

THE ETHICS OF LOVE IN SPINOZA AND KIERKEGAARD AND THE TELEOLOGICAL SUSPENSION OF THE THEOLOGICAL

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The analysis of love has been neglected more than almost any other subject in philosophy.¹
Irving Singer

The singular epiphany of God in the face of three men wandering in the desert! One can, of course, separate out of this or isolate from it the idea of God. One can think it or know it while forgetting the circumstances. Religions and theologies thrive on this abstraction just as mystics do on this isolation. But so do wars of religion.

Emmanuel Levinas²

In a momentary reflection on the deep psychological reasons that have landed him in such hot water, Socrates, an undoubtedly shrewd thinker, remarks to his religious interlocutor thus: "Is this, Euthyphro, why I am a defendant against the indictment: that whenever someone says such things about the gods, I receive them somehow with annoyance."³ At this early point in the dialogue Euthyphro had not said anything all too alarming, so we should not judge Socrates' remark as stemming from some preposterous religious claim, but rather as a natural burst from a discerning philosophical mind that could tolerate little in the way of theological or onto-theological saying. This annoyance, however, does not lead to an undermining of ethics as many might think. On the contrary, as exemplified by the person of Socrates, the abandonment of theology promotes a heightened ethical sensitivity. Of course, given Socrates' *daimonia*, we all know the "abandonment" is only apparent. Could it not be better conceived as a teleological suspension of the theological in order to meet the other as *tout autre*?

This essay is not directly concerned with Socrates, however, and while it may reasonably lead readers to question whether we would not all be better off from forgoing discourse on God, its explicit focus is more subdued. What I wish to argue is that the theological question—the question of God—or, more specifically, questions regarding the nature

and being of God, onto-theo-logical questions in Heidegger's sense,⁴ are, at best, irrelevant to an ethics of love and the promotion of such an ethic. At worst, they may undermine the possibility of an ethics of love. An ethics of love thus requires a teleological suspension of the theological.

Note that I am not arguing for the irrelevance of God *per se*. Of God *per se* I have nothing to say and humbly remain silent. I am suggesting instead that we begin our ethical quest with love without God, and if it happens that we then decide to affirm God, let us be sure that it is not God without love. Analogous to Husserl's epoché, which puts the question of the external world in suspense but does not thereby deny its existence, the teleological epoché of the theological brackets the existence of God in order to focus on the more pressing—the higher—concern of loving others, all others.

I shall develop my argument by considering what I take to be two profound visions of an ethics of love, both of which can clearly be seen as founding their ethical theories on God, i.e., Spinoza's *Ethics* and Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. Of course, the God of Spinoza and the God of Kierkegaard, could not, it would appear, be more different. The former is the one and only substance, a divine immanence, equivalent to nature, lacking a will and known through reason; whereas the latter is a transcendent God of will, absolutely different from creation or nature, and absolutely beyond reason. Spinoza's conception of God is pantheistic and naturalistic, akin to more Eastern theological conceptions, and favorable to scientists, such as Albert Einstein, who said: "The God I believe in is the God of Spinoza."⁵ In contrast, Kierkegaard's God is personal and revelatory, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Moses. Thus, we would appear to be justified in surmising that such different conceptions of God would yield significantly different ethical perspectives. When we explore the texts, however, we shall see, remarkably, that this could

not be farther from the truth. Hence, in affirming the ethics of love put forth in these works—and who would not wish to affirm this—we shall be led to affirm the irrelevance of the question of God. Before we begin our exposition, however, I must briefly address the term “ethics of love.”

The Ethics of What?

There is no way around it. As much as I would love to find a better word for “love” I cannot. I am well aware of the multiple meanings that “love” harbors, but all my attempts to uncover the essence of this term and find that one true designation that would unite those philosophers who pursued and embraced love have failed. My “Heideggerian hope”⁶ has been dashed, but it was perhaps not a wise hope to begin with, as Spinoza would likely suggest,⁷ although he himself appeared to master writing definitions that exposed the essences of the terms.

