, and their actions. The ethics of the enlightenment, in MacIntyre's view, separates actions from intentions and social context by evaluating actions in accordance with an abstract criterion.[9] This effectively frees individuals from the bonds they have to others and places them into the role of arbiter between right and wrong—they are not acting as members of a moral society, but as independent judges of what constitutes ethically valid and invalid actions.[10]

Abstracting the individual from their social milieu presents a significant problem for ethics, one which MacIntyre argues requires a return to a more socially and traditionally mediated approach. To this end, MacIntyre draws a link between the practice of virtues and history, one which requires current practitioners to look to the past to discover what is valuable as a means of attuning actions and intentions to better express the good (MacIntyre 1984, 193-4). Importantly, this is not just a stable set of practices and norms, but a set that evolves with respect to both the contemporary state of what is being practiced and the tradition that precedes and informs it. History, from this perspective, must be open to constant plundering of insight. This link between practicing virtues and history is not just true of broader social and human histories, but of personal history as well. MacIntyre also argues in favour of an inextricable link between practicing the virtues and possessing them (MacIntyre 1984, 149). Therefore, to learn the virtues depends not only on the natural inclination to act in virtuous ways, but also to practice the virtues through active use—it is not enough to *know* the virtues, they are not merely theoretical, one must also *act on* them. By pairing attaining virtue with practicing it, MacIntyre reveals a narrative capacity for accountability. Not only are our actions outwardly evaluable, but in mutually sharing life stories we are able to gain a more complex understanding of the expression of traditional courses of action that have ethical legitimacy—we can compare our stories with others, and recognise ethical rectitude and deficiency (MacIntyre 1984, 218). Recounting our life stories is our way of holding ourselves accountable to others: we seek to make our actions intelligible to others, to make them evaluable within the traditions our stories are founded upon.

With this brief accounting of his approach to narrative identity, we have discovered that narrative is intimately tied to virtue, both in its grounding of virtues within traditions and in its provision for individual accountability. We have already discussed the centrality of epics for MacIntyre's narrative identity, but we

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[9] MacIntyre sees the development of abstract lists of ethical and unethical actions, like the Kantian maxims, as drawing a line of demarcation between the action and the intention/social context. An individual can act in accordance with the maxims without having an ethical intention to do so—they can be coerced, ignorant, or deceived in acting certain ways, but because they are in accordance with the maxim they have acted ethically.

[10] This is the case with Kierkegaardian figures like William in *Either/Or*, and the Pharisees in his theological works.

will briefly return to it to elucidate the chains that bind narrative and virtue. It is within the context of Sophocles' epics that MacIntyre most directly approaches virtues from the scope of narrative identity (MacIntyre 1984, 143-4). Understanding virtues in the context of Sophoclean tragedy, a human life is understood as a series of successes and failures in the various arenas of life (social, moral, physical, etc.), and the virtues stand in stark relief as those ideals that allowed for success, as well as those having led to failure (MacIntyre 1984, 144-5). Focusing on the protagonists of Sophoclean tragedies also allows for a more complex understanding of the individual as both a member of society, as well as an individual who is able to transcend society—one who has duties to society, but is able to evaluate and question those duties. Likewise, society develops dialectically with the individuals comprising it: as individuals perform and question their various roles, society changes and new traditions and practices are developed. It is within history that individuals and societies discover virtues and vices on macro- and microscopic scales. But, what exactly *are* virtues for MacIntyre?

ii) Defining Virtue: Simply put, "a virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (MacIntyre 1984, 191). Once again, we find the virtues as practical, that is, arising specifically out of practical application, and through practice ethical value is transferred to the practitioner. However, stating that virtues are qualities we acquire through practicing actions aimed at 'the good,' including the possibilities for an altruistic interpretation (MacIntyre 1984, 229), is deceptively simple. To expand on this foundation we will note that MacIntyre argues that there are three necessary components to a virtue theory of ethics: *i*) an account of practice (practice being complex social cooperation that requires excellence and produces excellence[11]); *ii*) a narrative conception of self-identity; *iii*) a moral tradition (MacIntyre 1984, 186-7). We have discussed the second component above, so it is within this section that we will more clearly outline the first and third, namely the practice and the tradition of virtues.

For a virtue theory to be able to transcend the issues of emotivism,[12] namely the modern construction of arbitrary choice of moral actions, there needs to be standards providing a *telos* for the whole of a human life (MacIntyre 1984, 203). MacIntyre quotes Kierkegaard's 'purity of heart'[13] to support this, suggesting that to discover the foundation for a modern theory of virtue ethics one must first look to the virtue of integrity (or constancy—'to will one thing') which maintains the *telos* and purposiveness of a single human life. Ethical constancy is what makes a narrative conception of identity attractive to MacIntyre, and the *telos* MacIntyre posits is living a 'good life' (with tradition and social convention playing determinative roles in evaluating what 'good' or 'goods' constitutes a good life). Therefore, a political foundation to ethics is necessary, and MacIntyre follows Aristotle in placing his theory in a social context—it is not an *ex nihil* generation of a theory of ethics founded around virtues, but the examination and exposition of already present virtues practiced in everyday life (MacIntyre 1984, 147-8). Rather than being grounded in the intuitive preferences of emotivism, the virtues are grounded in the social context within which we grow up; virtues are not abstract ideals we

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[11] Cf: MacIntyre 1984, 187-189.

[12] A brief discussion of emotivism will be given when discussing MacIntyre's critique of Kierkegaard, but for context here: emotivism refers to modernist conceptions of ethics, based primarily on preference and individual attitudes towards ethical valuation. It is an emotivist position, as we shall see, that MacIntyre attributes to Kierkegaard and is the (less attractive) response to the abstracted morality of the enlightenment.

[13] A common reference point for MacIntyre (cf: 1984, 203; 1988, 165; 1990, 143).

discover intellectually, but practical activities we partake in regularly, although they are not always examined and given a clear taxonomy. What differentiates the virtues from other actions is their contribution to, or orientation towards *eudaimonia*.

It is *eudaimonia* that serves as the ultimate aim of acting ethically for MacIntyre. This is not meant to be conflated with physical rewards for acting (it is not money, power, pleasure, etc.), instead its importance is to the 'soul' of the individual because it promotes a sense of contentment (prosperousness, happiness, a general sense of 'well-being') (MacIntyre 1984, 148). *Eudaimonia* has its roots, obviously, in classical Greek philosophy, and to temper interpretations that may cast this *telos* as egoistic, MacIntyre not only roots virtues within broader social customs, but also traces a link between the Greek and Christian traditions of virtues. Charity radically alters the understanding of virtue ethics, changing the *telos* from individual contentment at the end of one's life to something closer to redemption, itself related to the overcoming of personal sinfulness (MacIntyre 1984, 174-5). This is the underlying theme of the quests in epics and romances of the Middle Ages, where the goal is to achieve redemption through questing, not to reach a state of happiness or contentment—Arthur is not questing for his contentment or the contentment of his community, but to address imbalances of justice arising from original sin, and to overcome the sinfulness tied to human existence. Introducing sin implies the introduction of evil into the world as contrary to good, which means that it ceases to be a matter of lacking virtue or being ignorant of it, but of being distracted from one's virtues; sin does not mean viciousness, but a lack of virtue, which is to say a lack of practicing the virtues one's society has codified. Furthermore, sin advances beyond Aristotle's ethics by allowing for an individual to *choose* to engage in evil actions, even under the guise of being good,[14] instead of having an ignorance or lack of virtue—through the lens of sin, virtues require individual will power to be practiced, rather than being an underlying feature of one's character.

We can see through our discussion of the virtues their interrelation to narrative. Virtues relate directly to our lived existence, to the way that we interact with others and the world, but are exemplified, codified, and expressed through a variety of narrative forms. The narratives highlighting virtues gain their authority by the characters expressing those virtues, becoming embedded in the broader cultural milieu and forming the basis for tradition. Despite their historical roots, the virtues and the *telos* of the good are not staid and reified, they remain open to reinterpretation through repetition and revision; successive generations reinterpret the actions sanctioned by tradition and their practice is transformed relative to new norms and customs. MacIntyre's account allows for an interpretation of human action through the lens of narrative that reformulates the valuation of actions through the application of the designation 'virtue'—rather than an abstract list of virtues, MacIntyre advances an approach to virtue that is founded in society, tradition, and history.

§1.2 A Possible Reconciliation

Now that we have a basic understanding of MacIntyre's ethics we can start to draw links between his and Kierkegaard's respective positions. MacIntyre may appear justified in stating that "the gap between an Aristotelian or Thomistic ethics of the virtues and a Kierkegaardian ethics is just too great" (MacIntyre 2001,

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[14] This echoes MacIntyre's critique of ethical systems separating intention from action, as these cannot account for sin and the active choice to commit evil actions—whether transparently, or opaquely.

353), especially given his critique of Kierkegaard in *After Virtue*. But, given his focus on the ethics of Judge William, which bears no resemblance to the ethics articulated in works from the religious perspective, perhaps this is not entirely true. Gordon Marino notes that MacIntyre did recognise that his portrayal of Kierkegaard's ethics as reflected in *Either/Or* is not an accurate one, as he points out that MacIntyre notes a "radical change" of ethic shortly after the publication of *Either/Or* (Marino 2001, 115). If there is the possibility of reconciling their perspectives on ethics, we must first address MacIntyre's criticism of Kierkegaard's ethic in *After Virtue*, and then tease out commonalities between their perspectives.

From the outset we can say that MacIntyre is absolutely right in his criticism of Judge William. We agree with MacIntyre when he points out that William's choice is irrational and arbitrary. While it is true that it constitutes a choice of something instead of the non-choice of the aesthete, it still lacks the justification MacIntyre is trying to recover in *After Virtue* (alongside his other works). While one can find defences of William in the responses to MacIntyre's critique in the collection *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, these defences often draw liberally from Kierkegaard's religious stage, and are then applied to the ethical stage. William's choice is intentionally presented as irrational by Kierkegaard, because he is committed to a relativistic ethic that he assumes as absolute because he endorses it—it is an arbitrary choice that is retroactively legitimised. An example that may help elucidate this is women's suffrage. Within Kierkegaard's Denmark there was discussion of suffrage for women (Kierkegaard himself got involved in the debate writing a satirical polemical essay under the pseudonym A[15]) and William puts his views in no uncertain terms: he is in complete opposition to women being seen as equal to men and has an extended, vitriolic screed to this effect (*EOII*, 311-6).

If William is so committed to this position, when the social ethics and morals changed in such a way as to liberate women (at least politically) he will be thrust into a dilemma: either he must realise the relativity of his commitments, or hold to his position as absolute and the new *Sittlichkeit* as irrational (thus undercutting the grounds of his own ethic, as he too relies on *Sittlichkeit*). The lack of plasticity and flexibility of his ethical absolutism leaves William with a position based not on good reasons or criteria, but on his own preferences and is thus irrational in the way argued by MacIntyre—he is not choosing based on reasons but "following the velocity" of his own fate (*EOII*, 164).[16] However, no such opposition to the equality of women is found (at least explicitly) in Kierkegaard's 'religious' authorship (both the Christian-religious and the pseudonymous literature of the religious stage, i.e., *Fear and Trembling*, the *Postscript*, etc.). In these works we find support for women's equality, at least in regard to living the life of faith (in both its theological and non-theological formulations).[17] We find the Married Man speaking of his wife as a co-author (*SLW*, 95-6), we find *de Silentio*

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[15] Cf: "Another Defence of Woman's Great Abilities" in *Early Polemical Essays*.

[16] William is critical of the aesthete for wanting to choose what to do instead of realising that choices have already been made and his duty is to choose what has been chartered on his behalf. The aesthete wants freedom, William wants to show that the only choice we have is the choice of necessity; we are already determined and must commit to what has been determined for us.

[17] "What abominations has the world not seen in the relationships between man and woman, that she, almost like an animal, was a disdained being in comparison with the man, a being of another species. What battles there have been to establish in a worldly way the woman in equal rights with the man—but Christianity makes only infinity's change and therefore quietly. Outwardly the old more or less remains. The man is to be the woman's master and she subservient to him; but inwardly everything is changed, changed by means of this little question to the woman, whether she has consulted with her conscience about having this man—as master, for otherwise she does not get him… In the name of Christianity,

implying that Mary is a knight of faith (*FT*, 65), we find Kierkegaard using women as exemplars of Christian piety (*WL*, 28, 317-8, 325; *WA*, 137-44), among a variety of other examples. Kierkegaard is consistent in his belief that *anyone* can accede to the life of faith.

Thus, while MacIntyre's critique of Judge William is well founded, it is not applicable to Kierkegaard himself, as the *telos* of Kierkegaard's ethic is not constraining and judging based on abstract maxims, but adopts a disposition of openness and humility; not to be *seen* as a paragon, but to *act as one* (this is why the tax collector is more representative of the religious stage than the Pharisee (*WA*, 125-34)). Thus, we may be able to reconcile their respective positions in a way that MacIntyre's misattribution obscured from him. J. Anthony Rudd interprets Kierkegaard as a virtue ethicist—a helpful interpretation for reconciliation. Central to his claim is attributing to Kierkegaard an understanding of moral development as "agent- rather than act-centred" (Rudd 2001, 136). This accords well with the preceding discussions of Kierkegaard's ethics, but does not entail that Kierkegaard is a virtue ethicist. Walsh prefers to attribute to Kierkegaard the position of "character ethicist" (Walsh 2018, 14-5), but acknowledges areas of agreement within the two traditions (Walsh 2018, 16). Assiter also disagrees with the assignment of a virtue ethic to Kierkegaard, noting that while there are similarities in the criticisms they elicit, these critiques are primarily oriented towards their weak normative structure, and failure to articulate a set of actions one *must* take to be ethical (Assiter 2009, 117). These commonalities reveal that there is something shared in the structure of Kierkegaard's and MacIntyre's ethics. Each transcends the sort of myopic ethical systems obscuring our common humanity and leading to conflicts with others possessing alternative views of what is right, the extremity of which is curtailing the rights of others (rather than recognizing commonalities and sympathetically showing care because of those core commonalities) (Assiter 2009, 118). Thus, it would appear that whether Kierkegaard endorses a virtue ethic or not, his ethic does not stand in contrast with virtue ethics, but in concert with it.

Another area of overlap is their approach to identity. We have already examined MacIntyre's commitment to narrative identity, and its intimate connection to his virtue ethic, and we have discussed Kierkegaard's concept of selfhood—but is Kierkegaard's a narrative conception of self-identity? Kirmmse argues that they are engaged in a similar process of employing the Biblical tradition to provide a narrative structure to life that could provide a cure for modern problems (Kirmmse 2001, 192), while Rudd argues that each of them present human beings as having "an unavoidable need for a meaningful narrative structure in our lives" (Rudd 2001, 140). We find Kierkegaard using narrative structures in works such as *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way*, *Johannes Climacus*, his journals, and elsewhere as a means of developing and relating different notions of character to his audience. Rudd in *Self, Value, Narrative*, which offers a sustained argument for adopting the lens

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fatuous people have fatuously been busy about making it obvious in a worldly way that the woman should be established in equal rights with the man—Christianity has never required or desired this. It has done everything for the woman, provided she Christianly will be satisfied with what is Christian; if she is unwilling, then for what she loses she gains only a mediocre compensation in the fragment of externality she can in a worldly way obtain by defiance" (*WL*, 138-9).

This passage, on its surface, exhibits the apathy towards social change with which Adorno charges Kierkegaard, but in fact it reveals the commitment to the equality of men and women—there is no direct refutation or denial of equality, but a rejection of the need to make it "obvious in a worldly way". While hardly constituting a positive contribution to advancing the rights of women, it remains at a considerable remove from William's harangue.

offered by MacIntyre's narrative identity,[18] suggests that there is "the need for a delicate balance between the need to recognise and accept our natures as having their own stubborn realities; and the need to take active responsibility for their shaping" (Rudd 2012, 244). This balance is created by interpreting our actions through the lens of narrative and, as Lippitt notes, when these possess particularly negative connotations we must reconcile them in a way that elevates them in our consciousness instead of repressing them; they must be integrated into our self-realization (Lippitt 2015, 135). This is an aspect of the radical self-openness Kierkegaard advocates as a means of both alleviating and heightening guilt-consciousness. Sigrist exemplifies this with a lecturer who ceases to be a lecturer if they cannot connect who they have been to the action they are performing—the lecturer is tied to that identity through a narrative relation that connects her actions (lecturing) with her identity as a lecturer (Sigrist 2015, 171). This accords well with the practicality of Kierkegaard's ethics: he is less concerned with abstract questions *about* ethics, and more concerned with expressing ethics through *praxis*—once again, paralleling MacIntyre's ethic that realises virtues through practical action.

These commonalities of their respective ethics help draw Kierkegaard and MacIntyre into a productive dialogue. While we do not agree with Rudd and others who claim Kierkegaard as a virtue ethicist, as Kierkegaard himself was critical of using virtue in ethical language,[19] it is undeniable that virtue ethics appear to offer a compatible lens through which to reconfigure Kierkegaard's ethics.

We may recall that our aim in this chapter is to provide to Kierkegaard's ethics a formulation that can make up for deficiencies arising from the ambiguity and limited discussion of them within religiousness A. So, we now turn to two of those deficiencies which MacIntyre's interpretation of virtue ethics may provide answers for: the desire for completion—a set goal that orients a unified, complete ethical life (*i*); and the desire for a clear criterion—a set of rules governing and promoting actions (*ii*). It is our hope that not only can MacIntyre provide answers to these problems, but that he offers a compelling account compatible with Kierkegaard's broader philosophical project.

i) Desire for Completeness

Positing a final end—the good life—is critical to MacIntyre's ethics, and provides the target towards which the human life should be aimed. This is meant to combat a lack of commitment he argues is inherent in emotivist positions. When means and ends are held apart, the individual does not commit to certain actions or commit to an ethical interpretation, instead they construe life as bodily actions and reduce identity to a recognition of bodily actions without ligaments to hold these actions together (MacIntyre 1984, 33). By positing an end towards which life can be lived, there can be a sense of unity to one's life, a unity that incorporates those various projects and actions. This is further supported by his discussion of the terminological foundation of 'moral,' where the Greek word *ethikos* pertains to character and, more precisely, *consistency* of character

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[18] Rudd favours MacIntyre's interpretation over Ricoeur's explicitly, although his treatment of Ricoeur's interpretation is fairly limited in scope and application (2012)—a deficiency we hope to correct in our account.

[19] We see this throughout Kierkegaard's works, but we find it explicitly stated when Climacus writes: "if the person presented is supposed to be great with regard to the universal because of his virtue, his faith, his nobility, his faithfulness, his perseverance, etc., then admiration is a deceptive relation or can easily become that" (*CUP*, 358). Here, the virtues as a whole, and virtues taken separately, are viewed with suspicion, as the accrual of virtue is predisposed to taking on the form of admiration and its obverse, pride. Furthermore, virtues are tied closely to the state, as we shall see below, and this is particularly distasteful for Kierkegaard.

(MacIntyre 1984, 38). Sigrist clarifies this by noting that MacIntyre employs a narrative framework as a means of providing a coherent sense of self to which ethical valuations can be transferred; it is not enough to be focused on a particular temporal iteration of one's self (past, present, future), but one must be a moral self "*as a whole*" (Sigrist 2015, 170-1). Thus, adopting a teleological structure is key to MacIntyre's employment of the narrative structure of life because it allows for an individual to recognise their self-consistency. Furthermore, a teleological perspective supports his advocacy of *eudaimonism* as the end-goal of various ethical actions and of ethical actions *in toto*, as well as the notion that an individual life can have a sense of completeness—the various successes and failures in life that contribute to a final success: the good life. Whether contentment or redemption, there is a final end, a *telos*, towards which individuals quest.

As we discussed in regard to narrative identity, the concept of a 'quest' is fundamental to MacIntyre's ethics. The notion of a quest allows for comprehension of the ends of various courses of action, narratives, and lives, and contributes to the conception of what is 'good' about a good life (MacIntyre 1984, 218-9). In turn, this helps our understanding of what is commonly good so as to gain a perspective on what constitutes a good life. The quest provides a lens through which to interpret, or plot, one's life in order to share in a common pursuit of the good. Therefore, the quest is integrative; its pattern is adopted from our social milieu and then utilised to provide structure, aims, and valuations to our actions and their outcomes. MacIntyre charges the modern conception of selfhood with atomising individuals in society, and thus removing their actions from the arena of social action and valuation (MacIntyre 1984, 204-5). This atomisation diminishes the unity of self-identity, offering in its place numerical unity that diffuses value into specific and distinct areas of life—my actions in one arena are valued separately from those in another. The narrative conception of identity helps to bridge these various arenas of action, allowing for self-consistency as virtues are revealed to be transferrable—virtues practiced in distinct domains can be shown to have a connection through their employment in alternative domains. Furthermore, by drawing on common social narratives, the individual can place themselves within a context that provides a framework for understanding what contributes and what does not contribute to a good life; our narratives provide a unity to our self, while the collection of narratives in a society allows for a unity of ethical valuation.

Where human nature may have served as the foundation point for ethical valuation within the modern period, MacIntyre's critique of emotivism helps reveal the ultimately empty content of such an approach. MacIntyre highlights the ambiguity within the concept 'human nature' and its complicated relationship with ethics in enlightenment philosophy, and contrasts it with Aristotle's intertwining of human nature, ethics, and humans reaching their *telos* (MacIntyre 1984, 51-3). The core idea within which Aristotle grounds his approach (and which MacIntyre also endorses), is that an unrestrained human nature *requires* ethics in order to reach its *telos*. The *telos* for both MacIntyre and Aristotle is the 'good', with MacIntyre specifying a quest for the good as the primary method of setting up the teleological progression of a human life—the entirety of that life should have a final goal towards which it is working. But, how is that goal determined?

MacIntyre's analysis of *phronēsis*, practical wisdom, provides an account for the way that intellect and action are intermingled: it is only through *phronēsis*, the wisdom to know how to act, that a person is able to develop a moral character and realise their *telos* (MacIntyre 1984, 154-5). This incorporates an important

caveat to the teleological approach MacIntyre adopts, as the end posited is not concrete, but fluid. It is only through practical action that we move towards an understanding of the good—while we may know the aim, we do not have a definition of what its end actually is until we work towards it. In this context, it is of grave importance to learn *how* to act in order to act properly, and this education comes from both acting and reflecting on that action (developing one's own narrative) and in understanding the actions of others (integrating into other narratives). By weaving narratives together, we find a good both legitimised by our social milieu and that grounds our actions, thus providing a sense of unity—even actions that are ostensibly unrelated contribute to reaching the good. MacIntyre contributes to the ethic of religiousness A by revealing the value of an ultimate aim of life: I completed a task successfully, it contributed to the good, and I am therefore realising the good.

ii) Desire for clear and authoritative rules:

The failure to provide clear ordinances that determine whether one is acting ethically was the second deficiency we located in religiousness A. Without the rigid, but relativistic criteria of the ethical stage—itself prone to ascribing universal ethical value to barbarous actions by abstracting from the reality and context of human action—and Christianity's transcendent expectation to love the neighbour, religiousness A lacks clear and authoritative guidance on what constitutes an ethical existence. This is also left open if we adopt the teleological view presented above. However, with MacIntyre's attention to tradition in mind, we will here formulate how his virtue ethics provides a groundwork for addressing this lack of guidance. Predictability, according to MacIntyre, is important in ascribing meaning to our life, as it is only through the ability to predict aspects of the future that we can envision long-term projects that allow us to attribute meaning to our lives and develop long-term relationships with others (MacIntyre 1984, 104-5). Quests are predicated on predictable end-goals posited when undertaking them. Alongside ascription of meaning is ascription of moral and ethical value, and so it is a form of predictability that may allow for flexibility within the ethical framework of the religious stage, without diminishing the underlying authority structure his virtue ethics possesses.

As previously stated, MacIntyre advocates a political foundation to ethics, following Aristotle, and thus places his theory in the context of society and tradition (MacIntyre 1984, 147-8); ethics is constituted from the cultural norms and patterns of actions sanctioned by historical and pseudo-historical narratives (i.e., epics, myths, legends, etc.). Thus, sociology is presupposed in ethical and moral thinking. There needs to be practicable norms for an ethic to evaluate—a problem emotivism side-steps by removing the distinction between authentic and inauthentic ethical activities (MacIntyre 1984, 23). So, to defend religiousness A from the emotivist charge it must be able to clarify which actions are ethical and which actions are not. So, we will examine the social dimension of MacIntyre's ethic to see whether it can provide the authority structure, as well as a set of rules for action, which is transferable to Kierkegaard's ethics.

Traditions are grounded in the social and cultural milieu of a society, and are clarified by structuring life along narrative lines. These, clearly, each contribute to the social foundations of his ethic—the former provides an authoritative set of rules grounded in historical practice, the latter a means of developing a character that can be attributed ethical valuations. However, we have not discussed how the traditions become authoritative (beyond the heroic figures who are said to articulate or exemplify that tradition's ethos). MacIntyre uses the Biblical Commandments to account for this, suggesting rules and laws are formalised tables of

the various offences that conflict with natural laws of a certain society (MacIntyre 1984, 151). Rather than an abstract set of rules MacIntyre associates with Kant's moral system, the codification of taboos are manifested from actual practice. In his account, it is when certain actions come into direct conflict with the understood rules (whether explicit or implicit) of a community, that the individual who commits those actions places themselves outside that community, and invites punishment. This further entrenches ethics in a social context, as it is by committing offences not just against community member(s), but against the whole community (represented by conflicting with social norms) that one is placed outside of the community and into the role of an outsider or villain, which in turn leads to investigation and action to limit their powers (i.e. to punish them for transgression). There needs to be an account of prohibitions because there are two distinct ways to fail the community based on virtues: *i*) a deficiency of virtue and therefore an inability to add to the social good; *ii*) wilfully transgressing and placing oneself in opposition to the community (MacIntyre 1984, 151-2). The latter invites reprisal, the former occasions an education in the virtues.

We should not be left with the opinion that traditions are reified, though. In our previous discussion, we quoted MacIntyre saying: "we enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourself part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others" (MacIntyre 1984, 213). The constraints are the social taboos drawn from the set of offences which encourage virtuous action and promise repercussion for a failure to respect the taboos, but these taboos are neither universal nor concrete. MacIntyre draws from Aristotle's definition of humans as *politikon zôon*, and sketches a virtue ethic not based on specific rules and laws governing action impartially and impersonally (a position attributed to Plato's virtue ethic), but rules revealing themselves through practical action within and dependent upon society (MacIntyre 1984, 150-1). Rather than norms being directly described in a positive way, it is actions with negative consequences for anyone engaging in those activities that provides definition. It is important to remember that because an individual is part of a society, it is not just the individual's inclinations that must be taken into account, but whether the bonds of community will also be tested. Therefore, there is an aspect of virtue that is innately private to the individual, but within each individual is a set of virtues relating to social conduct and expectation. These are flexible because they are not positively given, nor are they derived from a source outside human action—they are rules immanent to humans within their societies.

So, while MacIntyre's ethics is derived from a social context, they remain flexible to reinterpretation as a result of their relation to social practice. MacIntyre's account of virtues is not designed to transcend social setting or serve as 'universal' or 'absolute' rules, but to advocate for the socially mediated virtues of one's social milieu. This would provide the individual with a more clear set of ethical directives based on replicating the actions of a society's heroes, while also providing a set of actions that offend the community and invite punishment. The authority derives from the activity's historical, and social foundation: that its historical practice has contributed to both social and individual good reveals its inherent virtuousness, and legitimises its continued practice.

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In this section we have: outlined MacIntyre's ethics as a response to Kierkegaard's—or, more accurately, Judge William's—ethics, and suggested that the structure of MacIntyre's virtue ethics can provide answers to two of the deficiencies we located in the ethics of religiousness A. MacIntyre is able to offer a clear sense of completeness to an individual life by organizing it into a narrative whole with a clear teleological progression towards the 'good,' thus allowing for the evaluation of virtuousness or viciousness of that narrative whole. He also offers a clearer criterion for determining which actions are ethical and roots this criterion in the authority of cultural and social tradition. However, while there are indeed areas of overlap in their respective approaches to ethics, we must investigate whether the answers provided by MacIntyre are strong enough to support Kierkegaard's ethics in the way proposed without being inconsistent with Kierkegaard's ethical, and broader philosophical, commitments.

We closed our discussion of the desire for completion (*i*) by stating, "I completed a task successfully, it contributed to the good, and am therefore realizing the good"; but is this Kierkegaardian? Kierkegaard draws attention to the importance of the tense "loves" instead of "loved" because love must be continuous, must remain *present* (*WA*, 175). This is true in responding to ethical failures where judgment is made of the past, while forgiveness takes place in the present; applying an ethical judgment to another assumes no change in their character until retribution, while forgiveness in the present places the past out of sight (but importantly does not forget it[20]). While the narrative approach endorsed by MacIntyre allows for the individual to overcome having been unethical, because their life is taken as a completed whole, it requires a finite ending, which Kierkegaard is uncertain about: within his philosophy there is the potential that one *could* be virtuous, but that one never *is*. The teleological goal may be left open by MacIntyre, but that there is a predefined goal changes the relationship of the individual to their present circumstance—my choices may be affected by an abstract calculus about whether one action contributes more or less to my quest for the good. Furthermore, Quinn argues against a narrow conception of narrative unity by stating that its "preoccupation with unity and wholeness in our religious lives will not serve us well in the quest to strike a balance that is suitably responsive to claims both finite and infinite goods make on us" (Quinn 2001, 330). While recasting life into a whole through the lens of a finite narrative provides a more cohesive structure to human existence and a finite aim, MacIntyre risks either leading the Kierkegaardian self to have already decided on an ending, or to seeking to narrate their lives in a way that does not reflect their passionate interest—each of these being problems arising in the ethical stage.

The broader worry here is that in positing an eventual outcome, the interactions of the present become codified and pre-determined. It must be stressed that MacIntyre leaves the quest open-ended, each individual participates in discovering the goal, but because of the socially mediated nature of narratives, the goal is often not found through questing, but in the narratives that are socially legitimised: we are *sent* on a quest which does indeed have an ending. Furthermore, assuming that ethical judgment occurs 'at the end' rather than in time is also problematic on Kierkegaard's account. What is problematic in evaluating and applying a judgment

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[20] "What is hidden from my eyes, that I have never seen; but what is hidden behind my back, that I have seen. The one who loves forgives in this way: he forgives, he forgets, he blots out the sin, in love he turns toward the one he forgives; but when he turns toward him, he of course cannot see what is lying behind his back" (*WL*, 296). It is with forgiveness that one is oriented towards the person standing before oneself in the present, not judgment.

of what is and is not virtuous is an assumed or implicit sense of completeness, or finality, which is incompatible with a religious disposition: "the religious... proclaims... that the person who believes he has finished... has lost" (*SLW*, 443). MacIntyre's approach adopts too much from his inspiration, as the lives and actions of mythic and legendary heroes that legitimise culturally valid actions do indeed have a finality to them, where the existing, *living* individual's life and action do not. In one of his ethical-religious essays, the pseudonym H.H. writes that "we look only at the past, and this no doubt accounts for our backward way of thinking. It very likely is her ally assumed that it happens" as a result of being one of the "glorious ones" (*WA*, 70). When focused on the examples given in the past, and more specifically at those who are valorised for martyrdom, we seek to replicate them instead of becoming ourselves through existential action. We see only the figure cut out from their context by the act of valorisation; we focus on the end by looking at the historical event. MacIntyre places significant weight on the example and replication of virtuous action, but here we see H.H. questioning the validity of replicating actions based on their historical validation.[21] Thus, while the potential for a *telos* of cumulative action appears promising, it ultimately reduces the individual's life to following a prescribed pattern relative to legitimate social narratives and goals—the quest is to replicate older quests, and seek the good those quests sanction.

This helpfully transitions us to our second deficiency: the desire for clear and authoritative criteria for action (*ii*). Our discussion there was punctuated by highlighting the social foundation of MacIntyre's ethics. However, this may have been immediately suspicious as potentially providing a resolution for two reasons: Kierkegaard's was uninterested in defining and clarifying which actions confer the status 'ethical,' and his ethics is, in part, a critical response to grounding ethics in social, political, and cultural preferences. To this latter point, Walsh directly distinguishes between Kierkegaard's ethic, which situates at its core the individual striving to develop their self to their utmost ability as a human being, from Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, wherein the individual takes their ethics from the social structures governing their society (Walsh 2018, 46). While MacIntyre does not straightforwardly adopt the Hegelian model, there are clear implications arising from his virtue ethic that imply an endorsement of a form of *Sittlichkeit*. Even if we accept that tradition is separate from *Sittlichkeit*, Kierkegaard was aware of the use of tradition as justification for interpreting Christianity, and through Climacus he claims that employing tradition in this way is a means of cowing individuals into acceptance of the tradition by suggesting that if they spurn tradition, they spurn all those who came before them (*CUP,* 47-9). The claims to tradition are a rhetorical tactic to create guilt in order to reinforce the tradition's role within the lives of individuals—they do not expand or develop the individual's ethical disposition, but merely constrain it according to the preferences of the society.

What Kierkegaard is concerned with in his criticisms of tradition is not that traditions are *de facto* corruptive, but that they distort the individual's relations to others. We see this in his evaluation of the ethical stage's reduction of difference in order to create and maintain an essential and interchangeable sameness (*FT*,

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[21] We can recall that throughout our discussion of Kierkegaard we consistently ran into him criticising the notion that there are some actions which are fundamentally ethical. His emphasis on reactivity stands in direct contrast to grounding ethics in the past and requires attention to ethical responses in the present; we cannot rely on the past for examples of *what* actions to undertake, but *how* to undertake actions, i.e., with faith; with passion; with love, care, and respect for the subjectivity of the neighbour.

56). Through *de Silentio*, Kierkegaard argues that analogies and comparisons are employed as a means of diminishing differences—but this effectively voids the potential for alternative actions, suggesting instead that there are singular patterns governing an action's ethical value (i.e., legitimised quests). Once again this nullifies the individual's intentions and intensifies the focus on actions, transforming the actions into examples of normative rules and the individuals into avatars of the rules who are meant to be replicated without advancement or critical assessment. While this does show a rift between Kierkegaard's and MacIntyre's respective positions, asserting that MacIntyre's ethics lack advancement in understanding actions and intentions, or the potential for critical assessment of one's traditions, would be claiming far too much. However, drawing a set of virtues from previous actions, and sanctioning those actions because of historical legitimacy as a means of creating a concrete and recognisable code of ethics, is problematic for Kierkegaard because its focus is inherently on replication of the *status quo*, an attempt to *be* ethical relative to one's society and not an attempt to *become* ethical as a self among other selves.

