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THE SANCTIFICATION OF FRIENDSHIP: RECONCILING PREFERENTIAL AND
NON-PREFERENTIAL LOVES IN SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S *WORKS OF LOVE*

by

John Patrick Haman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of
Arts degree in Religious Studies
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2011

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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for the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts
degree in Religious Studies at the May 2011 graduation.

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Melissa Curley

Morten Schlütter

To my mother –

who, from the time I was a small child,
has always encouraged my love of learning.

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CHAPTER I

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FRIENDSHIP

There is something paradoxical about a formal philosophical reflection on friendship, love, or a vast array of intensely personal human experiences. On one hand, many readers may already consider themselves experts on the subject of friendship based on years of practice. During moments of delight, frustration, laughter and tears, a subjective engagement has made each of us intimately familiar with having, and being, friends. At a young age we learned that friends are fun to share our resources and activities with. Later in life when we have a bad day our friends are there to provide comfort and remind us about the good things we have. On the other hand, it is equally paradoxical that perhaps few of these self-professed experts share a common notion of exactly what it means to be a friend, or know the nature of the underlying love of friendship. Few of us even reflect on what moves us to seek the company of our friends. If we dig under the outward actions (which will vary greatly from person to person) and the familiar desire to be loved, what do we find? This level of prodding reminds one of a poor soul who, after being grilled by Socrates about the “real” motivations of his actions, has no recourse but to throw up his hands in utter frustration. It is here at the deepest levels of our personality that Kierkegaard confronts us. As we reflect on what we are doing—and what we *ought* to be doing—when we extend our love to our friends, Kierkegaard presents us with “You Shall Love.” As we will have a chance to explore, many features of the command to love our neighbor as ourselves will challenge us with startling claims that include loving every person equally qua child of God, placing God in the middle of every relationship, and transforming our friends and loved ones into

“neighbors.” Who is our neighbor? What does this term imply about the basic nature we share with our friends and with other human beings? What does it mean to turn friends into neighbors? Is it possible to give special attention to our friends while seeking to hold billions of other people in equal regard?

For many interpreters of *Works of Love*, these questions reveal a fundamental conflict in Kierkegaard’s thought between the claims of special, preferential loves such as friendship and the claims of universal, non-preferential loves such as Christian neighbor love. From their perspective, this conflict prevents anyone from simultaneously conforming to the requirements of each form of love. Either love God and neighbor at the expense of intimate relationships or defy God by binding ourselves together in selfish, worldly loves such as friendship. One cannot seek to love everyone equally while at the same time maintaining a circle of friends to which one devotes substantial time, energy and resources. For these interpreters, Kierkegaard appears to be committed to the implausible view that every resource delegation should reflect my universal concern and be divided equally among everyone (or at least everyone I encounter).

This stark either/or that interpreters find in *Works of Love* has led to a widely-held prejudice against the book that some have taken at face value without picking up a copy for themselves or reading powerful refutations of this viewpoint such as *Love’s Grateful Striving* by M. Jamie Ferreira. Unfortunately, this bias has continued to creep into scholarly works. In a footnote to John Lippitt’s article, “Cracking the Mirror: On Kierkegaard’s Concerns About Friendship,” he notes two recent philosophical investigations of friendship (Lynch, Vernon) that criticize Kierkegaard’s position in

Works of Love without firsthand knowledge of the full body of the text and allow another, older critique to serve as sufficient evidence of its failings:

Both Lynch's and Vernon's books have much to commend them. But on Kierkegaard, they have in common a surprising feature: the exclusion from the bibliography of the very text on which they base their attack on Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*. Revealingly, what both cite is the small sub-section of *Works of Love* excerpted in Michael Pakaluk's anthology: 'Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship' (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991). This sub-section—amounting to twelve pages in Pakaluk's book—is just one third of one of the fifteen deliberations that make up *Works of Love*. Or, to put it another way (using figures from the most recent English translation), 17 pages of a 386 page book. (Lippett, n. 132)

Why this prejudice remains and how long it will last are not questions we will address. Instead, we will turn to *Works of Love* to investigate this tension for ourselves and determine a possible resolution.

Our investigation has two major goals. The first is to decipher the either/or mentioned above that *Works of Love* appears to present to the reader. Is this a choice, as critics have thought, between enjoying special loves such as friendship and practicing universal Christian love? Is Kierkegaard's intention to make Christian love irreconcilable to the love that founds friendship? Our objective is to demonstrate that the answer is "no," and to show that preferential love understood in the context of neighbor love is endorsed by Kierkegaard himself. Why then does *Works of Love* present these two loves as it does? If at the end of the day the two forms of love are compatible, why does Kierkegaard suggest, in the interpretation of many, that they are opposed? This question will lead us to briefly investigate Kierkegaard's historical context and the specific audience he directed his writings towards.

The second objective will be to posit a model of friendship that satisfies the rigorous demands of neighbor love, as Kierkegaard understood the latter. This will

require an investigation of the defining features of such a relationship and an analysis of the nature of love—the love that can reveal itself in friendship, in a relationship to a fellow human being, or in both at the same time. If we recognize in this model the characteristics of friendship with which we are familiar, while also showing how loving our friends can be consistent with hearing and responding to Kierkegaard’s “You shall,” then we will be successful in our endeavor.

The first section will be dedicated to a definition of “neighbor love.” To understand the purported irreconcilability between neighbor love and other forms of love such as friendship it will be necessary to isolate Kierkegaard’s definitions of both, and observe how they interact within his ethical framework. By the end of the second chapter we will recognize an undeniable tension but also begin to see the ways in which it may be alleviated. In order to pursue a solution, we must gain a solid understanding of the Aristotelian concept of friendship that Kierkegaard sets up as a foil for Christian love. We will see that his concern for the lack of Christian categories in Aristotle will also be prominent in his critique of Golden Age Denmark. In chapter three we will reconstruct the context in which Kierkegaard wrote *Works of Love* and what his motivations and intentions were. As we begin to grasp the difficulties for a Christian in Aristotle’s model we will attempt to imagine what Aristotle’s idea of friendship could look like in the context of Christian faith. Robert O. Johann will provide a metaphysical framework that makes it possible to reconcile *eros* and *agape*, the two seemingly irreconcilable forms of love that characterize friendship and neighbor love, respectively. Finally, in chapter five we will return to the tension between neighbor and preferential love to see what light we can shed on the matter after analysis of the nature of love and the sociological framework

in which Kierkegaard worked. We will elucidate Johann's own model of friendship, based on Aristotelian and Christian assumptions, and submit it to a Kierkegaardian critique to discover whether it is a friendship of "conscience." It is hoped that by the time we have concluded this investigation, the contention between the two sides will look more reconcilable and that *Works of Love* may once again be recognized as among the most powerful and beautifully written treatises of love ever written.

This thesis is a work of Christian ethics. It anticipates an audience that is concerned to find a way to love their neighbors as themselves while also enjoying a variety of special relations. However, this is primarily a conceptual analysis of the thought of Kierkegaard into which anyone is free to enter simply to explore what it might mean to be committed to serving one's fellow human beings while acknowledging that we sometimes prefer the company of family and friends. The imperative to love or show compassion to one's fellow human being as such is prominent in many of the world's religions and even those not associated with any religion recognize its importance.

Defining Friendship

Friendship is a rewarding area of exploration because of the joyful side of human reality it reflects. Aristotle was surely not the first one to recognize that friendships make our lives worth living and that, given the choice, we would always live surrounded by people we are bonded together with in affection. Undoubtedly many readers will enter discussions about the nature of friendship like this one with happy memories and aware of the many benefits it has provided to their lives. In many investigations, pre-formed ideas may be considered obstacles to be eliminated by the development of precise

definitions of relevant terms. In this paper, the aim is more to uncover and clarify what I take to be common intuitions about friendship and its value.

For many people, friendship just *is*. Applying a theoretical definition seems to go against the spirit of the very love that underlies our personal relationships and seems to probe a reality best left alone. Yet friendship is an important part of most people's lives and one might reasonably hope that a better understanding of friendship will yield a greater capacity to cultivate good friendships in our lives. At the conceptual level friendship's multi-faceted nature is largely below the conscious radar of many people. We seek, along with Kierkegaard, to raise these hidden aspects into the light for inspection. Whose benefit do we really seek in friendship? Why are we attracted to some people rather than others? Does my love have an underlying foundation or does it act randomly? Although at times it seems nothing could be more natural than having a friend, removing the surface layer reveals a complex reality that conceals important truths of human existence.