“Love” is a fuzzy, ambiguous term, but it is hard to avoid. An ethics of love must begin by addressing this ambiguity and attempt to delineate the term as precisely as possible. Before this however, let me briefly comment on the other part of this phrase “ethics of love,” that is, “ethics.”

The centrality of ethics in Spinoza’s work is easily demonstrated by the title of his *magnum opus*. This Dutch Jew’s emphasis on ethics was unique for the time, a time that was profoundly influenced by the rise of the sciences and was focused on epistemological questions. Spinoza could have appropriately entitled his greatest work “Truth,” “True Knowledge,” or “The Way of Reason,” but he did not. Nor did he call it “God” or “God and Nature,” which would not have been unreasonable. Instead, his great work, an indisputable classic of philosophy, is simply entitled *Ethics* (1677). This signifies that the heart of Spinoza’s philosophy and the key value of this work lie in communicating the proper way of living or acting in the world.⁸ Not surprisingly, then, the term “love” can be found in this heart, making this text of central significance for this study.

To complicate matters, though, in Spinoza’s *Ethics* one can detect at least three separate conceptions of love, all of which appear to be highly significant in his work. These will be

discussed more fully in what follows, but they can be briefly referred to here in good Kierkegaardian fashion as aesthetic love, ethical love, and religious love. Ethical love, the second conception, is also referred to as “nobility” by Spinoza, and it is only this conception that is directly relevant to an “ethics of love.”

Kierkegaard, too, has several differing conceptions of love, and he is possibly more careful than Spinoza in his classification, but perhaps this is because his native Danish already contains different words for different kinds of love. In *Works of Love* (1847), the second text of central importance in this work, Kierkegaard distinguishes *Elskov* and *Kjerlighed*, the latter of which is relevant to an “ethics of love” and may be understood best as “neighborly love” or the *agape* of the New Testament. As we shall see, Kierkegaard makes additional distinctions as well.

More specifically, then, the ethics of love involves Spinoza’s “nobility” and Kierkegaard’s *Kjerlighed*. While this limits the scope of our focus considerably, it should not lead us to believe that we are about to expose directly and definitely such love in all its glory. Kierkegaard’s lengthy deliberations on “works of love” could not do so. Recognizing this from the beginning, Kierkegaard writes in the preface to this text that we are dealing with “something that in its total richness is *essentially* inexhaustible . . . *essentially* indescribable just because essentially it is totally present everywhere and *essentially* cannot be described.”⁹ Because of this, it is very likely that a good part of the philosophical community will experience annoyance in this subject matter, particularly over the implications of a non-verifiable central term. Such annoyance, which may frequently lead to frustration, is valid. I feel it too, and it is because of this, I think at least in part, that I have undertaken this work. What is invalid, however, is to reject a philosophical consideration of love because of its essentially ineffable nature.¹⁰ An important question for each individual to ask is whether the annoyance can be mastered. Can a vision of an ethics of love spun from the looms of Spinoza and Kierkegaard lead to contentment and edification, rather than exasperation? I think it can and will in the following pages try to show this.

Spinoza's Noble Love

We all know that coming to terms with love is difficult, and to complicate matters, we have to contend with explicit ambiguity in Spinoza's understanding of love in his *Ethics*.¹¹ There are three distinct conceptions at work within his text, which surprisingly are not clearly delineated by Spinoza. They are: (1) love as a passion defined as "pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause" (E3P135); (2) love as an action, equated with "nobility," which can be expressed as the desire to do good for others; and (3) love as an action based on understanding God, which brings about pleasure and the idea of an internal cause. Of these three conceptions—although the first is, strictly speaking, a perception for Spinoza, and the third may bring us into the realm of onto-theology—it is only the second, ethical conception that is directly relevant here. Let us consider some of the details.