It is for this reason that we can agree with Marino when he writes, "Kierkegaard was not much concerned with trying to hammer out the right secular 'oughts'" (Marino, 2001, 123), and Kirmmse when he points out that Kierkegaard had a "lack of fundamental interest in the problem of reason and ethics as he had inherited it from the Enlightenment, i.e., the project of constructing a rule-based rational morality as a product of human self-legislation" (Kirmmse 2001, 195). Mark Tietjen also argues along these lines, stating that modern ethics, associated by Kierkegaard with the ethical stage, "is dishonest, acting as though fundamental ethical knowledge is something in need of philosophical justification when it really is something everyone, including philosophers, possesses" (Tietjen 2013, 52). This represents the shift in Kierkegaard's focus away from abstract ethical principles to a more intuitive ethic rooted in lived existence and practice.[22] As each of these commentators argue, Kierkegaard's concern is not with developing an ethical codex, but revealing the openness of ethics because of freedom and subjectivity. There is *a* way to be ethical, but it cannot be given a strict structure or definition based on a set of concrete rules, as these rules have a habit of becoming unethical or used as a way of distracting from becoming ethical, so that one can self-righteously claim to already be ethical. As Mullen reminds us, due to the ambiguity of life, there can be no single set of rules that apply to each individual, and this inability to discover or hold to a single set of rules induces the feeling of anxiety (Mullen 1981, 50). Even those actions that are sanctioned by one's society must possess a greater flexibility than MacIntyre invests them with—the constraints of tradition are too tight and lead us back to William's ethical stage, and cannot represent or buttress the ethic of religiousness A.

Thus, while there are moments of overlap between Kierkegaard and MacIntyre, and often in important areas that invite reconciliation, if we adopt MacIntyre's virtue ethic as a means of providing answers to the deficiencies of religiousness A's ethic we end up with a turn back towards the ethical stage. Furthermore, the ethic that we saw constructed in the previous chapters requires a more robust picture and emphasis on self-becoming, subjectivity, and responsiveness to others. MacIntyre, while providing a compelling depiction of self-identity through a narrative lens, paralleling Kierkegaard's own presentation of selves, places too much of an individual's definition in their social context and the accumulation of socially-mediated virtues. The *telos*

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[22] We shall have occasion to further develop this in our discussion of *phronēsis* in Chapter 5.

of ethics cannot be a socially- or culturally-determined sense of 'the good' or else the possibility of ethical self-righteousness arises; it also cannot be *eudaimonism*, as this would (inevitably) isolate individuals in their own sense of the good life, or encourages disregarding *their* idea of a good life in favour of an externally defined one—the quest ultimately being to replicate socially valued quests. As we discussed previously, Kierkegaard is less interested in constructing an ethic around recognition and acknowledgment of one's ethical superiority, his interest being in *acting*/*becoming* ethical within the immediacy of the moment—an individual's history is important, but does not overshadow the present, nor the possibility of a more ethical future.

The ultimate irreconcilability of Kierkegaard and MacIntyre was indeed foreseen by MacIntyre, and so we must depart from him. Nonetheless, while we are moving on from MacIntyre, the insights provided by bringing his ethics into a relation with Kierkegaard's, and the compatibility of a narrative account of the self will return in the next chapter when we discuss Ricoeur. However, we will first examine an ethic that promises answers to the ambiguities arising from our formulation of religiousness A's *ethos*: how to recapture a relation to the transcendent, and how we are to relate to otherness. To address these, we must turn our attention to Emmanuel Levinas and his ethic.

§2 Levinas

With the failure of MacIntyre's virtue ethic to both cohere with and provide support to the ethic of Kierkegaard's religiousness A, we will now turn to Emmanuel Levinas. Like MacIntyre, Levinas has a history of engaging with Kierkegaard and was directly influenced by Kierkegaard in a variety of ways. However, where MacIntyre's interests were primarily focused on immanence and the way that we derive ethics from our societies, Levinas' concern is transcendence. It is his preoccupation with the transcendence of the other which we hope to align with Kierkegaard's emphasis on cooperative self-becoming in order to provide answers to the ambiguities in firstly, how the individual in religiousness A relates to the absolute (the transcendent), and secondly how our relation to others is defined, if religiousness A is a stage of heightened subjectivity. To explore how Levinas can provide us answers to these problems, and provide a lens through which to sharpen our understanding of religiousness A, we must: first examine Levinas' ethics (*§2.1*), before then examining how Levinas' ethics accords with Kierkegaard's and resolutions to the problems can be found in his view of the other as transcendent (*§2.2*). As in the case of MacIntyre, our concern is not just in providing an account that could persuasively clarify these ambiguities, but one correlating with Kierkegaard's broader ethical and philosophical commitments.

§2.1 Ethics and the Other

In *Proper Names* (1997), Levinas presents a criticism of Kierkegaard's project as having egoism at its foundation, with the emphasis on subjectivity ultimately being an emphasis on caring for oneself and oneself alone. Levinas elsewhere portrays Kierkegaard as violent, and in the same strand as Nietzsche because of the need to suspend the ethical, for subjectivity to stand in absolute opposition to generality (Levinas 1998, 34). The violence results from Kierkegaard's resistance to the 'system,' which Levinas suggests is actually just

other individuals (Levinas 1969, 40). Thus, like MacIntyre, Levinas perceives Kierkegaard's focus on subjectivity as contributing to the amoralism of recent philosophies, as external justification has been discarded for subjective ethical valuation (Levinas 1998, 31). However, as M. Jamie Ferreira notes, Kierkegaard's 'single individual' is a statement not about asociality but abut responsibility and accountability of the self—it is not to separate individuals in egoistic isolation from others, but to single out the individual who has their debt to others (and who is paradigmatic of all individuals who each have their own unique debt) (Ferreira 2001, 87). Its emphasis is on the introspective question of whether you did what was right, or did what had popular assent (Ferreira 2001, 88)—we have particular, concrete actions that we are responsible for as individuals, and when we melt into the crowd we abdicate our responsibilities. In fact, like MacIntyre, Levinas' ethic is in many ways a response to Kierkegaard (or to a Kierkegaard filtered through a lens influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and other existentialist thinkers), and this response re-orients ethics in relation to other individuals—to the Other. To focus our discussion we will briefly provide an account for two central features of his ethic: the transcendent face of the Other (*i*), and the necessary responsibility to care for the Other (*ii*).

i) The face of the Other

In his introduction to *Totality and Infinity*, John Wild sums up Levinas' basic question as "how can I coexist with [an other] and still leave his otherness intact?" (Wild 1969, 13). The danger that Levinas locates in egoistic subjectivity is that as an individual approaching such an alien other my inclinations are to "simply treat him as a different version of myself, or, if I have the power, place him under my own categories and use him for my purposes" (Wild 1969, 13). Levinas is also wary of the ways that interactions with others are often formulated, as he argues that "discourse is not love" (Levinas 1969, 76). From his perspective, both discourse and desire are not representative of love, and so he is not presenting a neighbour love ethic, even if care and responsibility for the neighbour are central concerns. Instead, he advocates for an ethic of infinite need (desire) for communication (discourse) that allows the other to maintain both their alterity and freedom (justice). It is our interaction with others that provides the fundamental concern of Levinas' ethic. His stated aim is revealing the "philosophical primacy of the idea of infinity" as produced through the interaction of the same and the other (Levinas 1969, 26). This revelation of infinite difference between myself and an Other, *should* accentuate each of our subjectivities without domination or submission (without attempting to totalise or be totalised). Where God is traditionally cast in the role of transcendent Other, Levinas posits that it is other individuals who are transcendent: the unbridgeable gulf between the I and the Thou means that the latter remains always beyond my comprehension, beyond my capacity to understand, and I must therefore be attentive to the stated needs of the Other, rather than intervening and asserting my needs on them.

However, the Other does not represent an "obstacle" or a threat to our existence—while they are not ours to control, we are also not in thrall to them—rather, they inspire a sense of *desire* in us (Levinas 1969, 84). The Other's difference is infinite and speaks to our need for the infinite, and in being confronted by the infinite we are forced to reflect on our finitude, on our imperfection; the other inspires a desire for a relationship with them and with this desire arises an impulse to aid them—it reveals our original responsibly to and for them. By revealing our finitude, the Other also reveals our self: recognition of one's self is discovered in our relation to the face, a "relation already consist[ing] in serving the Other" (Levinas 1969, 178-9). This service

"consists in speaking the world to the other" and is therefore a donation to them (Levinas 1969, 173-4); we serve the Other by sharing our world with them. Sharing the world "is not the entry of a sensible thing into a no man's land of the ideal" but a donation of the world to the other (Levinas 1969, 173-4). Interacting with other individuals reveals ourselves as limited, and provides them a space in our world—it is their infinite transcendence in our world that continually reveals our failings, our finitude, and draws us into a deeper relationship of care. Not love, as Levinas states, but *responsibility*, we are *responsible* for opening ourselves to receiving the other, and in turn open our world as a donation to the Other. For Levinas, the Other grounds our ethical existence first, and who we are is built upon that initial foundation.

But who is this transcendent Other? As we stated, it is other individuals; however Levinas does not see otherness alone as a suitable means of discussing our relation to other selves. The other is Other, and so rather than a distinction between two identified figures (i.e., A and B) it is a distinction between two wholly separate and unequal figures (the asymmetry of the I in relation to the Other) (Levinas 1969, 251). The Other is infinitely different than I, and reveals my own finitude, thus creating an asymmetry in our relationship (and so too in our ethical expectations). The transcendence of the Other makes them "unforeseeable", they are beyond our expectations, and this gives rise to freedom (Levinas 1969, 225). Through its resistance to violence, freedom calls forth morality by initiating the unspoken discourse of the face-to-face. It is within the face-to-face interaction that ethics finds its foremost expression, our confrontation of the wholly Other reveals our responsibility for them, and the asymmetry of our relation denies the possibility of rejecting or denying our responsibility for and to the Other. Furthermore, this face-to-face lends itself to dialogue with the other, to a communicative relationship. Levinas understands the Other as "someone, a he or a she, who can speak" (Llewelyn 2008, 80). Importantly though, this speech need not be vocalised, as the face itself *silently* calls out for justice. It is in the confrontation of the Other's face that we are grounded in the world, and grounded in our ethical responsibility.

ii) Responsibility for the Other

The face is what elicits an ethical response, but what ethical posture do we take in our relation to the Other? We have noted that Levinas does not see his ethic as one of neighbour love, even though it is the neighbour's face that calls forth ethics; instead he posits *responsibility* for the other. This responsibility is derived, in part, from the asymmetrical relation between myself and the Other. This is so because, "goodness consists in taking up a position such that the Other counts more than myself", and my self is discovered in "the coinciding of freedom with responsibility" (Levinas 1969, 271). Thus, "to express oneself, that is, already to serve the Other. The ground of expression is goodness" (Levinas 1969, 183). It is not receiving recognition, but in offering the other our being that constitutes goodness—ethical activity. We can only truly understand ourselves by giving ourselves to the other, and through our expression of goodness towards them (i.e., care for the Other) we deepen our self-understanding. The intertwining of individual identity with openness to caring for the other in turn suggests that "subjectivity *exists* within this responsibility [for the Other], and only an irreducible subjectivity can take on a responsibility. That is the meaning of the ethical" (Levinas 1998, 32). We become responsible for the other in such a way that we cannot discharge, or off-load, our duties; selfhood is constituted by our responsibilities, and in particular our absolute responsibility to the other (Llewelyn 2008,

72). Much like we saw in Kierkegaard's emphasis on loving the neighbour being a task each individual separately must take up and which defines the individual, so too with Levinas' care for the other, we have a unique relationship to others that demands *our* investment in their well-being (and therefore cannot be generalised or universalised).

Our particular responsibility to the Other is necessary because the "Other is poor and destitute, and nothing that touches this Stranger can be indifferent to the Self" (Levinas, 1998, 33). We approach the Other as a stranger in our world, and it is our responsibility in donating our world to them to provide for them. John Wall reconstructs Levinas' argument as a call to be passive, in the sense of becoming subjected, to the other, in order to embrace them in their otherness and to act ethically (Wall 2005, 125). We are to be fully accepting of their demands on us, allowing them to take what we are able to give, rather than seeking to give what we *assume* they need. Furthermore, it is in this open passivity that violence can be curtailed, as we are not actively seeking to impose, but are passively open to being imposed upon. Our responsibility to the Other is also subject to the evaluation of the Other. We are not the judges of our actions, as

> those I am answerable for are also those I am answerable to. The for whom and the to whom coincide with each other…. it forbids me to fulfil my responsibility as an act of pity, since I owe an account to precisely those I am accountable for. And it also forbids me to fulfil my responsibility as an act of unconditional obedience within a hierarchical order, since I am also responsible for whoever has power over me. (Levinas 1998, 33)

This means that our relation to others, despite asymmetries in relationships, is grounded in responsibility to and for them, whether they are in positions of power over us, or are under our power.

Levinas places responsibility for the other at the centre of human existence—not only is responsibility the foundation of our relation to others but the foundation of our very existence. The motivation for accepting this responsibility is the desire we have to relate to others, and a desire to be understood, but due to the infinite difference between our finite existence and the transcendent Other this must be constantly striven towards. This is reminiscent of our discussion of cooperative self-becoming in Kierkegaard's ethic, and forces us to challenge Levinas' assertion that his ethics stands in contrast to Kierkegaard's.

§2.2 Reconciling Levinas and Kierkegaard

The goal of our discussion here is parallel to our goal in attempting to reconcile Kierkegaard and MacIntyre: namely, reveal points of overlap in the ethics of Kierkegaard and Levinas extending beyond their ethical commitments into their broader philosophical ones. Speaking of Levinas' aims, Wild notes that his position advocates for us to "not think of knowing, in the sense of gathering, as the primary aim of man from which action will follow as a matter of course, but rather of action and of the achievement of justice and peace as prior to speaking and thinking" (Wild 1969, 16). What Wild distils here is an idea reflecting our earlier discussion of the importance of *being* or *becoming* good and not just *having done* good. This was a problem implicit in our comparison of MacIntyre and Kierkegaard, where the former is interested in accrual of virtue where the latter's interest is practice in immediacy (MacIntyre posits the possibility of reinterpreting our lives

as a quest ending with us being ethical,[23] while ethical becoming is constant striving for Kierkegaard—a striving which cannot have an end-point). While we can draw similarities to a variety of philosophical commitments, whether it be the similarity between Levinas' distinction of totality and infinity and Kierkegaard's of ethical and religious existence,[24] their critiques of objectivity,[25] or their intense interest in the human subject rather than philosophical generalisation,[26] our interest here is more directly focused on resolutions to the ambiguities we located in the ethics of religiousness A: a relationship to the absolute (*iii*); defining our relationship to others (*iv*). We will therefore constrain our discussion to these two ambiguities, and, following that discussion, determine whether Levinas' ethic of responsibility for the absolutely Other can provide a lexicon through which Kierkegaard's ethics can be better articulated.

iii) A relationship to the absolute/transcendent:

Transcendence plays an important role in Kierkegaard's ethics; as we discussed in Chapter 1 it is a transcendent God grounding and commanding the neighbour love ethic. However, in religiousness A there is no such God from whom to derive our need to care for the other. Levinas also adopts an ethic requiring transcendence, but lacking a transcendent God—so where does Levinas' locate transcendence? We have already mentioned that it is the Other; this is because "there can be no 'knowledge' of God separate from relationships with men" (Levinas 1969, 78). Dudiak argues that Kierkegaard's neighbour love "is only possible if it follows from, or has as its condition of possibility, our prior love of God" and contrasts this with Levinas' view that prior responsibility "precisely blocks the unlimited responsibility for the neighbour" (Dudiak 2008, 100). It is only through our relationship to the neighbour that Levinas believes we can approach God. Without God, Kierkegaard's position requires a similar approach, one placing the other individual in the centre of our ethical relations. Sympathy with all other humans is indicative of religiousness A's ethical perspective, as those who are *immanent* require and deserve ethical action. So, locating the other as transcendent, as Levinas does, offers an intriguing answer to the ambiguous nature of the transcendent in religiousness A.

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[23] While largely open-ended in *After Virtue*, the emphasis that MacIntyre places on traditions as defining and orienting the quest leaves it constrained and with a posited end-point. Rather than the quest remaining open and reactive to the world, it assumes an end-point with traditional legitimacy, and life is lived towards that end-point—traditions provide the goal of the quest, and the quest is therefore reified in certain respects.

[24] Levinas argues that religion and politics are opposed, as politics is interested in reciprocal recognition and ensuring happiness through conclusive political laws, while religion represents "Desire" which seeks out equality through the surplus of possibility (Levinas 1969, 64). This is not too far from Kierkegaard's approach to the religious, which is suffused with possibility, as opposed to the conclusiveness of the ethical stage. Furthermore, Levinas' critique of Hegel's system where "freedom is not maintained but reduced to being the reflection of a universal order which maintains itself and justified itself all by itself" (Levinas 1969, 87), would not be out of place in the *Postscript*. Levinas appears to have recognised this, at least in part, as he does note that "behind the philosophy of totality… [Kierkegaard's notion of existence] foresaw the end of philosophy, and how it would lead to a political totalitarianism in which we would cease to be the source of our own language and become mere reflections of an impersonal logos, or role enacted by anonymous figures" (Levinas 1998, 28).

[25] Levinas shows a similar conception of objectivity as Kierkegaard when he writes: "to know objectively is to know the historical, the *fact*, the *already happened*, the already passed by" (Levinas 1969, 65). The *Postscript*, among other works, consistently casts objective thinking as related to past-ness as a means of closing off discourse around it.

[26] Levinas shares a similar notion of truth as subjectivity, writing that "truth, which should reconcile persons, here exists anonymously. Universality presents itself as impersonal; and this is another inhumanity" (Levinas 1969, 46); and he also shares a similar worry over the false objectivity of philosophical thinking: "philosophy is an egology" because it rests on the self-sufficiency of the *ipseity* of its author (Levinas 1969, 44). This latter statement serves as the crux of Kierkegaard's parody of philosophical self-sufficiency in the form of Judge William, whose life-view is universal because it is *his*.

John Wall clarifies Levinas' alterity ethic by highlighting the intertwined nature of transcendence and immanence:

> Otherness is not purely Transcendence but also immanent, meaningful, disruptive to the world as it happens to be concretely. Its claim is not general or abstract but particular and singular. It makes not just a religious but also a worldly moral demand. (Wall 2005, 129)

It is within the immanent Other that transcendence is made manifest before us—their infinite difference reveals their transcendence, they are *beyond* our worldly comprehension. By placing the Other into a position of transcendence and beyond our worldly wisdom, Levinas is positing an Other who must *communicate* their needs to us—make themselves known—and we are to be attentive to them. In this way, "expression does not consist in *giving* us the Other's interiority" (Levinas 1969, 202), as their expression is interpreted in accordance with our own subjectivity, and so what they provide is a means of relating to the unrelatable. While we can communicate with others and seek out mutual understanding, the asymmetry defining the relationship between my finitude and the Other's transcendence will always place the Other at a remove from my understanding of them. We can communicate, but our communication is always limited to expressions that fail to contain the fullness of our interiority.

Assiter suggests an agreement between Levinas and Kierkegaard on this point. Not being able to provide an account of one's interiority to another, as well as the individual preoccupation with oneself, is located as a problem for each of them, as it leads to an unwillingness or inability to help others (Assiter 2016, 74). The incapacity to understand others occasions a retreat inwards, and thereby a desire for others to conform to *my* understanding of the world—a desire that must be resisted. There is within Kierkegaard's philosophy a clear hiddenness and sanctity to one's interiority, as one's interiority is always an irrevocably one's own.[27] Each individual has within them a world which they cannot communicate and give speech to; there is something about one's interior life which cannot be given adequate expression because it is intimately personal (*FT*, 77). Despite this interiority separating individuals from fully revealing themselves, we have a desire to share ourselves that, as Levinas notes, is central in our relation to others. We have a *desire* to relate to the Other as transcendent. This metaphysical desire is not like a need, though; a need can be satisfied, whereas gaining the desired "does not fulfil" but "deepens" it (Levinas 1969, 34). Levinas uses love to exemplify this, suggesting that while love can be satisfied as a need, it only grows and develops when it is a desire.

Thus, while this desire is metaphysical, Levinas is clear that it still requires *acts*, not acts tied to consumption, caress, or liturgy (and thus filling the need for sustenance, sensuality, or spirituality), but acts of care and responsibility, acts that *deepen* our relation through their communicative power (Levinas 1969, 35). Communication, expression, and discourse are all ways of *sharing* myself, or my world with the Other. The unfulfillable desire to relate to the Other means that we are constantly pulled to them, are constantly seeking to deepen our relation. Not because we need to fill a lack, but because we want to plumb the depths of that lack, and more specifically the lack of understanding of others; as with love, we seek to deepen that love through our relationship with another, not to reach an end-point where that love has been fulfilled. Effectively, this means that the closer I get to the transcendent Other, the more I realise the infinite gulf between the Other

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[27] Cf: *Fear and Trembling*, 83, 84, 113, 115; *Stages on Life's Way*, 35, 115.

and myself. Ferreira argues that, while Kierkegaard speaks of a 'need' to love, this need is more reflective of Levinasian desire, each is articulating an insatiable appetite, a craving that is ever encompassing (Ferreira 2001, 26-7).

This desire for communication with the Other is the means through which the individual is to relate to the transcendent. We may recall that this discourse need not be vocal, as it can be the silent discourse of the call received in the face-to-face—the very presence of the Other is a statement to us about our responsibility. Our discourses, in the form of vocal or silent conversation, leaves objectivity behind in order to let others *be*, not to reduce them to objects or "themes" of discourse; justice arises within this discourse, as conversation is the face-to-face respecting the other's alterity (Levinas 1969, 70-1). It provides the Other a space where they can remain untouched or unconstrained by our perception of them. Conversation is therefore the give-and-take forming ethical interrelationships; conversation is grounded in sharing oneself with the Other, and receiving the Other back in turn. This is the individual's relation to infinity, as opposed to the proclivity towards totalisation. To make clear the contrast between those whose interest is to totalise and those who seek the infinite, Wild says, "the former seek for power and control; the latter for a higher quality of life. The former strive for order and system; the latter for freedom and creative advance" (Wild 1969, 17). The creative advance that Wild notes is the creation of a need for action. The arrival of the face of the Other before us creates in the world a *need* for ethical action, they create a demand to which we must respond (Wall 2005, 129-30). The response Levinas advocates is donating our world to the other through communication.

Discourse embraces the Other in their transcendent Otherness, accepting their infinite difference; without discourse there is totality, the need to control and circumscribe the other—a need to make the Other into a reflection of oneself, as this renders them purely immanent and understandable—parallel to oneself.[28] For Levinas, justice and ethical action are possible when the Other is accepted freely as transcendent and wholly Other, neither resisted nor placed under our constraint, and insists that their infinite, transcendent call to action cannot be resisted when their face is before us.

iv) Defining the relation to others:

The call of the Other reveals the asymmetry in our relation: they stand transcendent and beyond our comprehension, and as such, meeting their needs becomes a desire for us—a desire, as we noted, that continually deepens. Our relation to the Other is an ethical relation first and foremost; it is our response to the face appearing before us, whether passive or aggressive, defining not only our relation to the Other, but also our self. Levinas proposes "to call 'religion' the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality" (Levinas 1969, 40)—the aim is to avoid the aggressive stance of violence. This posture of 'religion' as an ethical concept defining positive interpersonal relationships already evokes a comparison with Kierkegaard's religious stage, and its contrast, totality, shares commonalities with Kierkegaard's ethical stage, each limiting or neutering our acceptance of otherness. The violence Levinas speaks of is the attempted absorption of the other into our totality. The proper relation, the passivity of discourse, allows us to share the

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[28] We may see the reflection of Judge William in the desire for totality, where his letters to A are an address reflecting what *he* is interested in hearing and presented in a format to which *he* is predisposed. A is the recipient of the letter, but the real audience is Judge William, as it is his world which is being *forced onto* A, rather than opened *up to* A.

world with the Other, or, more accurately, provide space to the Other by donating the world to them. When we donate the world to the Other, we offer them a place in our existence and take responsibility for their existence in our life. This is where our responsibility to the Other is clarified, in our willingness to be open to the appearance of the Other, and to address their needs as communicated, rather than addressing the needs we think they ought to have. However, openness is also an obstacle to ethical relationships with others, as openness is risk, and risk invites fear.

Fear distracts, or discourages us from engaging with others because we are afraid of what we cannot know or experience—the transcendence of the Other places them beyond the bounds of comprehension, and therefore casts them as something to be afraid of. But, "the fear for my being which is my relation with death is not the fear of nothingness, but the fear of violence—and thus it extends into fear of the Other, of the absolutely unforeseeable" (Levinas 1969, 235). The Other inspires fear within us because they cannot be anticipated. Similarly, though, we fear *for* the Other because we do not know what violence will befall them (even violence we may inadvertently exercise on them). The uncertainty in our relationship with the Other occasions a steadfastness on our part, a need to be ready to respond and an openness for that response to be apologetic. The individual cannot relinquish their 'I,' which manifests from the responsibility associated with apology; my responsibility cannot be assumed or annulled by another—my responsibility serves to define the limits between others and myself (Levinas 1969, 245-6). This too is similar to Kierkegaard's ethic, where another cannot discharge my responsibilities, and my failures are my own to repent for—guilt-consciousness, for both Kierkegaard and Levinas, heighten my sense of self. The apology for one's failures highlights one's own contribution to the Other's state being "poor and destitute", a state that we must strive to help them overcome. The ever-present risk of this is totalising them, of absorbing them into our world, rather than giving our world to them. This leads to the violence of possession.

Levinas argues that possession represents the violence of constraint, or denial of the Other's subjective existence, and to exemplify this he discusses it in relation to love. He states: "nothing is further from *Eros* than possession" (Levinas 1969, 265), as "I love fully only if the Other loves me, not because I need the recognition of the Other" but because love requires a love of love—love is related to "the infinitely future, what is to be engendered" (Levinas 1969, 266). Thus, love is not about recognition, but is loving "the love the Beloved bears me" (Levinas 1969, 266). Love offers the Other a relationship, and being loved reveals that relationship has been taken up—it is a reciprocal and free desire to love. This is analogous to the desire for communication with the Other: we desire to communicate and that desire is fulfilled in our being understood, when our donation of the world to the Other is accepted. It is in these relationships, asymmetrical as they are, that the individual and the Other find a sense of equal purpose—the love of the transcendent elevates the individual. The asymmetry retains the infinite responsibility without collapsing it into a need for mutual recognition, transforming our understanding of that responsibility into an infinite desire to care for the other—the asymmetrical relationship is therefore not an attempt to cover a debt, but represents a deeply felt *want*. Furthermore, because this want can never be discharged, it becomes an infinite want, a want whose intensity increases through its

expression. It is from this that the infinite responsibility for the Other manifests itself; our continually deepening desire to relate to and understand the Other, expands our responsibility to them and keeps us engaged in an effort to fulfil their needs.

Ferreira connects Levinas' infinite responsibility to Kierkegaard's infinite debt of love; each is critical of 'bookkeeping' our responsibilities as though they were cheques and balances owed and owing— we only owe (Ferreira 2001, 124-7). This represents an ethical relationship for each of them, where our relationship to the Other is defined by a continual desire to care for them, and rather than this being an exhaustible desire— as communication only deepens the relationship—it reveals further responsibilities. The Other remains wholly Other, but our relationship to them is transformed in the revelation of their call to action. Our original responsibility to care for the poor and destitute face before us is transformed into an infinite responsibility when their transcendence is accepted; our donation of the world to the Other is a donation that must continually be made and remade.

Therefore, a transformed relationship to the Other is founded on their transcendence, and the call of the face that particularises myself as a self who must respond with care to the Other given to me. The ethical relation of discursive acceptance of the other appears to accord well with Kierkegaard's emphasis on the priority of others, and that relationships with others are central in defining one's own self. By reconfiguring Kierkegaard's ethic through a Levinasian lens, we can restate the ethic of religiousness A as one promoting dialogue with Others, and our responsibility is to *respond* to the other, to remain open to their needs, and to place ourselves under their judgment. From this perspective, Kierkegaard is articulating an ethic of communicative self-becoming, where our responsiveness to the needs of the Other provides the defining content of our self.

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Levinas' charge that Kierkegaard's ethics promote the violence implicit in totalising systems seems misplaced in light of the similarities in their positions. We see parallels within our discussion of the ambiguities in regards to the need for transcendence, the desire to take responsibility for others, and ultimately a cooperative nature of selfhood; a cooperation rooted in dialogue between the self and the transcendent. That their ethics is close in nature is no longer so controversial, and while they share a variety of common beliefs, their respective positions are distinguished by their foundation (God for Kierkegaard, the Other for Levinas), and this makes their views irreconcilable (Dudiak 2008, 107). However, once a transcendent God is taken away in the turn to religiousness A, this irreconcilable foundation may be overcome. If we adopt such a position, we can agree with Davenport and his suggestion that a reading of *Fear and Trembling* (and Kierkegaard's broader ethics) can allow for God to be replaced by the neighbour, and so it is the neighbour commanding us to suspend the ethical and not God (Davenport 2008, 175-6). This perspective aligns much more closely with our discussion of religiousness A, and suggests that Levinas would indeed offer an interpretive framework to understand Kierkegaard's ethic that also fits his broader philosophical commitments.

However, that being said, we must now look a little more closely at the way Levinas discusses the self in relation to the Other. For, while there were clear similarities throughout this discussion, Levinas' insistence

on a strong interpretation of the transcendence of the Other risks placing us into a subservient position to them. Furthermore, by positing selfhood as arising in the relation to the Other, Levinas also departs from Kierkegaard who sees interiority as a necessary step on the way to selfhood, such that without first engaging in discovering one's subjectivity, the subjectivity of others cannot be discovered. Therefore, while our relation to others enhances our subjectivity and our sense of self, in Kierkegaard's account, it does not reside originally in our relation to a transcendent Other as it does in Levinas. The Other cannot occupy an elevated stature to us or we risk adoration, not love of their self—adoration being an idealisation of the beloved that abstracts them from the person before us. Important to Kierkegaard's account is our own subjectivity and the need to love others as we love ourselves—adoration of others means a rejection of our own self-compassion, and thus loving the other is stunted or corrupted. Ultimately, for Kierkegaard, we can only care for others as much as we care for ourselves (we love the neighbour's self as we love our own), and in adoration we do not care for the other, but seek to possess them as an idea.[29]

Furthermore, the other is never wholly Other for Kierkegaard. Within religiousness A, the foundation of human existence is our relationship with other humans without the mediation of God; the individual in religiousness A does not relate through the medium of transcendence, as we find in religiousness B, but is concerned with immanence, with the world and other individuals that share the world. Others can therefore be sympathised with as subjects who, despite being different from us, nonetheless have certain shared commonalities we can recognise, anticipate, and apprehend—they are open to our understanding (in a minimal sense)—allowing us to respond to and imagine their needs. At the root of Kierkegaard's theory of the stages is a need for individuals to grasp their subjectivity through faith. It is faith that individuates, rather than the responsibility the Other thrusts upon us (although faith reveals our responsibility to the other). Thus, while Levinas' transformation of relationships with other individuals into relationships with transcendence accords well with the implicit structure of religiousness A, the broader commitments are nonetheless irreconcilable because the emphasis placed on selfhood in their respective philosophies differs dramatically. Levinas roots self-recognition in responsiveness to the Other, while Kierkegaard locates it in interiority, not egoistically opposed to others, but separate from them nonetheless. It is only after the transformation of the self through faith that our recognition of others as subjects, as selves, is able to be fully realised and transform the ethical relation of self and other. Thus, we cannot utilise Levinas' ethics to structure the ethic of religiousness A, but yet we can understand that ethic more clearly after having viewed it under the scope that Levinas has provided.

Conclusion

While MacIntyre and Levinas each provide aspects of what we are looking for, we have nonetheless seen that neither is able to definitively provide the support necessary for religiousness A while remaining felicitous to Kierkegaard's broader philosophical project. MacIntyre can help provide answers to the two deficiencies—completeness and authoritative rules for action, as we have seen. However, the way he does so is at odds with Kierkegaard's broader critique of the ethical stage—a stage that MacIntyre is also critical of.

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[29] This is evident in *Repetition*, where the Young Man idealises his beloved and cannot speak to or interact with her as an existential person lest the illusion he loves be shattered—idealising distracts from relationships with actual others.

Levinas also provides us some helpful answers in regards to the ambiguous status of transcendence and alterity in religiousness A. However, his emphasis on the Other to the exclusion of one's own self *as an other* is problematic in the schema of Kierkegaard's existential philosophy. However, this irreconcilability does not mean that there was no value in creating a dialogue between Kierkegaard and each of these two figures, as the agreements they do have provide insight into how we can understand Kierkegaard's structure and potential development of religiousness A, and importantly how the ethic of that stage should be characterised.

Therefore, while ultimately irreconcilable, there are important contributions to understanding the ethic of religiousness A that we will highlight here. MacIntyre's use of narrative identity as a means of providing a coherent life story allowing for ethical evaluation accords well with the way Kierkegaard presents self-identity in his own works. There are recognisable narratives in his philosophical works in particular, but his employment of narrative arguments in his theological works also reflects a recognition of the importance of narratives in the way we understand others, ourselves, and ethics. A narrative lens appears to be very attractive for understanding the way Kierkegaard structures identity, and complements the cooperative self-becoming we identified as key to his ethic. Levinas, on the other hand, provides us with a much more intriguing sense of recognising alterity and incorporating the transcendent in the immanent. The notion of 'donating' the world to the Other, and the radical openness that this entails, is recognisable in Kierkegaard's own advocacy for openness to others and to ourselves. Furthermore, the structuring of infinite responsibility as an infinite desire deriving from within ourselves, the idea that we *need* to be responsible for others, and that this responsibility requires dialogue and actively listening to the Other, also reveals ideas implicit in Kierkegaard's works. The desire for communication is evident in 'indirect communication,' which, like Levinas' view of communication, is never able to fully express the individual's interiority. We can summarise each of these points as: a need to narrate our lives and to engage with the narratives of other lives, and a need to recognise the transcendence of the other as an infinite subject, as we ourselves are.