Is there a definition of friendship that holds true throughout various times and places? It seems unlikely that this is the case. Location in history and geography play a predominant role in how any social interaction is formally defined. Richard White, in his article "Friendship: Ancient and Modern" points out that when Aristotle wrote about friendship in ancient Greece, adult freeborn men were the only people thought capable of engaging in the best form of it. Further, the ideal friendship, or "character-friendship" implied that affection was not the most important factor (Macintyre 156) and that it was not proper to burden another with one's own hardships. In his book *After Virtue*, Alasdair Macintyre expresses how this attitude is different from our modern conceptions:

Friendship of course, on Aristotle's view, involves affection. But that affection arises within a relationship defined in terms of a common allegiance to and a common pursuit of goods. The affection is secondary, which is not in the least to say unimportant. In a modern perspective affection is often the central issue; our friends are said to be those whom we like, perhaps whom we like very much. 'Friendship' has become for the most part the name of an emotional state rather than of a type of social and political relationship. (Macintyre 156)

An additional difficulty we will address more fully in the next chapter is that the term Aristotle used to refer to friendship (*philia*) applied to a much broader group of people than we would include today such as family and business partners. Later Christian traditions also presented friendship in ways that seem alien to us today. One example is the scholastic scholar Aquinas who spoke of "friendship with God." Even Kierkegaard, though referring to erotic love and friendship in ways that sounds vaguely familiar, seemingly locates them outside the discourse of the Christian life, making it seem that friendship is open to anybody EXCEPT Christians!

In recent times the situation has become increasingly complex with a wide variety of approaches to friendship that reflect the experiences of people who see the world in different ways and value different things. As White points out:

Today we no longer have a sense of the 'common good' that is unanimously agreed upon; in fact, our society endorses a plurality of different and often competing goods, and we cannot presuppose a common framework of beliefs that must bind relationships together at every level. Today, perhaps, we also have a much stronger sense of 'the individual' and the idea that every individual is unique and unrepeatable and, hence, valuable in herself. We like to think that we are all different; while, for the ancients, all of the individual heroes like Hector, Ajax, and Achilles, or the later sages, philosophers, and wise men are basically 'types.' (White 27)

We also cannot overlook the extreme transformation that social relationships have undergone with the explosion of communication media and social networking

technology. The easiest way to track a friendship is by a series of text messages, only rarely interspersed with face-to-face meetings. Sometimes even these meetings are done away with as we acquire new “friends” online whom we may never meet. It is undeniable that today the context in which friendship finds itself is radically different from any other time in history. Faced with these radically varying perspectives, is it possible to come to a consensus on a definition of friendship?

One of the main points of this investigation will be to illuminate the Kierkegaardian notion that something like love or friendship cannot be defined well simply by viewing it as an object and looking at it from the outside. It must be viewed subjectively, that is, from the point of view of a personal subject. Although the visible manifestations of friendship may vary greatly, all love has a common core that can be discovered through philosophical reflection and indeed can only be discerned by each individual. Love is, in part, a kind of interior orientation. It is only by examining this orientation that one can access the character of a given action or relationship that appears to express love. In Kierkegaard’s Denmark, many people identified themselves as “Christians” based simply on outward signs of faith that, while varying, all supposedly pointed to the same internal existence of God’s love. However, Kierkegaard did not believe that the term “Christian” could be applied to oneself simply because of outward actions and birth into a nation that identified itself as Christian. The designation “Christian” implies an inward movement of personality in which our beliefs form our very subjectivity. In other words, no external signs are reliable indicators of the presence of an inner love:

There is no word in human language, not a single one, not the most sacred one, about which we are able to say: If a person used this word, it is

unconditionally demonstrated that there is love in that person. On the contrary, it is even true that a word from one person can convince us that there is love in him, and the opposite word from another can convince us that love abides in the one who said it and does not in the other, who nevertheless said the same word. (WoL 13)

Similarly, our best friendships also have this inward depth. Let us illustrate this in more concrete terms. Imagine I have two people whom I consider friends: Jack and Jill. Jack is someone very much like me. We enjoy doing the same kinds of things and share many common interests and hobbies. Oftentimes we meet for drinks and sometimes take trips together, from which we have accumulated many pleasant memories. When I move, he is the first one I call and he readily agrees to lend a helping hand. If he has girlfriend trouble I am the first person he calls. We rarely fight and if harsh words are ever exchanged they are quickly laughed away. In contrast, Jill has few outward similarities to me. She lives far away and I do not see or talk to her regularly. When we do talk the conversation can sometimes become heated and occasionally forgiveness is not quickly given. In one situation we even competed with each other for the same job and became, in some sense, rivals.

Outwardly it is easy to see that Jack fulfills what many consider to be the ideal of friendship. Our relationship is characterized by reciprocity, equality, and shared pursuits. My relationship with Jill is not quite as rosy and one may wonder why I choose to continue to share my affection with her. However, what if it were discovered that Jack's actions did not reflect a loving apprehension of my being-in-itself but were instead based on a self-concerned desire to have a wing-man in order to approach women he was interested in getting to know better? His main objective, rather than desiring any real connection with my inner personality, is to keep me readily available in case he should

become single again. Although this luxury costs him time and effort, he judges it a fair trade. Should I still consider him a friend? In contrast, what if it became apparent that Jill truly desires to interact with the center of my personality but simply has a difficult time expressing herself? Far from viewing me as a means to an end of her choosing, she desires to know that core of selfhood I call “myself.” The connection we share, although sometimes rocky because of the natural pitfalls of navigating a personality not one’s own, is nevertheless motivated by genuine affection.

Like being a “Christian,” being a friend has more-or-less agreed upon doctrines and outward symbols depending on the social environment we live in. However, the way in which we internally understand our obligation, or whether or not we even do, depends on the underlying inward movement of affection and responsibility. While there are multiple, agreed-upon, outward manifestations of what we consider “friendship” such as spending time together engaging in shared pursuits, the inward motivations for participating in outward actions can range from totally dedicated and unconditional regard to mildly interested and quite conditional regard. Most of us would agree that the ideal friendship is characterized by an underlying “love” from which the acts of friendship spring forth. But what is the nature of love in friendship?

In his book, *Friendship, A Study in Theological Ethics*, Gilbert Meilaender describes the love expressed in friendship as preferential and reciprocal. It is directed toward a particular person with features we find “attractive or choiceworthy.” (Meilaender 3) Our own experiences echo the sentiment that our friends are those whom we enjoy spending time with because of certain personality traits that we are attracted to. Sometimes this attraction will be based on characteristics that we share with friends,

other times it may be a trait we lack but admire in others. In friendship, love can be understood partly as an affirmation of another person's unique characteristics that I find pleasurable and valuable. Our own unique personality allows us to enjoy and appreciate certain characteristics more than others. Finding another person funny, for example, is only possible if his particular sense of humor corresponds to my own. As Meilaender notes, the love expressed in friendship is "friendship" because it is limited in scope; "Friendship is not love in general; rather, it is a deep attachment to and preference for another person because of the sort of person he or she is." (Meilaender 53) In other words, we are friends with those we are attracted to, regardless if we can cite specific reasons for that attraction. This natural attraction will lead to feelings of affection, enjoyment, and wishing the other well for his own sake.

However, the presence of these elements is not equivalent to friendship until they are reciprocated. Meilaender argues that human nature desires not only to give itself in love, but also to be loved in return. (Meilaender 41) The dynamic process of freely giving and receiving affection is a fundamental characteristic of friendship:

... what we need and desire in friendship is not merely the return of our love. We need a relation of both giving and receiving between free and equal participants. To give only for the sake of getting a return must poison the relationships from the outset. And the same is true of giving in such a way that the other is not left free to reject our offer of friendship. (Meilaender 46)

The necessity of reciprocity in friendship combined with the element of wishing the other well for the other's own sake may seem contradictory. If we expect a return for our affection and our benevolence, can we still affirm the other for her own sake? On the other hand, if we show affection and benevolence toward the friend without any expectation or enjoyment of the union we deny a crucial element in friendship. We will

have a chance to address this question at length in the following chapters but for now it is important to emphasize the tension within friendship itself.