Spinoza initially writes of love as a passion, and consequently an emotion that a free, active person would strive to avoid. Although the term "love" is not defined and geometrically discussed until Part Three of *Ethics*, the ambiguity appears earlier in the text. The first use of "love" occurs parenthetically in proposition 31 of Part One, where it is claimed to "be related to passive and not to active Nature." "Love" does not appear again until it is found in the lengthy and significant scholium that closes Part Two. This scholium is significant because in responding to criticisms against determinism and explaining the practical benefits of this doctrine, Spinoza projects themes that are central in the last part of his work. The mention of "love" is in the following sentence:

This doctrine, therefore, besides the fact that it makes the mind entirely calm, has the further benefit that it teaches us in what our supreme happiness, or, our blessedness, consists: namely, solely in the knowledge of God, from which we are led to do only those things which love and piety advise.

So love advises. Love advises us to do only those things that will lead to our blessedness. Consequently, this is clearly not the kind of love that belongs to our passive nature as initially mentioned in Part One and further ex-

plained in Part Three. It is rather the kind of love that acts, rather than reacts, that prevents or weakens the passive emotions of hate, as well as love in the first sense, anger, and envy. This love advises us to help our neighbors, "not from effeminate pity, bias, or superstition, but solely from the guidance of reason." Perhaps it could be called rational love, although that would not be clearer at this point, perhaps intuitive love, perhaps a priori love. Perhaps.

The ethics of love is thus not primarily concerned with "aesthetic love" defined by Spinoza as "pleasure with the accompaniment of the idea of an external cause" (E3P13S), and for this reason it is not necessary for us to distinguish the different manifestations of this kind of love as determined by its objects, e.g., the love of one's spouse, the love of one's children, the love of sports, etc. However, in the course of explaining the passive dynamics of love and hate Spinoza writes this:

Proposition 43: Hatred is increased by reciprocal hatred, and conversely can be destroyed by love.

This proposition should make readers pause for at least two reasons: first, because of the powerful idea expressed—there is a way to remove hatred—and second, because of the inconsistent use of "love." It seems obvious that we are now dealing with a different kind of love. One cannot substitute Spinoza's essential definition into this proposition and have it make sense. The love that is now being referred to is active rather than passive.

There is another term Spinoza uses to refer to what we may understand as active, ethical love, and that is "nobility." Not surprisingly, this term is repeatedly equated with love, which further deepens the ambiguity. After fifty-seven propositions in Part Three that explain "the origin and nature of the emotions" and categorize forty-six passive emotions,¹² Spinoza writes only two propositions which explain active emotions rather than passions. Here are these propositions:

Proposition 58: Besides the pleasure and the desire which are passions there exist other emotions of pleasure and desire which are related to us in so far as we act.

Proposition 59: Among all the emotions which are related to the mind in so far as it acts, there are none apart from those which are related to pleasure and desire.

In the scholium to this last proposition Spinoza writes that all the active emotions are related to fortitude, which covers two categories of emotions, courage and nobility.

For by “courage” I understand “the desire by which each person endeavours to preserve his being in accordance with the dictate of reason alone,” and by “nobility” I understand “the desire by which each person, in accordance with the dictate of reason alone, endeavors to help other men and join them to him in friendship.”

Thus for Spinoza it is essential for an active person to try to help others, and it should be pointed out that the notion of “friendship” is not that which we normally consider to be based on personal preferences. It cannot be, since it is commanded by reason alone. A “friend” in Spinoza’s sense is what Kierkegaard will call the neighbor, and what philosophers generally designate as the other.