Thus, while interpreting Kierkegaard through the lens of MacIntyre's virtue ethic, and Levinas' alterity ethic, were incapable of achieving our desired goal of answering each of the four questions, they have provided stepping stones towards a philosophical perspective better suited to this task. Such a perspective should provide resolutions to the deficiencies (*i & ii*) and ambiguities (*iii & iv*), while also incorporating narrative identity, and a recognition of the other as a transcendent subject. Additionally, we want to draw out some of the more implicit attributes we have discussed above, whether it is moral creativity to avoid the constraints of *Sittlichkeit* or totalisation, an emphasis on radical self-openness, and an accountability to others so the self cannot be sufficient in ethical judgements. To find such a perspective we will now turn to Paul Ricoeur and his phenomenological hermeneutic.

5| *Kierkegaard Through Ricoeur*

Having passed Kierkegaard's ethic of Religiousness A through the lenses of MacIntyre's virtue ethic, and Levinas' ethic of alterity, we have gained an appreciation for some of the more obscure or implicit elements at play in the structure of his ethic. By progressing through their respective contributions, we have argued that his ethic possesses elements of each of their perspectives, but neither is able to be fully reconciled with Kierkegaard's position. This has led us to Paul Ricoeur, and it is the task of this chapter to clarify what Ricoeur's ethic entails, how his ethic can improve on what MacIntyre and Levinas offered, and how these improvements contribute to answering the deficiencies and ambiguities we confronted in the previous discussion. Adding to the rigour of this examination, we must discern whether Ricoeur's ethic is commensurate with Kierkegaard's broader philosophical commitments and can thereby offer to religiousness A an acceptable ethical framework.

To set up the forthcoming discussion, we will provide a brief restatement of what we learned in the previous chapter and how those ideas will be addressed and extended in this chapter. MacIntyre provided us with a concept of narrative identity incorporating an ethical dimension into the constitution of one's own self-understanding—narrative identity structures human life in accordance with pre-set traditional narratives. The way he designs narrative identity had two distinct advantages: *i*) it structures life in such a way as to create a sense of unity by organising all actions towards a predictable *telos*; *ii*) it is deeply entrenched in received tradition, so ethical authority is assumed within the very structure of one's life. However, while possessing certain advantages, we also argued that his emphasis on tradition as the grounds of ethics (reminiscent of *Sittlichkeit*), teleological progression (where an ending is assumed by adopting a pre-set quest), and a sense of unity incorporating a definite teleological end were all irreconcilable with Kierkegaard's existential philosophy. Thus, when drawing our comparison between Kierkegaard and Ricoeur we will be looking for an alternative account of narrative identity that avoids these commitments, while still interweaving ethics and self-identity (as we projected an interrelationship of these by describing Kierkegaard's ethics as an ethic of self-becoming).[1]

Levinas furnished our understanding of Kierkegaard with insights into the relationship between one's self and other selves. His ethics is formulated around an understanding of the Other as transcendent. This makes the Other wholly other to us, and therefore beyond our complete comprehension, and in need of a response from us. This response is occasioned by the face of the other, a face revealing their vulnerability and calling for a response of service rather than domination. We can recall Levinas' opposition of totality and

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[1] Marya Schechtman (1996, 2015) and Charles Taylor (1989) also support alternative approaches to narrative identity, but their accounts are less persuasive than Ricoeur's, especially for our purposes.

infinity: the Other must be treated as *infinitely different* if we are to respond to them appropriately (to respond to them as another myself reduces them to the totality of individual self-knowledge). We argued that there were three key benefits to adopting Levinas' approach: *i*) it required radical openness on the part of the individual; *ii*) it promoted an external call to take responsibility for the Other and be responsible to the Other; *iii*) it posited communication as key in engaging with other selves. Additionally, his concept of the political sphere's totalisation paralleled Kierkegaard's critique of the ethical stage. Furthermore, by situating transcendence directly within the immanent form of the Other, Levinas provided a helpful way of conceptualising others in Kierkegaard's ethic, as we required the restoration of religiousness B's transcendence within religiousness A's immanence.

However, despite affinities, there were also shortcomings in connecting Levinas and Kierkegaard's ethics. Levinas' emphasis on the Other as transcendent and the self as infinitely indebted to the Other risked placing individuals in thrall *to* rather than in a relationship *with* others—the dissymmetry that Levinas posits creates an infinite distance that forces the self to be pliant to the Other, not cooperative with them. Furthermore, Levinas risks minimising the self in order to maximise the Other; the Other becomes paramount and my own selfhood becomes subsidiary, only responding to the Other. Therefore, when we approach Ricoeur's assessment of alterity we will need to be mindful that it does not minimise the self, but also does not place the self into a position superior to that of other selves. We must also be attentive to communication as a space within which the self relates to and with other selves—an important element of Kierkegaard's ethic revealed to have great significance when viewed through the interpretive lens provided by Levinas.

With these goals in mind, we will now direct our attention to Ricoeur and begin to sketch out an outline of how his ethics contribute to understanding Kierkegaard's. This chapter will be structured similarly to our discussion of MacIntyre and Levinas. We will first be interested in developing Ricoeur's broader philosophical commitments and the ethics that he proposes, using responses to MacIntyre and Levinas to refine his ethic (*§1*); following which we will return to the deficiencies and ambiguities and evaluate whether Ricoeur can provide adequate resolutions (*§2*). However, it will remain for the conclusion of this thesis to discuss whether Kierkegaard's and Ricoeur's commitments can be reconciled such that the ethical structures provided by Ricoeur and the philosophical language he uses can best articulate the ethic of religiousness A.

§1 The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur

Our first concern is to outline Ricoeur's ethics, but to contextualise it we will first provide a briefly examine the relationship between Kierkegaard and Ricoeur alongside some of his philosophical commitments. By providing this background, we hope to draw some preliminary parallels between and Kierkegaard and Ricoeur, as well as reveal the presuppositions underlying his ethical philosophy. After this preliminary discussion we will briefly present his interpretation of narrative identity and its relation to ethics (*§1.1*). Having a picture of the ethical aims of narrative identity will allow us to examine how this represents an improvement on the ethical positions advanced by MacIntyre and Levinas, using comparison to further elucidate and contour his position (*§1.2 & §1.3*). Through this analysis and comparison, we hope to gain an appreciation for Ricoeur's philosophical commitments that will, in turn, furnish us with a solid basis from which to resolve the

deficiencies and ambiguities, adding new contours to the structure of Ricoeur's ethics, and to the prospective structure of the ethics of religiousness A. However, before we move into our discussion of Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity, we will first see how he engages with Kierkegaard, who, as Mark Dooley notes, Ricoeur was inspired by, along with and *via* Edmund Husserl (Dooley 2010, 169).

Despite there being a tradition linking Ricoeur and Kierkegaard, his interactions with Kierkegaard are somewhat limited. In his essay "Philosophy After Kierkegaard", Ricoeur associates Kierkegaard with German Idealism, and in particular Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. He connects him to Kant's "critique of practical reason as distinct from a critique of physical experience;" Fichte for the act/fact distinction which allows for possibility and actuality to condition existence; and Schelling for his examination of the problem of finite existence, and more specifically "the connection between finitude, freedom and evil" (Ricoeur 1998, 17). While connecting him to each of these figures, Ricoeur situates Kierkegaard within the trend of a "return to Kant", where Kierkegaard is addressing the "possibility of *speaking* about existence"—which, for Ricoeur, represents a "critique of existence" (Ricoeur 1998, 16). Ricoeur views Kierkegaard as indebted to the idealist tradition, even if his own works are often couched as criticisms of that tradition. Furthermore, Ricoeur sees Kierkegaard as utilising a "fractured dialectic" that shares more in common with Hegel than with later existential thinkers (Ricoeur 1998, 10). Ricoeur arrives at this description by drawing Hegel and Kierkegaard into a single project: a critique of the 'ethical' view of the world—from the Hegelian perspective Kant represents the ethical, for Kierkegaard it is Hegelianism (Ricoeur 1998, 20). This fractured dialectic is attributed to Ricoeur as well, with S.H. Clark pointing to "evident affinities with the broken dialectic of Kierkegaard's work, which is praised for its concentration on 'the individual who emerges in sadness and solitude, in doubt and exaltation—and in passion, "the irreducible existent" whom the System does not include'" (Clark 1990, 16).

The emphasis on individualism Clark draws our attention to is not unrecognised by Ricoeur. He finds in Kierkegaard's writings the need for a new discourse, one "which will attend to singularity and give it expression" (Ricoeur 1998, 21). Ricoeur further describes this singularity by reference to Hegel, where it is "constantly regenerated at the margin of discourse"—it is always returned to, but without being central to Hegelian discourse (which, Ricoeur argues, seeks to bypass singularity for generality) (Ricoeur 1998 21). Kierkegaard seeks to develop an alternative form of discourse that does indeed place the singular individual in the central position, casting the absolute to the margins of discourse. We find this discourse continued by Ricoeur in his own writings, where the individual is centrally placed, as it is only as individuals that we can approach and interpret the world around us. This leads Ricoeur to adopt a form of philosophical discourse sharing other affinities with Kierkegaard's. Of particular interest to us are the kinds of moral experiments Ricoeur discusses, reminiscent of Kierkegaard's literary output. In these examples, there is not just an attempt to present clear and straightforward sets of actions with pre-set moral value, but valuation is itself part of the experiment.[2]

We can recall that Dooley did not argue Kierkegaard alone was inspirational for Ricoeur's philosophy, he also references Husserl. Husserl himself was influenced by Kierkegaard—indeed, Hanson refers to Lev

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[2] We see this in Judge William, who is not just speaking about actions he sees as ethical/unethical, he is implicitly *advocating* for a system of moral valuation (as do each of the pseudonyms).

Shestov's insistence that Husserl can only be understood in relation to his "enthusiasm for Kierkegaard" (Hanson 2010, ix). Ricoeur's early works are preoccupied with both developing Husserl's phenomenology and extending it—works like *Freedom and Nature* (1950), his expositions on Husserl in *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology* (1967), and *Fallible Man* (1960) each build on and extend Husserl's method. However, while Ricoeur was deeply engaged with phenomenology, his interests were diverted to hermeneutics—evident in *Symbolism of Evil* (1960), *Freud and Philosophy* (1965), and *The Conflict of Interpretations* (1969). The hermeneutic turn would exert an influence over much of his writings. His engagement with the analytic tradition in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975) then sees his hermeneutics interact with speech act theory, inspiring and transforming his philosophy into phenomenological hermeneutics. Phenomenological hermeneutics would become the central perspective of his later works, particularly his series *Time and Narrative* (1983-5) and *Oneself as Another* (1990), where he develops and articulates his own interpretation of narrative identity. The consequence of his narrative identity, along with its attendant shift in the relationship between oneself and others—extended broadly to historical others—would be explored in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) and *The Course of Recognition* (2005).

Alongside his philosophical works, Ricoeur engaged with theological thought—although he incorporated theological themes and ideas into philosophical works as well.[3] This engagement with religion is representative of Ricoeur's interest in a "pre-philosophical understanding", what he calls "the *pathos* or deeply affective language of wretchedness" and seeks as its starting place that which precedes philosophy—Kierkegaard's discussion of human existence in *The Sickness Unto Death* being an example of this "pre-philosophical richness" (*PA*, 3). In fact, Ricoeur states that it is Kierkegaard "who gets closest to the initial intuition of [his] inquiry" and Ricoeur utilises Kierkegaard's discussion of despair as the incapacity for fully reconciling the infinite, "fantasized", existence with one's finite existence (*PA*, 5). However, while Kierkegaard captures the sense of an unstable mixture of infinite and finite, his position remains pre-philosophical by virtue of remaining "an appeal from one human being to another" (*PA*, 6). Ricoeur's interest in his project is to reach a higher-level description transcending a discourse between individuals and discovering something not necessarily universal, but beyond the merely interpersonal.[4] The pre-philosophical is necessary for the movement to philosophy, and Kierkegaard, on Ricoeur's interpretation, provides such a starting point.[5]

While Ricoeur's works are rich with insights and offer a wealth of compelling concepts and ideas, our primary interest is his interpretation of narrative identity. While we already discussed MacIntyre's interpretation of narrative identity as organising action into an intelligible form oriented towards a final end—the *telos* of the quest—we find a different, unique point of departure for Ricoeur. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur's concern is the interrelation of historical and literary writing (his interests in volumes I and II respectively).

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[3] "Religion is the place within philosophical discourse where it is possible to contemplate both the necessity of transcending images, representation and symbols, and the impossibility of giving them up" (Ricoeur 1998, 22). This perspective on the religious does not necessitate theological religiosity, much as we have argued Kierkegaard's interpretation of the religious (in the form of religiousness A) does not. The ability to appropriate, but distinguish, the theological from a religiousness broadly understood is important to Ricoeur, whose project is expressly philosophical (much like the project we are undertaking).

[4] We will see this extension most clearly when comparing Ricoeur's and Levinas' alterity ethic below (*§1.3, §2.ii, §2.iii*).

[5] We may also point to a certain irony here, as our project is to take Kierkegaard's "pre-philosophical" insights to the level of philosophy by way of Ricoeur's: we seek to reveal the philosophy of the pre-philosophical.

Ricoeur describes recognition of oneself, or the recognition that we have gained knowledge, as "something like reading a life" (*CR*, 68)—life is something that we read and interpret. However, as a point of divergence from MacIntyre, and a point of convergence with Kierkegaard, Ricoeur emphasises the way "human action regenerates and nourishes itself, drawn forward by its insatiable quests" (*FM*, 127). It is this insatiability that leads Clark to draw a comparison between Ricoeur's focus on humility as the only recourse in the face of inconclusiveness, to Kierkegaard's position (Clark 1990, 165). Ricoeur, like Kierkegaard, does not posit a final *telos within* a human life, but as a guide for life.[6] He does not, however, see this as something against which to fight, but as offering up possibilities for continual action and development—it is with the background of inconclusiveness that Ricoeur situates narrative identity into the broader framework of social and political philosophy. Thus, to understand Ricoeur's ethics requires an assessment of his phenomenological hermeneutic—his conception of narrative identity.

§1.1 Narrative Identity

We briefly noted that Ricoeur approaches narrative identity with a different aim than MacIntyre. As a result, their respective articulations of narrative identity are not fully reconcilable. We can recall that the aim of MacIntyre's project was to use narratives as a means of grounding ethics in legitimate social practices, themselves rooted in and mediated by mythological and legendary literature (where the enduring popularity or cultural value of a work provides its proscriptions ethical weight). MacIntyre's emphasis is on understanding life as a quest for the good, and borrows its evaluation of the 'good' from the literature of one's given tradition(s) (and thus the quest is a tool for organising ethical action towards a pre-determined good). By borrowing the quest's structure, the individual is able to presuppose an end when narrating their life: they are aiming towards goods sanctioned by their social milieu. Ricoeur, taking a very different approach, roots narrative identity first in practical action and the way we communicate actions to others, and then adds to that a relation to historical and literary narratives. It is less about legitimising action, as on MacIntyre's interpretation, and more about refracting lived existence through a medium conducive to sharing one's experience of existence with others; narrative is a communicative rather than authoritative method for Ricoeur. Therefore, Ricoeur's approach may offer us a more complementary formulation of narrative identity than MacIntyre.

Thus while MacIntyre's conception of narrative identity does share common features with Ricoeur's, and can guide our present discussion, Ricoeur's represents a substantially different account and will therefore require its own outline and development.[7] As a result, we are here concerned with providing an answer to *why* Ricoeur sees narrative identity as an essential lens through which to approach ethics, and *how* narrative identity expresses ethical refinement (both within the individual, and in social institutions). Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity is not reconcilable with MacIntyre's because of their differences, and we cannot substitute what we have discussed regarding MacIntyre's narrative ethics into our discussion here—although he will

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[6] Kierkegaard posits a final *telos* in the sense of salvation and an "eternal happiness", but this is always placed *after* life, not within it.

[7] We will have occasion throughout this discussion to refer to MacIntyre (as his interpretation of narrative identity we already know), but the more substantial differences will be raised later when examining the ways that Ricoeur extends beyond MacIntyre's interpretation (*§1.2*).

serve as a good foil to further develop the advantages to Ricoeur's interpretation in addressing religiousness A's ethic. Thus, we must ask: how exactly does Ricoeur's conceptualise narrative identity?

To answer this question, we must begin *before* narrative identity with self-identification. Ricoeur proposes three stages of self-identification: individuation ("spoken of"), identification ("says that") and finally "imputation" ("speaks for him- or herself") (*PA*, 212-3). An important corollary to this development is an attendant transformation of our relations to others: "there is, to be sure, an 'other' already at the beginning, but it is only along the course of our development that this 'other' becomes another 'person,' in that the individual becomes an *ipse*" (*PA*, 212-3).[8] It is only in the transition from identification to imputation that we activate narrativity; the first level being identification of the 'I' as an actor: I *am* what I *am doing* (*PA*, 224). There is a second triad arising in this transition to narrative, the triad of describe-narrate-prescribe. This triad serves as the basic constituent of the *self*, as it relates to describing an action and then prescribing future actions through the mediation of narrative (*OA*, 115). This structure opens action up to reassessment in order to discover alternative courses of action in the future—we will see that this allows one to hone ethical conduct through practice and reinterpretation.

Narrativity is therefore the conduit of ethics. Ricoeur argues, "there is no ethically neutral narrative" as narratives present alternative ways of estimating, evaluating, and judging (*OA*, 115). Narratives offer us a way of experimenting with ethics (just as they offer us the possibility of experimenting with political and social configurations[9]). We have, to this point, the basic formula of narrative identity: self-identification, its nature as binding that identification over time and creating self-constancy, and finally we have argued that narratives are inherently ethical. Our interest is now in explicating why Ricoeur supports an ethic intricately interwoven into one's narrative identity. To provide this explanation, we will approach narrative identity with three main intentions: to reveal why Ricoeur believes narrative can provide a strong account of ethics (*i*), to highlight the relationship between practice, ethics, and narrative (*ii*), and to elucidate the ethical *telos* of narrative identity: flourishing (*iii*).

i) Why Narrative

Ricoeur argues that "narrative constructs the enduring character of a character, what we can call this character's narrative identity, by constructing the kind of dynamic identity of a well-told story. It is the identity of the story that makes for the identity of the character" (*PA*, 232). A well-told story develops a central character of the story's action, and it is this character which persists across our various stories and contributes to further refining that character: our self-identity. Our self-identity is derived from the composition of the stories we tell about the enduring character that becomes our *self*, and it is the development of our character that represents the goal of ethics for Ricoeur. We can agree when John Wall asserts that narrative identity is the culmination of the various factors in human existence, binding both our freedom to relate to the world and our involuntary existence within it (Wall 2005, 35). Not only does our narrative identity allow us to create meaning

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[8] We can draw a parallel between this view of individuation and Kierkegaard's theory of the stages. The aesthete recognises themselves as set apart from others (can be "spoken of"); the ethicist, being concerned with themselves, is a person amongst others (asserts themselves); and finally, the knight of faith recognises themselves as a person amongst *other persons* (takes responsibility for his or her self).

[9] Cf: "Ideology and Utopia" in *From Text to Action*.

for ourselves, but it also projects ourselves towards new courses of action without abandoning the grounds of our existence (whether our embodiment, our society, or our history). Narrative identity is therefore an indispensable lens through which to understand ethics, as it provides what Ricoeur calls "narrative resolution" (*PA*, 246).

Narrative resolution relies on shared stories and literary structures providing flexibility to our ethical responses. We structure our memories as though they were stories—they are plotted like a story—and thus create narratives that, when collected and interwoven, define who we are. Our projects (which in turn become narrated memories) determine our identity, and it is when we actualize the projects we undertake that we make them part of our identity in a more concrete way (Ricoeur 1991, 77). It is through engagement in projects that we extend our self-understanding (I am the person who committed to this, and who followed through on it). The notion of emplotment is particularly important to Ricoeur, as

> emplotment confers an intelligible configuration on a heterogeneous collection composed of intentions, causes, and contingencies. The unity of meaning that results rests on the dynamic equilibrium between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordances that, up to the close of the narrative, put in peril this identity of a unique kind. (*CR*, 100)

Therefore, Ricoeur understands emplotment differently than MacIntyre, positing it as a *recovering* of a perilous unity of meaning holding consonance and dissonance in balance—between the opposite poles of sameness and self-constancy—narrating the past and present, and projecting towards an uncertain future. It is this perilous task of joining sameness, what Ricoeur refers to as '*idem*,' and self-constancy, what Ricoeur refers to as '*ipse*,' that are posited as the primary units of narrative identity.[10]

However, if identity, the combining of sameness and self-constancy, is as perilous as Ricoeur says, why advocate for narrative beyond its capacity for organising life into a unity or delimiting it within traditionally recognised boundaries (as proposed in MacIntyre's interpretation)? The answer is that not only does narrative provide an organisational tool for understanding one's own life, but it also allows one's life to be shared with others—we can communicate our lives through narrative more effectively than we could otherwise. The poetics of narrative allow for an indirect presentation of one's life story, making it a "told story", rather than a directly spoken account of life (*PA*, 230).[11] The important distinction here is between directly telling one's story in the sense that it is complete, or an indirect method that lacks completeness but makes up for this by being open to revision and refiguration. Refiguration includes returning to events and understanding them differently, incorporating the stories told about us into the stories we tell about ourselves, and other tools of reinterpretation. Narrative offers a communicative tool for opening our life stories to others and ourselves, revealing an even more important aspect of the narrative approach: the incorporation of ethics directly into the way we talk about ourselves. We can recall Ricoeur's statement that "there is no ethically neutral narrative" (*OA*, 115), and this is in part due to the socialising role of narrative. By reframing our lives in a format sharable with others, we necessarily open our lives up to judgment, and accept that what we can be held to account for those activities to which we commit.

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[10] These will be explored and developed further when we refine Ricoeur's position relative to MacIntyre (*§1.2*).

[11] This indirectness is another similarity to Kierkegaard, who also stresses the need for indirect communication of existential experiences.

Therefore, narrative is not only the story of a life, or a method of organising life in the format of a culturally pre-determined quest for the good, but a practical ethical activity affecting the world. Ricoeur also emphasises acting and suffering as constitutive in determining human time—we perceive time in regards to both historical and fictional narratives that represent our actions, and through our perception of suffering we are called to perform new actions (*TNIII*, 99). In this way, narratives encourage and motivate action in the world, achievable because of the refiguration of time occurs within narratives (particularly novels) (*TNIII*, 102). There is within the telling of a narrative an implicit directive to future action. As Clark clarifies, "narrative is both the result of an intentional act, that which is made; and that which occasions further action" (Clark 1990, 153). Narratives, on Ricoeur's account, are not atomistic, but link with other narratives and occasion action—his approach is focused less on appropriating pre-set narratives to organise one's life towards a specified *telos*, and instead on using tropes and poetic discourse to describe lived existence. While Ricoeur does indeed posit a *telos*, it lacks the same specificity that MacIntyre presupposes when he grounds narratives in traditionally and socially legitimised quests, as Ricoeur leaves narratives open to new forms of description (as we read new forms of literature we appropriate new structures and tropes we can then employ in our own narratives).[12]

For Ricoeur, narrative identity is a means of organising lived existence in a way that leaves it open to reinterpretation and understanding, is communicable to others, and incorporates an ethical dimension by opening itself to judgment. With this in mind, we can further clarify the relationship between narrative and ethics. We have repeated that Ricoeur sees narratives as inherently ethical, as they represent actions in an evaluative medium. We have also hinted at the relationship between narrative and ethics in regards to planning action and projecting towards new possibilities for ethical development. David Rasmussen writes, "as narrative can thematise action, so it can be the bridge to ethical life" (Rasmussen 1996, 166). Narrative bridges the gap between an actor's capacity and an actor's obligation to act by complementing our memory and providing a framework through which we articulate and account for the actions we have taken in our lives (Rasmussen 1996, 166-7). However, from where does one depart in order to discuss this narrative bridge? We will follow Ricoeur's lead and look to the pre-philosophical foundation of ethics. Placing myth in the pre-philosophical space of religious representation in Hegel's system, Ricoeur writes,

> Might it then be possible to rediscover a meaning of ethics that would proceed less from the
> idea of duty and obligation than from the impulse that pushes the slave toward liberation? If
> we understand ethics in this way as the whole set of conditions for the realization of freedom,

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[12] We find here another similarity to Kierkegaard. Climacus, in the *Postscript*, discusses the human *telos* as related to practical wisdom, its interest being existence (*CUP*, 313). We will further clarify this similarity below (*§1.2.iii*), but suffice to say that Kierkegaard, like Ricoeur, does not fix that *telos* on a particular goal, but on *existing*—the *telos* is taking a passionate interest in existence. Thus, rather than narrating one's life relative to a projected goal (i.e., the quest legitimised by my social context and determining the courses of action necessary to reach the *telos* presupposed by that quest), our narratives arise naturally. As we describe actions, and project towards future actions there may be a *telos*, but it underlies action, rather than determining one's actions (i.e., I aim towards the good, but this requires me to creatively manifest the good through practical action—the *telos* is a guiding force, but does not provide a set of instructions). This is why Ricoeur's ethics can be described as an ethics of ethical development, as we approach ethics creatively to discover, or develop, a better understanding of ethics, much as we have argued is the case in Kierkegaard's ethic of cooperative self-becoming. There is an intuition of what the good entails, but we lack a clear and systematic account of what exactly it is (discussed further in *§2.ii*).

> then all self-understanding is ethical and we can affirm that symbolic consciousness is the long detour by which the self discovers the conditions of its own establishment. (*PA*, 174)

From this perspective, myth does not offer an answer to "what must I do?" but to "what must I hope?" (*PA*, 175). While Ricoeur derives this insight from Kant and Hegel, it might be that Kierkegaard is a closer ally here. Kierkegaard would not only agree with this denial of the mythical in opposition to the philosophical—that they are not at odds—but would also agree that philosophical positivism cannot provide an adequate ethic because it cannot give an adequate answer to what one should hope for. To put it in a more recognisably Kierkegaardian way: it reveals possibilities one should have *faith* in manifesting. The question of "what must I hope?" is a guiding question to Ricoeur's ethics. As we stated above, he does not seek out preordained courses of action handed down through tradition, but instead incorporates a *telos* of living a "'good life' with and for others, in just institutions" (*OA*, 172), a *telos* that is unarticulated and inaccessible except through continual practice, remaining that which we *hope* to reach through sustained ethical development.

Thus, when Ricoeur describes ethics as the "aim" of an accomplished life and morality as the "articulation of this aim in norms characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint" (*OA*, 170), we can understand him to mean that ethical development is the *telos* of his 'little ethics.'[13] By positing the *telos* of ethical action as the continuous refinement of ethical-practice, Ricoeur implies the primacy of ethics over morality, whereby ethics constitutes morality—morality manifests from the *actualisation* of the ethical aim (*OA*, 170). This is further developed by Ricoeur's interpretation of 'self-esteem' and 'self-respect,' where the former represents ethics and the latter morality, together representing "the most advanced stages of the growth of selfhood" (*OA*, 171). The ethical *telos* can be described as self-esteem which, when realised, contributes to self-respect within one's broader social community. This development of a 'little ethics' is reformulated as an ethics of argumentation. A possible candidate for an ethic of respect, Ricoeur outlines the ethics of argumentation as a *search* for the best, or most compelling, argument and thereby is not something universal and set, but is malleable, open to revision, and being returned to with new and better arguments (*OA*, 285-6).[14] Argumentation serves as a critical apparatus within conviction, allowing for the conversion of conviction into "considered conviction" (*OA*, 288). Argument is not just a means of baselessly questioning conviction, but properly tuning it. Convention can be placed opposite argumentation in a dialectic that has only practical outcomes; convention is the baseline of morals which argumentative ethics confronts and transforms (*OA*, 287). It is the response to the convention that brings about considered conviction; argumentation forces a reassessment and reorientation of one's (and one's community's) perspective on convention and conviction.

The aforementioned *telos* of living a good life with and for others in just institutions is achieved in the "reflective equilibrium between the ethics of argumentation and considered convictions" (*OA*, 288-9). It is within this dialectic that plurality is centrally positioned, and universality can be aimed at without being assumed or imposed from an abstract position—this equilibrium is an equilibrium arrived at through practice.

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[13] Ricoeur uses the term 'little ethics' throughout his later works, where he argues that ethics is not an independent system of morality separate from the domain of human action but is an integral part of personal identity—therefore, it is not a 'large ethical system' but a 'little ethics' of the self. We have seen hints of this already in the acceptance of narratives as implicitly ethical in their very nature.

[14] In a way, this describes MacIntyre's project of restoring virtue ethics—it is a return to an earlier ethical system with new and, arguably (*!*), better arguments.

Argumentation allows conviction to supersede convention (*OA*, 290); it evaluates what *has been* and replaces it with a better interpretation based on the stronger arguments. This refinement of one's ethics is always within a broader social context, another integral aspect to the narrative function—our appropriation of literary tropes and narrative structures implicitly draw us into relationships with others (those seen, as in the face-to-face, and those unseen, as in historical figures or those with whom we share social bonds but will never meet). This ethical self-development arises through practical action and the acquisition of practical wisdom, towards which we will now turn our attention.

ii) Practical Wisdom: Active Decisions and the Invention of Ethics

What does Ricoeur mean when he speaks of practical wisdom? Drawing from H.G. Gadamer's interpretation of *phronēsis*, as well as returning to Aristotle's discussion of the relation between *phronēsis* and *phronemos*, Ricoeur develops practical wisdom as the means of responding to calls for ethical action. While inspired by Aristotle, Ricoeur argues that his means-ends model breaks down in relation to questions of 'why' certain life plans constitute a 'good life.' "The action-configurations that we are calling life plans stem, then, from our moving back and forth between far-off ideals, which have to be made more precise, and the weighing of a given life plan on the level of practice" (*OA*, 177). This represents *phronēsis*, an interpretation Ricoeur attributes to Gadamer. Ricoeur also draws on Benjamin's interpretation of stories as the means through which we express our personal experiences—and it is this more narratively focused view that he refers to as practical wisdom (*OA*, 164). Practical wisdom can therefore be described as the accumulated wisdom of interpersonal dialogue that, through argument (among other discursive forms) allows for a honing of our understanding of ethics. It is through practical wisdom that we revise and improve our social relationships by revisiting morality in light of the possibility for greater justice, agency, and equality.

Practical action, on Ricoeur's account, offers the potential to retain moral conviction without the "ruinous alternatives of univocity or arbitrariness" (*OA*, 249). The practical testing of moral convictions reveals where their limits lie; rather than adopt a totalitarian reason or a purely subjective lens, collective development of practical wisdom offers a possible recourse to better understanding how and why we should act ethically. The moral conviction that Ricoeur argues should be given greatest weight is that of the Golden Rule and it is this conviction that is *tested* in action to reveal whether assumed morals *are indeed moral*. Practical wisdom is achieved through testing ethics (i.e., through fiction, argumentation, and direct practice). Reliance on experimentation means "practical wisdom consists in inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception required by solicitude, by betraying the rule to the smallest extent possible" (*OA*, 269). The rule here is the moral standards of our community/communities. Thus, ethical creativity does not mean complete ethical freedom; there are still constraints in the form of the prevailing moral norms, but practical wisdom provides space for alternative actions.[15] Using death as an example, Ricoeur discusses the necessity for ethical plasticity: one must judge, in each situation, when it is appropriate or inappropriate to tell someone they are dying because it has the possibility of causing suffering (*OA*, 269-70). It is in these boundary situations that moral norms break down and the need for creative ethical responses is necessitated. In some cases of a person dying, a lie is

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[15] We saw this in our earlier discussion of Rosa Parks. She acted within the rules but only to a degree, and "invented" a course of action in contrast to the rules inhibiting her freedom and which thereby did violence to her (and others).

necessary to avoid undue suffering (i.e., if they are "morally or physically too weak to hear the truth" (*OA*, 269-70)). Practical wisdom informs such responses, and itself is informed by the plurality of responses heard in the narratives of ourselves and others.

We can therefore state that for Ricoeur, practical wisdom is a derivation from practice, consideration, and evaluation. When properly developed, it incorporates the practices and decisions of others—it takes "the counsel of men and women reputed to be the most competent and wisest" (*OA*, 273). So, the ethical creativity informed by practical wisdom is not purely idealist and isolated for each individual but is developed pluralistically in concert with other agents; we invent ethical possibilities in tandem with other ethical actors. However, it requires the tools provided by a narrative approach to ethics because it is through narrating our actions and listening to the narration of the acts of others, that we constitute and refine practical wisdom. Another feature of practical wisdom, according with the broader picture we have been sketching of Ricoeur's ethic, is its incompleteness; practical wisdom is a continuous, cooperative effort. Practical wisdom offers the best guide to achieving an ethical existence,[16] providing a sense of stability that extends beyond our own narrative and incorporating the narratives of others—this requires us to *esteem* others as well, to value their agency and respect it as we respect our own. This emphasis on fostering mutual esteem is tied to the advancement of the individual subject, central to the *telos* of Ricoeur's ethic. Self-esteem, and the esteem of others, is tied to human flourishing—to becoming who we can be through practical wisdom and ethical self-transformation.

iii) Flourishing of the Subject

Having discussed the stakes in ethical development, and noted that Ricoeur's use of narrative incorporates a reciprocal relationship between one's own ethical self-development and the ethical development of communities in which that individual participates, we can now look more closely at ethics on an individual level. Here, our interest will be to provide further definition to Ricoeur's 'little ethics,' and clarifying what he means when he grounds ethics in 'self-esteem' and how self-esteem relates to interpersonal interactions in the form of 'solicitude' and sympathy. Central to our discussion will be communication and an emphasis on the other as an agent—where ideology and violence seek to reduce agency, ethical action should not only support it, but also find ways to *extend* it. The aim of Ricoeur's narrative ethics is not to control the other through proscription and constraint, but work alongside the other as equal subjects, respectful of each others' subjectivity, and encouraging parallel ethical growth through dialogue, practice, and productive argumentation.