We have seen that there are two aspects of friendship's love that cannot be eliminated: preference and reciprocity. Meilaender believes friendship is attractive to us because of the structure of human nature, a nature bestowed on us by God: "As the gift of the Creator, [friendship] has (for the creature) its own legitimate place in human life." (Meilaender 32) This indicates that friendship, its desire of reciprocity and all, is consistent with a Christian doctrine as long as the natural love is "taken up and transformed by love for God." (Meilaender 32) Although friendship is justified on the grounds that it is a "school in which love is learned," its incompleteness seems to point to a love that transcends our human nature. If there is only one true form of love that can properly found friendship and it is discovered that our friendship does not share this source, no matter what outward acts are shown, then we must consider the possibility that what we think is love is essentially something else.

CHAPTER II

NEIGHBOR LOVE VS PREFERENTIAL LOVES

The neighbor is neither the beloved, for whom you have passion's preference, nor your friend, for whom you have passion's preference. (WoL 60)

If there are only two people, the other person is the neighbor; if there are millions, every one of these is a neighbor, who in turn is closer than the friend and the beloved... (WoL 21)

If in order to love the neighbor you would have to begin by giving up loving those for whom you have preference, the word "neighbor" would be the greatest deception ever contrived. (WoL 61)

As far as thought is concerned, the neighbor does not even need to exist. (WoL 21)

From the varying and seemingly conflicting meanings of these four quotations from *Works of Love* a few initial observations can be made. In any book, passages taken out of context can reflect a position not consistent with the book as a whole. This is especially true for *Works of Love*. The passages above seem to express inconsistent viewpoints. This apparent inconsistency has been a focal point for critics who believe the tension between preferential love and Christian love is untenable. On one hand it is impossible to deny that the tension exists and that it appears to have been intentionally built into the structure of the book. On the other hand, just because the text gives the impression of a conflict does not mean the same text does not also posit a solution. It is our goal in this chapter to illuminate this seeming opposition and to map the disagreement between the two forms of love. Because our stated goal is to seek a way to incorporate neighbor love into "preferential" relationships like friendships, it will be necessary to formulate concise definitions of both friendship and neighbor love to use as standards to validate the model of Christian friendship we will discover in chapter four.

Neighbor Love

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard uses the term “preferential love” to refer to erotic love and friendship. In many ways his characterization of friendship seems to share some of the characteristics we described in chapter one. In essence, the people we love preferentially are those we spend most of our time with and appear to care about more than others. We do not call everyone our friends but rather only a few. Kierkegaard characterizes these loves primarily in terms of inclination and desire, most notably the desire of a return of our affection. Because we exist in the temporal realm we have a social instinct and have specific needs that we seek to meet periodically outside of ourselves. Our inclinations and desires to unite with others and enjoy their company are neither good nor evil in themselves like some Christian thinkers had thought but instead are morally neutral.

In other times, when people carried out in life their understanding of Christianity, it was thought that Christianity had something against erotic love because it was based upon a drive; it was thought that Christianity, which, as spirit, has posited a cleft between flesh and spirit, hated erotic love as the sensuous. But this was a misunderstanding, an exaggeration of spirituality. (WoL 52)

However, Kierkegaard does not believe that these relationships, based on “drives,” contain any inherent ethical or spiritual quality and that they can quickly distort the universal command to love if not understood properly. Kierkegaard’s thesis in *Works of Love* is that preferential love is an incomplete form of love that draws increasingly closer to the beloved or friend while simultaneously excluding all other people. This preference causes a marshalling of one’s time, energy and concern in the direction of the beloved who, Kierkegaard assumes, has characteristics that are supremely pleasing and deemed

more worthy of affection and promotion. For Kierkegaard, a human inclination of this sort that expresses itself unchecked opposes the basic notion of universal, Christian love.

The basis for Kierkegaard's concept of neighbor love is found in Matthew 22:39: "But the second commandment is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." His decision to base a core section of *Works of Love* around this verse reflects the theological importance Kierkegaard places on revelation. Without grace in the form of divine revelation humans would be largely ignorant of the ultimate source of their existence. In Kierkegaard's mind, if it weren't for God giving the command, humans would be unable to discover the true nature of love for themselves.

There at the boundary where human language halts and courage fails, there revelation breaks forth with divine origination and proclaims what is not difficult to understand in the sense of profundity or human parallels but which did not arise in any human being's heart. It actually is not difficult to understand once it has been expressed; indeed, it wants only to be understood in order to be practiced, but it did not arise in any human being's heart. (WoL 25)

Taken in this sense, the command can be seen as a form of revelation that imparts divine knowledge to the fallen human state. The "You shall love" becomes a way to glimpse how we are to respond to God and what this response will mean for our interactions with other people. For Kierkegaard, this means treating everyone as though they were a "neighbor" (You shall love your *neighbor* as yourself).

The neighbor referred to in the commandment is "all people" and more specifically, the person who is physically nearer to you than anyone else. (WoL 21) This does not mean we must simultaneously sustain a love of all people at all times in order to satisfy the law, but instead we fulfill it by loving the individual person we happen to encounter, no matter who they may be or whether we already have a relationship with

them: “To be sure, ‘neighbor’ in itself is a multiplicity, since ‘the neighbor’ means ‘all people,’ and yet in another sense one person is enough in order for you to be able to practice the law.” (WoL 21) Kierkegaard seems to be describing a predisposition that recognizes value in every human being and expresses this recognition when it encounters individuals. Although each individual has unique characteristics that make him valuable in himself, this uniqueness also expresses a universal value present in every human being. Kierkegaard points out that the value we recognize in others is also present in ourselves, a fact that is very obvious to us. We are also “neighbors” and when we fully recognize it we have not only learned to love ourselves in the correct way, we have also learned how to love others properly:

To love yourself in the right way and to love the neighbor correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing. When the law’s *as yourself* is wrested from you the self-love that Christianity sadly enough must presuppose to be in every human being, then you have actually learned to love yourself. The Law is therefore: You shall love yourself in the same way as you love your neighbor when you love him as yourself. (WoL 22-23)

The neighbor is every person, including ourselves. When we have discovered the “neighbor” inside us and learn to love it properly, we will consequently discover love for the neighbor that exists outside ourselves.

In many ways Kierkegaard’s characterization of Christian love is the opposite of our description of friendship; the neighbor is not loved because of any distinguishing characteristics nor is reciprocity a motive for loving him. Instead, mutual attractiveness and reciprocity (friendship as we know it) narrow the scope of our love and limits it to certain select people (friends, lovers, etc.). As a result, we “distinguish” between those we have affection for and those we don’t. As we have seen above, to make distinctions

in the value of certain people is to abandon a universal, equal regard for everyone:

“Equality is simply not to make distinctions. . . Preference, on the other hand, is to make distinctions.” (WoL 58) As we will see later, one of the biggest concerns Kierkegaard has about friendship is that it can be a form of selfish self-love in which my love for the other is simply an extended, selfish, love for myself. Instead of being self-loving by oneself, two friends may join and be self-loving together. Ferreira notes that not only does this joined self extend selfishness, but also eliminates the recognition of the friend as truly “other” and entitled to be respected in his autonomy:

It is noteworthy that the most crucial division Kierkegaard makes is between nonpreferential love (Kjerlighed) and preferential love (Forkjerlighed); since the root term is the same, Kjerlighed or “caring,” we can infer that the crucial division is between caring that is not restricted in focus and caring that it restricted. In short, Kierkegaard is here announcing the category of neighbor as one that is intended to safeguard the alterity of the other, to be sure that in love we allow the other to be more than an extension of oneself. (Ferreira 43)

Neighbor love acts to preserve the uniqueness of the other and to make sure we are not using him or her for our own selfish benefit.