Nobility has now been defined, but what’s love got to do with it? In a significant proposition in Part Four Spinoza writes:

Someone who lives in accordance with the guidance of reason endeavors, as far as he can, to repay the hatred, anger, contempt, etc. that another has for him with love, i.e. with nobility. (E4P46)

So, now, for Spinoza, “love” is nobility (and in the demonstration of this proposition Spinoza refers readers to the initial reference to nobility in E3P59S). This means we are no longer to think of it as a passion defined as “pleasure accompanied by an external cause.” Love is now a purely internal movement of the self, although it is intended to have external effects—to decrease hatred, anger, contempt, etc.—works of love, if you will. Following the command of reason, it is clear that one shall love, and through acts of love one strengthens and preserves one’s own being. Without love one lives miserably (E4P46S).

In the final scholium in Part Four Spinoza writes:

These and similar things that I have demonstrated about the true freedom of man are related to fortitude, that is to courage and nobility. I do not think it worth while to demonstrate here, one by one, that a free man hates no one, is angry with no one, envies no one, is indignant with no one, despises no one, and is far from being proud. For these, and all the things that relate to true life and religion, are easily demonstrated from Props. 37 and 46 of this Part: namely, that hatred is to be conquered by love, and that each person who is led by reason desires that the good that he seeks for himself should also exist for others.

There are other passages in the *Ethics* where Spinoza indicates the equivalence of love and nobility, but we do not need to continue our exposition of this point. We are now justified in discussing Spinoza’s *Ethics* as an ethics of love, in which love is understood as an active internal movement whereby one acts to strengthen the other.

Love in Kierkegaard

Unlike the predominant focus of Spinoza’s *Ethics* on God, Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* focuses on the commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” leaving the mysterious concept of God lurking behind. This may already be seen as an improvement, but does Kierkegaard’s working out of the Judeo-Christian commandment offer readers an essentially different love ethic?

The ethics of love in Kierkegaard, if we allow *Works of Love* to guide us, is about understanding and applying the central Christian command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). In one of the most careful analyses of this verse, Kierkegaard methodically breaks up the commandment to focus on what is implied by “shall,” “the neighbor,” and “you.” An explicit analysis of the remaining central term, which is of course “love,” is not to be found. Although this may seem surprising at first, it fits with the view that love cannot essentially be conceptualized or expressed; it can only be internalized and lived. Or, as Robert Solomon has put it, “love can only be understood from the inside.”¹³

As indicated earlier, Kierkegaard’s discussion is complicated by the fact that Danish has

two words for our English “love.” *Elskov* is used to refer to what is also called “self-love,” (although “self” is ambiguously used by Kierkegaard as we shall soon see, and thus I would distinguish between “self” and “ego” and then can this “ego-love”), “spontaneous love,” “preferential love,” “erotic or romantic love,” and “friendship.” *Elskov*, like Spinoza’s aesthetic *Amor* as initially conceived, is passive and defined by transcendent objects (e.g., an attractively curved physique, or *my* spouse, *my* sibling, *my* child, etc.).¹⁴ *Kjerlighed*, however, which like Spinoza’s nobility is the kind of love that essentially defines the ethics of love, is referred to by Kierkegaard as “self-denial’s love,” “eternal love,” “the spirit’s love,” or “true love.” This love is not defined by external objects, but rather the innermost center of a person (what we commonly refer to metaphorically as the heart). *Kjerlighed*¹⁵ is active rather than passive, and inclusive rather than exclusive. This love is not an unfree reaction caused by external forces; it is a free action produced from within the inner self (the true self)—an action that we may consider to be “as difficult as it is rare” (E5P42S) or “more difficult . . . than to capture a city” (WL 218).

In the expression “you shall love,” the “shall” is a sign of duty or obligation. Where this duty comes from, where its foundation lies, is a mystery. Whether we consider it as a divine command or a law of reason, we do not come closer to unveiling its origin. In either case we are dealing with an a priori source that is grasped through an intuitive seeing. Such is the nature of both Kierkegaard’s and Spinoza’s visions. In Kierkegaard the duty to love is understood as “a change of eternity”—not unlike Spinoza’s *sub specie aeternitatis*—which secures one against every change, despair, and frees one in blessed independence. Let us consider an example.