Self-esteem represents the continual development of one's self-understanding, and it is through ethical actions that our self-esteem is constituted (our self-esteem is bound-up with the evaluation of our actions by others). Ricoeur praises self-esteem "as the melodic cell of basic ethics found on the wish for a good life" (*PA*,

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[16] Kierkegaard also discusses the importance of practical wisdom in the *Postscript*, with Climacus referring to practical wisdom as the ability to think of possibilities within existence (cf: *CUP*, 313-5). This is contrasted with pure thinking that is completely disinterested and disconnected from existence. He also asks a question about how possibility relates to one's existence in actuality, and writes in reply: "as soon as we begin to ask such questions, we are asking ethically and are maintaining the claim of the ethical upon the existing person, which cannot be that he is supposed to abstract from existence, but that he is supposed to exist, which is also the existing person's highest interest" (*CUP*, 315). Like Ricoeur, Kierkegaard draws a connection between practical wisdom and ethics, grounding ethical possibilities in our ability to think about possibilities that can be actualised, with each of them seeing it as an integral component of living an ethical life.

247). Ricoeur suggests, "that by evaluating our actions, we contribute in a specific way to the interpretation of our own selves in ethical terms" (Ricoeur 1989, 99), and self-esteem is the interpretation of ourselves mediated by the ethical evaluation of our actions. Self-esteem is itself an evaluative process indirectly applied to ourselves as selves (Ricoeur 1989, 99). We must be conscientious, and open to self-evaluation, in order to gain self-esteem—that in turn means we must possess guilt/sin-consciousness. Self-esteem is therefore both key in reaching the *telos* of ethics, a good life, and also connects us to others through an evaluative framework.[17] We can further develop self-esteem by noting its role as a "reflective-moment" where "it is in appraising our actions that we appraise ourselves as being their author" (*OA*, 177). Thus, self-esteem is the result of the attestation that we not only have the potential to narrative ourselves, but to actualize the narrative path we course for ourselves (Wall 2005, 79). It is both the reflective moment where we commit to certain actions, and is actualised when we complete those projects. Self-esteem arises with the recognition of our having authored our own narrative through our own willed actions—agency informs self-esteem (hence its importance in Ricoeur's formulation of ethics and his definition of violence).

Self-esteem is not originally an internal, or isolated action—while we do esteem our own self, our ability to esteem derives first from "esteem[ing] others *as* myself" (*OA*, 193-4). Esteeming others as myself is a capacity which becomes available alongside the recognition of the mutual subjectivity of myself and the other—we are both capable of acting and affecting the world, and so we find that it is "fundamentally equivalent" to esteem "the other as a oneself" and esteem "oneself as an other" (*OA*, 193-4). This similitude between esteem for myself as an agent and esteem for the other as an agent is tied to the love commandment by Ricoeur in a footnote, where he points out the "as yourself" represents an originary desire to be loved that is "earlier and superior to all laws" (*OA*, 194n32).[18] It is for this reason that discussions about the ethical individual inevitably return to the individual in relationship to others; ethics is discoverable within cooperative efforts, not individual ones.

While self-esteem is the inward and personal manifestation of living an ethical life, self-respect is its social dimension and therefore a higher-order form of self-esteem. Self-respect ultimately becomes the primary moral disposition for Ricoeur's sense of self-esteem because respect "is directly structured as a dialogical category in the same way that interaction [implies] conflict: there is no self-respect without respect for the other" (Ricoeur 1989, 100). To be a self, one must be able to properly esteem and finally respect oneself; one expresses that through love of the selfhood of others, such that "it is the other in myself that I respect" (Ricoeur 1989, 100). Ricoeur believes that respect and the implication of self-esteem in respect "may be the key to the

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[17] We should note that self-esteem is not without its criticisms. Wall, drawing on feminist critiques of Ricoeur's ethic of self-esteem, notes that there is a limitation in Ricoeur's approach, as he does not take into account the social and historical limits on defining selfhood for women in particular (but minorities in general) (Wall 2005, 82). Self-esteem presupposes a self that is esteemed, but selfhood can be obscured by those who hold social power—as is the case in ideological systems of oppression. While Ricoeur does indeed address these, the set of assumptions that he commits to is open to criticism from lenses like feminism that incorporate an alternative historical narrative (one which Ricoeur would no doubt welcome into the plurality of historical narratives).

[18] Once again, we find a parallel between Ricoeur and Kierkegaard. Here we can see with clarity how the cooperative self-becoming advanced by Kierkegaard and derived from the neighbour love commandment is manifest in Ricoeur's own ethics (albeit with a different philosophical language).

correct interpretation of the strange commandment to love my neighbour as myself; this commandment interprets self-esteem and respect for the other in terms of one another" (Ricoeur 1989, 100).[19]

It is within the give-and-take of our social interactions that esteem and respect become solicitude. Esteem for others is solicitude, and is the affirmation that *i*) others can practice the same self-narration that I do; *ii*) their narrative adds to my own; and *iii*) my relation to these broader narratives entails instantiating a certain justice[20]—as Wall puts it, "my narrative unity is also a narrative unity participated in by others" (Wall 2005, 80). Therefore, "the esteem of other people and the exchange of esteem through alterity are thus operations originarily conjoint with self-esteem" (*PA*, 226). Our esteem is bound up with the esteem of others such that our self-esteem affects and is affected by others. This is nowhere more clear than in the case of the promise, which is centred on esteem (my own sense of self-esteem and how it will be affected by my fulfilling the promise, and my respect of the other by keeping the promise) (*PA*, 226-7). Solicitude is the "with and for others" that cannot be separated from self-esteem; solicitude and self-esteem cannot be experienced or reflected upon independent of each other, as our existence is directly interwoven with the existence of others (*OA*, 180). The relationship between self-esteem, respect, and solicitude has as its paradigm the Golden Rule—reciprocity, once again, assumes an integral function in his ethic. Ricoeur asks, "were we no less justified in allowing the voice of solicitude to be heard, behind the Golden Rule, the voice which asked that the plurality of persons and their otherness not be obliterated by the globalizing idea of humanity?" (*OA*, 227). Solicitude, through its root in self-esteem and respect, retains the selfhood of the other, it engages with the other as *an* other and does not reduce them to a generality. The ethic thereby calls for particular action appropriate to unique situations.

However, the intermingling of my identity with that of others achieved through solicitude does possess potential problems. "Each person's identity is constructed between these two poles:" my self-esteem and the domination of the self by the other (*PA*, 248). Ricoeur advocates an acceptance that the individual is spoken to before they can speak, and so their memory is affected and contributed to by the memories of others. Therefore, our identity is not solely influenced by our own retelling, but the retellings of others that offers us an identity from without, while self-esteem serves to resist this and provides our identity from within—this requires a balance incorporating the narrative of others without requiring the forfeiture of our own.

The inverse of solicitude is suffering, where suffering is the incapacity to act; a reduction in one's ability to participate in one's own subjective becoming (*OA*, 190). It is violence, the reduction of another's agency that causes suffering and necessitates a response. There is a natural response to the suffering of others in sympathy. Ricoeur's presentation of sympathy is as something one *gives* to the one suffering, who *receives* it—effectively elevating sympathy above pity because the sympathetic individual is 'suffering-with'

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[19] This re-statement of the love command represents an implicit connection between Ricoeur and Kierkegaard, as each acknowledges the command as intimately connected to *selfhood*.

[20] Wall compares this to Aristotelian 'equality': "the need for proportion in the distribution of social goods" (Wall 2005, 80)

(*OA*, 190-1).[21] Pity is a form of sympathy that retains the suffering of the other because it reduces their agency; the pitied one does not receive the sympathy of their own accord, they are forced to accept it. The sympathy Ricoeur promotes requires the one sympathising to do so in such a way that the other is receptive to that sympathy allowing for the mutual recognition of suffering-with.

This form of sympathy advocated by Ricoeur leads him to posit friendship as the paradigmatic relationship between two subjects. Friendship is a clear indicator of the *need* for others, and Ricoeur writes:

> To self-esteem, friendship makes a contribution without taking anything away. What it adds is the idea of reciprocity in the exchange between human beings who each esteem themselves. As for the corollary of reciprocity, namely equality, it places friendship on the path to justice, where the life together shared by a few people gives way for the distribution of shares in a plurality on the scale of a historical, political community. (*OA*, 188)

Friendship is paradigmatic because it represents individuals *willing* their own mutual sympathy, adding to the esteem of each other through mutual recognition, and an understanding of cooperative ethical self-transformation. Friendship also opens up avenues towards happiness, as "the more we attend concretely to others and to the larger moral situation around us, the more we realize our happiness is part of larger narrative adventures whose outcomes are not entirely in our own hands" (Wall 2005, 71). It is within friendships that solicitude is most clearly visible, as it reveals that "it is first for the other than I am irreplaceable" and thereby that the other is irreplaceable to me (*OA*, 193). Friendship reveals the other as *invaluable* within my existence.

The flourishing of the subject, the advancement of self-esteem, its transformation into respect within one's communities, and finally the reciprocity of solicitude is accomplished through interpersonal interaction. While this is a continuous effort, as one never exhausts self-esteem, it is nonetheless an effort one does not undertake alone, but is willed into existence by agents and manifested in the world through practice. Solicitude is not the final say, though. While friendship is a paradigmatic example of solicitude, it is directly interpersonal, and we have already acknowledged that Ricoeur's interests extend beyond the direct face-to-face. This occasions 'critical solicitude,' the term Ricoeur uses to refine solicitude after it has passed through morality (in the form of respect) and is the form taken by practical wisdom "in the region of interpersonal relations" (*OA*, 273). It is critical solicitude that we enact in institutions, as these are governed by mores and norms (although the primacy of ethics leaves mores and norms open to revision and alteration) and are therefore more broadly applicable, especially to those whose face we will never see. Critical solicitude, as the form of practical wisdom in the context of communal life, is re-grounded in ethical action invented through the process of practice, failure, and reassessment.

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Narrative identity, on Ricoeur's interpretation, is not only sophisticated in its structure and definition, but extends beyond just a means of forming an identity, affecting and underlying each domain of an individ-

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[21] Ferraira argues that Kierkegaard's interpretation of mercy—itself interrelated with sympathy—is similarly concerned with not being reduced to pity (Ferraira 2001, 195). Kierkegaard advocates for an active engagement in alleviating suffering, not passive giving, or the expectation that what is given will be passively accepted—both individuals must be engaged in acts of sympathetic interpersonal engagement.

ual's life. Ricoeur promotes narrative identity because it offers a lens through which to bring a level of conso-
nance to the distinction between what remains the same about a person despite changing—how they can remain
self-constant. This inherently implies an ethical dimension; by adopting narrative structures to describe one's
life, one's lived existence is reformulated in a way both shared with and evaluated by others. As a corollary of
this, narrative identity posits our lives as social and 'open' to others. Furthermore, it remains a 'little ethic' by
placing its focus on individual life—it is not an ethic claiming universality or completeness, but one promising
to work towards ethical self-transformation through practice. This modest teleological structure promotes both
individual ethical development, and broader social development through active engagement in assessing, re-
assessing, and envisioning courses of action that will lead to a good life with and for others in just institutions.

However, while we have described Ricoeur's ethics in broad strokes, we can refine it by comparing it
to both the MacIntyrean and Levinasian ethics we confronted in the previous chapter, thereby revealing ways
that Ricoeur's approach represents an improvement on the ethical systems they offer.

§1.2 MacIntyre

While we have briefly contrasted MacIntyre and Ricoeur, we merely noted divergences rather than
clarifying them. Specifying their different interpretations is necessary though, and it is here that we will begin
to unpack those differences and provide greater depth to our understanding of Ricoeur's ethic. Additionally,
we hope that through further comparison we can reveal how Ricoeur offers an ethic of narrative identity im-
proving on that provided by Macintyre. While we will reserve testing Ricoeur against the deficiencies and
ambiguities for later (*§2*), we will begin to formulate responses by highlighting the differences between his
and MacIntyre's respective approaches to narrative identity. To underscore the differences in their approaches,
we will be relying on two major areas of divergence: the constitution of a narrative identity (*i*), and the rela-
tionship between narratives and communities (*ii*). By drawing attention to these two areas of contention, we
hope to not only articulate the advantages of Ricoeur's interpretation, but also presage answers to the deficien-
cies.

i) What Constitutes Narrative Identity?

Ricoeur actually responds directly to the differences in his and MacIntyre's perspectives on narrative
identity. In his view, MacIntyre does not attempt to bridge the gap between fictional and lived narratives, a
gap that Ricoeur hopes to bridge by vesting ethical content in works of *fiction* as well as in one's own life
narratives (*OA*, 158-9). MacIntyre has a more straightforward, but limited, understanding of narrative identity
than does Ricoeur, who sees a greater value in ethical hypotheticals. For MacIntyre, the ethical dicta are di-
rectly given in the authoritative texts of a tradition, while Ricoeur posits that fiction is where we *play* with
ethics and use hypotheticals to suggest ways of acting (or of avoiding acting), and which lack a definitive
ethical statement.

Thus, while the good life for MacIntyre is contingent on tradition and social milieu, Ricoeur states that
it is "for each of us, the nebulous of ideals and dreams of achievements with regard to which a life is said to
be more or less fulfilled" (*OA*, 179). Without an appeal to an abstract traditionally mediated definition of the

good life, Ricoeur instead situates it within lived existence, providing a subjective expression that is reconcilable with the lives of others.[22] The role of action in a narrative exemplifies this distinction. For MacIntyre, actions are a means of exhibiting virtue and contribute to a virtuous narrative (participating in actions lead to recognition as virtuous relative to social valuation). For Ricoeur, the goal is self-esteem, or self-flourishing. Thus, each discrete set of actions contribute uniquely to this aim and are not reducible—each action has its own unique ethical quality distinct from others. MacIntyre presupposes a virtue content that, when accumulated, represents a life lived virtuously—each action can be reduced to representing a virtue that is then applied to the individual's character. To put it succinctly, actions remain discrete and separately contribute to the development of an ethical character for Ricoeur; for MacIntyre, they are reduced to their virtue content, become transferable, and can be projected onto their character *in toto*; I *am* virtuous because I *have been*. Ricoeur's ethics is therefore focused on *refinement* of ethical *praxis* over time, not reflecting predetermined normative structures (i.e., socially-mediated virtues). This is, in many ways, parallel to Kierkegaard's position, wherein individuals are ethical within the moment of acting, not as a whole or because of past actions.[23]

A further divergence from MacIntyre is the question which narrative is meant to answer. Where MacIntyre seeks a way of organising life in order to create unity, Ricoeur is responding to a different question: "how can a human being remain mostly the same, unless in him or her over time some immutable core escapes change?" (*PA*, 231). He narrows this lens by stating, "everything in human experience contradicts this immutability of a personal core. There is nothing in our inner experience that cannot not change" (*PA*, 231). It is this *aporia* between that which changes and that which stays that same to which Ricoeur believes narrative can offer an answer. Ricoeur, following from this question, notes that it is "inevitable" that we will reach this *aporia* because we, for example, possess a name from birth to death which suggests something immutable about us—but, as Ricoeur states, "the experience of corporeal and mental change contradicts such sameness" (*PA*, 231). This distinction, between sameness and self-constancy is distinguished as *idem* and *ipse* identities respectively. There is a further aspect to this dialectic of *idem* and *ipse*: "the dialectic of identity confronted by otherness. The question of identity in this sense has two sides, one public, one private. The story of a life includes interactions with others" (*CR*, 103). These three aspects of identity are what occasion the use of a narrative structure—but, what exactly does Ricoeur mean by describing identity as '*idem*' and '*ipse*,' and how does the dialectic provide a narrative resolution?

One's *idem* identity relates to the self in its numerical identity, the retention of sameness over time (my name refers to the same 'me,' my body has always been mine, etc.). This is contrasted with the *ipse* identity, which has an imaginative component that opens the possibility of forming a coherent sense of a self over time. Identity as sameness (in terms of substance), *idem*, in its various forms seeks stability above all else. That something can retain some sameness at all times (generally in a physical sense) has a variety of problems, most notably its bracketing of time and therefore responsibility (i.e., if I am not able to maintain a consistent

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[22] This is clarified by the 'with and for others' aspect of the ethical *telos*. We communicate what the good life means to us—those ideals, dreams, and achievements—to others and enter into dialogue about them, thus revealing how we can achieve them with others, and whether they infringe on the good life of others. It is important to note that it is *with* and *for* others that we live a good life, and so our goals must consider others.

[23] This commitment reinterprets ethics as engagement in transformative action, not merely the replication of previously legitimised actions.

identity, then I cannot take responsibility for my actions—nor can I hold others responsible for theirs) (*PA*, 243-4). It is for this reason that *ipseity* is required. *Ipse* identity, an "identity in spite of time", is based on self-constancy in relation to temporal commitments (e.g., keeping one's word) (*PA*, 243-4). We can therefore refer to the *idem*/*ipse* distinction as one of sameness/self-constancy—*idem*-identity relates to the "substantial or structural" aspects of the self, while *ipse*-identity includes those things related to reflection (i.e., memory and promising) (*PA*, 244).[24] Dialectically relating these poles is the aim of Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity: revealing the dialectical relation between the self as the same self, and the self as a consistent and constant self.[25]

This leads Ricoeur to note a similarity between himself and MacIntyre, as his ethics is also grounded on the sense of a 'unity to life' (*CR*, 102-3). However, for Ricoeur this unity is formed through the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse*, such that reflection and imaginative emplotment of actions (*ipse*) can be connected to a particular body (*idem*), allowing for the manifestation of responsibility for actions. This is in contrast to MacIntyre, who posited narrative unity as the unity of one's actions in service of a particular quest. Thus, Wall notes that Ricoeur diverges from other advocates of narrative by viewing 'character' as the individual's selfhood as *pre*-constituted, whereas most narrativists, like MacIntyre, see it as the *telos* of narrative (Wall 2005, 35-6). *Ipseity* is the self that relates to character, which claims *that* character as its own and uses that sense of character to project towards the future and relate to the world interpretively. Character is a primordial sense of self prior to reflection, but providing the vantage point from which an individual engages in the world. *Ipseity* is, therefore, closely associated with ethics as it represents our ability to connect our actions with our intentions, and reflect on the consequences of those actions.[26]

Now that we have briefly sketched the nature of identity as comprised of both *idem* and *ipse*, we can begin to examine how these are dialectically interrelated through narrative.

> The idea of narrative identity gives access to a new approach to the concept of *ipseity*, which,
> without the reference to narrative identity, is incapable of unfolding its specific dialectic, that
> of the relation between two sorts of identity, the immutable identity of the *idem*, the same,
> and the changing identity of the *ipse*, the self, with its historical condition. (*CR*, 101)

Narrative allows for the reconciliation of these two poles by creating a dialectic that connects the sameness of the self with the attendant changes that occur through active existence. Narrative brings together the infinite, in the form of motives and actions, and the finite, in the form of attribution to someone in particular (*OA*, 146-7). Therefore, we can say that the *ipse* is the various intentions, motives, and, ultimately, actions an individual undertakes, which are then grafted onto their *idem* identity via narrative structures and tropes. The individual is thereby able to remain *this* individual despite changes to their dispositions, their personal history, and the

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[24] We can draw an early parallel to Kierkegaard here, as he also posits a dialectical relation between two poles of one's existence: the finite and the infinite. Much like Ricoeur, Kierkegaard suggests that the self only manifests from this dialectical process, being reducible to neither pole, but relating to the dialectical synthesis of their finite and infinite aspects. There is a further similarity in their description of each of these, where the finite relates to that which is given, and the infinite is possibility. This parallel structure of selfhood we briefly see here will be further clarified below.

[25] Like Kierkegaard's original synthesis, the self relates two polar opposites without collapsing them to a singularity, or being reduced to that synthesis.

[26] It is also the capacity for imaginative responsiveness, offering the possibility for the invention of new patterns of ethical action.

way they are understood by others. Ricoeur employs a narrative understanding of identity as a means of bringing together these two opposed forms of identity without attempting to reduce one to the other—narrative maintains each pole and their importance in the process of self-identifying, enriching both *idem* and *ipse* and providing a coherent and consistent self that can be recognised and rendered understandable.

We have previously described Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity as a phenomenological hermeneutic, and it is the reconciliation of the *idem* and *ipse* that occasions this terminology. The hermeneutic aspect derives from the need to interpret one's life, as "to read oneself, that is what I will call the refiguration, not only of time, not only of action, but of the agent him- or herself through narrative" (*PA*, 225). It is the refiguration of ourselves as agents that occurs through the interpretation of our lived existence. The *idem*, while remaining the same, is affected by changes to the *ipse*, changes arising through actions unique to our own agential decisions. This is the aforementioned "narrative resolution" of the *idem*/*ipse* distinction–narrative resolution being the emplotment of one's life into a told story, the effect of which is to reveal the self-constancy of the *ipse* while simultaneously binding it to the *idem* (*PA*, 246). We must stress that the *ipse* cannot be reduced to the *idem* and as a result there is always the remnant of dissonance (and sometimes a complete dissociation between the two, i.e., what I promised and what I actually did, are at odds with each other) (*PA*, 246). The effect of the narrative resolution is to draw a balance between both *idem* and *ipse* in order to answer the question 'who am I?'—an answer remaining open enough so our narratives can be recognisable when we tell them and when others do. As Ricoeur notes, "the stories we tell of ourselves differ from those told about us by others", yet we can still connect these seemingly different stories to the 'who' that we are (*PA*, 245-6). Narratives offer a flexibility allowing for variations in telling without collapsing the possibility for recognition in the various retellings.

We know that Ricoeur is interested in outlining a form of narrative identity consolidating sameness and self-consistency over time; in support of this he writes,

> we must be capable of describing persons as basic particulars and selves as self-designating subjects of discourse in order to be able to characterize actions as intentionally-brought-forth events, and agents as the owners and authors of their actions; and we must understand what agency means in order to apply to actions a moral judgment of imputation and to call persons responsible selves. (Ricoeur 1989, 100-1)[27]

It is a narrative structure that possesses this capacity. There are two models of self-permanence over time to which we can assign responsibility: "*character* and *keeping one's word*" (*OA*, 118). We have already noted that character is the default sense of self that is layered with meaning as we engage in activities. Because of this layering, it represents the "almost complete mutual overlapping" of our *idem* and *ipse* identities. Keeping one's word retains one's self as the same, but irreducibly so—the 'I' that made the promise is the same as the 'I' who was faithful to it, and yet, the latter 'I' is not reducible to the former because of the commitment kept. Wall says Ricoeur's concept of ethical "capability" is not just an abstract ability to impose our freedom or act

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[27] This echoes Kierkegaard's description of ethical self-development through the stages, where it is only at the level of the religious where the individual recognises themselves as a self and as the author of their actions—it is only within the religious stage that we find individuals assume responsibility for actions they committed to and undertook. Prior to this we find the ethicist who performs actions mandated by an external source (their responsibility is relative to pre-given duties, not to personal ethical decisiveness), and the aesthete whose identity is too disparate to enable the attribution of a coherent sense of self.

in accordance with pre-set narratives, but a freedom for attestation in the world (Wall 2005, 76). Our actions attest to our capabilities, and the actualisation of the self in all its varied facets (body, tradition, social and historical relation, etc.) in the world, and this attestation is filtered through the medium of narrative. Thus, it is through the language of narrative that we arrive at ethical judgment and the capacity for taking responsibility for our actions.

How exactly does narrative overcome the atomisation of action and restore the capability for attributing responsibility? Before answering this question, we should be clear that Ricoeur does not agree with MacIntyre that a positive moral system is the primary foundation of an ethic. Instead, he argues that ethical actions should be practiced in accordance with a negative deontological position, namely to "act solely in accordance with the maxim by which you can wish at the same time that what *ought not to be*, namely evil, will indeed *not exist*" (*OA*, 218). Moral obligations, when given negatively, provide greater plasticity to ethical action, whereas positive moral obligations circumscribe ethical action through positive laws and predetermined responses. With this in mind, we can point to promises. "The proud assertion 'I will do it' expresses in language the risky posture of *ipseity*, as self-constancy that goes beyond the safety of mere sameness" (*CR*, 103). Ricoeur stresses that self-narratives are open,[28] so when we make promises we leverage our selfhood; the "will" is an assertion that places our sense of self on the line. Where sameness would suggest that the "will" creates a necessary chain of events, Ricoeur is clear that this is not the case and we can fail willingly or unwillingly—we can *choose* to commit 'evil' actions, like being deceitful, but this interrupts the integrity of our self.[29] For Ricoeur, one's narrative self-constitution relies on self-esteem and self-respect, each of which is bound-up with our relation to others; this sets him apart from MacIntyre, whose account incorporates others but only as members of the society from which we adopt the quest. Promises are a central example of what Ricoeur is discussing when he speaks about ethics because the promise represents the dialectical trust between oneself and others inherent to an ethic of self-transformation, the same dialectical trust that underlies the argumentative structure underwriting and informing the ethics proposed in and through narratives.

Promises produce a fissure between *idem* and *ipse* identities, a fissure that practical action and the narrative function bridges—selfhood and sameness diverge with the promise, whose ethical thrust is "to respond to the trust that the other places in my faithfulness", because it offers an alternative to character as the source of identity (*OA*, 124). It is not solely our character affected by the temporal element of existence, but our felicity, whose permanence is in *self-constancy* not character.[30] Therefore, promises are indicative of

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[28] Neither birth nor death is experienced by individuals, so it cannot be included in one's narrative as the opening and closing of the story—our story remains open at either end. This is important, as it reveals the riskiness of identity, that it has no self-known foundation, nor finality, that can provide a solid grounding for our narrative and therefore our selfhood.

[29] This is similar to Kierkegaard, who also stresses the openness of activity and the way our sense of self is affected by commitments we fail to follow through on. As we have discussed previously, Kierkegaard, like Ricoeur, leaves space for failures beyond our control—we can be held accountable for failing because of accident, but with the recognition that we tried—but *choosing* to fail, or being deceitful in our commitment, represents a failure to construct a coherent self. Again, we see a shared commitment to intertwining selfhood and ethical practice.

[30] Character is the core of our identity, but is affected by and not sufficient to define our self-identity. Self-constancy informs and contributes to our character, which gives permanence to our personal history.

"strong *ipseity*" because they represent "self-constancy in spite of changes of heart and even changes of inten-tion… but this strong *ipseity*, again, only occurs with an allocutionary counterpart, in that the commitment of a self to itself has others not just as witnesses but also its audience. Here we have the for others of strong *ipseity*" (*PA*, 327). Our promises are, necessarily, made to others and rely on those we make the promise to for evaluation[31]—my esteem, and therefore my *ipseity*, relies on their recognition of me through my fulfilment of the promise, and this is then internalised and incorporated into my self-identity. This is distinct from Mac-Intyre's account, the thrust of which is producing *unity*, rather than layering self-constancy over self-identity; making and keeping the promise is sufficient for unity, as one's narrative is composed independently of oth-ers.[32]

This leads us again to the necessity of trust. Fidelity is central to our acquired identifications because they place a value or values above our own egoistic survival, again revealing the non-reducible *idem* and *ipse*, as each must be considered (the promiser and the promise keeper are the same (*idem*) because of the narrative continuity of acting on the intention over time (*ipseity*)) (*OA*, 121). The narrative function is therefore essential in maintaining ethical constancy, serving as a medium through which ethical actions are inscribed over an unchanging character—rather than MacIntyre's hope to bring unity to the whole of one's life, Ricoeur posits narrative as a way of reconciling what we have done and our character into who we are *becoming*. Promises themselves give rise to habits. Acquired habits serve as identifiers allowing for a stability of character that assures "numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity across change, permanence in time which defines sameness" (*OA*, 122). This character is representative of the "what" of the "who" that I am—character is informed by our habits, themselves constituted out of a constant felicity to our commitments. My character *becomes* the actions that I have undertaken, and which I can narratively attribute to myself, and yet always remains the same character that is my self. This is not a complete unity—I change over time—but a progressive development of self.

Character, as in MacIntyre's interpretation of narrative identity, is important, but it is not sufficient to describe the self; there is more than just character at work in Ricoeur's 'little ethics'. Thus, while character can, as Richard Kearney says, lead us to "the door of ethical action", it "cannot lead us through" as we are agents and must will ourselves through that gateway (Kearney 1996, 184). On Ricoeur's account, character gives way to the self of practical, ethical action in the world—and more importantly, among other selves. It is this sense of character, passed through the sieve of narrative that is recognisable by others, with recognition requiring, in the first place, confrontation with the other. There is embedded in narrative identity a need for recognition; our narratives are not solely for us, but for a public audience as well (Venema 2000, 238). We construct our identity in order to bring ourselves into the larger community through engagement with others. As Ricoeur says, "to make oneself recognised is first to give rise to a mistake, then to correct it" (*CR*, 73). Engagement with others, as a corollary to ethical self-transformation, is part of the same process of correcting

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[31] This includes our own self as an other—I make a promise to my future self (who is other than I am now) that I later evaluate.

[32] I feel the influence of others on my own self-narrative through tradition and social context, not through direct contri-bution (i.e., their evaluation of my actions).

the mistaken propositions one begins with—and thus, a nexus point is produced between one's own ethical transformation and ethical transformation *with* others.

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Defending his theory of narrative identity, Ricoeur writes, "we tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative" (*TNI*, 75). There is an internal desire and we narrate our stories to share them with others—to bring attention especially to the suffering that we experience, and that others have experienced. This impulse to engage in corrective activities to resolve ethical deficiencies is implicitly incorporated into the very structure of narrative, which, we must continually stress, is why Ricoeur opts for a narrative understanding of self-identity—it intertwines ethics directly with one's lived existence. To develop this necessary narrative approach, Ricoeur says that it

> seems plausible to take the following chain of assertions as valid: self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well as from fiction, making a life story a fictional history or, if one prefers, a historical fiction, interweaving the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of imaginary autobiographies. (*OA*, 114n1)

This set of assertions sets up the basic framework of narrative identity—not only the irreducible bridging of sameness and self-constancy, but also the fostering of communication of one's selfhood with one's community. However, Ricoeur does concede that this lacks a "clear comprehension of what is at stake in the very question of identity applied to persons or communities", and that the emphasis on fiction and history, while unveiling this structure, opens the possibility for attention to be turned away from questions of identity (*OA*, 114n1). Thus, while narrative can perform the functions necessary to develop a coherent self-history, it can also obscure one's identity behind the literary forms informing one's narrative; too much fictionalising can limit self-understanding, and too often historical analysis elides those who have suffered. In such cases, identity is not brought to the fore, but recedes to the background. It is the decentring of the self that we located as a problem in MacIntyre's account, and reveals decisively why we endorse Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity.

ii) Narrativity & Community

The sociality of narrative reveals community as essential to narrative identity and ethics. While Ricoeur does not found ethics on communally validated quests like MacIntyre, he does accept that narratives are inherently communal. The tropes and literary forms used to narrate ourselves constitute a give-and-take—we have a unique narrative substantially reliant on social narratives. An emphasis on trust, recognition, and mutuality are essential components in forming communities, and the attestation of who we are through our actions is made in the presence of those who comprise our communities. In order to avoid the problems of limiting ethical interactions to narrow face-to-face interactions, Ricoeur extends his ethics to institutions that mediate between myself and absent, or unseen, others (i.e., those I will never meet, but whose life I invariably have an effect on). Institutions are founded on common mores (not constraints) and are necessitated by plurality, where "plurality includes third parties who will never be faces. A plea for the anonymous in the literal sense of the

term is therefore included in the fullest aim of the true life" (*OA*, 195). If we are to aim at the good life with and for others in just institutions, we must therefore incorporate those others who do not appear before us.[33]

Among the ways others do not appear before us, but with whom we remain inextricably linked, are historical individuals. Similarly to MacIntyre, Ricoeur argues that "history precedes me and my reflection: I belong to history before I belong to myself" (*HHS*, 68). Our existence is already, at its outset, entrenched in a history that is wholly separate from oneself (even my birth is mediated through a historical record). We are not entirely separate from it though, as we are active in it: "man's link to the past precedes and envelops the purely objective treatment of historical facts" (*HHS*, 76). We already have a standpoint before attempting to evaluate history in 'objective' ways, and so we are always already engaged in and with history, and through shared history we engage in and with communities. "The collective project of humanity, the continuous narrative of which we form a part, cannot ultimately either resolve or console us for this existential plight" (Clark 1990, 190). Our incorporation into communities means that it is incumbent on us to contribute to the ethical transformation of those communities—our ethical transformation affects others and assists in the transformation of our communities and institutions. This is distinct from MacIntyre, who sees our connection to community formed and reinforced by our adoption of quests legitimised by and within those communities—the aim is participation, not transformation.[34] While we can never be discharged from the need to engage in this transformation, Ricoeur emphasises a significant consequence for failing to engage with and improve the ethics of our society.

Although not directed specifically at MacIntyre's position, Ricoeur's ideology critique represents a decisive rupture between himself and MacIntyre. Ricoeur's assessment of ideology situates it as a failure to engage adequately in ethical social-transformation and represents a fundamental reason why we need ethics. It is "in the test of confronting others, whether an individual or a collectivity, narrative identity reveals its fragility… it is worth noting that ideologies of power undertake, all too successfully, unfortunately, to manipulate these fragile identities through symbolic mediations of action" (*CR*, 104). Identity is fragile and, because of the variety of different ways of narrating one's life, which is an otherwise positive feature for Ricoeur, narratives are nonetheless prone to manipulation through the use of interpretative lenses provided by ideologies. "The temptation regarding identity that lies in the withdrawal of *ipse*-identity to *idem*-identity thrives on" the fragility of narrative in the face of ideological corruption (*CR*, 104). The primary goal of ideology, in Ricoeur's account, is the reduction of selfhood to numerical sameness—innovation becomes entirely obscured behind the sediment of ideologically enforced habits, such that possibility is relinquished.[35] This neutering of possibility is what Ricoeur refers to when discussing violence.

Violence, on Ricoeur's account, is the assault on a person's autonomy, their "power-to-act", while evil (its moral dimension) destroys self-respect and esteem: "humiliation—a horrible caricature of humility—is

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[33] This will be a major area of distinction between Ricoeur and Levinas in (*§1.2*).