However, Kierkegaard does not mean that we should show affection only to those who possess unique features we identify with or find attractive. Rather, everyone is to be loved despite any perfections, or lack thereof. Loving the neighbor means recognizing and appreciating their underlying worth, which is present regardless of any particular feature they possess:

The emphasis is not on loving the perfections one sees in a person, but the emphasis is on loving the person one sees, whether one sees perfections or imperfections in this person. . . He who loves the perfections he sees in a person does not see the person and therefore ceases to love if the perfections cease, when the change begins, although this change, even the most distressing, still does not mean that the person ceases to exist. (WoL 173)

This quote highlights Kierkegaard's concern with the transitory nature of preferential loves. Because the love in friendship is based on the perceived perfections of another person that I find attractive, when these characteristics cease to exist, so does the friendship. On the other hand, neighbor love is unconditional and does not rely on specific features nor a formal relationship. According to Kierkegaard, true love "abides." When a break occurs between two friends the love of friendship ceases to exist but the love of the neighbor that existed between the two should remain unaffected. This is due to the presence of God in the relationship as the "middle-term" which we will investigate later in this section. The important point to note here is that Kierkegaard characterizes the love of friendship as only existing in a state of reciprocity. Once mutual affection is withdrawn, the relationship dies. Kierkegaard finds this characterization to lack the Christian standard of universal love in which no event of any kind, even withdrawn reciprocity, is able to cause the cessation of one's love towards another. The love for our neighbor is unchanging because the neighbor is always present in another person, regardless of our feelings towards him or the relationship that may exist. A love based on something less than love of the neighbor, the essential character of everyone, fails to approach other people (including ourselves) in their essential humanity. We have seen the basis of neighbor love, but how is it lived in the subjective existence of the individual? What is the nature of neighbor "love"?

Love of the neighbor is primarily an inward task of affirming the unique value of other individuals, independent of emotion, inclination or instinct. Whereas the love of friendship includes reciprocated affection and joy, Kierkegaard seems to avoid these terms in relation to neighbor love in fear that they signal improper self-love. Because

neighbor love constantly remains focused on the way we *ought* to treat other people, there is a strong element of ethical responsibility and a level of detachment from the passions. Ferreira points out that the command is simply not capable of asking something of us that we are not able to generate spontaneously: “The command cannot command what cannot be commanded; it cannot command the partiality of inclination or preference, but it does not exclude its presence so long as that partiality does not undermine the impartiality that consists in not excluding anyone from our responsibility to build up.” (Ferreira 260) Ferreira also notes that simply because neighbor love is not predicated on the passionate emotions we feel towards friends does not mean they are completely absent in the proper practice of neighbor love. We cannot be expected to approach strangers with the same kind of devotion we give to our closest friends but at the very least we will exhibit benevolence when attending to those who need our help. In some cases this benevolence will be supplemented by the intimacy found in friendship, other times it will be limited to a willingness to lend a helping hand. Kierkegaard does not reduce all relations to the amount of affection they contain for the simple reason that it varies from situation to situation. It is not the lowest common denominator—our willingness to affirm our responsibility to the neighbor is. (Ferreira 260) What is at stake in *Works of Love* is not the elimination of one form of love or the other but instead what is at stake in the difference. (Ferreira 45)

It is clear that we *ought* to treat everyone as neighbors, as commanded by God. If passionate preference is a laser that directs love on a single point, expecting a return of that love, non-preferential love is a blazing sun that radiates it in all directions without conditions. Non-preferential love, or neighbor love, sees no fundamentally

distinguishing characteristics that make certain people more worthy of love than others. It seeks everyone on the basis of equality—specifically, equality in their being human and their being called to become more fully human in a relationship to the ground of their being. It is unaffected by changing personalities, geographical location, or time. It relies on no temporal qualification and is eternally lasting. It is this love, revealed by the command in Matthew 22:39, which is at the center of *Works of Love*.

Neighbor Love's Origin in the Command to Love

It seems odd to speak of any love and its manifestations in terms of duty. Friendship, in particular, is not generally envisioned as entailing an obligation to love. To say that we are obliged to love the friend seems to fail to appreciate the freedom in which friendship is created and sustained. It seems that a primary feature in friendship is the equal freedom each party has to enter into, or exit out of it. If it turns out that two people have characteristics that are incompatible, the friendship may be quick-lived. In an ideal scenario, the attraction may grow more deeply over time. In either case, a command to love appears to violate the freedom inherent to friendship. Isn't it more noble and satisfying for a friendship to continue on its own mutually recognized merits than to rely on a sense of duty or obligation? We may also doubt we could love another simply because we are told that we ought to. The love we have for friends is based minimally on the recognition of shared values and the knowledge that the other person's affections are genuine and freely given. The fact that my "friend" has been commanded to love me and may not really love me for being me, or enjoy the fact he has to "love" me, will not go very far in promoting genuine reciprocal love from my end. Not unrealistically I may begin to resent what seems inauthentic and forced.

Kierkegaard agrees that friendship can never be commanded because genuine, reciprocal attraction cannot be coerced. However despite this outward appearance of freedom he will argue that it is neighbor love, not friendship, that exhibits true freedom. For Kierkegaard neighbor love is immune to many shortcomings he finds in preferential loves including susceptibility to change, despair, and habit—all of which neighbor love has overcome because of its commanded nature: **“Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured against every change, eternally made free in blessed independence, eternally and happily secured against despair.”** (WoL 29, Kierkegaard’s emphasis) In what ways does the command stabilize and protect the neighbor love it refers to?

As we have perhaps witnessed in our own lives, sometimes friends are transformed into enemies. A disagreement or situation may cause what was once a happy relationship to turn into its opposite. Kierkegaard emphasizes the unfortunate possibility that friendship’s love may turn to its opposite, hate or jealousy, to prove its vulnerability to change. The love of friendship can also diminish in less drastic ways, as when it is transformed by the passing of time into habit. Far from the original passion that ignited the relationship, habit is a “predatory creature” that slowly removes friendship’s love without one even realizing it until it is too late. (WoL 36) The danger with love based on inclination and desire is that it is subject to the whims of our emotions. In addition, it relies on the existence of an equally unstable object of love that that may be subject to a change of heart—leaving us without the “other half” of our love. Kierkegaard does not think this is true freedom, but rather its opposite.

The despair is due to relating oneself with infinite passion to a particular something, for one can relate oneself with infinite passion—unless one is

in despair—only to the eternal. Spontaneous love *is* in despair in this way, but when it becomes happy, as it is called, its being in despair is hidden from it; when it becomes unhappy, it becomes manifest that it was in despair. (WoL 40)

In his view, the truest love should not rely on any temporal good to fulfill itself because by doing so it sets itself up for ultimate failure. To exist solely in love of friendship and other preferential loves is to be in despair, whether one realizes it or not.

In contrast, Kierkegaard believes that neighbor love avoids these pitfalls. With the force of the command behind it, neighbor love is never allowed to change, nor turn into habit. If the object of love is lost, neighbor love continues to love in its absence and “abides.” Abiding, regardless of time or place, reveals an inner continuance and self-evident nature of love that signals a “transformation of the eternal.” Because of this transformation, neighbor love can never be changed into hate or jealousy. It is not altered by the removal of the beloved nor weakened by changing emotions:

Does the dance end because one of the dancers has gone away? In a certain sense. But if the other remains standing in the position that expresses bowing toward the one who is not seen, and if you know nothing about the past, you will say, ‘The dance will surely begin just as soon as the other one, who is awaited, comes.’ (WoL 307)

Kierkegaard believes a love that relies on temporal goods is actually imprisoned within the very inclinations and desires it bases its affection on. Whereas neighbor love is unaffected if the object of love is taken away, the love in friendship atrophies if the object is removed.

For Kierkegaard, “duty is liberating.” (WoL 38) Instead of being a burdensome task, the command releases us from the limitations of our preferential loves:

Alas, we very often think that freedom exists and that it is law that binds freedom. Yet it is just the opposite; without law, freedom does not exist at

all, and it is law that gives freedom...this *shall*, then, makes love free in blessed independence. (WoL 38-39)

By undergoing the transformation of the eternal, love becomes unconditional.

Kierkegaard understands preferential love as conditional love that persists as long as pleasant feelings are exchanged. Once these features change, the love ceases to exist.