If I love my beloved with only preferential love and not eternal love, then I can indeed love my beloved passionately, and I may even claim that I love her more than myself. But if my beloved changes and says she no longer loves me and wants to separate, what happens to my preferential love? It may easily change and become hate, in which case I could hardly be conceived as independent of my beloved, but highly dependent indeed. Or, it could happen that I am cast into despair, which for

Kierkegaard is a “misrelation in a person’s innermost being” (WL 40). The only way to avoid or prevent such despair is through “eternity’s shall,” which is to say to transform preferential love into eternal love. When my beloved says she hates me and I recognize that it is my duty to love nonetheless—that nothing changes or revokes this duty—then, and only then, can I freely respond with love. Whether we speak of an eternal duty or a dictate of reason matters little in practice. Kierkegaard recognizes that preferential love involves a misrelation, and so too does Spinoza, who writes:

Then it is to be noted that the sicknesses and misfortunes of the mind derive their origin chiefly from an excessive love for a thing that is subject to many changes, and which we can never possess. (E5P20S)

The corrective to the faulty, excessive, passive love is eternal love, which for both Kierkegaard and Spinoza is said to have its basis in God. Let us grant them this presupposition and not worry about the difference. Let us turn instead to consider “the neighbor.”

The neighbor is the “nearest,” not in the sense of “preferential love,” but in the sense of essential love in which case I understand myself not as he, man, teacher, husband, father, or coach, but rather as “one who is equal” or similar to all others. Conceptually, Kierkegaard tells us, the neighbor is “a redoubling of your own self.” This is difficult to clarify because of the ambiguous term “self.” Kierkegaard writes that “self-love cannot endure ‘redoubling,’” (WL 21) and thus expresses dual notions of the self. The point is that the “true self” found in redoubling is the eternal self that is common to us all. Kierkegaard illustrates this nicely in the following passage.

Every human being is the neighbor. In being king, beggar, rich man, poor man, male, female, etc., we are not like each other—therein we are indeed different. But in being the neighbor we are all unconditionally like each other. Dissimilarity is temporality’s method of confusing that marks every human being differently, but the neighbor is eternity’s mark—on every human being. Take many sheets of paper, write something different on each one; then no one will be

like another. But then again take each single sheet; do not let yourself be confused by the diverse inscriptions, hold it up to the light, and you will see a common watermark on all of them. In the same way the neighbor is the common watermark, but you see it only by means of eternity's light¹⁶ when it shines through the dissimilarity. (WL 89)

Similarity and Dissimilarity: Two Contemporary Readings

This notion of the (true) self in Kierkegaard, which is equal and similar in us all, can be seen as equivalent to Spinoza's understanding of the (true) self, for after all, in Spinoza's thought we are all essentially one, united in our *conatus*, or conscious desire (what I think Kierkegaard means by "passion") to persevere. This is not a common view that I am putting forth, but a recent work by Clare Carlisle entitled *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming: Movements and Positions* also recognizes an affinity here.

However, the ontological interpretation that has eventually emerged from our focus on the theme of movement, and which captures the essence of Kierkegaard's thought—the self as a center of power, and God as the source of all power—is integral to Spinoza's *Ethics* too.¹⁷

Carlisle goes on to explain that for Kierkegaard "the essentially human is passion," and . . . passion is a movement of intensification that can be equated with inwardness itself." She continues by suggesting that this view of Kierkegaard shares an ontological similarity to Spinoza's *conatus* ("the endeavor to persist in being"). Carlisle then writes that "to become religious is to understand that this power which spontaneously pours forth is a loving power."

These are important points by Carlisle that complement my reading of Spinoza and Kierkegaard. Where we seem to differ, however, is that I have focused on affirming the ethical similarity, while leaving religious and onto-theological questions aside.