[34] We can recall that traditions cannot be critiqued from the inside on MacIntyre's account.

[35] Kierkegaard diagnoses his contemporary age with this ailment—it is an age where the ethical stage thrives, and the religious stage is obscured alongside possibility. The reduction of possibility to necessity, or to social utility, is central in Kierkegaard's characterization of both his age and the ethical stage, and serves as a constant point of critique throughout his *oeuvre*.

nothing else than the destruction of self-respect, beyond the destruction of the power-to-act" (*OA*, 220). The assault on one's selfhood constitutes evil because it diminishes the basic constitutive power of the individual and disperses their ability for self-recognition and understanding (which has dire ramifications for relating to others).[36] This too distinguishes Ricoeur from MacIntyre, who sees evil as an opposition to the good, or a distraction from the virtues—evil, for MacIntyre is something one is complicit with or accomplice to, thus pitting oneself in opposition to the good. Rather than identifying it relative to interpersonal relations, as Ricoeur does, MacIntyre's interpretation is relative to the social valuation of virtues and the good. Furthermore, MacIntyre's ethic does not have the same worry over ideology that Ricoeur's does because it is practicable within ideological systems—MacIntyre located this as a problem in Aquinas' virtue ethic, and offers an alternative of forgiveness and re-education in virtues contrary to that ideological system.[37] MacIntyre's example requires a retrospective position, though; his proposed response to overcome ideological corruption comes *after* the virtues supported by that system have been delegitimised (which is to say they have become vices). If this is the case, the individual whose quest is mediated by an ideological tradition cannot recognise it as such and therefore the possibility for committing violence in the way outlined by Ricoeur can be legitimised within such a perspective. The need to overcome ideological corruption occasions Ricoeur's conceptualisation of narrative identity as an improvement on MacIntyre's—by positing violence as inhibiting the agency of others, Ricoeur offers a compelling alternative to evil being only retroactively recognised as an institutional problem. He posits that evil is the institutionalisation of violence through oppressive narratives, eventually concretising into traditions promoting quests that include violence.[38]

However, ideology is not solely related to overarching systems of domination, as portrayed in traditional Marxist critique. Instead, Ricoeur suggests that it is discoverable in any social relationship and institution (religion, science, interest groups, etc.)—it is not purely class interests that determine ideology, but a common social imagination that forms bonds between individuals (*FTA*, 324). Ideology is embedded in the fabric of narratives, reifying itself in traditions that obscure or delegitimise alternatives to itself. Because narratives have their foundation in cultural and traditional structures, there is always a tinge of ideology embedded within them; communities possessing shared narratives will always have some distinction from other communities (*TNIII*, 259). While this may sound like ideology is inevitable, we must recognise that there is a plurality of narratives available to us, and it is through our own incorporation and deployment of alternative narratives that we enrich and transform past narratives. This pluralistic approach to narrative is more capable of defending itself against ideological corruption than MacIntyre's because of its plurality; by advocating unity, MacIntyre's

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[36] This too is reflective of Kierkegaard's ethical perspective on loving the neighbour as a *self* (and therefore an autonomous agent) and is key in his discussion of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death* where a denial of agency minimises self-recognition.

[37] Cf: MacIntyre 1981, 178-80.

[38] Without this perspective, Rosa Parks could not have legitimately made the stand she did, as it would pit her against the accepted and legitimate social order. The justness of her actions could only be recognised *after* a change in the tradition, but without the possibility of recognising her actions as ethical, those actions that, alongside Parks' own, culminated in the changing of the tradition holding segregation to be legitimate would be similarly delegitimised. This is the problem with relying on *Sittlichkeit* as the basis for ethics and limiting the possibility for ethical reflection on the *status quo*: the status quo cannot change *without reflection and critique*, and thus violence gains an ethical status.

narrative approach becomes resistant to change and development—unless the traditions themselves change, the narrative of the quest remains legitimate and therefore remains the primary method through which to order one's life into a unity.[39]

While Ricoeur does acknowledge that ideology is a necessary aspect of social bonding, he characterises corruptive ideologies as 'pathological.' It is the goal of pathological ideology, whether implicitly or explicitly, to reduce the plurality of narratives to a univocity—the very problem we located in MacIntyre's approach. This is most clear in historical writing, which Ricoeur states should not only be "the story of the triumphant kings and heroes, of the powerful; it is also the story of the powerless and dispossessed. The history of the vanquished dead demands to be told" (Ricoeur 1984, 17). He further argues that there is an intention behind the fictionalising of history to align it with an ideology, thus making history function as a means of manifesting that ideology in the world (*TNIII*, 189). Fictionalising history, reducing the plurality of interpretation to a singularity, allows for its internalisation in those immersed in that history, who then manifest its ideological purpose through the corruption of institutions. Venema argues that ideology attempts to reduce pluralities of meaning into a specific meaning suiting the needs of particular social configurations (Venema 2000, 243), thus negatively effecting narrative identity which requires a plurality of narratives that overlap and interweave with the narratives of others (Venema 2000, 241).

The interconnectedness of narratives, their plural nature, is central to Ricoeur's positing narratives as not only the framework through which we develop our self-identity, but how we interact with others. The ideology critique he is engaging in is meant to reveal how adopting a singular narrative as legitimate reduces both the capacity to self-identify, and the capability to productively, and ethically, interact with others. This further separates his account from MacIntyre's, as the goal becomes pluralistic narrative refinement rather than straightforward narrative unity. Kemp draws a comparison between Ricoeur's ideology critique and Kierkegaard's critique of the Hegelian 'Great Narrative' of history (the 'Great Narrative' is not entirely dissimilar to MacIntyre's traditionally motivated quests). Kemp argues that their respective critiques highlight "the perversion of the historical narrative which assigns itself authoritarian and absolutist rule does not provide that all historical narrative ruins rather than edifies the good life" (Kemp 1989, 77). He goes on to add, "considering that ethics reveals the relations between humans, it seems unreasonable to set aside one life for narrative, and refuse it a collective life as well, that is, refuse it the role of an ethical model calling everyone to make life better" (Kemp 1989, 77). Kemp is here outlining that rather than the critique of ideological history meaning that *all* historical writing is pathologically ideological, we can instead look towards the possibility of edifying historical writing.[40] It is the recovery and retention of narrative pluralism interweaving personal and social narratives that elevates Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity over MacIntyre's—like Kierkegaard's, Ricoeur's critique is meant to reveal the possibility for self-improvement as a guide to social improvement; my own self-transformation should help or inspire the self-transformation of others.

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[39] For MacIntyre, individuals are incapable of 'looking in' on their own traditions, and thus critique of one's traditions is severely limited (MacIntyre 1984, 125).

[40] Recall that Ricoeur sees ideology as a component of all interpersonal interactions; it is not *de facto* corruptive, but becomes corruptive in the same way that the sedimentation of habit can become corruptive, by occluding other possible ways of approaching existence.

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We find in Ricoeur's approach to narrative identity an intimate connection to one's community, that ethical action does not take place in a vacuum and cannot be isolated to individuals alone—he finds no self-sufficiency in ethics. The intersection of narrative, ethics, and community also reveals what is at stake in non-ethical action, namely violence to the other in the form of a reduction of their autonomy and capacity to develop a sense of self. This is a common theme running throughout Ricoeur's authorship, but takes a central position in his critique of ideology. The past must remain open to revision in order to hold open the future to alternative courses of action, as changes to our interpretive framework for understanding the past have a direct consequence on the freedom we have in positing the future (*TNIII*, 216). The present is affected by revising our understanding of past events; the expectations engendered by the past are borne out in the actions and expectations of the present. Thus, when a plurality of narratives is reduced to a singular, legitimised one, as in MacIntyre's quest, the present becomes reified in the bonds of the past—the expectation is continuation, not renewal, change, and liberation. The transformative power of narrative, specifically in regard to its ethical dimension, is necessary both on a personal level, and on the level of broader communal life, as Kemp highlighted that our own personal ethical self-transformation contributes to our society's ethical development.

A strong emphasis on revision and reinterpretation is lacking in MacIntyre's account. While MacIntyre does accept that traditions change, his emphasis on traditions mediating which quests legitimately aim towards the good provides a legitimacy to the past over the present—there is less an exploration of ethics, and more an explication of ethics. This is why we argued earlier that we have a restoration of *Sittlichkeit* at the heart of MacIntyre's account, because it roots itself in traditions independent of human action, but presiding over it. Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity is not only able to incorporate community robustly, but does not shunt the individual off to the side or place existential action into a secondary position in ethical discourse—ethics is embedded in existential practices rather than being external to them. This difference is paramount to our interest, as MacIntyre's position, reliant on tradition as it is, is open to the corruption of ideology by reifying those traditions and therefore becoming unable to provide an ethic focused on responsiveness to individuals in unique ways. It is this latter aspect that we argued is central to Kierkegaard's ethic, and appears to be incorporated in Ricoeur's—although we shall test that against Levinas, whose ethic is entirely founded on responsiveness to others.

To summarise our discussion thus far, we have cast Ricoeur's 'little ethics' as utilising narrative to interweave personal identity, personal and communal life, and the advancement of flourishing through practical ethical decision making. We have also shown how his interpretation diverges from MacIntyre's and argued that his ethic is more compelling because it is more resilient to the corruption of ideology and better expresses the practical realities of existence. By rooting identity in practical action, the communal narratives used to plot life do not become reified, but remain plastic, reusable, and reinterpretable. Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity is therefore the essential feature through which an individual not only recognises himself or herself as a self, but also becomes an *ethical self*. As Wall argues,

> Ricoeur shows that, in the end, no received narrative component of moral life does not also,
> at the same time, demand to be narrated by a capable self. Narrative goods finally belong to

> "selves" as those beings in the world uniquely capable of having and forming narrative meaning. Presupposed in all narrative history, truth, and particularity is a free human capability, however actually realized, for creating one's own more coherently storied life. (Wall 2005, 81)

Selfhood is, ultimately, the central unit in ethical existence for Ricoeur. While community plays a decisive role in ethical self-transformation (as we require others to evaluate the actions we undertake, hold us to our commitments, etc.), it is ultimately the individual self who must *will* an ethical existence—we must strive for a good life *with* and *for* others. Ricoeur stresses the reciprocal relationship between individuals and communities, that the actions we undertake are a response to the call of another, but also an example to others. Furthermore, there is a dissymmetry inherent to our finitude: we are always actors in our own lives, thus others are patients, and so we must be cognisant of our responsibility to others; others are in our care and not at our disposal.[41] It is this more fundamental relationship, the self to others, which will now become the focus of our attention.

§1.3 Levinas

That Ricoeur shares affinities with traditional alterity ethics (like the ethic we have previously seen promoted by Levinas[42]) is not controversial. However, Wall refines Ricoeur's alterity ethic, noting that it is one of creative self-transformation as a response to the needs and provocation of others (Wall 2005, 104). There is the need to take responsibility *for* others that initiates a transformed understanding of our ethical selfhood as intimately intertwined *with* that of others, in opposition to Levinas' ethic that focuses only on the '*for* others'. This emphasis on ethical self-transformation in order to appropriately respond to the needs of others as the *telos* of ethics recasts selves—both my self and the selves of others—as the primary unit of ethics. Furthermore, while morals and norms have their place, they do not "have the final word" on how to act (*OA*, 171); ethical self-transformation is prioritised because norms can become staid. That others elicit this self-development is founded in our active engagement in the world with and among others. It is responsiveness to others that draws Ricoeur into a relationship with Levinas. However, accountability to others is more than what we *mean* to do, and Ricoeur affirmatively quotes Bernard Williams' statement that "in the story of one's life there is an authority exercised by what one has done, and not merely by what one has *intentionally* done" (*CR*, 79, my emphasis).[43] Intentions alone are not definitive of our responsibilities, as we can both exceed and fail to meet those responsibilities. Thus, Ricoeur adds a dimension of striving, one necessitating a creative approach transcending strict moral boundaries as a way of accepting that our actions will, at times, fail to fully satisfy the other's needs. However, failure does not invalidate the intention; narratives encourage continued transformation through the acquisition of practical, ethical wisdom. As Haruki Murakami writes, "a good

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[41] There is always a dissymmetry in our relations to others, not because there can be no expectation or desire for reciprocity, but because we are always *agents* acting on *patients* (*OA*, 219). While we are the patients of the other's actions, we are the agents in our own, so from a first-person perspective (which we always live) there is inherently a dissymmetry and therefore an ethical compulsion—we must account for our actions because we author them and therefore it is incumbent on us to act ethically.

[42] Michael Sohn's *The Good of Recognition* (2014) provides an account of the affinities between Levinas' and Ricoeur's ethics, especially in regard to the importance of recognition, with a depth beyond the scope of this discussion. That they share affinities is important to note, but their differences are what we are interested in here.

[43] Williams 1993, 69.

woodsman has only one scar on him. No more, no less" (Murakami 1991, 244); failure offers opportunities to learn and refine.

Nonetheless, while Ricoeur diverges from Levinas, there is a commonality in their overall positions: they accept a dissymmetry between others and myself. We saw this dissymmetry in Levinas as one of transcendence and immanence; the Other, as transcendently other, is elevated and requires ethical response. I am responsible both for and to the Other, as they are the arbiter of ethical value (they determine which actions I ought to take in order to satisfy their needs)—though this risks becoming the adoration of which Kierkegaard is wary. Our interest will therefore be in how Ricoeur traces the interrelationship between oneself and others, and how this interrelationship manifests ethics without falling prey to the possibility of adoration instead of genuine love of the other's self.

i) Ethics: The Crossroad of Narrativity and Otherness

Ricoeur situates ethics in our relationships with others—even in cases where ethical actions are taken towards oneself, this is classified by Ricoeur as ethical responsiveness to the *other within ourselves*.[44] To clarify why this is, Ricoeur asks the question, "how can we ask ourselves what matters if we could not ask to whom the thing mattered or not?" (*OA*, 137). Ethics is not solely about evaluation, but has a strong interpersonal component to it—another commonality with Levinas. A further similarity is their focus on communication, as "the speech pronounced by someone is a speech act addressed to someone else. What is more, it often is a response to a call from others" (*CR*, 96). Speaking is rooted in the relation and engagement with others. We implicitly acknowledged this when outlining Ricoeur's 'little ethics' as an ethic of argumentation—argumentation being a discursive form requiring at least one other interlocutor. We also find other selves as essential in developing self-identity, with Ricoeur suggesting an additional component to the dialectic of *idem* and *ipse*: "the dialectic of identity confronted by otherness. The question of identity in this sense has two sides, one public, one private. The story of a life includes interactions with others" (*CR*, 103). That otherness is intertwined with Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity should be of no surprise, as fidelity to promises, argumentation, and attestation are all interpersonal concepts we discussed when outlining Ricoeur's position, and we are aware that narratives are not ethically neutral. Therefore, it is the nexus point of narrative and otherness that clarifies Ricoeur's ethic, and where his ethic diverges from Levinas.

There are two forces at work in ethical action: "the summons to responsibility, where the initiative comes from the other, and of sympathy for the suffering other, where the initiative comes from the loving self" (*OA*, 192). This marks Ricoeur's ethics as separate from the ethic proposed by Levinas, as Levinas places the impulse to ethical action as response alone—it is not an internal impulse, but an external *call*[45]—while Ricoeur

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[44] We also found this commitment in Kierkegaard's ethic, where ethics *requires* otherness. His ethic is placed in opposition to *Moralität*, which atomises ethics and allows individuals to be isolated in their own ethical becoming as long as they execute mandated duties. For Ricoeur, otherness is a part of the constitution of our selfhood, and when we practice ethical treatment of ourselves that is, as in the love command, loving our self as a neighbour.

[45] Lewis and Stern, in "Commanding, Giving, Vulnerable: What is the Normative Standing of the Other in Levinas?", outline the ambiguities in Levinas' language—while 'call' is a common term in his works, it is expressed through other terms with equal weight. Our preference is 'call' because it captures the direct and explicit nature of Levinas' Other, while also implying the requisite passivity to the call that Levinas suggests is the appropriate reaction of the individual confronted by the Other.

posits an internal, sympathetic, impulse as well. Kemp highlights this distinction writing, "Ricoeur considers the tacit message of the face more as a request than a prohibition: the request to love the other as oneself rather than the interdiction not to kill him or her" (Kemp 1989, 67). Therefore, we find, on Ricoeur's account, that it is a 'request'[46] we respond to, and thus an equilibrium must be forged between the self and the other rather than an insurmountable asymmetry of violence or care.[47] This equilibrium is achieved "through the recognition by the self of the superiority of the other's authority" for the former, and "through the shared admission of fragility, and, finally, of mortality" in the latter (*OA*, 192). In each case the self must recognise the priority of the other as either authority, or occasion to understand oneself (i.e., their failing brings to mind my own), thus taking responsibility. Responsibility is not just retrospective responsibility for previous actions, but a prospective responsibility for others derived from a shared vulnerability (Ricoeur 1996a, 16).

Responsibility and fragility are inextricably linked, as Ricoeur notes that "another, by relying on me, renders me accountable for my acts" (Ricoeur 1996a, 17). I am fallible, and so when approaching others I must not only take on the responsibility to help them, but must also prospectively be responsible for possible failings. The future is decisive, as it is through practice that ethical interaction with others is honed; I am bound to being responsible for the other because I cannot discharge my responsibility to them, and am accountable to them for the inability to discharge my responsibility.[48] While responsibility is indeed what Ricoeur is describing, he does use an alternative term that better conveys his meaning. Borrowing from Gabriel Marcel, Ricoeur argues that it is availability—being at the disposal of the other—that contributes to self-constancy (one's *ipse* identity) (*OA*, 267-8). Our responsibility to the other is to be available to them—where Levinas posits us at the disposal of the other, Ricoeur favours an availability to the other. Therefore, it is both others and myself to whom fidelity is owed. Availability incorporates an internal impulse as a response to the external request. My promise is a response to them, not a purely internal commitment; I must keep my promise or I am not being self-constant, and I lose my self in my betrayal of the promise. As Wall puts it, "the other arrests, stops, interrupts

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[46] Requests have a weak normative structure; unlike commands or demands they are not obligatory but rely on the discretionary value of interpersonal relations (i.e., respecting others) (Lewis, 2018). For Ricoeur, requests are rooted in human *praxis* and existence, not in an abstract obligation separate to it—we are not bound by commands or demands despite their obligatory nature because we are autonomous and can *choose* to ignore them. So too can we ignore a request, but what separates it from commands or demands is that it approaches the other as an equal, as someone worthy of respect. Rather than assuming a position of authority, the request incorporates a sense of humble equality between the addressor and the addressee. Ricoeur's *request* thereby incorporates an understanding of the freedom individuals possess in ethical and moral decision making—we do not have to choose what is ethical and moral—while also making the request discretionary. That one makes a request does not necessitate a positive response, but such cases do not elude ethics, as a failure to register them reveals a fundamental lack of *respect* and *care*; I can choose not to honour your request, but in so doing I am *choosing* to ignore you, and therefore denying you the respect you deserve—I do violence to you.
Furthermore, unlike the command or demand, a request's weak normative structure allows for a variety of responses: an argument over whether the request is necessary; a dialogue about how to best address the request; clarification about what is being requested; etc. This is broadly in line with the ethical argumentation Ricoeur supports. If requests open up space for dialogue, rather than obedience, the obligatory nature may dissipate, but its ethical content does not. Thus, requests are not trivial and able to be denied out of hand, but represent the need to be cognisant of the ethical imperative at its core—to show respect for the other. It also highlights the practical nature of Ricoeur's position, as obligation, while intuitively strong, loses that strength in the face of human freedom—Rosa Parks was *obligated* by a command to relinquish her seat, and we know the response.
[47] Importantly, 'request' is not meant in a literal sense, as though *all* situations meriting an ethical response *must* be phrased in the form of a request. Rather, what is being suggested is that, within our very engagement with others, there is an *implicit* request being made: *recognise* me as *deserving* of ethical treatment, recognise me as a *self*.
[48] Thus necessitating a *continuum* of responsibility.

human freedom, and yet only freedom can finally give the other a response" (Wall 2005, 104). It is the freedom of availability that allows for creative and ethically transformative responses to the other. Rather than a predetermined acontextual response, or uncritical responsiveness to the other's demand, Ricoeur's adoption of Marcel's 'availability' affords a greater openness to responsiveness, allowing for freedom in addressing the needs of the other.

We have asserted accountability to others, that when we make ourselves available to them, we simultaneously open ourselves up to their judgment; our response *to* them is assessed *by* them. However, what provides the other with the status of ethical arbiter? Can we not be the arbiters of our own ethical conduct? Ricoeur's answer to these questions is the asymmetry of interactions between agents and patients (the actor and those acted upon) that gives rise to the "most decisive ethical considerations" (Ricoeur 1989, 99-100). Like Levinas, Ricoeur posits that there is always an asymmetry in our relations, by virtue of our first-person perspective. We are actors, while others are patients[49]—we must be cognisant of *our* interactions with others because *they are at our mercy*. However, the power of the actor does not *de facto* represent violence against the patient(s) but supplies the means to use the patient(s) instrumentally and therefore has the potential for violence.[50] Where Levinas posits the Other as transcendent and thereby asymmetrical to us, Ricoeur roots asymmetry in agency. That we possess a first-person perspective means that we are agents, we act on others; I cannot act on your behalf or override your agency with my own without committing violence against you. Thus, our interest is in our own actions and their effect on others—this is reciprocal, as others experience us as patients and themselves as agents. We must therefore be cognisant of *our* actions and willing to listen to the assessment of our actions by others—this represents the utilisation of *phronēsis*, the development of ethics through response, assessment, and improved responsiveness.

While indirect recognition, in the form of the gift for example, gives expression to mutuality, it is important to note that Ricoeur does not advocate reciprocity as a necessity. Ricoeur argues that "the obligation to give in return creates a dependence of the receiver with regard to the giver, but that the gesture of giving would be the invitation to a similar generosity" (*PA*, 294). This leads to a "chain of generosity" marking out recognition without the requirement of recognition being a struggle. Ricoeur, taking a critical posture towards Levinas, questions where friendship fits into the Levinasian picture. He writes, "what strikes one immediately is the contrast between the reciprocity of friendship and the dissymmetry of the injunction" (*OA*, 189). While Ricoeur agrees with Levinas that the self is "summoned to responsibility", he sees that for Levinas this as an

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[49] Ricoeur uses the term 'patient' to highlight the agential nature inherent to the first-person perspective—we can appreciate (recognise) the agency of others, but we only do so sympathetically; I recognise your agency as parallel to my own. By way of an example, we can think of someone who has had a heart attack: while a patient in the colloquial sense, they remain an agent and must therefore be cognisant of their actions—they remain ethical actors despite being a patient to others. One benefit of this language is avoiding self-righteousness. If we are agents, irrevocably so, then our concern must be with *our* actions, not the actions of others—our primary concern is *our* ethical practice, not that of those who we effect by our action. While we can sympathetically recognise the agency of others, they remain at our mercy (just as we remain at theirs). Thus, there is an asymmetry: others are at my mercy and my ethical responsiveness is to care for them without demanding reciprocity—however, this asymmetry exists for the other as well.

[50] We can recall that violence, for Ricoeur, refers to the limiting of agency on the part of the other: when we impede on the other's ability to author their own life-story, we do violence to them.

"accusative" stance, rather than one *inviting* reciprocity.[51] The accusatory stance does not offer responsibility in kind, it only makes a demand—this invites the worry of failing to recognise agency (or violating ourselves by constraining our will to the demands of others). By contrast for Ricoeur, the initiative to respond to others is derived from "goodness" which "is at one and the same time the ethical quality of the aims of action and the orientation of the person towards others, as though an action could not be held to be good unless it were done on behalf of others, out of *regard* for others" (*OA*, 189). This represents a chain of generosity grounded on trust between one friend and another (although friendship is the example *par excellence*, it is not the only relationship that such an understanding of reciprocal equality and trust exists).

This alternative form of recognition retains the agent/patient distinction and all-important trust; when giving there remains an asymmetry in our relationship, but we *trust* in mutuality[52]—not assurance, not certainty, but *trust*.[53] By retaining the asymmetry of interpersonal relationship, Ricoeur incorporates the importance of alterity critical to Levinas' account, but extends beyond that account by asserting the mutuality of others and oneself. Thus, while the other is not wholly transcendent and beyond our comprehension, they are also not just another 'myself,' because they are patients and therefore require responsible and ethical responsiveness, not agents or objects from whom I demand responsiveness.

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We close this section by highlighting a divergence implicit in this account: Levinas' minimising of selfhood. As we argued in our previous discussion of Levinas, by positing the Other as transcendent he ultimately minimises the self. However, as we have consistently stressed, ethics is rooted in *self*-identity for Ricoeur—without a self, ethics is neutered. This is grounded in his view that if I cannot come to grips with my own selfhood, I cannot recognise the self of another. The dissymmetry is therefore too great in Levinas' account and risks disintegrating ethics in favour of adoration (as we argued in the previous chapter). Ricoeur offers us a more compelling ethic of alterity by immersing it in narrative identity, thus incorporating it into the very structure of our existence as a self. He suggests that reciprocity is grounded in self-understanding and the nature of oneself as an *other*; we are not fully transparent to ourselves and must, at times, understand ourselves through the same lens we understand others. Furthermore, Ricoeur's position offers us a more structured approach to ethics that does not rely on diffusing ethics, as ethical actions contribute to social ethics in a more

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[51] This is rooted in the transcendence of the Other for Levinas, because there is no sympathy between myself and them to invite mutuality, the accusative stance reaffirms the dissymmetry. Ricoeur's interpretation of the summons is one of sympathetic responsiveness that foreshadows reciprocity of responsibility without demand or expectation; I *trust* the other self to safeguard my selfhood similarly to my safeguarding theirs.

[52] The Golden Rule is, in Kemp's estimation, the grounds of Ricoeur's sense of narrative and precedes the relation of our narrative (Kemp 1989, 66). It is the mutuality of the Golden Rule, to share our narratives with others and be willing to accept their narrative, that grounds mutual recognition. This give-and-take is what is meant by mutuality, where the responsibility is on the *agent* to give and to be *willing to receive*. Wall further clarifies this, noting that Ricoeur argues that the Golden Rule cannot be reduced to an ethical stance of reciprocity, "do for others so that one may eventually gain a reward in return", as this instrumentalises others and represents the power of human freedom to will violence against others (Wall 2005, 113-4). Instead, as we saw previously in his perspective on deontology, Ricoeur advocates for understanding the Golden Rule in the negative form that leaves open whether we receive, but demands that we give (Wall 2005, 114).

[53] We may note a similarity between the role faith played in Kierkegaard's ethic in allowing us to forgo certainty when engaging in ethical decision-making.

coherent way than in Levinas' ethic. Practical wisdom, as we discussed earlier (*§1.1.iii*), is reciprocal. We contribute our ethical practice to communal ethical practice, and we in turn borrow ethical practices from the practices of others. It is a cumulative wisdom from which we derive ethical decisions, rather than ethics being wholly unique to each situation—we contribute ethics to others through our ethical self-transformation. Ricoeur, therefore, serves as an advancement on the alterity ethic advocated by Levinas because he is not only able to incorporate a responsiveness to the other, and a responsibility to and for them, but is also able to transcend the face-to-face relationship on which Levinas hinges his ethic.

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Ricoeur's narrative ethic is, to say the least, sophisticated and embedded in the breadth of existential experience. The interpretation Ricoeur promotes grounds narratives in lived existence, despite being drawn from communal ones. Where MacIntyre vested narrative with the power to forge a unity of the self in its orientation towards a determinate *telos*, and Levinas posits the Other as a transcendent and wholly other being, Ricoeur offers a more modest ethic. Replacing the grand narrative of MacIntyre and the transcendent otherness of Levinas, Ricoeur posits narrative as a medium through which to communicate within the face-to-face and to those who we will never meet. Furthermore, Ricoeur embeds ethics into lived existence, without recasting the self as subservient to the Other—we live *with and for* others, not just *for* others. Thus, to summarise the interweaving of ethics and narrative in Ricoeur's approach, we will recall four key aspects of his 'little ethics': *i*) narratives provide a medium to reconcile our *ipse* and *idem* identities—to layer our actions onto our immutable character; *ii*) practical wisdom reveals ethics; *iii*) narratives connect the individual to a broader ethical community that arbitrates ethical value; *iv*) ethics arise as a response to others.

These features are reminiscent of our engagement with Kierkegaard's ethic: a focus on otherness that promotes selfhood, the necessity of ethical practice, a need to remain cognisant of the broader effects of our actions, and our inherent connectedness to others. We have largely avoided shading our discussion of Ricoeur under the aegis of Kierkegaard, but we will now sketch how the love commandment, central to Kierkegaard's description of ethics, can be recast in a non-theological model while retaining its ethical import by examining Ricoeur's presentation of it. By extending such a bridge between their ethics we can help elucidate implicit connections throughout our articulation of Ricoeur's 'little ethics'. In his essay "Love and Justice", Ricoeur is interested in whether love, understood in the context of ethics, has a normative status comparable to traditional utilitarian or Kantian ethical standards (Ricoeur 1996b, 23). He argues that love is not reducible to either *eros* or *agape* separately, but contains each of them; it is "both the real analogy between feelings, and the power of *eros* to signify agape and to put it into words" (Ricoeur 1996b, 28). Thus, the command to love "is a commandment that contains the conditions for its being obeyed in the very tenderness of its objurgation: Love me!" (Ricoeur 1996b, 27). It is our own desire *to be loved* upon which the love commandment is situated, and so it can be understood as an immanent, internal impulse underwriting the persuasiveness to love, rather than an obligation to divine authority. Furthermore, it is "precisely because love is hypermoral, it enters the practical and ethical sphere only under the aegis of justice" (Ricoeur 1996b, 37).

Justice, on Ricoeur's account is rooted in love—love not only as *eros* or *agape*, but as an ethical responsibility for and to others. From this perspective, justice not only makes arguments, but also has a monopoly of power given to it by popular assent; it is a social practice that has a variety of rules and features that lends an air of impersonal authority—but these are distinct from love (Ricoeur 1996b, 29). Love does not argue or mediate; Ricoeur asserts that love does not argue at all (at least when understood in the Christian context). Most importantly though, while love and justice each have an infinite possibility (there is always a "but…"), justice reaches its terminus in a decision that is the responsibility of a judge (Ricoeur 1996b, 29-30), and as a result, justice is a "sign of force" (Ricoeur 1996b, 30). Ricoeur argues that love and justice are set in dialogue as poetry and prose: "hymn and formal rule" (Ricoeur 1996b, 32). Each of these must remain in tension, allowing us to gain a better sense of responsibility that does not obscure one under the supremacy of the other (Ricoeur 1996b, 32). Thus, justice, while rooted in love, remains distinct from it, and it is only in the interplay of love and justice, that institutions can be renewed and reformulated with the other in mind. Justice extends beyond love by making a decisive choice, but love amends justice by revealing where its decisiveness falters, or fails to address the needs of others.

Ricoeur, further developing the distinction between love and justice, describes love as a logic of superabundance and justice as a logic of equality. However, it is only when love confronts and accepts justice that it avoids reduction to immoral or non-moral logics (through its exploitation, etc.), and justice requires reassessment under the guise of love to avoid collapsing into maxims of pure reciprocity ("I give *so that* you will give") (Ricoeur 1996b, 34-6). Ricoeur is here emphasising that love must embrace justice to avoid the problems associated with the non-reciprocal nature of superabundant love—loving actions cannot be made into maxims the same way that judicial concepts can be. To make love an ethical disposition there must be a standard through which it passes: justice.[54] Roger Mehl presents generosity as requiring that "I do not hold myself to the rules of strict equity, but add a sort of surplus to what is due" (Mehl 1971, 96). This retains the dissymmetry between the other and myself: I always owe a surplus relative to what is given. The love commandment, seen through this lens, becomes less a divine command that has a strict, authoritative backing, and becomes instead an impulse, human in nature, which is frail and requires our attention and engagement to maintain—love and justice are cooperative, but neither is a given. This perspective on the love commandment not only fits with our description of religiousness A's foundation, but can also reveal a more refined picture of how the stages interact with each other (love must be tempered by justice, but not obscured by it—the passion of the aesthetic must pass through the ethical, but shine through in the religious sphere).

If we are willing to accept this interpretation of the love command, a clearer bridge between Kierkegaard's ethic and Ricoeur's ethic is revealed. However, this should not distract from the variety of implicit agreements in their ethics that we have seen throughout our examination of Ricoeur's 'little ethics.' And so, with Ricoeur's interpersonal ethics in the back of our mind, alongside Kierkegaard's ethic of cooperative self-becoming, we will now direct our attention to the problems we located with latter's ethical commitments and address the deficiencies and ambiguities with a new lens: phenomenological hermeneutics.

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[54] This is similar to the passage from the ethical stage to the religious stage, where the individual has understood or appropriated a sense of justice which can temper their understanding of being loving

§2 <u>Kierkegaard & Ricoeur</u>

Having articulated Ricoeur's ethics, we must now recall the deficiencies and ambiguities we are seek to resolve. The deficiencies were: *i*) a desire for completeness, or a clear ethical *telos* which is achievable and determines when we are ethical; and *ii*) a desire for clear and authoritative rulesets to direct ethical action. These were previously addressed by MacIntyre, whose ethics is concentrated on immanence, and whose answers were predominantly, although somewhat implicitly, grounded in restoring *Sittlichkeit*, and were therefore insufficiently reconcilable with Kierkegaard's commitments to serve as an adequate framing. The ambiguities related largely to the transcendental aspect of the individual, namely: *iii*) a relationship to the absolute/transcendent that can provide an unassailable authority to ethics; and *iv*) a definition of our relationship to others, clearly signifying the relationship of the other to my own ethical practice. We attempted to resolve these by associating Kierkegaard and Levinas, but the emphasis on the transcendence of the Other had a variety of problems, chief among them the status of wholly Other and placing others beyond comprehension, thereby verging too closely to adoration. With the basic questions restored to the forefront of our attention, we will examine whether Ricoeur is able to provide a response to each of these, and thereby whether his 'little ethics' will be able to offer the framework we are seeking.

i) Desire for Completeness

Our first concern is whether Ricoeur posits a final end to ethics. Ricoeur expressly denies the sense of completeness MacIntyre advocates because he does not believe that the narrative unity MacIntyre posits is valid, stating that his own concept of narrative closure

> is lacking in what A. MacIntyre in *After Virtue* called the narrative unity of life… Now there is nothing in real life that serves as a narrative beginning; memory is lost in the hazes of early childhood; my birth and, with greater reason, the act through which I was conceived belong more to the history of others—in this case, to my parents—than to me. As for my death, it will finally be recounted only in the stories of those who survive me. I am always moving toward my death, and this prevents me from ever grasping it as a narrative end. (*OA*, 160)

This is a central issue we located in attempting to ally MacIntyre with Kierkegaard: the former posits an end where the latter claims that no end *exists*. This necessitates a structuring of identity that is drawn from the lives of others—the quests which my tradition has legitimised—and used to direct my own, thereby appropriating a *telos* appropriate to the one whose quest I am replicating, but independent of my own lived existence. Furthermore, Ricoeur writes that "it is precisely by reason of this entanglement", the entanglement of our life story with that of others, "that life histories differ from literary ones" and questions of whether "one can then still speak of the narrative unity of life" are opened when we open our narratives to the contributions of others (*OA*, 161).