Works of Love indicates that all preferential loves end in despair. For loves that are changed rapidly, the despair becomes immediately evident. In other situations the realization does not develop quickly, as with habit: “Alas of all enemies, habit is perhaps the most cunning, and above all it is cunning enough never to let itself be seen, because the person who sees the habit is saved from habit.” (WoL 36) For Kierkegaard, this despair is the ultimate fate of all solely preferential, temporal loves. Even if the pitfalls of the more intense emotions are avoided, persons who feel such love still face the arduous task of sustaining a love based on inclinations and desires that change. We have seen that the command to love is not able to spontaneously generate passionate desire; here we see that passionate desire is also not able to sustain itself over time. Loves that once burned with intensity become routine, even boring. The fire that long ago fueled a friendship or erotic love may fade away to ashes. When we finally awaken from the trance habit has seduced us into, Kierkegaard believes we finally discover the despair that was present all along.

By contrast, the unchanging character of neighbor love protects against both habit and despair: “habit is continually something that *ought to be changed*; the unchanging, however, is something that neither *can* nor *ought* to be changed.”

(WoL 37) Sometimes, we wish we could turn the clock back on many of our relationships to re-experience the passion and the flood of emotions that sparked it. We desire this because many of those emotions have drifted away and have changed or disappeared altogether. However, if the same passion still existed we would have no need to wish a return, and habit would have no sway. For Kierkegaard, neighbor love is impervious to habit because the command perpetually confronts us with an unchanging strength.

Kierkegaard believes we are prisoners of our desires and inclinations but yet live under the illusion that we are free, simply because we can act to satisfy them. Kierkegaard argues against this notion and claims that only the duty given by the command releases us from the prison we occupy; “Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally made free in blessed independence.” (37) Now that we know the characteristics of neighbor love, and who we are to love (the neighbor), we may ask how we are to love them. Kierkegaard answers “as yourself.” But this answer alone seems insufficient. If we have an inherently selfish love that we direct towards ourselves, should we direct it at others? The issue of proper self-love is of crucial importance to Kierkegaard because it will shape the form of the love we direct toward others. Simply, if we do not know what it is to love ourselves as the command requires, we are likewise unaware of the proper way to love others. This question will lead us into further areas of neighbor love including the role of self-denial, God as the middle term in all love and what it means to say that neighbor love is “highest.”

The Role of Self-Love

The commandment said, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” but if the commandment is properly understood it also says the opposite: You shall love yourself in the right way. Therefore, if anyone is unwilling to learn from Christianity to love himself in the right way, he cannot love the neighbor either. He can perhaps hold together with another or a few other persons ‘through thick and thin,’ as it is called, but this is by no means loving the neighbor. To love yourself in the right way and to love the neighbor correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing. (WoL 22)

One of the most important distinctions Kierkegaard makes is the difference between proper self-love (present in neighbor love) and selfish self-love (basis of preferential love). The importance of proper self-love originates in the very command itself: “You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*.” Clearly, if we do not know how to properly view ourselves we will not be able to love others correctly either. What is the “right way” to love ourselves so that we may also direct that same love outward at others?

The primary method used in *Works of Love* to illuminate proper self-love is to contrast it with its opposite: improper self-love. Kierkegaard finds this “selfish” self-love to be present in preferential loves like friendship. This is not the love the command refers to and when people direct it outward they merely extend selfishness, not neighbor love. He believes that selfish self-love may appear to be selfless in relationships like friendship and erotic love, in which two people give themselves to one another, but that it actually expresses an extended self-love. Selfish self-love does not necessarily have to terminate within our sovereign being but may extend outside us to the relationships we actively participate in, especially friendship and erotic love. Kierkegaard thinks that if we

are made happy by the people we choose to be friends with, there is a risk that our ultimate goal for sustaining friendship is *our own happiness*. This is precisely the reason why we choose certain people to be friends with—they have features that are pleasing *to us* and satisfy *our own* desires.

...the beloved and the friend are called, remarkably and profoundly, to be sure, the other self, the other I—since the neighbor is the other you, or, quite precisely, the third party of equality. The other self, the other I. But where does self-love reside? It resides in the I, in the self. Would not self-love then also start loving the other I, the other self? (WoL 53)

Kierkegaard identifies in this tendency a hidden motive in all preferential forms of love. The very act of choosing friends based on our own preferences and desires illustrates our self-directed interest. Loving preferentially is done for our own sake, not out of a love for others. In selfishly loving others we do not display neighbor love but instead an extended self-love that binds together in opposition to the rest of the world. In some sense, by “preferring” the specific people we call friends we continue to satisfy our self-centered desires. By choosing certain people over others we effectively withdraw our love from those we have not chosen. Although we appear to have “given” our love, in reality we have done so to gain the preferential love of our friend in return. Far from being a self-denying act, it is merely an exchange of affection and goodwill in which both parties benefit. This problem is then intensified by the exclusion of other people at the expense of the friend.

Kierkegaard returns to this theme in the deliberation entitled: “Love Does Not Seek Its Own.” In it he confronts those who still believe that in friendship the distinction between “mine” and “yours” disappears and results in a truly unselfish form of love. What more could be asked of someone besides requiring them to give up all they had for

someone they loved? Kierkegaard responds by placing the relationship within the broader context of society. Although it may appear within the relationship that the love is unselfish, from the viewpoint of the rest of the world, the two appear bound together isolated in self-love.

By being exchanged, *mine and yours* become *ours*, in which category erotic love and friendship have their strength; at least they are strong in it. But *ours* is for the community exactly the same as *mine* is for the solitary one, and *ours* is indeed formed—not from the contentious *mine* and *yours*, because no union can be formed from that—but is formed from the joined, the exchanged *yours* and *mine*. (WoL 266-267)

In other words, we would consider someone selfish if they turned their back on us because they particularly loved playing video games and couldn't be troubled with our dire need. However, Kierkegaard believes that when two people bind themselves together they increasingly begin to see only each other and less and less of the needful society around them. From society's point of view, these two people turn their back to the rest of the world as a single unit in the same way our disinterested video gamer shunned our pleas for help. The "ours" is simply a larger manifestation of "mine." This radical devaluing of love in friendship provokes the question: if proper self-love does not involve satisfying my inclinations and desires, what counts as an expression of self-love for Kierkegaard?

Expressing Proper Self-Love through Self-Denial

Self-denial is an important theme in *Works of Love* because it is used by Kierkegaard to counter-balance selfish self-love. As we have seen, Kierkegaard characterizes natural self-love as a movement towards the fulfillment of natural inclinations. One additional characteristic of such self-love is that because everyone seeks its fulfillment, the "world," or society in general, approves of it. Kierkegaard

understands this to be because the world views friendships and special relations for the benefits they offer, not because of any intrinsic value they may have.

The world is no better than this; the highest that it acknowledges and loves is, at best, to love the good and humanity, yet in such a way that one also looks to one's own earthly advantage and that of a few others...one step beyond that and you have lost the world's friendship and love. (WoL 123-124)

As a result, a person who seeks no advantage in love will have difficulty finding a friend and will be forced to endure the world's scorn. It is undeniable that Kierkegaard is reflecting here on his own experience at the hands of the newspaper, *The Corsair*, and his subsequent ridiculing by the citizens of Copenhagen (Garff 395).

M. Jamie Ferreira breaks down self-denial as understood by Kierkegaard into two parts. The first is to give up all the natural self-loving that acts strictly for its own satisfaction. This does not sound totally alien to ordinary conceptions of friendship's love which also expect sacrifice and the suspension of selfish goals. However, in the second movement, Christian love rejects the advantage that accompanies worldly sacrifice. When a natural love sacrifices self-interest, it receives the esteem of the world and gains friends that provide benefits that compensate for what was given up. Kierkegaard's Christian self-denial does not accept these benefits because the motivation for its sacrifice is love of God, not expectation of any return. The "double-loss" in Christian self-denial is the sacrifice of self-interest and also the loss of worldly respect. (236-237) In this understanding, not only is the world opposed to Christian love but the two appear to be inherently incompatible. Kierkegaard emphasizes the hypocrisy in "sacrificing" oneself in order to gain status in the world. He also criticizes the tendency in his "Christian" society to subsume Christian categories by vocally proclaiming its own

supreme authority in the name of Christianity—yet never admitting an existence outside of a worldly category. For Kierkegaard this is a fundamental confusion:

The bungling and the confusing (to which paganism and the poet are just as opposed as Christianity is) result when the defense proceeds on the basis that Christianity does indeed teach a higher love but in addition praises erotic love and friendship...Concerning spiritual matters, one cannot, if one wishes to avoid speaking foolishly, talk like a shopkeeper who carries the best grade of goods but in addition has a medium grade, which he can also very well recommend as almost as good. (WoL 45)

Christianity is indeed the highest for Kierkegaard but not in the way that the world portrays it. This misunderstanding is where Kierkegaard believes many people are led astray.