If pressed regarding the originating impulse of this paper, I might say that it arose from an intuitive awareness of the unity of Spinoza's and Kierkegaard's ethics of love. I could just

feel (recall that for Spinoza feeling and thinking go hand in hand) and see "at a glance" (E2P40S2) that both "adequate ideas" were identical. When readers miss the unity of Spinoza's and Kierkegaard's ethics of love, and many fine ones have, it may be because they accentuate the differences and consequently obstruct or marginalize the same. In Merold Westphal's thought-provoking recent book entitled *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul*, he adopts this more common position, arguing that Spinoza's "alternative ethics" differ "dramatically from that of theism."¹⁸ While there may be theological differences regarding the status of ethical claims, such as whether they are divine commands or not, the emphasis on the ethics of love is of a practical, not theoretical, nature. This emphasis is clearly found in Kierkegaard, a renowned deconstructor of philosophical theory, who focuses on the practical works of love and does not wish to speak of love itself, for it is essentially indescribable and unspeakable. There can be for Kierkegaard no theory of love, for, as has been noted, its origins are essentially mysterious.

The emphasis on the practical ethics of love is less clear in Spinoza, although the title of his greatest work does indicate its priority. *Ethics*, however, is cloaked in a metaphysical, theoretical—and indeed hypothetical—façade. While there are certainly complex historical reasons for this—as well as possible psychological ones which Nietzsche has put forward—we should not lose sight of a simpler, but holistic, hermeneutic hypothesis that Spinoza wrote his famous work in order to cope practically with the violent exigencies of the natural world. The ethics of love is the only true way of coping.

Consider the following proposition—referred to but not cited above—which is a crucial point in Spinoza's ethics of love:

The good which each person who follows virtue seeks for himself he also desires for all other men,¹⁹ and the more so, the more he has a greater knowledge of God. (E4P37)

While I can conceive of reasons why some commentators would not focus on the "ethics of love" in Spinoza, it can hardly be maintained that "nothing" in Spinoza's therapeutic ethics requires that I concern myself with the

happiness of others, forbids me to be indifferent to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.”²⁰ Such a claim fails to acknowledge the active emotions of fortitude and nobility, i.e., love, that figure so prominently in Spinoza’s ethical vision. To imagine Spinoza’s moral exemplar of human nature as lacking the desire to help others is to form an inadequate idea in Spinoza’s terms. Only when I endeavor to help others to become stronger and join them in friendship—or better “neighborship”—by wanting the same good for them that I desire for myself, do I approach what Spinoza understands as an exemplar of human nature.

Although a metaphysical foundation for Spinoza’s ethics is given in his unfolding of the concept of God, the practical love ethic in Spinoza’s work centers on the ideal of a moral exemplar and fortitude. Let us return to consider this active emotion.

Fortitude, as we have seen, has a twofold essence. First, it is a way of being for oneself or “a desire by which each person endeavors to preserve his own being by the dictate of reason alone,” which Spinoza calls “courage.” Second, it is a way of being for others or “a desire by which each person endeavors to help others and join them to him in friendship,” which is called “nobility” (E3P59S). It is important to understand the unity of these two sub-concepts of fortitude.²¹ In desiring to preserve one’s own being one endeavors to help others, and by helping others one preserves one’s own being. This is similar to the Christian command as explained by Kierkegaard: “to love your neighbor as yourself” means “that you shall love yourself in the same way that you love your neighbor when you love him as yourself” (WL 23) In other words, the love of neighbor teaches us to love ourselves in the right way—in a way that causes ourselves to flourish and increase in loving power. Readers who see Spinoza’s ethics as essentially egoistic miss this point, namely that for Spinoza being for oneself is essentially being for others. An additional point against this view is that for Spinoza one is less free alone than with others in a commonwealth (cf. E4P73).