Supporting Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity, Wall argues against contemporary Aristotelians like MacIntyre that such a unity is an "impossible possibility;" our self-narratives are continually evolving and transforming (just as social ones do), and in effect any unification is historically unachievable, and

unachievable because of human evil (Wall 2005, 62-3).[55] Unity presupposes a sort of perfection, and that is something to strive for, but something always beyond our grasp. The quest, even if the quest is itself the good, must have an *end*—it is a quest for *something*[56] after all—and this is what forces MacIntyre to default back to *Sittlichkeit*, to the legitimised, traditional ethic supplied by one's social context. Clark also supports the incompleteness of the self in Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative. He emphasises the importance of discordance, denying the possibility for complete unity of the self (the irreducible nature of the *idem*/*ipse*, for example), one grounded on the guilt of our finitude in the face of the eternal (Clark 1990, 166). There is an incomplete synthesis that we *strive* to complete, but which is ultimately beyond our capacity to actually realise. This informs Clark's statement that "the individual is memorably defined [by Ricoeur] as an unfinished task" (Clark 1990, 30). While Ricoeur may posit a task—i.e., to live a good life with and for other in just institutions—it is an open-ended task worked towards through the refinement of practical wisdom and ethical action without the guidelines or legitimisation of one's social milieu.

If Ricoeur's narrative identity does not have the same unity as its central conceit, how does he incorporate a *telos*? We have seen some hints above, where the *telos* is more of a guide than a known end towards which we strive. Ricoeur's narrative identity is focused on what he terms "the hermeneutics of recollection" rather than the hermeneutics of suspicion (the "obligatory route" to personal identity in modern culture), and the virtue of the fictive approach is that it is "revelatory" and "has a power of transformation" (*PA*, 241-2). We have already had occasion to appreciate the importance of ethical-transformation, both of the self and of communities, but it is the revelatory nature of ethics that is of particular interest to us here. Ricoeur relies less heavily on what *has been* than MacIntyre, as he argues that while we can interact with the past and call it forth through its connection and comparison to the present, it is always abstract, and therefore subject to revision, reconfiguration, and corruption (*TNIII*, 156). This fragility of the historical record transfers to the past an ethical fragility—is the past to which you look a legitimately ethical past, or just a reified ideological past that

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[55] We may question whether MacIntyre's position can accommodate this dynamism, but to do so would deny the unity to human life MacIntyre presupposes in the quest. Unity requires a sense of an ending (i.e., what one is questing for), and the rationale for adopting the quest structure was its allowances for comprehending the *ends* of actions (MacIntyre 1984, 218-9). Both Ricoeur and Kierkegaardians critique this sense of unity because it assumes both a beginning and an end to a human life—Kierkegaardians argue against it on a variety of grounds (i.e., Marino (2001) and Lippitt (2007)). Ricoeur argues that there is no unity because, among other reasons, our lives are inherently bound-up in the lives of others (suggesting that even in death we have no unity because the stories of our life continue in those who remember us). Therefore, for MacIntyre to accommodate this he would have to sacrifice the possibility of a human life having the unity presupposed in the literary form he advances and adopting an alternative framework—i.e., an adventure. However, this would necessitate an alternative approach to narrative identity entirely, one which may not also incorporate the virtue ethics intertwined in the questing formulation because it lacks the same specificity of ends. MacIntyre wants to include predictability so that the virtue content of actions can be stabilised; however, if we cannot predict how actions will play out, their virtue content becomes too arbitrary and the whole model is thrown back into the chaos of emotivism.

While the quest structure does offer a model for striving—as the quest could be the quest for the good—the metaquest still presupposes an ending, 'the good.' By contrast, both Ricoeur and Kierkegaard promote ethics of striving the ends of which is unclear and intuitive—we strive to improve ourselves, our society, etc. but under the aegis of *faith* not a presupposed understanding of the good (i.e., those institutions, actions, beliefs, etc. that society values as virtuous). It is the set of presuppositions underwriting and inspiring the quest that Ricoeur and Kierkegaard would have worries about because these become reified and/or distorted through ideology or dogmatic acceptance of social norms as extra-moral.

[56] Even if we assume a quest for a 'dynamic good' (i.e., social norms), such goods crystallise into static goods when adopted into a tradition. Thus, if tradition is the bedrock of MacIntyre's approach, the quest must be for a static, not dynamic, good.

is self-justifying? What Ricoeur advocates is incorporating the guideline of "living a good life with and for others in just institutions" in a more open-ended narrative reality—we require the freedom to reassess and reconfigure the past in order to reveal the possibility for a more ethical future.

Without the plasticity provided by an open-ended *telos*, the freedom required for ethics collapses under the weight of prior practice—under the sediment of unreflective habit. By emphasising the role of practical wisdom in the invention of ethics, Ricoeur is positing that ethics manifests from action directly; it is the *revelation* of ethics through engagement with other subjects that reveals the ends of ethical action. There is no 'narrative unity' in Ricoeur, nor an adopted quest, but an impulse to transform ourselves ethically through active responses to others. This may appear arbitrary or ambiguous, but Ricoeur adds conditions by advocating for considered conviction—we will recall that considered conviction is the result of critical assessment of our (moral) convictions through argument.[57] There is an open-endedness to his ethic, one which does not promise a final end, but does have guidelines to constrain ethics (there are certain courses of actions which we cannot undertake) without constraining ethical possibilities (new courses of action are not proscribed by abstract laws).

Is Ricoeur's rejection of a strong teleological position in favour of one that works in tandem with a negative deontology reconcilable with Kierkegaard, though? Pattison takes a critical view of the narrative position advocated by Rudd (and MacIntyre by implication) by noting that a lack of ending, or the possibility of equally viable alternative endings, brings into question what kind of story our narrative can be (Pattison 2015, 206). The narrowly teleological position Rudd adopts from MacIntyre is indeed prey to this problem— a problem which dissipates in Ricoeur's interpretation. For Kierkegaard, the absence of a conclusion expresses inwardness because it is a part of existence to lack conclusiveness; existence continues on and conclusions are always external to an exister and produce external relations (i.e., a subject who has died is conclusive, but is now an object) (*CUP*, 289). This openness to change and possibility accords well with Ricoeur's description of existence. Additionally, by articulating Kierkegaard's ethic as an ethic of cooperative self-becoming, we have stressed the necessity of possibility for alternative ethical actions. There is no definitive statement on what is ethical, only what is not (as the love command does not explicitly define what is an act of love, it only affirms that we are to be loving). By presenting his ethic as inventive, Ricoeur offers an account that is teleological, albeit loosely, leaving the route to that *telos* open for existential exploration.

ii) Desire for clear and authoritative rules:

It should be evident by now that clear and authoritative rules are not likely to be a part of Ricoeur's formulation of narrative ethics. Kemp presents Ricoeur as opposed to a Kantian ethic, but concerned that without consideration of such an ethic there would be no criterion for judging a good from bad narrative existence (Kemp 1989, 65-6). Thus, there must be some rules that guide action so it does not collapse into relativism. However, Kemp locates the problem with fundamental principles of ethics being their relation to acts and not "*ethical attitudes*" (Kemp 1989, 81). Furthermore, the Kantian error, in Kemp's estimation, is that it

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[57] Furthermore, moral guidelines like the Golden Rule and love command further delineate the strictures of the ethic alongside the negative deontological formula to avoid actions that would cause others to suffer. Despite having a weak normative structure, Ricoeur's narrative approach incorporates a variety of normative elements that provide stability to his ethic.

focuses on applying fundamental moral value to specific acts, which will require, of necessity, exceptions (Kemp 1989, 82). The alternative to this, which Ricoeur advocates, is the "benevolent spontaneity" of solicitude, which allows for the individual to respond to the other out of goodness *without* it being reduced to obedience—it is done out of my own will to realise the good (*OA*, 190). This is the grounds of esteem—my self-esteem is grounded in esteeming others. Ricoeur sees this as the only alternative to the violence of compelling an ethic of obligation, providing ethical guidelines instead of a strict criterion of ethical laws (Ricoeur 1989, 100). The goal is not to *force* ethical action (as this elides agency), but to instantiate a *desire* to be ethical—an idea we saw in Kierkegaard's ethic, with the desire to love forth love.

Ricoeur is distinct from MacIntyre because he does not invest tradition with concrete and necessary determinations of ethical action. He argues that there must be flexibility and the possibility for alternatives; while he accepts social mores and norms, they do not possess authority as in MacIntyre's account because they take a secondary role to ethical *praxis*. Where tradition mediates and legitimises certain courses of action in MacIntyre's account, Ricoeur promotes creative responses that refine or build-on settled tradition—the aim being ethical transformation of, in this case, tradition. To this end, Ricoeur rejects the need for *Sittlichkeit*, arguing that an ethic of the self makes it superfluous (*OA*, 240). *Sittlichkeit* represents a 'third agency,' separate from ethics and morality. Within an ethic grounded on selfhood, such an extraneous agency is superfluous. This is because the possibility for navigating conflicts between ethics and morals exists within each self and thereby requires a cumulative resolution through interpersonal ethical action, not an external agency to intervene and declare a victor. This is intertwined with a rejection of ethical certainty. Clark notes that Ricoeur's denial of certainty leads him to advocate that to have certainty requires closure and forced limitation. Clark argues that Ricoeur's "thought is theologically Pauline in its exploration of the paradoxes of sin under the Law. Law sets an impossible standard that must be transgressed and so creates sin; and then provides the temptation of identifying with the Law for the sake of self-righteous domination" (Clark 1990, 27; cf: *SE*, 139-50). This is central in the advocacy of ideological traditionalism, where self-righteousness circumscribes ethical action—so long as the tradition's ethic is reified, that ethic is taken as absolute and certain. However, in truth this does violence to the individual whose agency is circumvented in favour of the replicating laws of action. This means laws and morals are left open for interpretation, ethical exploration, and experimentation. Thus, ethics is creative and called forth through practical action and *phronēsis* rather than delineated and prescribed by a set of moral laws.

Ethics is therefore revealed, not created *ex nihilo*. Social mores provide guidelines that can be reinterpreted and changed in accordance with practical action; this is because, on Ricoeur's account, universalised morality comes into conflict with the contextual character of ethical action. The necessity of exceptions leads Ricoeur to clarify that ethics and morality perform two separate roles: moral universality is justificatory, and ethical action takes place within actualization (*OA*, 283). Morality sets a standard against which ethics is played out and which ethics must necessarily overcome at times (this is why ethics is prior to morals). Thus, "the enterprise aimed at demonstrating the validity of a fundamental ethical principle by the coherence of a system of moral laws and prescriptions is condemned to failure, for one cannot deduce from *situations* where the principle is valid" (Kemp 1989, 80, my emphasis). Kemp emphasises Ricoeur's distinction between *revealing*

and not just *reflecting* the good or bad (Kemp 1989, 75). Ricoeur is arguing for the primacy of ethics over morality, whereby ethics constitutes morality—morality is the actualisation of the ethical aim (*OA*, 170), so morals and norms have their place but not "the final word" (*OA*, 171). Ethics is prioritised because it is grounded in *praxis*, allowing for flexibility in responding to the needs of others as an alternative to morals, which have a propensity to become staid beyond their historical and social context.

Wall locates "one source of evil in the world" as "the human propensity to deny its original creative capability by clinging to narrow or fixed historical world views from the past, acquiescing in distorted systems of power in the present, or failing to engage with others in the formation of a more genuinely human and inclusive nature" (Wall 2005, 5). This is in reference to Ricoeur's criticisms of the overreliance on traditional forms of morality that constrain the possibility for new courses of action. Wall takes this further, noting, "we cling to our own merely limited worlds, however profoundly distorted, because we refuse the uncomfortable and hyperbolic task of re-creating it together with one another" (Wall 2005, 170). We previously discussed Ricoeur's interpretation of narrative identity as impelling us to ethical action because our narratives are inherently tied to ethics. Here we see Wall clarifying Ricoeur's position as one set against the contentment of ideology and aimed at producing new interpretations of ethics and a restatement of morality in the light of ethical advancement. This weak normative structure may make us hesitant to use Ricoeur's ethic as an answer to the problem of clear and authoritative rules; however, he presents a concept of justice congruent with his interpretation of narrative identity revealing its utility in answering this question.

Ricoeur defines justice as the extension of the face-to-face paradigm between a face and myself, to others and myself (*OA*, 194), and argues that injustice is recognised before justice (*OA*, 198). This is important, as it means that only through the critique of injustice can we reveal what is just—another approach through negativity in order to reveal positive ethical advancement. Love neither argues for, nor reaches, such a conclusive result, but must be included in considerations of justice to maintain its connection to existential practice—without love, justice becomes oppressive and loses its openness to change and refinement. Justice can therefore provide rules for action, while remaining open to change through application and argumentation.

This is in agreement with what we have seen from Kierkegaard's ethic in two ways: *i*) the relation between one's selfhood and tradition exists, but is dialectical and does not bind the individual to replicating that tradition; *ii*) Kierkegaard's writings lend themselves to a reading such that traditions require transformation to respond to contemporary problems. Thus, the Kierkegaardian position seems to accord well with the response of Ricoeur's justice: individuals work to produce it and provide assent, but that assent is contingent on its ability to respond to the problems unveiled through ethical *praxis*. Morals demanding certain courses of action are not concrete, and are brought into question and revised in accordance with the dialectic of individual and age. As Kierkegaard argues in *Two Ages*, there is a dialectical relation of the individual and the age, where the individual requires the age for their sense of self—because it provides their context—and the age requires individuals to give it form (*TA*, 47). Backhouse, clarifying Kierkegaard's view of history, states that nations

have to re-imagine their past, present, and future in relation to current needs (Backhouse 2011, 4).[58] The concept of justice advanced by Ricoeur does not overstep Kierkegaard's commitments, but incorporate implicit aspects of his philosophy, contributing to a sense of authority immanent to and manifesting from existential ethical practice, without assuming an absolute and abstract stature that circumscribes ethical possibility.

iii) A relationship to the absolute/transcendent:

The transcendence in immanence we saw advocated by Levinas is somewhat similar to Ricoeur's perspective on our relation to the absolute. However, as we noted previously, Ricoeur does not commit to the absolute transcendence of others. Instead, what we find is a suggestion that it is subjectivity and agency that are transcendent features of each individual, ourselves included, and it is our subjectivity and agency that is held sacrosanct in his ethic. We have also noted the discrepancy in how Levinas and Ricoeur posit the asymmetry of self and other, where Ricoeur's response is that the asymmetry is one of agent and patient. Ricoeur further differentiates the dissymmetry in his ethic from that of Levinas, stating that in his view "sharing the pain of suffering is not symmetrically opposite to sharing pleasure… A self reminded of the vulnerability of the condition of mortality can receive from the friend's weakness more than he or she can give in return by drawing from his or her reserves of strength" (*OA*, 191). The dissymmetry is therefore not because the other cannot be understood or anticipated because they are wholly other, but because their suffering extends beyond our ability to remove or alleviate it.[59] Our sympathetic response is incapable of exceeding the needs of the suffering other.

Ricoeur states that, in *Fallible Man*, he was investigating the problem of the "inner disproportion" within human beings who are "distended between an infinite and finite pole" (*PA*, 2). He goes on to note that addressing this problem requires two main concepts: the triad finitude-infinitude-intermediary (instead of focusing on finitude) and using perception and language as the starting point for philosophical anthropology— as this duality captures something of "the ordinarily dialectical structure of human reality" (*PA*, 3). The uncanniness of the other, that there is an inner disproportion, intensifies alterity and occasions the necessity of trust. The "untransferable character of personal experience, and principally memory", means, "the coincidence between what you mean and what you say is forever unverifiable. We can only credit…, believe in… the other's veracity" (*PA*, 265). The benefit of this is its extension beyond "the merely perceptual criterion" of alterity and "the moral criterion of the injunction inherent in the summons to responsibility, as in Levinas" (*PA*, 266). In Ricoeur's account, the other is not merely their flesh (to be perceived commanding us) but their

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[58] This is true of individual identity for Kierkegaard as well. Even the identity Judge William is re-imagined so that only his wife is viewed as his first love (negating the love he may have felt for others) as a means of justifying his present station. However, like the ideological state, Judge William posits his re-imagined history as absolute and unquestionable, thus sectioning off the possibility of recovering any loves he may have had before, and simultaneously accepting a distorted perspective on his life.

[59] James R. Mensch responds to Ricoeur's questioning of the foundation of Levinas' ethic in the asymmetrical relation, suggesting that the asymmetry has a communal foundation in the call for "all the Others of my Other", the Other as a representative of all humanity (Mensch 2015, 127). While Mensch's response does heighten the asymmetry—myself as one and the Other as all—it does not speak to the deeper problem of the Other not being a representative of humanity as caring or just. Ricoeur's concern is that in the passivity to the Other we are incapable of critically assessing and responding to the command of the other when that command is unethical. In the case of Rosa Parks, would we consider acquiescence to the command to relinquish her seat ethical if it meant the annihilation of her self-respect in the face of the Other's command—how can Rosa Parks be expected to respond to others in an ethical way if she passively accepts the rule and command of a segregationist?

self (i.e. their memories, narratives, intentions, etc.). They are not just their appearance as different, but are separate in ways that cannot be perceived from our unique vantage point (and the same is true of our failure to be fully comprehended by others). It is this uncanniness, that which cannot be experienced by us, which provides a sense of transcendence—another can be anticipated, but they cannot be *known*. This retains the transcendence of the other as we found in Levinas, but pushes it to a deeper level, opening others to us and in turn opening the avenues for responsiveness to others. We must remain committed to communicating our self to others, and be willing to listen when others communicate their self to us.

We can also draw attention to Ricoeur's argument that love has a logic of superabundance and justice a logic of equality. It is only when the former has confronted and been minded by the latter that it can avoid adoration or impersonal judgment. As we mentioned above, love and justice must be intermingled to avoid justice becoming reified and ideological, but here we see the superabundance of love requiring justice to constrain that abundance in order to avoid the problem of adoration (a problem we located in Levinas' answer to this ambiguity). By intertwining love and justice, Ricoeur "implies not just equity but excess" (Wall 2005, 117-8). Thus, despite limiting the other's transcendence, Ricoeur is able to maintain a transcendent self that we can recognise others possessing,[60] but without sacrificing an understanding of our own selfhood when responding to the other self. Selfhood is paramount to Ricoeur's ethic, and this equilibrium between superabundance and pure reciprocity allows for the selfhood of each individual to be valued and recognised. Absent a recognition of one's own self as eliciting an ethical response from others, we are incapable of recognising the other's *need* and *worthiness* for ethical response.

This has strong parallels to Kierkegaard's position. Without God, immanence—other individuals—take the place of transcendence. However, Kierkegaard does not extend this otherness to the degree that Levinas does, and like Ricoeur retains a strong emphasis on one's own self-recognition in recognising others. This is the root of his interpretation of the ethical call to love others as we love *our self*. Both Kierkegaard and Ricoeur suggest that others can be anticipated without collapsing others into another myself—for Kierkegaard collapsing the other into another myself is egoistic love of oneself, and for Ricoeur it is the violent denial of the other's agency. Without a sacrosanct understanding of the other as subjective or agential, in the same way that I am, ethics cannot have any real meaning for either Kierkegaard or Ricoeur. Furthermore, Ricoeur's description of the dissymmetry as one of agent/patient accords with Kierkegaard's emphasis on being self-reflective on one's own choices, and not to engage in comparison or to try to directly replicate the actions of others. That others have agency can be understood by us, but they are only ever patients to us, and thus our concern must be with applying practical wisdom (which Kierkegaard also supports in ethical decision-making (cf: *CUP*, 313-5)) in determining how best to address the needs of others.

iv) Defining the relation to others:

For Ricoeur, our relation to others is defined by our interactions with them as well as our participation in institutions. Unlike Levinas, Ricoeur goes beyond the face-to-face relation of the other who calls out for response and instead posits the need for *dialogue*. Communication is necessary for ethics, and is instrumental

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[60] This can be understood through the lens of the *ipse* identity, those features which only the individual themselves have access to.

in sharing our narrative and receiving narratives from others—it is therefore integral for ethics, allowing for judgment and evaluation. The emphasis on interpersonal interactions for Ricoeur is *sharing* the world instead of *donating* the world. Others play a decisive role in Ricoeur's ethic, serving as the impetus to act, as well as the arbiters of our actions. The way he structures alterity includes one's own self, and the dissymmetry presupposed by alterity instantiates a *need* and *desire* to accept responsibility (both retrospective and prospective) because we are ourselves both oneself and another. This responsibility for the other (even the other that is our own self) must be loving, with sympathy serving as its main expression. Furthermore, through dialogue with others we retrieve equality with them, as well as a heightened understanding of the self as an other, and the other as a self.

To unpack Ricoeur's ethic of otherness, we must begin with our relation to the other in its most basic form. For Ricoeur, the other is presupposed because

> one way or another, I have always known that the other is not an object of thought but, like me, a subject of thought, that he perceives me as other than himself, that together we intend the world as a common nature, that together, as well, we build communities of persons capable of behaving, in their turn, on the scene of history as personalities of a higher order. This tenor of meaning precedes the reduction to oneness. (*OA*, 332)

Before we reflect on what is our own, we presuppose the 'oneness' of the other, against which our own is reflected upon—and what we discover are shared commonalities, i.e., history, culture, etc. Therefore, otherness is not solipsistic because it is not purely external, but is actually internal to the individual in its presupposition. The dialectic of the self is not only self and sameness, but self and otherness (*OA*, 317); the self I am is distinct from the self I was and is further separate from the self I will become.[61] This incorporation of the other within one's own selfhood leads Ricoeur to ask, "if my identity were to lose all importance in every respect, would not the question of others also cease to matter?" (*OA*, 138-9). This does not mean that Ricoeur supports a self overwhelmed by otherness, but a tension between self and other—a tension between an involuntary demand and a voluntary response (Wall 2005, 112). Otherness is integral to Ricoeur's ethic because it is, like the ethic itself, manifest in individual existence.

Otherness, as stated above, occasions the need and desire to accept responsibility for and to others. However, responsibility is not just a retrospective responsibility for our actions, but a prospective responsibility for others in the future derived from our own sense of fragility, the recognition of our capacity to fail to address the needs of the other fully (Ricoeur 1996a, 16). Responsibility and fragility are inextricably linked though, as Ricoeur notes that "another, by relying on me, renders me accountable for my acts" and therefore highlights my failures (Ricoeur 1996a, 17). We are both responsible and fragile simultaneously; fragility limits the activity of responsibility and requires us to strive to maintain it, to conquer, acquire, cultivate and preserve it (*PA*, 252). Responsibility is not a given because of our inherent fragility, but is necessary if we are to be able to construct a sense of self incorporating self-designation and esteem. Reconciling and accepting that we have a responsibility for our fragility occasions a purely practical response. It requires the "pursuit of programs of

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[61] This is not to mention that we have otherness at our very core because we do not recall our birth, and our memories are fallible. The self we construct through memory is a self that incorporates the stories of others and is therefore, at its core, other than our own self.

transformation" that would improve in rehabilitating and re-socialising individuals in order to recover autonomy—a task demanding both institutional and personal investment (*PA*, 253). This pursuit means responsibility must be future-oriented, rather than preoccupied solely with actions that have already taken place.

This shift from past to future responsibility points to a connection with Kierkegaard, who views ethics as legitimised in present and future action, as well as revealing the importance of continuity in ethical practice for Ricoeur. We can therefore agree with Wall, who does not see the reduction of selfhood in the face of alterity, but a more complex passive-active moral tension (Wall 2005, 111). Moral freedom is qualified in a radical and fundamental way that does not encourage passivity to the other, but a recognition of their provocation for self-willed moral action. Responsibility is not a passive, reflective act, but an active and future-oriented disposition that we adopt in our ethical relationships to others. Thus, responsibility's future and past dimensions connect us to the outcomes of actions we will undertake and have undertaken, and accepts an indebtedness to the past that informs our present self (i.e., our self as derived from our personal history, and the history of actions we participated in) (*OA*, 294-5). Their overlap is present responsibility, which is integral to holding oneself together as a self who has been and will continue to be an author of their own actions. This prospective responsibility is thereby related to our need to care for the other, which Ricoeur roots in the Golden Rule and the love commandment.

The pursuit of programs of transformation are not random or arbitrary. Such pursuits are centred on the Golden Rule and love command within our active lives, which requires, above all, *trust* in the other, and this trust relates to Ricoeur's ethical categories of sympathy and solicitude, the necessary dispositions for acting ethically with and towards others. "The effect of the 'crisis' of selfhood must not be the substitution of self-hatred for self-esteem" (*OA*, 168). The effacement of the self in the humility of openness to the other should not occasion self-hatred, but a transformation of self-esteem—we are not to submit ourselves to others, in the same way that Levinas advocates, but to transform ourselves through our relation to the other—our response to others affects a change in our self-understanding. This response finds its guide in the love command. Wall argues that for Ricoeur, "the love command acknowledges the absolute alterity of the other, but still requires that one make the other a response" (Wall 2005, 119). However, Ricoeur does not see the command to love as originating solely from the other, but within one's own self—the recognition of our need for love is revealed through our loving interactions with others (Wall, 120-1). This dialectical relation in loving relationships is paralleled in Ricoeur's approach to agency, where recognising our agency allows for the recognition of others as agents, and likewise the agency of others reveals to ourselves the fullness of our agency.[62] We can further clarify Ricoeur's understanding of love. For Ricoeur, according to Wall, 'love' is not an emotion or a reciprocal task, but a "disorienting moral command" related to respect for the self and for other selves (Wall 2005, 117). The love command is therefore not just a law of reciprocity (a problem Adorno identified) nor is it merely emotional intimacy (so Løgstrup cannot employ his critique because love here includes—but

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[62] We can recall Rosa Parks to exemplify this latter assertion. We understand ourselves as agents, but it is in the appreciation of others as agents that our own agency reveals greater possibilities. Reading about the decisiveness of Ms. Parks reveals to us that our agency is not constrained by unjust laws, but provides us with the means of confronting and transforming those laws through the use of our agency. Thus, our agency is dialectically related to the agency of others: we understand ourselves as agents, refine agency in relation to others, and help others refine their own agency in turn. So too with love: we recognise our desire *to* love, in being loved recognise our need *for* love, and through loving love forth love.

is not limited to—emotional intimacy). Ricoeur employs the love command as a means of highlighting the ethical *telos* of respect for the agency of oneself and others—this is made manifest through sympathy and solicitude.

As we explained above, Ricoeur's conception of sympathy is something one gives to another who is suffering, who actively *receives* it. This rescues sympathy from pity because of the active agency on the part of both parties. Sympathy is possible in Ricoeur's account because of the inherent similarity between oneself and another—the same mechanism allowing us to recognise the agency of the other, as well as the other's need to be loved, opens us to being sympathetic to them. We recognise and respond to the other as agents, rather than simply as patients, which means listening to the ways they communicate their needs and responding in kind. Sympathy allows us to anticipate needs, but does not go so far as to allow us to determine that a response will *necessarily* address the need. Within the context of ethical evaluation, sympathy is understood as solicitude, the "with and for others" of self-esteem (*OA*, 180). Solicitude's aim is in caring for another as *an* other, as a particular other deserving unique responses and respect—they are not wholly Other, but they are distinct from us. This follows a similar line of thinking in Levinas, where the individual cannot absorb the other into the totality of one's own self-understanding without diminishing them, but extends beyond Levinas by retaining a reciprocity of recognition through mutual trust (we previously saw this exemplified in friendship). Through solicitude, the individual is able to forge an equality between themselves and others rooted in a mutual, reciprocal respect that is not accusative, but invitational; I am invited to assist the other, to whom I make myself available.

The search for equality through solicitude and sympathy reveals a lack within us, the *need* for friendship, the desire for *others* (*OA*, 192). This need for others is not confined to face-to-face interactions though, and this requires an understanding of equality extending beyond interpersonal relationships like friendship. It is here that Ricoeur's concept of equality is activated. Ricoeur writes, "*equality*, however modulated, *is to life in institutions what solicitude is to interpersonal relations…* Equality provided to the self another who is an *each*" (*OA*, 202). Equality allows for the appreciation of the irreplaceability of *each* individual human— this too extends beyond the face-to-face Levinas' ethics centres on, to those beyond our purview to whom we are called to respond. This sense of equality is meant to affect the institutions we participate in, and is the final element of the *telos* of his 'little ethics' when simplified to 'a good life with and for others in just *institutions*.'

This is where we enter into the realm of the political, where we engage with others with whom we do not have a face-to-face relation, but to whom we still owe ethical duties; we remain responsible to the other, even if their face does not directly demand it from us. Perhaps predictably at this point, "political discussion is without conclusion, although it is not without decision" (*OA*, 258). This is indicative of the sense of 'becoming' underlying the structure of Ricoeur's ethic and that we have seen arising throughout our discussion. Here, we find the capacity for decisive action without that implying or requiring an ending. Despite lacking a definition of an ultimate *telos* (as is the case in Hegel[63] and, arguably, MacIntyre), Ricoeur does not see decisive ethical action as impossible, but instead as developmental. Each decision contributes to our understanding

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[63] It was brought to my attention that some Hegelians, living up to the stereotype, insist that Hegel argues, with equal vigour, that the opposite is also true.

of ethics, and offers alternative avenues for ethical interactions; an end of ethics is unrealisable for Ricoeur, with the focus instead being creative refinement of ethical practice—a practice that is as imperative as it is unceasing. Ricoeur extends this further, stating, "I would even say that the tenacious incorporation, step by step, of a supplementary degree of compassion and generosity in all our codes—including our legal codes and our codes of social justice—constitutes a perfectly reasonable task, however difficult and interminable it may be" (Ricoeur 1996b, 37). This incorporation of compassion is achieved through the interpretation of laws through the lens of the love command by advocating for solicitude and equality within our institutions. Without adopting such a lens, and thus leaving justice to its own devices, a law of reciprocity is prone to reification becoming the norm, and the system of justice is left prone to ideological corruption and a diminishing of the possibility for flourishing.

Wall, highlighting the creative approach implicit in Ricoeur's ethics, argues that the love command takes a central role in his ethic,

> the love command recognizes that the human imagination is always already bound to reduce otherness to its own finite calculations. And so it commands in response that the human will itself, as at once passively caught up in and actively embracing of violence, turn ever more superabundantly toward its other. The command is not fixed or static; it is for the self's radical and continuous moral conversion. (Wall 2005, 120)

While we have previously conditioned how Ricoeur interprets this command, Wall's elucidation of its importance helps to reveal how it affects individual ethical engagement. Alongside narrative, the love command provides a foundation for ethical self-transformation requiring the individual's recognition of themselves as an agent and their own wilful desire to recognise and treat others as agents as well. The reciprocity of recognition is a communicative act, rather than a legislative act—it is a mutual conversation, not an order or rule underwriting interpersonal relationships. It is engagement in conversation that defines our relation to others. Thus, we can see that Ricoeur would concur with Kierkegaard, who believes that patience and understanding are required for ethical transformation; we must know ourselves as humans in order to "renounce the inhuman" and know and be willing to listen to others earnestly (*TA*, 10-1). To engage in ethical self-transformation, in cooperative self-becoming, we must listen to and respond to others as selves, and not just accept the criteria proposed by the "luminaries of the moment", or the luminaries of the past for that matter.

Conclusion

We have described Ricoeur's ethic as inventive, creative, and developmental alternately throughout our discussion. His emphasis on the freedom of ethical decision-making and his loosening of the binds of moral dicta allows for a greater flexibility in our engagement with others. This is rooted in his perspective that the other must be approached singularly when possible, and while we can anticipate their needs, we must be attentive to their own articulation of those needs—thus occasioning dialogue on how best to address those stated needs. Narratives are inherently communicative, and it is within the sphere of communication that ethics is evaluated, clarified, and advanced—it is only in the actual, practical application of ethics within interaction

that we can define ethics. Kearney points to an "*excess* of imagination"[64] that gives rise to a multiplicity of meanings, and within ethics, as elsewhere, this "culminates not in absolute knowledge but in an endless conflict of interpretations" (Kearney 1989, 13). Such an assessment clearly outlines the sense of 'becoming' we have continuously encountered in Ricoeur's approach to an ethic of selfhood—there is no clear, defined end point, but instead a plurality of opportunities for practice and refinements. Ethics is therefore better defined as a creative response to others that, in turn, leads us to a new sense of understanding the 'ethical self-transformation' that has been a theme of our discussion. This creative, transformative ethic also exhibits clear parallels to the endless ethic of cooperative self-becoming we found in religiousness A.