Christian love does not ask for natural loves to be visibly changed to other “supremely high” natural loves but rather that these natural loves be *transformed* with the introduction of a completely new category. Specifically, the love command requires that one’s foundational regard for every human being be the regard of neighbor love, in which the other is affirmed both in his or her essential humanity and in his particularity, as a unique and irreplaceable child of God. Neighbor love in the form of self-denial rejects the primacy of the selfishness in which natural loves are constructed no matter how “high” they seek to elevate themselves.

But then has not Christianity, since by its ‘You shall love’ it thrust erotic love and friendship from the throne, set something far higher in their place? Something far higher—yet let us speak with caution, with the caution of orthodoxy. People have confused Christianity in many ways, but among them is also this way of calling it the high or the higher to the highest or the supreme highest. Ah, but this is a deceptive way of speaking that untruthfully and improperly allows Christianity to try in a meddlesome way to ingratiate itself with the human craving for knowledge or curiosity. Indeed, is there anything for which the natural man is more desirous than for the highest!...No, the essentially Christian is certainly the highest and the supremely highest, but, mark well, in such a way that to the natural man it is an offense. (WoL 58)

This confusion led to what Kierkegaard believed to be pronounced hypocrisy in the leaders of Denmark's state church. Because it was funded by the government and provided a way of making a living while acting as a collective "witness," it became little more than a worldly institution claiming to be reflecting the "highest" Christian values. Some church leaders lived in luxurious conditions while simultaneously preaching of sacrifice and the blessedness of casting all worldly cares away. In his righteous indignation over this blatant hypocrisy Kierkegaard focused on key figures such as Bishop Mynster who were particularly egregious examples of not practicing what they preached. We will explore this issue in greater detail in the next chapter but for right now the point is that Kierkegaard thought that hypocritical church leaders speaking about Christian love as the "highest," only directed people toward the visible and worldly and away from God. The result was a country that titled itself "Christian" and assumed that by simple geographical location everyone within it automatically became a "Christian" by association. Kierkegaard passionately opposed this false understanding; "The word 'Christendom' as a general designation for a whole nation is a caption that easily says too much and thus in turn prompts the single individual to believe too much about himself." (WoL 48) In the next chapter we will investigate the way in which *Works of Love* as a whole can be seen as a corrective to this false belief.

Kierkegaard's focus on the expectation of persecution gives ammunition to critics like Knud Ejler Løgstrup who claim that under this model self-denial becomes the true end of the Christian. Løgstrup interprets Kierkegaard to hold that one cannot expect the neighbor to ever recognize an act of love because any recognition would take away the element of "hatred" that the world is supposed to show towards the Christian. (Løgstrup

221) In other words, any act of love that does not immediately provoke persecution from the world fails to meet the standard of self-denial because one risks being praised for a kind act:

It is therefore implicit in Kierkegaard's thinking that the worst thing that could happen would be for our neighbor to recognize that he or she was an object of love. If our neighbor understood that something had been done for his or her welfare, everything—from a Christian standpoint—would be spoiled. Why? Because...the Christian would be basking in the applause of his or her neighbor. And then where would self-denial be? It would become a pretense because the Christian would receive the applause of his or her neighbor for it. (Løgstrup 221)

Ferreira replies to this challenge by citing the example of Luther and the similar path which Kierkegaard followed: "Luther had made it clear that suffering as such is not the goal; we are not to artificially seek suffering, although it will in all likelihood be the result of our imitation of Christ." (237) In other words, the Christian is not required to seek out hardship in the name of faith but rather must be steadfastly resolved to suffering it if the occasion arises. Ferreira emphasizes that the Good Samaritan was not out explicitly looking for ways to deny himself but rather encountered a situation in which expressing love necessarily involved a sacrifice in time and resources. Suffering is not an end in itself but rather may be required as a consequence of the expression of love.

Underscoring Kierkegaard's elucidation of self-denial is the attempt to define a love free of selfish self-interest. By eliminating both the expression of natural inclination and the chance of any benefit that would render the sacrifice invalid, Kierkegaard has given the reader an example of what such a love would look like. However, the picture he paints is a bleak one that emphasizes only the sacrifice inherent in the love. As in the case of the command, Kierkegaard balances out the negative characterization with one that is somewhat more positive and descriptive of the joys that accompany Christian love

in the deliberation entitled; “Love Does Not Seek Its Own.” Kierkegaard emphasizes that in erotic love and friendship, the “mine” and “yours” distinction is not eliminated but merely exchanged. However, as long as the division remains there can be no neighbor love:

Love does not seek its own, for there are no mine and yours in love. But ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ are only relational specifications of ‘one’s own’; thus, if there are no mine and yours, there is no ‘one’s own’ either. But if there is no ‘one’s own’ at all, then it is of course impossible to seek one’s own. (WoL 265)

In order to eliminate the selfishness of improper self-love it is necessary to dissolve the antithetical “mine” and “yours” altogether while still maintaining the distinction between the “I” and “you.” Kierkegaard does this by relinquishing the “mine.” If there is no specification of “mine,” then everything belongs to another. However, with the removal of “mine,” the dichotomy between “mine” and “yours” evaporates and everything that was sacrificed is in some sense returned. By reaching out in sacrificial, benevolent love and dissolving all selfish desires in full acceptance of the distinctive value of another, we “infinitely distinguish” ourselves in our own love. Before this movement we were not affirming ourselves as neighbors but were bound up in inclination and desire. By sacrificing these desires and giving up the “mine” we affirm our very being. In this process we relinquish our selfish desires, aspects that are not the essential “us,” and in doing so gain our true selves:

...a wondrous thing occurs that is heaven’s blessing upon self-denying love—in salvation’s mysterious understanding all things become his, his who had no mine at all, his who in self-denial made yours all that was his. In other words, God is all things, and by having no mine at all self-denial’s love won God and won all things. (WoL 268)

Far from giving up all things for the sole pursuit of persecution and hatred, by dissolving the selfish desire that separates the “mine” from the “yours” the miracle of God’s love is allowed to enter the person. By giving up all things in self-denial, Christian love gains everything. The Christian is not motivated by the desire of a sensual bliss or psychological comfort, but rather acts out of faith in the spiritual authority of the command. He is not motivated by a selfish intent but instead sacrifices everything in order to reunite himself with the ground of His existence and to relinquish self-centered desires and the praise of the world.

To summarize, Kierkegaard’s thesis is that proper self-love is not characterized by constant striving to fulfill our inclinations but rather consists in affirming our spiritual being that remains independent of these desires. Although he is not advocating that our desires be completely suppressed, he thinks proper self-love will prioritize them in view of our commitment to affirming the unique value of ourselves and others. We will act in a way that first respects the dignity of ourselves and others and only then, after we are sure we are acting in a way that is consistent with the spirit of neighbor love, will we pursue the temporal goods we need. Kierkegaard is not denying the importance of these goods in our life, or the richness they add to living. Rather, he is preventing these concerns from eclipsing the inherent dignity of each human being, including us.

One final aspect relating to self-denial should be emphasized. It has been seen that when we deny priority to our inclinations we come closest to God by dissolving all selfish attachments and opening ourselves to the knowledge of God’s love. The inward movement in which we recognize the element we share with everyone else that makes us “neighbors” is Kierkegaard’s ideal form of proper self-love. The “as yourself” of the

commandment directs our attention to the fact that we presuppose intrinsic value in ourselves and most likely do not need to be reminded why we are unique and deserve to be loved. As we have seen above, the same presupposition of value in ourselves (the “neighbor”) is also what we direct outward. In essence, we love others in the same way we love ourselves and hence, we also are called to presuppose love in other people as we do in ourselves.