Conclusion

When one realizes how the emphasis on the

relevance of the question of God affects an eminent and insightful commentator on the philosopher of religion, whose central goal is to affirm “theistic theology, for religiously significant discourse about the personal Creator, Lawgiver, and Merciful Savior of Jewish, or Christian, or Muslim monotheism,”²² one can only wonder with fear and trembling what effects the emphasis will work on those less eminent and less insightful. Over-accentuating the relevance of the question of God may very well lead one to undervalue the importance of the practical and singular. While we can with good reason presuppose that this is unintentional, it is difficult to fail to see the “un-ethical” reading of Spinoza that is before us. Any reading of Spinoza that misses the “ethics of love” is a grave distortion. Similar distortions, it is sad to admit, are commonplace within philosophy when embracing practical and singular views are subordinated to abstract questions on the nature of truth. Certainly Spinoza was keenly interested in such abstract epistemological questions, but his conatus—his spirit, his “passion” in the Kierkegaardian sense—would not let him rest there. It led him to affirm a practical philosophy of life in a way like no other modern philosopher did.

What happens when we fuse the horizons of Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* is that the apparently all important question of God loses its relevance. This does not imply that God is irrelevant, but the focus is shifted from a hermeneutics of onto-theological difference to a hermeneutics of the same.²³ When one considers how difficult the ethics of love is to practice, how demanding it is of all one’s energy and focus, then ruminations on the nature of God²⁴ seem misplaced at best. We are thus well advised to suspend the theological question for the higher purpose of loving the other.

In closing, let me summarize the axioms, the commandments, or the prescriptive norms of the ethics of love. As I see it, there are no “you shall nots,” only five “you shalls” (which could easily be changed into Nietzschean “I wills” if you prefer). These nearly all amount to the same thing.

1. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39)
2. You shall desire the good and endeavor to do

what is good for each person. (Cf. E4P37)

3. You shall return hatred with love. (Cf. E3P43)

4. You shall know yourself as free, but know others as determined. (Comment: Notice that following this will eliminate the common attribution error that psychologists are accustomed to explain. It also eliminates the judgment of others and focuses one's attention on the re-

sponsibility of one's self. Philosophically, of course, this is paradoxical, but in the absence of a solution to the knotty problem of free will vs. determinism, this is the most edifying and loving path one can take.)

5. You shall presuppose that love is present in everyone. (Comment: This is basically Kierkegaard's rewriting of 1 Corinthians 8:1, "love edifies." Cf. WL 216–17)

ENDNOTES

1. *The Nature of Love*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), xi. Happily, Singer's comment of two decades ago is now becoming outdated, for there have been many excellent recent philosophical works on the subject of love. While these cannot be listed here, let me simply note an already impressive list of twenty-first century texts devoted to Kierkegaard's vision of love: M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Rick Anthony Furtak, *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); and Joel D. S. Rasmussen, *Between Irony and Witness: Kierkegaard's Poetics of Faith, Hope, and Love* (London: T & T Clark, 2005). See my reviews of Furtak's work in *The Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* 50 (August 2006) and of Hall's and Rasmussen's work in *Religion and Literature* 38 (Winter 2006).
2. "Beyond Intentionality," in Alan Montefiori, ed., *Philosophy in France Today*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 115.
3. Plato, *Euthyphro*, in *Four Texts on Socrates*, trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 47.
4. For Heidegger, Western metaphysics is onto-theology. See Merold Westphal's illuminating discussion in "Overcoming Onto-theology," in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds. *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 148–50. Westphal calls onto-theology "the pride that refuses to accept the limits of human knowledge," however, as I will suggest below, he could go farther in suspending the onto-theological.
5. Quoted by Max Fishler in *What the Great Philosophers Thought about God* (Los Angeles: University Book Publishers, 1958), 245.
6. Jacques Derrida coins this phrase in his famous essay "Differance" to refer to Heidegger's hope of finding the perfect word to express Being. See Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 159.
7. Spinoza disavowed "hope" as a passion that the wise person would avoid. See Spinoza's *Ethics*, trans. G. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), E3P18S2 and E4P47, where E stands for the Part of *Ethics*, P for proposition, and S for scholium. References to this text will follow this pattern and be given parenthetically throughout this paper.
8. Many philosophers overlook this seemingly obvious fact and identify his "interest in the sciences" as "the heart of Spinoza's thought." See, for example, G. H. R. Parkinson's "Editor's Introduction" to Spinoza's *Ethics*, p. 10. While I would not deny that such an interest in the sciences and epistemology is very important and must be acknowledged in Spinoza's work, I would argue that such an admission should not lead to an undervaluation of the importance of what I intend by the term "the ethics of love." It is Spinoza's emphasis on the importance of ethics that separates him from the other modern philosophers and shows him to possess, in my mind, a spirit kindred to Kierkegaard's.
9. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3. Hereafter this work will be referred to parenthetically in the text as WL.
10. Of course, Kierkegaard can also be enlisted to respond to the skeptical and worrisome, for he addresses such persons in the opening pages of *Works of Love*, 5–7.
11. Other examples of ambiguous terms are "freedom" and "emotion."
12. Of the forty-eight emotions listed in the "Definitions of the Emotions," at the end of Part Three, only the