We can further elucidate the creativity in cooperative self-becoming by returning to Kierkegaard's humourist Johannes Climacus. He wants to "leave it up to each person to practice coming back to the idea from the most diverse sides, to practice using his imagination to uncover the strangest instances of relative differences and relative situations in order to figure it all out" (*PF*, 98). This pluralistic approach strongly resembles Ricoeur's ethics, where there is no straightforward and singular response, but a need for a multiplicity of responses that hone and refine one's ethical practice—it is by approaching things in *creative* and *imaginative* ways that we *reveal* ethics. Anti-Climacus also praises this creative function, writing that "imagination is the medium for the process of infinitizing... whatever of feeling, knowing, and willing a person has depends upon what imagination he has, upon how the person reflects himself— that is upon imagination" (*SUD*, 30-1). Imagination is therefore the medium through which we are able to approach the realm of possibility—possibility itself being the realm of ethics, as ethics requires the freedom of possibility because imagination represents our ability to consider ourselves as possessing possibilities (possible feelings, knowledge, actions, etc.) and therefore the resources to approach ethical situations in appropriate ways (*SUD*, 31).[65]

These commonalities between Kierkegaard and Ricoeur suggest an easy partnership between Ricoeur's 'little ethics' and Kierkegaard's ethic of cooperative self-becoming. In our introduction of Ricoeur's ethic we noted that he is interested in "what we must hope", as guiding our ethical action. There is not a clear set of directives orienting ethical self-transformation, but a hopefulness, a trust—or *faith*—in ethical refinement. Furthermore, Ricoeur's articulation of his ethic provides us with answers to the deficiencies and ambiguities in ways that both extend beyond what MacIntyre and Levinas were able to do, without sacrificing the possible reconciliation between his ethic and Kierkegaard's. While it remains to be seen how Kierkegaard's ethic will look in the advent of Ricoeur, it seems reasonable at this stage to conclude that using Ricoeur's ethic in support of Kierkegaard's proposes a compelling and promising prospect.

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[64] Kearney is using 'excess' as a positive here, where that excess of imagination allows for the recognition of a greater number of ethical possibilities. This is necessary to qualify, as Kierkegaard's aesthetic and ethical stages could be charged with an 'excess of imagination' in negative ways (i.e., ways that abstract the individual from their lived existence).

[65] Imagination does introduce a danger, though. When an individual seeks to live in imagination they seek to avoid existing finitely, and therefore relinquish their active engagement with the world—a problem resolved by Ricoeur's insistence on the re-inscription of the *idem* by the *ipse*, possibilities achieved then overlaid on the sameness of the finite.

Conclusion
Creativity, Revelation, Inter-Subjectivity

Our aim in this project has been to reveal and clarify the through-line ethics forms between Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and veronymous works—his existentialism is inherently founded on ethics, which is centrally located in his description of lived existence. This has led us to not only examine both his theological and philosophical works, but to also bring him into dialogue with other ethically-minded philosophers as a means of achieving this aim. To this end, we have, throughout the course of our investigation, consistently hinted at several major ethical concepts that represent the central concerns of Kierkegaard's ethic: *selfhood*, *creativity*, and *revelation*. While not always articulated directly in this way, these three concepts have continually resurfaced throughout our discussion. They are evident in the emphasis on selfhood and the plasticity of ethical response in Chapters 1 and 2, where a major concern was defining what is at stake in self-becoming and self-giving and how these are interrelated with the ethical transformation of oneself and one's neighbour. We also find them in the revelation of ethics, which was most vividly seen in Chapter 3's imaginative re-construction, where ethics was revealed through the active assertion of self-respect[1]—itself requiring a robust sense of oneself and others as subjects. Each of these suffused our final Chapters as well, becoming clarified when discussing Ricoeur's narrativist ethics, where each of these concepts is activated and interrelate to build a structured ethical system that is open to novel approaches to ethical action, as well as recognising constraints from a variety of institutional structures, alongside the recognition of existence in an inter-subjective world. Our interest now is to take what we have learned and show how Kierkegaard's *ethos* shares a similar structure to that of Ricoeur, if only in a much more indirect and elusive articulation.

However, before we rearticulate Kierkegaard's ethic through the language provided by Ricoeur (and the contemporary continental philosophical tradition more broadly), we should summarise our findings with a little more specificity than their relation to the three guiding concepts above. Our first concern when approaching Kierkegaard's ethics was to provide it a definition felicitous to Kierkegaard's intentions, thus we utilised *Works of Love* and his overtly Christian writings to give form to his ethics. We argued that these works do not present a strong divine command ethic with a clear and authoritative set of rules governing action, but an ethic of cooperative self-becoming. This ethic was intimately related to Kierkegaard's interpretation of selfhood and subjectivity, and his advocacy of the recognition and support of the subjectivity of others (thus assisting in their self-becoming). This not only required self-giving love, but also an understanding that self-giving cannot be externally determined or directed—self-giving relates to what each individual can give uniquely, and is

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[1] We shall illuminate this characterisation of the imaginary re-construction below.

therefore not a universalisable set of actions. Critical to each element of Kierkegaard's theological ethic is an emphasis on selfhood and the necessity of grasping one's own selfhood through ethical engagement with others. Much of this was couched in the language of 'neighbour love' and was rooted in theological presuppositions about divine authority, divine createdness, and an equality before God—even if the divine command itself was minimised.

Following the development of the ethic as theologically motivated and grounded, we turned a sceptical eye on these presuppositions. By drawing on the critiques of Løgstrup and Adorno, we refined the ethic, arguing that much of the strength of the criticisms is based on mischaracterisations of Kierkegaard's authorship and limiting interpretations of his works. Løgstrup's narrow interpretation of the neighbour love command and of what Kierkegaard means by 'neighbour' was a particularly illuminating critique. Not only did it help to clarify what Kierkegaard means by neighbour—occasioning a discussion of the neighbour as 'the other' in *Works of Love*—but it also allowed us to place greater emphasis on what love of the neighbour refers to: love of the neighbour's *self*. Similarly, Adorno overemphasising the discourse on loving the dead helped clarify the nuance in Kierkegaard's position, and its connection to the temporal world: we exist in a world that is not just what is present, but what has passed, and what will come to pass. The call to love the dead as though they were living is a call to *remembrance*, a call to recognise the other that was and their importance to us—we are not sectioned off from our past, or distanced from it, but shaped by it and, more particularly, by those others from our past. Furthermore, the past is not inaccessible or alien to us, as it remains present through recollection.[2] This call to love the dead as living, in light of our connection of Kierkegaard and Ricoeur, can help to elucidate a subtle and indirect claim being made by Kierkegaard: re-evaluation of the past through recollection affects and reorients ethical action in the present by allowing us to actively reflect on others and ourselves. Loving the dead, as engagement with and reinterpretation of the life of the dead, affords us a perspective of judgment from which we can affect our own ethical self-transformation.

While the criticisms raised by Løgstrup and Adorno were not insurmountable, the response to them relied primarily on answers drawn from Kierkegaard's theological works. This was anticipated by the theological orientation of the previous Chapter. However, we were still left with questions about whether the ethic could be secularised—can we articulate the ethic independent of its original, theological assumptions? To answer this, we tested the ethic in a non-theological experiment to assess whether it was still comprehensible and practicable despite lacking the overtly Christian and explicitly theological framing. The example of Rosa Parks was illuminating, as it not only showed the possibility for re-contextualising her decision as a possible teleological suspension of the ethical, but did so by situating it within everyday life. We concluded from this that the sphere of religiousness must have a secular expression, leading us to adopt Climacus' distinction between religiousness A and B, where A represents the immanent, secular expression of the religious stage.

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[2] Recollection is an important concept in a number of Kierkegaard's works, but is summed up very well in *Stages on Life's Way*, where it is a method of remembering the past through an interpretative lens developed through existence; memories are affected by one's perspective, which changes over time (*SLW*, 10). Recollection is separate from remembering because it includes subjective appropriation of the memory—it is personal and refined by the active engagement with the memory (*SLW*, 14).

Highlighting this distinction allowed us to uncover the ethic of the religious stage as shared between the immanent and the transcendent, but with the caveat that the latter expression has the Christian presuppositions that bolster and support the ethic (with authority, clear sets of rules, etc.). The lack of a clear, authoritative claim to legitimacy meant deficiencies and ambiguities needed to be addressed to avoid the temptation of the ethical stage and its emphasis on abstract ethical laws, or adopting the Christian life-view and its claim of transcendent authority.

The revelation that religiousness A shares an ethic with religiousness B required us to articulate it in a language suitable to its immanently and secular status. However, providing a suitably sophisticated response required us to look beyond Kierkegaard's own writings, as there is limited engagement with and development of this manifestation of the religious sphere. This occasioned us to develop a dialogue with the virtue ethics of MacIntyre and the alterity ethics of Levinas as a means of providing a direct account of an otherwise indirectly defined ethic. Our initial findings from the dialogue between these three figures revealed areas of overlap in their ethics, while also pointing to resolutions to the deficiencies and ambiguities that limited the viability of the ethic of religiousness A. However, despite the commonalities in their respective positions, MacIntyre and Levinas were incapable of providing accounts that accorded with Kierkegaard's broader philosophical commitments, and thus their respective ethical systems were not suitable candidates to assist in articulating Kierkegaard's ethics. Nonetheless, they did furnish us with an alternative lens through which to read the ethical writings, with MacIntyre's interpretation of narrative identity as a means of conceptualising ethics within the lived existence of the individual, and Levinas' inter-subjective approach to ethical relations with others and the sanctity of subjectivity. Together, these pointed us towards another figure: Paul Ricoeur.

In assessing Ricoeur's contributions to ethics, we found that his philosophical commitments were more reconcilable with Kierkegaard's, while simultaneously offering an advancement on MacIntyre's conception of narrative identity, and Levinas' alterity ethic. Furthermore, Ricoeur was able to provide resolutions to the deficiencies and ambiguities in ways that avoided falling back into the ethical stage (as we found in MacIntyre's responses) or which limited the importance of one's own self (as we found in Levinas' responses). Therefore, by aligning Kierkegaard's ethics with those of Ricoeur, we were able to posit an ethic of self-becoming with and for others in a vivid way, as the focal point of their respective ethical perspectives is self-flourishing—with an emphasis on selfhood. In each of their accounts, we find self-flourishing not as a competitive or isolating task, but as an essentially cooperative and communicative one; each supports the transformation of one's own self and the selfhood of others through mutual ethical striving. Ricoeur's view that our relationship to otherness is already part of our own self-constitution can be re-cast through Kierkegaard's lens as the neighbour within us—we love the neighbour as we love ourselves: as a neighbour. While Kierkegaard's presentation of neighbour love is reconcilable with Ricoeur's position, Ricoeur provides us an alternative language that relinquishes the overtly theological ties to the neighbour love command.[3] This alternative language

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[3] Although Ricoeur does incorporate the neighbour love command into his own formulation of ethics, albeit without its theological presuppositions.

allows us to both re-articulate and re-contextualise Kierkegaard's ethics within a contemporary language, allowing us to remain felicitous to Kierkegaard's position, while minimising the theologically-influence of language he uses even in the secular sphere of religiousness A.

While we have already ventured some translation of Kierkegaard's ethic into the language provided by Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutic, it will be our task here to carry this a step further and articulate the ethic by appropriating the language of Ricoeur's ethic (*§1*). We will then assess this by reviving our imaginary re-construction and test whether the language provides a more coherent and clearly secular account that neither discards nor obscures the ethic's Kiergaardian provenance (*§2*). Finally, it will be incumbent to justify the status of religiousness A as sharing in the ethic of the religious sphere without infringing on the importance of religiousness B to Kierkegaard's overall existential schema; we are not seeking to write religiousness B out of its rightful position, but to re-position it as an intensification of the ethic (*§3*). By clarifying the ethic in Ricoeur's language and retaining the importance of religiousness B, we hope to successfully walk the tightrope of religiousness A without faltering and falling back into the ethical stage, or leaping to the appropriation of theological assent required in religiousness B.

§1 Articulating the Ethic

As we have previously mentioned, we have had opportunities to read Kierkegaard through the lens provided by Ricoeur. Our brief discussion of the love command in Chapter 5 found us arguing that the secular interpretation advocated by Ricoeur maps onto Kierkegaard's interpretation quite nicely—especially the dialectic of passion (love) and justice.[4] This dialectical relationship has parallels to the movement from the aesthetic stage to the religious; the passion of the aesthetic stage and the constraints of the ethical stage must find an equilibrium if they are to be employed towards ethical ends, hence the rediscovery of passion in the religious stage. It is only within the religious stage that the dialectic of passion and justice takes place, as the aesthetic and ethical stages are monolithic in their interests: the aesthete is too taken with passion to have constraints; the ethicist, who is too focused on abstract and impersonal codices, cannot address needs uniquely. This example helpfully provides a secular language to articulate the need for passionate care that avoids the problem of adoration, but elevates the judicial nature of the ethical stage by incorporating an interest in the selfhood of the other and a *care* for that selfhood. Additionally, like Kierkegaard, Ricoeur does not disentangle ethics from lived existence; rather, they each view self-becoming *as the ethical task par excellence* and this self-becoming is always *with* and *for* others. However, to fully appreciate the intersections of Ricoeur's and Kierkegaard's ethics we will approach this with two important details in mind: the language Ricoeur offers to articulate ethics (*§1.1*), and the situation of otherness both exterior and interior to the individual (*§1.2*).

§1.1 Ricoeur's Language

One of the guiding questions we asked when developing the ethic of religiousness A was: how does the language of contemporary philosophical debates help us retrieve Kierkegaard's ethic of the religious stage?

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[4] Love provides the need to care for others as unique individuals deserving of particular responses, while justice constrains and directs love in important ways—together they allow for responses that are creative and address the other's needs without becoming 'soft' or obedient adoration.

We have already encountered some answers to this in the previous chapter, and it will be our goal here to not only recall those points of convergence, but to develop them and show how they reveal a secularised ethic for religiousness A. Among the commonalities, we found both Kierkegaard and Ricoeur supporting a similar structure of selfhood—especially the irreducible nature of the self to *idem* and *ipse* that paralleled the irreducibility to finitude and infinitude for Kierkegaard. They also share commonalities in relation to responsiveness, positing an interest in responding to the world as given, as well as the importance of responsibility—one's actions have effects on the world and on other individuals for which the individual recognises their culpability. They each promote indirect communication as a means of forging sympathy, and having faith or trust that others are engaging in the same task of ethical self-transformation because one cannot have certainty of the intentions of others. We also found them both supporting a dialectic of love and justice, where justice tempers the superabundance of love, and love reveals the limitations of justice—a dialectic at the very heart of each of their ethics. These four intersections between Kierkegaard and Ricoeur's ethics—selfhood (*i*), responsiveness (*ii*), sympathy (*iii*), and love and justice (*iv*)—will serve as the primary focal points for us to re-articulate Kierkegaard's ethic within a contemporary philosophical language.

i) Self-Becoming

The linguistic alterations attendant to adapting Ricoeur's description of selfhood to Kierkegaard's are subtle, but allow for a clearer accounting for what it means to be a self. Anti-Climacus, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, memorably defines the self as

> a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self. (*SUD*, 13)[5]

If we adopt Ricoeur's *idem*/*ipse* distinction, we can clarify the synthesis as the overlaying of self-constancy over sameness—the synthesis is of sameness and self-constancy, but this is not the self. Like Ricoeur, Kierkegaard associates constancy with possibility: possibility for new courses of action, possibility for re-evaluation of one's prior actions, possibility for forgiveness, etc. Possibility finds its contrast in sameness, that which remains unchanging—our place of birth, our name, etc. These are dialectically related, but are irreducible, and the self is reducible to neither its sameness nor its consistency. This is what necessitates the narrative interpretation of the self in Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutic. Narrative *relates* the *ipse* and *idem* in order to create a coherent self over time, but also relates to one's own lived existence; narrative relates to the synthesis, while also relating to that relation: my self is the story (or stories) that I tell about my lived existence. Thus, the self is not the narrative, but the recognition of that narrative as *mine*—I relate to the

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[5] Walter Lowrie's translation is similar to that produced by Howard and Edna Hong, but inserts some helpful additions. We prefer the Hong and Hong translation for its simplicity, but provide the Lowrie translation as well to show the consistency in translating Kierkegaard's somewhat mystifying definition. "Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation [which accounts for it] that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self. Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded, man is not yet a self" (*SUD* (Lowrie), 17).

relation that connects the *idem* and *ipse*. This helps clarify the definition of self that we find in Kierkegaard, by providing a more sophisticated language, while also offering to Kierkegaard a way of describing how the relation relates itself to itself: narrative.

Narrative identity, as we have argued previously, is a consistent feature of Kierkegaard's *oeuvre*, and while it remains indirectly supported by him, the fact that he employs it—and employs it to great effect—suggests an agreement with Ricoeur. One key advantage is the openness of narrative identity, so that, as Murakami writes, "there [are] always more details that could be filled in", and our life stories always have space for "growing deeper and deeper and bigger and bigger" (Murakami 1997, 444). That re-interpretation of our own personal narratives is possible is subtly acknowledged by Kierkegaard, and we noted above the example of Judge William, who reinterprets his wife to be his first love.[6] The necessity of reinterpretation is necessary for reminding us of our imperfection, a necessity that Kierkegaard was keenly aware of, as such reminders help "us to be kept in a continuous striving" (*WA*, 170). However, Kierkegaard was also aware of the problematic nature of reinterpreting one's life, although his presentation of it is much more subtle. Like Ricoeur, Kierkegaard reproves uncritical assent to and adoption of impersonal narratives—this underlies much of his critique of the 'Present Age' in *Two Ages* and elsewhere. They also share worries over unmoored narratives, Ricoeur because these drift into fantasy, Kierkegaard because they drift away from passionate interest in existence. Balancing between pathological ideology and abstract utopianism is necessary to retain agency, as they each associate agency with ethical activity; without the recognition of the subjectivity of others and myself, I cannot engage in ethical action. Narrative identity offers to Kierkegaard's philosophy a way of conceptualising one's existence as a self, without reducing it to sameness or infinite possibility, while simultaneously embedding it in lived existence and the continuity of ethical striving.

We can therefore say that Kierkegaard and Ricoeur posit an inextricable link between selfhood ethics. Evans draws attention to Climacus' statement of the ethical task as one not intending to transform society directly, but to cultivate a sense of one's own self (Evans 1983, 282). While this is true, and Climacus does emphasise the importance of the individual's own self-transformation, this individualistic ethic is transformed when read through the lens provided by Ricoeur. Through such a lens, the implication of cultivating one's self *requires* the transformation of others, initiating the process of *cooperative* self-becoming. Furthermore, mutual and cooperative ethical action allows for social transformation; by adopting a narrative lens, we can recognise ethical self-transformation as more intertwined with social transformation than is immediately apparent. Kierkegaard's self is not *sui generis*, the "established relation"—our humanity—is not established by our self, but occasions the self when the self relates to that established relation (*SUD*, 14). Despair, our unwillingness to engage in our own self-becoming, is overcome when the "self rests transparently in the power that established it" by not only relating itself to itself, but also to that which established the initial synthesis (*SUD*, 14). While

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[6] That she is his 'first love' is necessary because she is his wife, and one's wife is the person they love. Without having previously married someone, William cannot understand his wife as anything but his first love (even if he experienced the emotion of love with others before her). This insight was pointed at above, and with it we argued that there is a pathological ideology at work, as William's passions are subverted to align with an abstract system that intervenes on his relationship to the world.

Anti-Climacus, as outspoken a Christian as any of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms,[7] locates this power in God, we can perhaps reformulate this by drawing on Ricoeur's philosophy of history and another important feature of narrative identity: the plurality of narratives we share in what precede us.

We are connected to others through relationships formed before the realisation of our own self-consciousness—we have an inherent connection to our families, our society, and to broader human history just by having been born at a certain time and place. These relationships are conveyed to us through the narratives we are told, and which serve as the patterns for our own narratives. In this way, the narratives we receive from outside ourselves influence our relationship to our established synthesis: we not only receive that synthesis from our parents, but also have our relationship to it formed by a long history and tradition of storytelling. Thus, otherness is incorporated into our sense of self and alongside it a recognition of our lineage and the interconnectedness of our lives to the lives of others. An inherent connection to others in this way is supported in the *Postscript*, where Climacus states that it is the sympathetic relationship between individuals that delineates religiousness A—the concern of the sphere of immanence is not our relationship to transcendence, but our relationship to our self and selves of others encountered in the world. It is this concern with others in the world that Ricoeur is positing by situating otherness within us through the stories we are told; we are not fully transparent, even to ourselves, and that is in part because much of our self is derived from outside of our direct control. This too accords with Kierkegaard's account, allowing us to understand the neighbour love command with greater depth.

We already briefly discussed the neighbour love command's secularisation by Ricoeur, where it serves as an open-ended guideline for action rather than a clear and definitive statement on how to be ethical. While it very clearly has a theological articulation in *Works of Love*, the argument that subjectivity is truth in the *Postscript*, along with the statement that the ethical task is to become subjective, to become one's self, suggests that the neighbour love command is transferrable beyond its theological context. Taken together, *Works of Love* and the *Postscript* suggest a commitment to the love command and its relation to selfhood: loving other selves as we love our *self*. Thus, if selfhood is achievable within religiousness A, as we have argued, the ethic should be possible to engage in without understanding neighbour love as a divine command, but as a secularised care for and support of other selves as we express our own selfhood. This would allow us to view it as Ricoeur does, namely as a guideline for orienting ethical decision-making, without assuming transcendent backing or requiring obedience. Perhaps, we could re-articulate it as a request for cooperative self-becoming, wherein the engagement in the task heightens our subjectivity by continually orienting us towards care for and support of self-becoming—our self-becoming is improved by our helping others become a self. This insight parallels our discussion of self-giving in Chapter 1, where self-becoming was intimately intertwined with self-giving because it revealed new avenues for becoming;[8] this too parallels Ricoeur's narrative approach, as new

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[7] Although, unlike many of his co-religionists in Kierkegaard's works, he is decisively Christian and therefore has his existence in the sphere of religiousness B.

[8] This dialectical relation is important for both Ricoeur and Kierkegaard. While on its surface it may take on a selfish appearance (as I am striving for *my* selfhood), it is only through earnest care for others that our own self can be revealed in its fullness.

narratives reveal alternative ways of understanding and interpreting our own lives, thus allowing for a heightened sense of self-understanding. Viewed from this perspective, Kierkegaard's neighbour love ethic in religiousness B receives a secular translation avoiding the problems of abstract rules or adoration, but retaining the importance of alterity and the impetus to act out of care for the self of others.

ii) Responsiveness & Availability

We can follow this reinterpretation of neighbour love a step further by positing that Kierkegaard's ethic incorporates the structure of responsiveness we find in Ricoeur's ethic. While we structured Kierkegaard's position as one of neighbour love centring on acts of self-giving, we can re-contextualise this as a call for responsiveness and availability: to be self-giving requires us to *i*) respond with caring actions towards others, and *ii*) make ourselves available to them.[9] We have already associated Kierkegaard and Ricoeur as advocates for *phronēsis* as the basis of ethical existence—they each agree that it is *praxis* that *reveals* ethics, rather than a set of ideals or principles abstracted from existential concerns. This informs their respective approaches to responsiveness, where responses are determined relative to the needs of others, rather than in accordance with a codex. This is especially vivid in Ricoeur's 'little ethics,' where we find re-interpretation of previous action promoted as a means of revivifying ethical response; it is in the refinement of ethical action through practice that we find ethical transformation of oneself, others, and society. However, it is evident in Kierkegaard's ethics as well, although obscured by the God-given command to love the neighbour. If we adopt a lens minimising the command, or removing it outright—as is the case in religiousness A—we find an open-ended advocacy to act with care towards others. There is no qualification, or set of rules determining what is loving, and in *Works of Love* (as we find elsewhere), it is largely presented through narratives that highlight respect for, care of, and support in self-becoming. This leaves a great deal of room for practical response in the world (as many of Kierkegaard's examples attempt to show), and we can find in his advocacy of responsibility, helpfully tied to responsiveness by Levinas, a heightened appreciation of the need to be available to others, responsive to them, and responsible for our responses.

We can recall that one of the primary criticisms of the ethical stage is its lack of personal responsibility; ethicists place responsibility outside of themselves, despite calling for responsibility on the part of others. We see this vividly in Judge William in two distinct ways: *i*) his 'choice' to recognise the norms of society/flow of history as inescapable and determinative, and *ii*) asserting A's responsibility to become an ethicist, without actually himself taking responsibility to help A become one. In regards to *i*), we see him disavow any responsibility for how society is, instead arguing vociferously to accept it as it is and adopt its necessity as determinative of one's selfhood and existence—while he is responsible for choosing, he is not responsible for what he chooses, nor the effects of his choice. This affects *ii*), as we find him detailing the necessity of uncritically adopting the social mores as determinative of one's life to A—moving into the ethical stage—but, while he is quite intent to see A change, he does not tailor his plea for the aesthete. The structure and language of his

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[9] While 'giving' gives one a sense of the 'donation' we found emphasised in Levinas' ethic, its use by Kierkegaard is more reminiscent of Ricoeur's availability because it is not a one-sided gesture—self-giving requires reception by the other on Kierkegaard's account.

letters are more characteristic of self-assurance than persuasion, as it is written in a style he approves of, while demanding the interest and acceptance of A. Furthermore, he provides himself a way out of his responsibility by questioning the letters' persuasiveness himself,[10] effectively relinquishing of his own responsibility in helping the aesthete.

This can be contrasted with the religious stage, wherein we find Kierkegaard advocating for engagement with others in accordance with their judgement. Tailoring one's responses to others is not only necessary, but provides the basis for taking responsibility for one's actions. Within the religious stage, there are no definitive rules for acting in certain situations, and so there is no other culprit for one's actions than one's self. For example, when Rosa Parks denies the validity of the demand for her to relinquish her seat, she has to take responsibility for that action because it is decisively hers, she cannot point to a rule-set from which she borrowed that course of action. This intensifies the role of responsibility in Kierkegaard's ethics (as it does in Ricoeur's), as it both removes the boundaries of legitimised actions and lays bare the individual to ethical judgment; without boundaries we are free to respond creatively, but these responses can fail and there is no other source but oneself upon which to attach blame.

Within the immanently religious sphere, we are forced to accept an internal compulsion to take responsibility for others because we sacrifice the command. Backhouse rightly emphasises that 'the ethical' has different meanings to different pseudonyms, especially the religious ones. In particular, he highlights Johannes Climacus' association of ethics with possibility, capability, and responsibility of decision-making (Backhouse 2011, 136).[11] This orients ethics within lived existence, and clarifies the importance of personal responsibility when engaging in ethical action; there is no safety net, such as social mores, within the existential ethic. It is for this reason that *de Silentio* presents the knight of faith as burdened by responsibility, where he or she bears the weight of their decision, and bears it alone, because, in suspending the ethical, the universal is no longer there to provide relief (*FT*, 78). While the knight of faith can communicate indirectly through the language of sympathy, direct justification for their actions eludes them; the actions of the knight of faith speak for themselves, just as they do in Ricoeur's account. The rationale behind centring responsibility on the individual is presented nicely by Evans, who writes,

> the most ethical person is not the person who passes over his failings by thoughtlessly assuring himself that he is no worse than 'the others.' He is precisely the person who is sternest with himself; the most relentless in uncovering his ambiguous motives, who is not content with his ability to 'fool the others' and hence may accuse himself when no one else does. (Evans 1983, 43)

Evans' statement here reveals two important aspects of Kierkegaard's view of responsibility: it requires active self-assessment and reflection, and it also recognises the temptation of the ethical stage's offer to submerge personal responsibility into group responsibility. Rather than responsibility being inescapable, Kierkegaard

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[10] From the outset of his letters William acknowledges the aesthete's resistance to pedagogy (*E/OII*, 6), yet remains consistent in attempting to use it to persuade his interlocutor. That he recognises its limited viability but persists reveals the real intention behind the letter: it is meant as justification for William (and those 'universal men' like William), and not for the upbuilding of the aesthete.

[11] Backhouse also addresses the 'truly ethical' category introduced in Anti-Climacus' works, where the ethical is transformed by love. While this is explicit in Anti-Climacus' Christian account, it is implicit in Climacus' secular ethic, which is centred on recovering an inherent, inter-personal sympathy as the root of ethical action.

posits that it not only can be escaped, but that we *want* to escape from it, which reveals its necessity all the more sharply.

Responsibility, as we have previously noted, is intricately related to guilt-consciousness for both Kierkegaard and Ricoeur. In each of their respective views, it is this pairing that draws our attention to our self as agent, and reveals our need to act ethically: the justification for my actions is in the adequacy of their response to the other, not an external legitimisation. Kierkegaard never diminishes or shies from the difficulty that such a perspective on responsibility entails. Anti-Climacus, discussing the necessity of venturing without the certainty of externally legitimised courses of action, reveals that prudence and inaction are a deceit when he writes,

> the world considers it dangerous to venture in this way—and why? Because it is possible to lose. Not to venture is prudent. And yet, precisely by not venturing it is so terribly easy to lose what would be hard to lose, however much one lost by risking, and in any case never this way, so easily, so completely, as if it were nothing at all—namely, oneself. If I have ventured wrongly, well, then life helps me by punishing me. But if I have not ventured at all, who helps me then? (*SUD*, 34)

There can be no self without venturing, here synonymous with living the life of a knight of faith. Without the ethical certainty provided by the ethical stage's adherence to abstract ethical dicta or social norms, the individual is left to venture, to experiment in ethical action. As Anti-Climacus says, this does not mean that such actions will be successful, but failure is itself a guide. This subtly incorporates the two dimensions of responsibility outlined above. Anti-Climacus illustrates the need for activity and reflection on that activity—life punishes "venturing wrongly", which encourages improvement and refinement and thereby fosters self-becoming, while also acknowledging that it is prudent not to venture in such ways, the cost of which is one's self. Losing one's self is a heavy toll, as it represents the denial of agency. Therefore, we find here an advocacy for active engagement in the world, a need for ethical refinement through practice and failure, and the subsequent realisation and acceptance of agency through that process—and it is agency, subjectivity, that is emphasised throughout Kierkegaard's literature on ethics.

Agency plays a decisive role in Ricoeur's 'little ethics' as well, being the primary point of view of any individual; we are agents in the world and affect the world through our activity. This in turn means the adoption of responsibilities to and for the other—we are responsible for the effects the actions that we author have on patients, on *others*.[12] Ethical self-transformation is occasioned by accepting our responsibility to and for others; we must make ourselves available to others, and take responsibility for the effects of our actions, whether intentional or not. This has parallels with Kierkegaard's self-giving, itself predicated on both an understanding of one's self and of one's capacities, and the ability to anticipate or respond to the needs of others. Self-giving as outlined by Kierkegaard is not a forceful act, but a responsive one that recognises its responses as fallible; a self-giving agent cannot determine the response that the patient should accept, but must strive to address

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[12] This disposition is absent in Kierkegaard's aesthetic and ethical stages because each of these denies personal responsibility and embraces abstract determinants for existence (i.e., fate or predestination). The movement into the religious stage is necessary because it is within the religious stage that selfhood is realised, and responsibility and agency are embraced.

their needs as they articulate them.[13] This perspective accepts that failure is itself a tool for progressive growth—a stance we have consistently presented Kierkegaard as advocating. Thus, failure does not represent a lack of ethical rectitude, but reveals the necessity for continual striving; further action is encouraged by understanding failure through this lens, as the alternative neglects an appreciation of the role failure plays, instead utilising failure as a justification for limiting actions or refusing to respond in the future. By highlighting responsiveness and availability, we can understand Kierkegaard's advocacy for self-giving in a new way, one that remains consistent with its previous definition, but has a refined perspective on the structure of the relationship between the agent and the patient.

This refined interpretation of interpersonal relationships is especially important in Kierkegaard's ethics because it is necessary to avoid pride and self-righteousness. Evans draws our attention to the individual's need to remain incognito in the religious stage, because to make oneself conspicuously religious flirts too close to taking on a self-righteous disposition, or imposing one's preferences onto others (instead of allowing them to choose for themselves) (Evans 1983, 205). Even absent a theological interpretation of religiousness, the worry is the denial of the agency of others in deference to one's own—others must live in the same way I do, and this justifies *forcing* one's worldview onto others, rather than finding ways to cooperatively *share* worlds. It is this mutual sharing that religiousness A does particularly well on Kierkegaard's account, because an existential focus on immanence possesses an inherent sympathy with all other individuals.

iii) Solicitude & Sympathy

Solicitude and sympathy are central concepts in Ricoeur's ethic; we will therefore recall important features of each of these concepts in turn. Solicitude was described as the "with and for others" of self-esteem, because esteem and solicitude cannot be separated from each other; it is caring for another as *an* other. Solicitude forges mutual respect and invites the other to ask for assistance—it *clarifies* my availability; it is formed from esteem and respect—it affirms the other's ability to narrate their lives, that their narrative affects mine, thus entailing ethical duties. Solicitude also invites an imbalance we must be aware of, namely my own self-esteem and domination by others—solicitude does not mean breaking down my own self-esteem to invite the other to dominate me, but instead invites the other to share in my world.[14] Sympathy, interconnected with solicitude, is naturally communicative—we must seek to understand the needs of others through direct dialogue, as well as active engagement (this is its indirect form). Additionally, it is mutual: it must be both given *and received*, not merely given; it anticipates needs but does not determine them, it *appreciates the agency of others*—we can recognise ourselves as agents who act on patients, and sympathy allows us to appreciate the agency of others and that we ourselves are patients to them. The emphasis on sympathy relates to its role in

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[13] Although, as we have argued previously, dialogue between the agent and patient can lead to mutual understanding of the action's intentions, and why that action may better address the needs of the patient. However, this still requires the assent of the other; if they remain adamant that this course of action is harmful or unwanted this must be accepted by the agent, who then tailors their future responses accordingly. Self-giving, understood in this way, incorporates mutual engagement by each member affected by the action, and encourages recognition, rather than being an imperious determination justified by the agent's ethical self-sufficiency.

[14] We can once again note the distinction between Ricoeur's advocacy for *sharing* the world as a contrast to Levinas' advocacy for *donating* it. Solicitude is not meant to place the individual under the yoke of the other, but to produce a mutuality and reciprocity between equal subjects.

sharing one's world with others, and thereby reveals avenues for ethical action. Together, these manifest respect for the agency—for the selfhood—of others. We argued previously that friendship exemplifies this, as we seek out friends because of a recognised need for others, and the mutual give-and-take of friendships serves to improve each of our esteems without subtracting from them; the selfhood of each member of a friendship is enhanced by the relationship.