When Kierkegaard speaks of presupposing love in another person, he does not mean that we assume they have a loving disposition or that they strive to love everyone as a neighbor. Rather, he is pointing to the *potential* everyone has to love and to attain the highest levels of neighbor love. This act can be likened to God’s presupposition that there was love in human beings and that they could strive to love in a neighborly way. Instead of (somehow) revealing this by direct means, Christ sacrificed himself in the hope that this loving act towards us would “love forth” love in us. “Have you not experienced this yourself, my listener? If anyone has ever spoken to you in such a way or treated you in such a way that you really felt built up, this was because you very vividly perceived how he presupposed love to be in you.” (WoL 222)

The fundamental characteristic in love is that it “can and will be treated in only one way, by being loved forth; to love it forth is to build up. But to love it forth is indeed to presuppose that it is present in the ground.” (WoL 217) Love, unlike wisdom and talent, is not a being-for-itself but rather “a quality by which or in which you are for others.” (WoL 223) In order for a person to be “loving” they must seek to make other people feel “built up” by presupposing the existence of love in them. This, then, is the outpouring of our love towards others. Instead of selfishly presupposing only our own

worth and value we extend this love towards others. In cases in which I am confronted with a person that is highly repulsive to my natural temperament, my fundamental desire to build up in love will positively influence my attitude toward the person and undoubtedly my actions as well. My recognition of the command will affirm the intrinsic value of this person regardless of the way he treats me because my love, neighbor love, is not predicated on his actions. Instead, I presuppose the existence of love in him and do my best to love it forth. Rather than return hate with hate, which nets only the same, I will return hate with neighbor love in the hope it will kindle love inside him.

This orientation reflects the ethical aspect of neighbor love we described above. For Kierkegaard, choosing to love a certain way is not primarily a decision about how to act but what kind of orientation to assume towards the other. Although actions undoubtedly spring from this orientation, Kierkegaard wants to focus on the inward movement of “conscience” that helps us overcome selfish desires that attempt to dictate our relation to others: *“Love is a matter of conscience and thus is not a matter of drives and inclination, or a matter of feeling, or a matter of intellectual calculation.”* (WoL 143, Kierkegaard’s emphasis) If neighbor love is exclusive of inclinations and feelings, and preferential loves are composed exclusively of these elements, does this mean the two forms of love are mutually exclusive?

But the essentially Christian is too earnest to be distinguished. It does not wish to bring about any external change at all in the external sphere; it wants to seize it, purify it, sanctify it, and in this way make everything new while everything is still old. The Christian may very well marry, may very well love his wife, especially in the way he ought to love her, may very well have a friend and love his native land; but yet in all this there must be a basic understanding between himself and God in the essentially Christian, and this is Christianity. (WoL 145)

It seems that Kierkegaard is doing his best to confuse us. After disparaging loves like friendship he now seems to endorse them, albeit under a certain condition. How can a person engage in preferential loves (which are based on selfish self-love, according to him) and at the same time participate in self-giving Christian love that seeks no outward change? This is the crux of the tension: how do we maintain our preferential loves and continue to love the neighbor?

As we will see, the “basic understanding” that characterizes neighbor love is an inward movement that recognizes our responsibility before God and the irreplaceable value of other human beings. For Kierkegaard, the command reveals the true nature of love. In order to adhere to it, we must always keep our responsibility to the command in our mind and it must play an active role in how we orient ourselves towards others. No inward movement of love may be legitimized unless it is successfully passed through this understanding of the conscience. What is the nature of the conscience and what role does God play in it?

God as Middle Term

Neighbor love is the responsibility before the command to affirm every human being in his or her intrinsic value before God. Kierkegaard does not believe simple alteration of outward actions is sufficient to reflect this responsibility. To return to the example given in the introduction, Jack displays actions that appear to be self-giving, and he will receive the world’s praises because his actions can be verified by their existence out in the open. The fact that he acts from self-interested motives is of little concern to the world because it remains unseen. However, Kierkegaard believes that Christianity expresses the opposite view. “Worldly misunderstanding needs to have it outwardly

expressed that love in the Christian sense is the spirit's love—ah, but this cannot be outwardly expressed, since it is indeed inwardness.” (WoL 146) Kierkegaard maintains that what is of primary concern to Christianity is not the outward actions but rather the motivations that drive actions. These motives are precisely what Kierkegaard wants to emphasize. Jack's priorities are based on his own inclinations and desires, rendering his “acts of love” no more than superficial ways of getting what he wants. Kierkegaard does not believe this orientation reflects neighbor love. This is not to say that getting what we want is wrong, but rather that this desire should be subordinated to our responsibility before God. “Christianity teaches that that God has first priority...and everything, everything a person owns is collateral to this claim.” (WoL 149)

But what about friendships that are not based on the model of “Jack?” Surely we would not characterize the love of friendship as radically self-loving but rather self-giving. Despite our best intentions, Kierkegaard believes we still fall victim to a standard less than neighbor love to determine how we love. As we have already seen, he argues that preferential love is ultimately self-loving because it is based on inclinations and desires and is incapable of reaching neighbor love on its own—loving the neighbor requires the immediate presence of the command. Although friendships are not inherently evil they are nonetheless incomplete because they use only another person's standards of love. There must be another component of the relationship that ensures both people act in accordance to the standard of neighbor love. For Kierkegaard, this third element is God.

However beautiful a relationship of love has been between two people or among many, however complete all their desire and all their bliss have been for themselves in mutual sacrifice and devotion, then though everyone has praised this relationship—if God and the relationship with

God has been omitted, then this, in the Christian sense, has not been love but a mutually enchanting defrauding of love. (WoL 106-107)

God is the ultimate grounding of our existence and is the source of love. Without his example, and the command, we would not know how to put aside our inclinations and love the neighbor. By hearing the command and striving to imitate God's love we draw closer to him and consequently, the true expression of love. Kierkegaard believes that any form of love not ultimately founded on the desire to love in godly way is reduced to the fulfillment of natural desires. Only by placing God as the "middle-term" in every relationship are we able to view every person as a "neighbor" who exists as an intrinsic, unique value. "Worldly wisdom is of the opinion that love is a relationship between persons. *Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: a person—God—a person, that is, that God is the middle term.*" (WoL 106-107, Kierkegaard's emphasis)

Kierkegaard believes that before we may love another person as a neighbor we first need to have a relationship with God. It is in that relation that we hear the command and assume personal responsibility for living it in our lives. Loving the other as a neighbor is affirming the love that God has for them and also affirming our own participation in that love. Our own participation in God's love consists in keeping the duty to love constantly in mind: without a relation to it, and God, I risk falling back into inclination and desire. Therefore, in my subjective experience of loving the neighbor there are three elements; myself, the neighbor, and the standard by which I love the other (my God-relation, the middle-term).

It is important to stress the central role of the God-relation. Without it, the "neighbor" does not exist as such, nor do I exist in a state where I can recognize him.

Kierkegaard stresses that we must first secure ourselves in our relation to God and only then are we prepared to love properly:

The God-relationship is the mark by which the love for people is recognized as genuine. As soon as a love-relationship does not lead me to God, and as soon as I in the love-relationship do not lead the other to God, then the love, even if it were the highest bliss and delight of affection, even if it were the supreme good of the lovers' earthly life, is still not true love. (WoL 120)

Kierkegaard thinks the best way to love another is to awaken in them their own existence as a neighbor. Although he does not spend time elaborating on why that is, we may posit that presupposing love in another person gives them an opportunity to recognize the “neighbor” inside themselves, if they have not already. Basically, if I treat a person with the respect he deserves it may influence him to develop a God-relation. Although he may be frustrated by my standard of love that does not coincide with his own, it is possible that this clash could provoke an inner questioning that ultimately results in a God-relation of his own. For those already in a God-relationship, our “middle-terms” will overlap and simultaneously help us both to reach deeper levels of communion with God and each other. Presumably this is the ideal of friendship that Kierkegaard would endorse. Later in this investigation we will analyze the nature of two benevolent loves in communion with one another.

Although we have referred to the God-relation as a type of “standard” it is important to realize that it is more than simply an objective guideline or “rule to live by.” Instead, the God-relation is a vibrant, living dynamic that unites us with the ground of our being and allows us to see the value associated with being a “neighbor.” Not only does the middle-term provide the command, but it also encourages us when we are met by the

scorn of the world. It is truly a lived reality that shapes our orientation towards other people but also is the very basis upon we rest our lives.