- first two listed, desire and pleasure, can also be considered as actions. This is clear from proposition 58: “Besides the pleasure and the desire which are passions, there exist other emotions of pleasure and desire which are related to us in so far as we act.”
13. Robert Solomon, *Love: Emotion, Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Doubleday, 1981).
 14. Jean-Paul Sartre’s *The Transcendence of the Ego* would be useful here in explaining how the ego should be understood as a constructed, transcendent object, a product of an ego-less self.
 15. It should be noted that contemporary speakers of Danish are not as careful as Kierkegaard in distinguishing the two Danish terms, so that frequently one finds *Kjerlighed* (the modern spelling is *Kjærlighed*) used to speak of what Kierkegaard intends by *Elskov*.
 16. Compare the use of “eternity’s light” in Kierkegaard with Spinoza’s famous *sub specie aeternitatis*.
 17. Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard’s Philosophy of Becoming: Movements and Positions* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), 134.
 18. Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 61.
 19. It is regrettable, although understandable for the time, that the ethics of love found in Spinoza (and Kierkegaard as well for that matter) is not free from sexism and speciesism. Such is indicated by this quote and several others in *Ethics*. My current research includes an appraisal of the inadequacy of Spinoza’s speciesism, which is more prominent than his sexism, in light of the ethics of love.
 20. Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 65, my italics.
 21. A parallel position is found in Spinoza in his understanding that the sub-concepts of thought and extension are united in the concept of substance.
 22. Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 161–62.
 23. Some readers might be unclear over the apparent shift in claiming that the question of God is irrelevant, while not rejecting the possibility that God is relevant. It should be noted that I am thinking within the postmodern tradition of Heidegger, Gadamer, Caputo, and Westphal, which attempts to overcome onto-theology, i.e., the presumption to know how to answer questions about the nature and being of God. Hermeneutical consciousness knows that finite human beings cannot know how to answer such questions in Truth, but this does not imply that God per se is irrelevant (which is a mistake some postmodernists make)—because I simply cannot know who God is or what God means. This is why I claim that the focus of my essay is more subdued than might initially be seen and why I write “of God per se I have nothing to say and humbly remain silent.”
One further point: if we really want to overcome onto-theology it seems to me that we cannot cling to either a theistic or pantheistic conception of God. Why not affirm both Spinoza’s and Kierkegaard’s conception of God? “Because such affirmations involve an absurd impossibility for thought,” one would reply. But is it not entirely the case that “God” is an impossibility for thought—in which case the paradoxical affirmations of “both/and” might bring one capriciously closer to the Almighty?
 24. This holds as well for the nature of “Being,” and it is interesting to note that “*Jehova* is a tenseless term for the Hebrew verb ‘to be.’” Paul Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 6.

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