This interpretation of solicitude and sympathy contributes to Ricoeur's promotion of an ethic of self-flourishing—it supports the *telos* of living a good life with and for others in just institutions. It also shares affinities with the ethic of cooperative self-becoming we have argued Kierkegaard promotes. While he does not use the term 'solicitude,' sympathy is evident in the immanent stage of religiousness A and is a decisive feature of the ethic of religiousness A; sympathy is derived from our shared humanity, but extends beyond that in important ways—and this can be developed further by appropriating Ricoeur's language. The communicative nature of sympathy is reminiscent of the indirect communication supported by Kierkegaard across his works. This communicative strategy is adopted because it not only recognises subjectivity, but also enriches it (i.e., sympathy allows the other to communicate how they feel by drawing on common experiences) thus personalising them.[15] The essentiality of otherness to sympathy, and ethics as a cooperative and not individualistic endeavour, leads to an emphasis on communication of that otherness; it is not predicated on an assumption of sameness, but a recognition of difference. This led Kierkegaard to call for those who wish to be sympathetic to "show your genuine sympathy by not claiming to be able to put yourself in the other person's place; and you who suffer, show your genuine discretion by not claiming the impossible of the other" (*WA*, 116). Kierkegaard's ethic posits sympathy as a respect for alterity, not a reduction to sameness, informing his critical posture towards determining what is ethical from an abstract position. This represents an implicit alignment with Ricoeur's solicitude, and the respect for alterity that roots both sympathy and, more broadly, ethics.

The inability to respect otherness is evident in the ethical stage, leading Frater Taciturnus to write, "illness and poverty do not concern the ethicist; he has no sympathy with this suffering; he has no fellow feeling for it" (*SLW*, 461). So long as an ethicist is healthy and/or happy, they do not want to hear about the suffering of others, their self-interest precludes an interest in the problems of others and suggests that the world is already ideal. The Married Man writes, "to have sympathy is an essential quality of being human" (*SLW*, 113), and therefore it is the ethical stage's emphasis on obscuring humanness in an effort to idealise oneself that effectively delegitimises sympathy. Kierkegaard's religious stage is a response to this, calling for the resurrection of sympathy and the recognition of alterity. The Married Man goes on to imply that sympathy is necessary for resolutions to take on an ethical content—without sympathy, we cannot engage in ethical action

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[15] As an example, humour, in the humourist/religious sphere, fosters sympathy by revealing shared experiences—painful experiences being highlighted by Climacus (*CUP*, 533). Humour, being the inverse of pain, obscures the pain but still conveys it. Its hiddenness requires reflection by the interlocutor to be understood, it requires the interlocutor to connect their subjective experience with the experience of the other—this creates a sympathetic bond between each of them by forging a connection between two subjects.

(because lacking sympathy either dehumanises ourselves and others, thus obscuring unique needs, or it generalises all humans and elides unique needs in favour of 'universal' ones[16]). Thus, sympathy remains a central tenet of Kierkegaard's ethic, unsurprising, perhaps, given its focus on cooperation.

Both Ferreira and Assiter emphasise the importance of sympathy in Kierkegaard's ethical commitments. Ferreira, in particular, connects it to mercy (Ferreira 2001, 195). Absent sympathy, mercy is reduced to pity because it becomes passive—passively thinking of the other, or passively giving to the other. Ferreira, therefore, interprets Kierkegaard's definition of mercy in a way similar to Ricoeur's concept of solicitude and sympathy, requiring active engagement with the other and the reception of merciful acts by others. This is in agreement with Kierkegaard's broader philosophical commitment to subjectivity, which accentuates the respect for the subjectivity of others. This broad appreciation of subjectivity necessitates faith, or trust, that others recognise themselves (and oneself) as subjects, as well as trust that the communication of one's own selfhood will be positively received by others. If we understand Kierkegaard's commitment to the respect for subjectivity as the root of his ethic, Ricoeur's concepts of solicitude and sympathy seem to be located at the heart of the cooperative self-becoming that we posited as the *telos* of Kierkegaard's ethics. Ethical self-transformation is always a cooperative activity for both Kierkegaard and Ricoeur, and engaging in cooperative activities requires respect for the alterity of others, and sympathetic communication with others. This has led us to argue previously that Kierkegaard is advancing an inter-subjective interpretation of existence, and it reaches its sympathetic maximum within the immanent sphere of religiousness.

As important as solicitude and sympathy are to Ricoeur's account, they are not definitive and require extension. Each of these concepts are intimately associated with interpersonal—face-to-face—relationships, but Ricoeur wants to extend his ethics to those who we do not have direct interactions with, just as *Two Ages* (among other late writings critical of ethically bankrupt social institutions) suggests Kierkegaard did. This is evident, albeit largely implicitly, in religiousness A, as the individual in this stage has an essential sympathy with *all* humans and is therefore socially minded.

iv) Love & Justice

Here, we will venture some brief social and political ramifications of reading Kierkegaard's ethics under the aegis of a Ricoeur. While solicitude and sympathy are foundational to Ricoeur's ethics of social and political activity, they are functionally limited to face-to-face interactions, and must give way to justice.[17] The argument we will be making is in line with other commentators,[18] although the route we have taken and will continue along is different. The aim of drawing social and political implications from Kierkegaard's ethic is

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[16] We find this criticised throughout Kierkegaard's writings on ethics, where the counterpoint is often predicated on abstracted rules for ethical action that are incapable of properly evaluating needs. An example of this is the ethical judgment of the woman who, because she was robbed, was incapable of making a donation (*WL*, 317-8). From the perspective of the ethical sphere, she has performed an unethical act relative to the general principle that donations are ethically good, but, within the religious stage, the context is taken into account because the emphasis there is on the uniqueness of her situation.

[17] Solicitude, however, does have a broader social form: critical solicitude. This is folded into the dialectic of love and justice, though, and so our discussion will accept this without redefining and discussing it.

[18] This interpretation is evident in the interpretations of Assiter (2009), Backhouse (2011), Walsh (2018), and others.

to help reveal the intricately interconnected nature of ethics in both Kierkegaard's and Ricoeur's social and political thought by highlighting the dialectical relationship between love and justice—a dialectic explicit in Ricoeur's treatment of ethics, but implicit in Kierkegaard's. Ethics is not its own domain, but underlies the entirety of human existence.[19] While love is clearly a significant component of Kierkegaard's *ethos*, justice may appear to be a difficult concept for us to associate with him, given his parody of Judge William. However, this does not encompass a denial of the legitimacy or necessity of justice, but rather a criticism of an impersonal conception of justice abstracted from lived existence. This is the same animus that leads Ricoeur to adopt the dialectic of love and justice, rather than advocate for justice alone.

While Kierkegaard is indeed critical of society from a certain angle, as Backhouse states, his "position is not *anti*-social. Pointing out that human society is not god is not the same as seeking to annihilate that society" (Backhouse 2011, 27). This accords with Walsh, who suggests Kierkegaard's critique of Christendom is meant as a critique of state morality not society *in toto* (Walsh 2018, 98). It is not society or the political that Kierkegaard rejects, but an interpretation of society and politics that is abstracted from lived, human existence. Assiter's account presents us with a concept of the political separate from family, everyday life, and existence, becoming a mediator of competing interests between individuals with justice as the arbitration process of those competing interests (Assiter 2009, 139). Following this account, we can understand the political sphere as one where the individual seeks to satisfy personal interests but political structures force the individual to reconcile their needs with the needs of others. Much as we find ourselves using sympathy and compassion to find accord with those we come across in everyday life, the political forms a similar structure with those with whom we have no interpersonal relationship. These accounts, while distinct from our own interpretation following Ricoeur, reveal Kierkegaard's intimate interest in the social and political spheres within which we exist—we cannot abstract ourselves from our social context, we must engage with and transform that context. Placing an emphasis on this, and bringing us much closer to Ricoeur, is Backhouse, who states that nations have to re-imagine their past, present, and future in relation to current needs, so the roots of our society become difficult to trace as the relationship with history is kept fairly ambiguous and developmental (Backhouse 2011, 4). This is true of individual identity as well, and helps draw attention to the dialectical relation between personal ethical transformation, and the transformation of social ethics.

If we accept the above characterisation of Kierkegaard, we find him much more committed to social and political ethics than he is often credited with, although his position entails a need for caring responses that are not always sanctioned by abstract and impersonal rules. This commitment to a social ethic situating respect for alterity at its core is reflected in Ricoeur's advocacy of the intermingling of love and justice. Justice is too staid and impersonal, while love can become soft and used to merely placate others. Together they allow for unique ethical responses on broader scales, without becoming too intensely focused on currying favour—

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[19] This is evident in Ricoeur's critique of pathological ideologies, as well as Kierkegaard's critiques of both the ethical sphere and the present age. Furthermore, the religious individual's entire life is changed by the absolute decision, including, as Climacus states in a footnote, "minor matters" (*CUP*, 389), and therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that one's relationship to the social and political world one exists in will be similarly transformed.

together they refine the arbitration process between individuals and groups of individuals.[20] While impersonal justice was not unfamiliar to Kierkegaard, he did note a distinct lack of love in the social and political structures of his contemporary society. This lack led him to state "the positive law [of life-relationships]: they can do without each other and they can stay together, or more positively, they cannot do without each other because of the mutual bond" and when inwardness is lacking, "instead of the relation of inwardness another relation supervenes: the opposites do not relate to each other but stand, as it were, and carefully watch each other, *and this tension is actually the termination of the relation*" (*TA*, 78). It is the abstracted nature of the latter case that Kierkegaard attributes to the ethical stage's influence on society and politics. There is no relation between individuals, but a mutual supervision, or surveillance. Love introduces the necessary passion to invigorate relationships, to encourage engagement *with* others, and it is by engaging with others that we discover them as *other selves*—they are not aliens to be looked on with distrust, nor objects to be evaluated, but selves who, alongside one's own self, are striving in self-becoming.

Restoring this passionate interest in others on a social level underlies the political commitments implicit in Kierkegaard's works. This does not mean that love is given free reign, as we argued previously love must have some constraints in order to avoid becoming adoration or symbolic of servitude towards the other. The self-esteem and self-respect of the individual introduces limitations to love in accordance with a sense of justice codifying esteem and respect without dulling the passions that esteem and respect cultivate. These commonalities between Kierkegaard and Ricoeur are primarily speculative, but provide a lens through which to reconstitute Kierkegaard's social and political philosophy in a productive way incorporating his *ethos*.[21] Furthermore, it helps to accentuate the importance of otherness in Kierkegaard's ethic—a commitment we have continually seen supported by Kierkegaard and which gains a deeper significance when we read him through the lens of Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutic.

§1.2 An Ethic Locating Otherness Within and Without

In our final chapter, we argued that Ricoeur provides a more coherent lens through which to appreciate our relationship to others: they can be sympathised with and require ethical responsiveness that treats them uniquely and respectfully. However, there is a further insight offered by reading Kierkegaard through the lens provided by Ricoeur: locating otherness within oneself. This insight has been unaddressed until now, but it implicitly and subtly influenced our previous discussions. There are three forms of otherness in one's self which Ricoeur locates that we can highlight in our revised account of Kierkegaard's concept of selfhood: *i)*

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[20] While love and justice are activated most plainly in social and political relations, they are no less active in our own interpersonal relationships—although there an emphasis is placed by both Ricoeur and Kierkegaard on solicitude and sympathy because these tend towards love and understanding (producing a sense of justice, but one even more particular and grounded in unique situations).

[21] Providing a wide-ranging and in-depth discussion of the ramifications of this interpretation is beyond the scope of this investigation, but one final element is worth mentioning. The concepts of guilt/sin also take on a more intriguing meaning in this context, as they help to guide the passionate interest in social transformation, something Kierkegaard speaks (to a degree) positively about in regards to the revolutionary age. By contrast, in the ethical stage, the conformity and conservative nature of society is supported by the legitimisation of guilt as something everyone participates in; it is neutralised and thereby acceptable without a need for change. This too seems to show an agreement between Kierkegaard and Ricoeur, as Ricoeur also argues favourably for politics to transform and change alongside the individuals from whom society manifests.

those aspects of ourselves that are not directly available to us (i.e., characteristics revealed in response to lived existence); *ii*) those aspect of ourselves which are imparted, formed, or inspired by our relationships (i.e., familial traits, shared interests with friends, or responses to/from strangers); and *iii*) the voice of the other within ourselves that requests our attention and suggests ethical decision making: the voice of *conscience*. These forms of otherness within one's own self help to reveal not only how we can relate to others (as we relate to our own self as other), but also how the neighbour love command remains active beyond its theological context: we are to love others as we love the other in ourselves. Articulated in this language, the ethic of cooperative self-becoming situates otherness as an integral part of our own self-becoming, thus avoiding the problem of self-becoming reverting to a solipsistic or egoistic endeavour. We *must* engage with otherness, and our main avenue for doing so is in response to those others who arrive in our lives.

The first and second of these have been common features throughout our discussion. In the case of the otherness that originates outside of ourselves, we find the self as a process through which we uncover and discover ourselves through *praxis*. We are not known *a priori* (as Judge William believes himself to be), but strive to become our self. This is central to becoming subjective—entering the religious stage—in the *Postscript*, and serves as a key element of Anti-Climacus' discussion of the self in *The Sickness Unto Death*. In fact, despair is predicated on this understanding of the self as becoming and the need to *will* to be and become oneself; the self cannot be taken for granted, nor can it be discarded, no matter how tempting that appears. We must strive to become that self, to become *other* than what we currently are through ethical self-transformation. In the second case, we find Climacus arguing that, despite inwardness being intimately personal, within the religious sphere it intertwines individuals by revealing the importance of other individuals to oneself—in turn leading to a concern for the inwardness of others (as we saw in *Works of Love*) (*CUP*, 247). Walsh supports this, by noting that the qualities of faith, hope, and love central to Kierkegaard's ethics are expressive communicative qualities that draw us into relationships with others (Walsh 2018, 134). There is a recognition of the role that others play in our self-constitution, whether this occurs through communicative activities (sharing our worlds) or through active engagement (what I do for others reveals something I may not have previously known about myself). Like Ricoeur, Kierkegaard's developmental interpretation of selfhood requires space for otherness within the self; possibility, highlighted by Anti-Climacus, plays this role, as it offers us avenues through which we can become that which we are not yet—but this must remain grounded in those finite determinants that govern and constrain possibility.

While locating otherness within oneself manifests most clearly in our own self-becoming and the intertwining of our life with the lives of others, it is also apparent in Kierkegaard's discussions of conscience. Like Ricoeur, Kierkegaard also refers to "the voice of conscience" (*UDVS*, 32, 45, 128, 129), and similarly refers to conscience as "speaking" (*UDVS*, 128, 129, 131). This voice is not one's own voice though.[22] Additionally, he states, "deep within every human being there is a secret-sharer who is present just as scrupulously everywhere—the conscience" (*WA*, 182). Conscience, despite being presented as something 'other' situated

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[22] In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard refers to the conscience as the God-relation, therefore placing it outside of the individual—it is other than the self. This also reframes our previous discussion, as the God-relation influences our sense of self and, by incorporating conscience into the self, there is once again otherness within one's self.

within the individual, possesses the power of individuation—it marks the individual as a singular individual (it is *my* conscience). Yet, despite its role in individuation, conscience is always interested in otherness: preserving my otherness, the me I have yet to become, or the otherness of other individuals. This adds an additional layer of complexity to Assiter's assertion that Kierkegaard believes we must love ourselves to love others (Assiter 2009, 99). Her position entails taking care of our needs in order to help others, and is more substantial than just surviving, extending to how we relate to ourselves—do we take care of ourselves? Do we have a sense of self? Etc. Adopting the lens offered by Ricoeur broadens our appreciation of this, as the care for the self can be understood as the recognition of a need for self-respect, rooted in the alterity located within our self-constitution. Otherness, therefore, whether within or without is the focus of the ethic Kierkegaard is advocating—self-becoming is a respect for the other that we are to become, a respect for the voice of the other that instructs us and encourages ethical behaviour, and a respect for the becoming of those around us and in our society. We violate our neighbour when we dominate them, and violate ourselves in the adoration of our neighbour—a balance must be struck between these, and it is from that equilibrium that genuine ethics is manifested.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

To summarise, we can highlight that Kierkegaard's ethic does indeed posit self-becoming in the world as a becoming with otherness, within and without, and thereby concerned with the support of alterity as a support of both subjectivity and justice. While these do reveal the ethic of cooperative self-becoming that we contend Kierkegaard supports, we can return to two features introduced earlier and relevant to the practical application of the ethic: creativity and revelation. The ethic is creative because it supports our capacity to draw on possibilities for alternative ethical actions, and it is revelatory because it is through practice that ethics is both revealed and refined. Together, these intertwine the individual and others without reducing them to a totality; together, these reveal Kierkegaard's ethics as inter-subjective, focused on bridging the gaps between subjects through mutual reciprocal support made available to others; the *telos* of the ethic is advancing the selfhood of others in a way reflecting our own desire to have our selfhood supported. This requires creativity because each individual is deserving of unique responses, and it requires revelation because it is the evaluative capacity of others that determines whether actions are indeed ethical and therefore which actions to commit to in the future, and those from which we ought to abstain.

By reading Kierkegaard's ethics through the lens provided by Ricoeur, the implicit advocacy for ethical creativity and revelation are thrown into sharp relief. Ethics must contain a *creative* element because it is contingent on freedom, possibility, and self-becoming, and it is *responsive*, and default responses fail to adequately address unique needs.[23] It is revelatory because ethics is not given, it is discovered and refined through practice and cooperative striving. It is through creative responsiveness to the needs of others (including the other within ourselves) that it *reveals* ethical action as possessing ethical content—resolving the problem of contentless ethical structures in the ethical stage. This finds agreement with Kierkegaard's argument that even

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[23] This is true both individually and socially. As society changes ethical responses must also change, so the necessity for plasticity remains behind our direct interpersonal relationships.

the best actions are not *always* ethical, because the best actions are relative to the situation within which they are needed and are thereby not necessarily transferrable. Furthermore, creativity can be brought under the aegis of imagination, where "imagination is the medium for the process of infinitizing... whatever of feeling, knowing, and willing a person has depends upon what imagination he has" (*SUD*, 30-1). Imagination is considered by Anti-Climacus to be a medium through which we apprehend the world as possessing possibility; imagination is our ability to consider possibilities available to us.[24] Imagination, therefore, reveals the possibilities for creative response by uncovering possibilities in actuality—without the ability to imagine alternative courses of action, we cannot engage in courses of action that reveal ethics. This use of imagination as a tool for revealing possibilities is as evident in Kierkegaard's various creative approaches to writing existence and creatively presenting alternative ethical frameworks (i.e., the pseudonymous works), as it is for Ricoeur (i.e., his analysis of literature as a place to creatively 'play' with ethics).

One further element shared between them and intimately connected to creativity and imagination is persuasion. We argued above that Ricoeur supports an argumentative ethic, wherein ethical values are supported and opposed through dialogue. This process concludes (or should conclude) with the argument best promoting living a good life with and for others being adopted as a framework through which to refine our understanding of ethical practice—leading to another dialogue and argument. We find a similar advocacy in Kierkegaard's discussion of persuasion. In *Two Ages*, he writes, "persuasion presupposes that there is a difficulty, an obstacle, an opposition; it starts with this, and then persuasion clears it away. In other words, persuasion is a movement on the spot, but a movement that changes the then and there" (*TA*, 20). Similar to Ricoeur's appreciation of argumentation, Kierkegaard interprets persuasion as having an effect on lived existence, influencing the promotion of ethical decisions and courses of action—it is not just a rhetorical tool, but one that can *move* people to ethical self-transformation. We may think this verges too close to the ethical stage, and indeed it has its root there; however the 'new beginning' of the religious sphere occurs *through* persuasion—"those who by becoming single individuals seek the decisive category of religiousness, will scarcely be tempted to discard the persuasive... they will know both how to *honour* it and *appreciate* it" (*TA*, 22, my emphasis). The individual in the religious stage recognises the capacity for persuasion as a means of finding or forging agreement, but does so in appropriate ways (honouring and appreciating its utility)—persuasion, when practiced in the sphere of religiousness, respects alterity, it is a rhetorical device through which separate subjectivities can be bridged respectfully. This too requires imagination and creativity in presenting one's perspective, and reveals, through cooperative discussion, an action's ethical content. Once again, we can find agreement between Kierkegaard and Ricoeur, and a more nuanced picture of how ethics is structured and disseminated in the religious stage. Indeed, it is the creativity of the imagination, the (responsible) use of possibility, which orients action and reveals ethics through ethical practices that respect the alterity of both oneself and others, in a way that supports *cooperative self-becoming*.

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[24] However, imagination also introduces a danger if the individual seeks to live in their imagination, thus denying their finite existence (*SUD*, 31). Those figures who seek to exist as pure subject and in reflection of their life/the possibilities they have/could have had—like Quidam—are too paralysed in thought to actually take action.

§2 Re-Constructing the Imaginary Re-Construction

We will here return to our imaginary re-construction, where Rosa Parks stands as a representative of religiousness A. However, we now have the language provided by Ricoeur to reassess this case. Thus, our goal is to describe it in terms of self-esteem (ethics) and self-respect (morality), thus providing a more secular interpretation than our initial re-construction afforded, which was predicated on Kierkegaard's theological language. Moreover, we are here interested in capturing the sympathy and solicitude inherent to her action, as well as its connection to both practical wisdom and, ultimately, cooperative self-becoming. As a brief reminder, Rosa Parks' decision to remain in her seat highlighted a conflict of ethical duties, one occasioning a suspension of the ethical and the revelation of the need for a higher *ethos*. However, rather than taking our lead from Abraham as we did before, we will here proceed from an understanding of the situation as one requiring a recognition of self-esteem and self-respect, sympathy and solicitude, and practical wisdom. Where previously faith had been the central concept underwriting her decision not to relinquish her seat, now we focus on *trust* as the heightened form of inter-subjective respect: Parks *trusts* that her action will be recognised as a symbolic call for a revision of social norms, an assertion of self-esteem and self-respect both for herself, and for those who are similarly oppressed.

We can begin by noting how sympathy and solicitude are active in this scenario. As argued above, Kierkegaard's ethic implicitly articulates an advocacy for what Ricoeur terms sympathy and solicitude—the relationship of oneself with otherness, and the extension of care for otherness. Sympathy and solicitude reorient ethics and morality in the light of self-esteem and self-respect respectively. The aim of the ethic is to accentuate subjectivity and selfhood, and with the clarity provided by sympathy to promote and advance these through changes to institutions. In the case of Rosa Parks, what we find is a social and political world antagonistic to self-flourishing and which refuses to respect the selfhood of all its members, leading to the need for a reinterpretation of those institutions. This is what we previously referred to as the teleological suspension of the ethical, but here we can understand it as a conflict of interpretations—the interpretation of equality is different between the ideal equality of all peoples and the 'separate but equal' claim of segregation. The practical implications of this were an inability to reconcile the demand that she relinquish her seat with the recognition that she possesses an equal claim on that seat. While we may intuitively believe that she should relinquish her seat if we adopt the self-giving ethic Kierkegaard presents, when we pass it through Ricoeur we find a greater nuance that supports her decision. To give her seat in accordance with the demand would be a violation of her own self-esteem, it would be an acceptance of the lower position accorded to her by (an unethical) social convention. While there is still a lack of certainty here, Parks can trust that in making her decision she is symbolically advocating for an ethical revision of the prevailing social norms; her decision, while on its face being self-advocacy, has a deeper meaning in its repudiation of a system affecting more than just herself.

While Kierkegaard and Ricoeur each support communicative approaches to ethics, Ricoeur through argumentation and Kierkegaard through persuasion, each of them is consistent in a requirement for practical action. Ethics is not an abstract topic of conversation, but is specifically practical. Thus, while Parks could have spoken and appealed to the need for a higher ethic, her action served as a stronger form of communication: it *showed* the inequality directly in a way that was not only apparent, but also irrefutable. Her criticism of the

prevailing system, whether directly intentional or not, was both vivid and precise: what is being demanded of her was clearly unethical, predicated as it was on a view that she is not a person, a subject, a *self* in the same way as the white man who demanded her seat. We previously noted the importance that Rosa Parks *acted*, with the success being secondary to the act itself. The necessity of action in the face of possible failure is due to the emphasis on practical action as the means of revealing ethics—it is only through acting that we can determine the contours and refine ethics in accordance with reaction and reinterpretation. Our failure to meet the mark offers us an opportunity to learn how to improve in the future, and similarly our successes reveal new patterns of action in the future;[25] our successes and failures offer us a chance to be *ethically creative*. It is through the acquisition of practical ethical wisdom that we revise and improve our social relationships by revisiting morality in light of the possibility for greater justice, agency, and equality.

Parks' decision represents the activation of practical wisdom and creativity in revealing a higher ethical possibility—she knows what the convention currently is, recognises its fallibility, but also can see the possibility for it to be otherwise, for it to acknowledge and support the subjectivity of each individual. Parks' actions speak to a desire for a renovated social relationship that esteems and respects her selfhood, and the selfhood of others without sacrificing her own self-esteem or self-respect. Solicitude (and critical solicitude, solicitude's moral cousin) is the proper term for Parks' actions; she is acting with solicitude both on her own account, and the account of others who are similarly dispossessed of equal freedom. We can therefore say that Parks' actions represent a commitment to cooperative self-becoming, evidenced by the desire for recognition *as persons* deserving equal rights; her decision, whether intentionally or not, is ultimately a statement about selfhood, and the freedom to pursue the possibility of self-becoming that others under that unethical institution assumed. The selfhood of Parks, along with each person affected by segregation's arbitrary limitations based on racial categorisation, is asserted through the denial to relinquish her seat: she is a self equally deserving of that seat, and she demands that her self be respected.

<div align="center">***</div>

Here, we reinterpret Rosa Parks through Ricoeur's ethical language, but arrive at the same commitment to cooperative self-becoming we found when reading her actions through Kierkegaard's ethic. Furthermore, we can find a parallel between Ricoeur's describe-narrate-prescribe approach to ethics and Kierkegaard's exposition of the Abraham case (which describes the *Akedah* through narrative as a means of prescribing an ethic predicated on faith in a way that inspired our original re-construction). Each of them is supporting an approach to ethics that is more interested in development and refinement than staid ethical structures that are either irrefutably absolute, or claim to have universal presuppositions.[26] What we find in rearticulating the Parks example, but utilising Ricoeur's language, is a *desire* for self-esteem that dialectically interconnects the striving involved in becoming one's self, with the striving of others becoming selves; Parks' decision cannot be isolated from the society within which that decision was rendered necessary, and so it cannot be taken as

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[25] Albeit suited to new situations and not merely replicated.

[26] These were claims that Kierkegaard and Ricoeur each respond to, and which we argued against specifically in regards to Levinas (and the Absolute otherness of the Other) and MacIntyre (and the universality of narrative and virtue) respectively.

self-serving, but self-giving and intimately connected to the self-becoming of others. In making her decision she gives what only she can, namely her self, so that others can also partake in their own self-giving—she reveals the possibility of self-esteem, even if she knows that the reaction to her call for self-respect will be denied (at least within an unchanged society). She makes herself an example for future responses to unethical treatment, where self-respect is promoted without infringing on the agency of another; she sacrifices her freedom in the moment, but with the trust that that freedom will be restored when she receives the self-respect she asserts that she merits.

A further implication can be drawn from this example. Above we ventured a brief characterisation of the social and political ramifications of drawing Kierkegaard and Ricoeur into a relationship, and we can see their similarity here as well. Both Kierkegaard and Ricoeur do not advocate wholesale social disruption to obtain abstract, ideal political structures (Kierkegaard critiques the 'Age of Revolution' on this ground, and Ricoeur critiques utopianism), but do support progressive change through individual and collective action. It is by asserting one's self-esteem, and thereby the esteem of others, through argument, persuasion, and ethical activity that forces a transformation of convention through considered conviction. It is engagement in the process of cooperative self-becoming that occasions ethical self-transformation; in turn the influence of one's own transformation on others leads to the reassessment of social norms and the support of their self-becoming. Both Ricoeur and Kierkegaard are committed to inter-subjectivity, where support of the other's self requires ethical treatment and attentiveness to *their* needs, even when that other is the other within one's self.

§3 The Status of B in Light of A

The ethic that we have supported here is largely based on our intuitions, in that it relies on creative application of ethical response, and the revelation of ethics by seeking to love (care for, respect, and advance the selfhood of) the neighbour (others), or as Ricoeur has stated, live a good life with and for others in just institutions. This positions ethics beyond our capacity to *know*—we cannot be certain that the course of action we are undertaking is indeed ethical, and there is no strong form of legitimacy accepted by either Kierkegaard or Ricoeur. Each roots ethics in practice and an intuitive sympathy with others. Immanence aims at a more just and ethical world, thus providing our actions with the possibility of capturing absolute value rather than only relative value—while the ability to concretely know the absolute is reserved for religiousness B, religiousness A recognizes in the ideality of the aim its absolute presuppositions.[27] We may worry that this supplants religiousness B by providing religiousness A with the ethical stature that Kierkegaard explicitly invested in religiousness B. However, there are still valuable and important aspects of religiousness B that are precluded from A, and it is these features that make the appropriation of Christianity in religiousness B important, and why it is paramount in Kierkegaard's stages: Christianity not only articulates this ethical *telos*, but also makes it absolute by backing it with transcendent authority. Thus, religiousness B retains its validity and purpose even if it is not the only sphere in which his ethic can be practiced. While appropriating Christianity as truth is not

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[27] This indistinct understanding of the absolute requires continual striving which, as we have argued, adds a positive dimension. However, the indistinct understanding of the absolute means that it has a greater potential to be confused with relative values, and it is this potentiality, among other reasons, that made the transition to religiousness B appear necessary to Kierkegaard.

a necessary transformation if one is to live an ethical existence—as the basic framework of ethics is shared with religiousness A—it nonetheless transforms that ethic by providing a clear and coherent program legitimised by a transcendent, authoritative God who can provide forgiveness of sins.

Thus, it is still not appropriate to suggest that Religiousness B lacks ethics, or has a different ethic. Instead, our suggestion is that it is a separate stratum of ethics because the inclusion of a transcendent creator God both initiates and legitimises the ethic as a moral impulse, thereby giving greater structure and clearer validity to the *ethos*. These both render the ethic comprehensible (in a sense) by providing it an explicit and undeniable *telos*, while also intensifying it: we gain an infinite sense of sin, we are aware that we can not make amends within one's existence.[28] While religiousness A does not offer a practical possibility for repayment, its immanent nature allows for an anticipation of making amends: we can imagine overcoming our guilt, even if we cannot actualise it. However, religiousness B offers no such hope. The decisive Christian depends on God's grace to overcome infinite sinfulness. This does not legitimise inaction, as we find the Pastor advocating in his 'Ultimatum,' but inspires a singular focus on actively living out the ethical demand—we realise that we must strive, even though that striving can only lead to the recognition of the need for transcendent assistance.

Kierkegaard's Christian ethic is, as noted above, centred on its authority structure. While we argued in the first chapter that the command to love the neighbour does not need to be accepted in its strongest interpretation, the authority of God is still undeniable and supreme. That God commands us to love the neighbour lends an authority to the necessity to live out that command whether it forms a moral obligation, or is only a reminder or guide to act out of love. This transcendent command is wholly absent in religiousness A. Without a transcendent God to provide the command, we rely on sympathy to remind us to act with respect for others and to guide our ethical decision-making. Sympathy, as we found in Ricoeur, has the open structure of a request, as this assumes the *equality* of individuals as subjects who evaluate ethical content. Requests serve as a means of bridging the gap between agents who have an equal share in determining the ethical value of that request; without transcendent backing, individuals must work cooperatively to reveal ethics, as it is not given. This, once again, provides religiousness B with an important stature in Kierkegaard's theory of stages. Religiousness B recaptures supreme ethical authority through a transcendent God, where there are obligations we owe to God as our creator and therefore the command to love has obligatory moral worth insofar as it is legitimised by a supreme authority.[29]

Moreover, the promise of an eternal happiness, or blessedness, in religiousness B offers something of a balm to the intense striving that it requires. By Contrast, religiousness A retains the tenterhooks of anxiety because there is no transcendent authority, only the faith or trust that our actions are indeed oriented towards the good. Each of these stages in the sphere of religiousness provides support for the ethic as an ethic promoting

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[28] This can be contrasted with a desire to make amends in the world of immanence—we know we are guilty alongside others who are guilty, whereas in religiousness B we are infinitely sinful before a sinless God.

[29] One could argue, and perhaps remain consistent with Kierkegaard's overall philosophical-theology, that even here there is a request. God *requests* are recognition as an authority through Christ—it is a human that enjoins us to love the neighbour, and the authority rests on accepting the request for recognition. This would still be in agreement with the necessity for personal appropriation of the truth of Christianity on Kierkegaard's account because it relies on faith that the request is being made by God and not by another human being; one does not merely assent to Christianity for Kierkegaard, but *actively answers* it through lived existence.

cooperative self-becoming, each of these incorporates respect for alterity as its ethical content, but they diverge in the expression of the ethic. Religiousness B has an explicit guide to act with love for the neighbour—even the neighbour that is ourselves—through self-giving and an appreciation for the other as an other. Religiousness A makes up for this lack of guidance with an emphasis on creativity and the revelation of ethics—it is *praxis* that reveals whether our actions are ethical, and *praxis* where we correct our ethical lapses. Within the sphere of religiousness, we must both recognise ethical possibilities, as well as the need for practical action— we must imagine new courses of ethical action and then put them into practice. Cooperative self-becoming is an appreciation that we are a synthesis of both that which is finite and that which is infinite within ourselves, but that our self transcends that and re-interprets it in an ongoing process of becoming: the process of becoming a more ethical self.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Having offered a reassessment and restatement of Kierkegaard's ethics, we are participating in a task sanctioned by Johannes Climacus. In *Philosophical Fragments*, he sought to "leave it up to each person to practice coming back to the idea from the most diverse sides, to practice using his imagination to uncover the strangest instances of relative differences and relative situations in order to figure it all out" (*PF*, 98). Not only does this serve as a final definition of what we have engaged in here, returning to Kierkegaard's ethic from a new 'side,' but it also serves as a summary to the ethic itself: the need to return to ethics, to reassess and reinterpret it. This approach to ethics involves being cognisant that ethical transformation is not a one-time choice, as Judge William believed, but an engagement in the continuous and strenuous activity of the creative revelation of living with and for others ethically—of becoming a self, alongside and in co-operation with others.

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