It is also important to note that the God-relationship does not obscure the relationship I have with my friend but only conditions my response to her. Because the way in which I approach others is internally conditioned by my God-relationship, this understanding will color any relationship I am engaged in. Kierkegaard would contrast this to a pre-command state in which we are unaware of our responsibility to the neighbor and focus instead on fulfillment of our inclinations. If anything, placing God as the middle term allows us to more fully comprehend the great value of another person. Once the primary focus has been shifted from “my desires” to “your intrinsic value” I am free to embrace my friend with greater fullness.

By imposing the eternal standards of true love and keeping God as middle term, a relationship is protected from becoming consumed by inclination and desire. Instead of loving the beloved according to society’s standards, we abide in the love determined by the presence of God in our conscience, even though it may not reflect the love she expects to be treated with. As a result we may possibly become “hated” by the beloved. If we are not willing to conform to the standards of the people we love, and they do not recognize God’s command, they may become upset when we refuse to orient ourselves in a way that violates the “middle-term” of the relationship. To them, it will seem as though we are self-loving by violating their standard of love. For Kierkegaard, placing God as the middle-term and following his command means being “willingly to endure being hated as a reward for one’s love.” (WoL 114) However, this does not mean our God-relation has blocked our view of the intrinsic value of the other; rather, it allows us to see

this value with increasing clarity. We deny the beloved's request based precisely on the recognition of their intrinsic worth and refuse to adhere to another standard we do not believe accurately reflects it. God as the middle-term allows us to see that truly loving another is not based on adhering to *her* ideas but on adhering to *God's* standard of love (neighbor love). Far from being self-loving or overlooking the other, we are reaching out in what we consider to be an eternally validated love.

Neighbor Love and its Opposition to Preferential Love

If we accept the conclusion that neighbor love opens up a new dimension that allows us to share in God's limitless love we still may be at a loss for how to practice it in our daily lives. It is precisely here that a tension becomes evident. What are we to make of the radical opposition that Kierkegaard appears to draw between neighbor love and erotic love and friendship? At one point he claims that the only way to love the neighbor is to give up all claims to the happiness of erotic love and friendship and accept the claim eternity presses on the individual. (WoL 90) Erotic love and friendship are not only thrust down but also stand directly in the way of understanding and practicing neighbor love.

Anyone who insightfully and earnestly reflects on this matter will readily see that the issue must be posed in this way: shall erotic love [Elskov] and friendship be the highest love [Kjerlighed] or shall this love be dethroned?...No, if it is certain that Christianity teaches that love for God and the neighbor is true love, then it is also certain that what has thrust down 'every high thing that elevates itself against the knowledge of God and takes every thought captive in obedience' has likewise also thrust down erotic love and friendship. (WoL 45)

From passages like these it appears that neighbor love is both higher than natural loves and replaces them. By Kierkegaard's own words it seems that the intrinsic incompatibility of the two loves can only mean an either/or, and if one is a Christian then

neighbor love is the only choice consistent with the Kierkegaard's elucidation of Matthew 22:39. While the intent of the paper is to show that this is precisely *not* the either/or that *Works of Love* offers the reader, there can be no denying that this tension is evident and appears to be deliberately fostered.

Although we will analyze Kierkegaard's role as corrective in chapter three, we can begin to see that the tension he brings to bear is not simply about two forms of love but is also concerned with a fundamental misunderstanding of the demands of being a "Christian":

Whereas, alas, people forget what the pastor has said, how accurately and how long they do remember what the poet has said, especially what he has said with the help of the actor! This certainly does not mean that efforts, perhaps by force, should be made to get rid of the poet, for that would result only in a new illusion... (WoL 47)

When it came to relationships like friendship, Kierkegaard observed that the members of Danish society seemed to form their judgments about ideals from poetic accounts and popular literature. At the same time, they naively believed that because they lived in a country that was "Christian" these ideals would be consistent with what it meant to be a witness to the truth. This same perversion of Christianity also applied to the social relationships the Danes had: "It is obvious in Christendom we have completely forgotten what love [Kjerlighed] is. We pander to erotic love and friendship, laud and praise them as love, that is, as virtue. Nonsense!" (WoL 424)

In the context of *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard uses the poet to reflect how a particular culture or society defines the ideal in friendship or love. In nineteenth century Denmark, Kierkegaard was referring to classic and popular literature. Today these ideas are transferred not only by literature and plays, but television, movies and the internet. In

one way or another, the popular conceptions of friendship frame how we approach others. As a result, when Kierkegaard refers to the poet we may also understand him as referring to popular conceptions and standards society has in place. When he refers to “erotic love and friendship *as understood by the poet*” it is helpful to remember that the poet symbolizes both a “pagan” perspective and also a confusion of the categories in which someone who acts in strictly temporal ways understands herself as also being “Christian.”

Returning to the difference between preferential and non-preferential love, it is not our intention to resolve the conflict in the present chapter but rather to highlight Kierkegaard’s perspective. From our initial analysis of neighbor love we have observed that it is self-denying and seeks to reach out in love for the sake of the other and her relationship with God. However, as we have seen, the nature of Kierkegaard’s self-denial does not preclude a certain affirmation of the self (as recognition of myself as a neighbor). This positive experience of the self is not based on the fulfillment of selfish desires but on the experience of being rooted in the love of God. A self is not essentially defined by temporal attributes but rather by its standing before God in full view of both the law and the gospel. Neighbor love also stresses that the person to whom we reach out has equal standing to both ourselves and everyone else in the world. They are not bound up with our own self-interestedness but exist independently from us; rather than “other-I” they are “first-you.” (WoL 57) The way in which our love manifests itself is by our presupposition of love in others and thereby “loving forth love.” We will keep these designations in mind as we search for a reconciliation between neighbor and preferential love and envision what turning this principle into concrete practice may look like.

However, before doing so we need to become more familiar with the problem Kierkegaard sees with natural loves like erotic love and friendship. As we have observed, he seems to view them simply as extended forms of self-love and not intrinsically valuable on their own. Illustrated by his use of the “other-I” as a foil to Christian love, he seems to be pointing directly at Aristotle and the classic notion of friendship. Understanding how he believes these loves fail on their own merits and lack the interior movement of the Christian will require a brief analysis of the origin of the traditional philosophical analysis of friendship, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.

CHAPTER III
THE CLASSICAL MODEL OF FRIENDSHIP
AND THE ORIGIN OF THE “OTHER-I”

Undoubtedly the most well-known and cited philosophical treatment of friendship is located in chapters eight and nine of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Many important theologians such as Aquinas used the *Ethics* to construct frameworks that describe the ideal ways of relating to other people in Christian love. 20th century Catholic thinker Robert O. Johann, whose ideas will become vitally important in developing a model of Christian friendship in chapter four, was heavily influenced by the Aristotelian ideas that had passed through a Christian transformation.

It is clear that Kierkegaard was also well-read in Aristotle from a survey of his extensive library which included many volumes of Aristotle’s works and commentaries. One such commentary was written by F.C. Sibbon, who was the Dean of the Faculty of the University of Copenhagen. Kierkegaard had personally submitted his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* to Sibbon in 1841. (Garff 196) Many Aristotelian concepts such as “potentiality” and “actuality,” found their way into important Kierkegaard works including *The Concept of Anxiety*. One such concept used in *Works of Love* that appears to have originated in the friendship chapters of the *Ethics* is the “other-I.” This term, which emphasizes the way in which our personalities and interests are transplanted to our friends, is used positively in Aristotle’s usage and negatively in *Works of Love*. The different ways Kierkegaard and Aristotle employ this term reveal the fundamental differences in how each thinker envisions the self and its ultimate goal and grounding. Many other components of the model of friendship

Aristotle develops, such as reciprocity, pleasure, and preference also figure prominently in *Works of Love* and earlier books including *Either/Or*. The reoccurrence of these concepts throughout the authorship, combined with Kierkegaard's familiarity with Aristotle and the prominent influence of classical thought on his writing makes it a safe assumption the model of friendship critiqued in *Works of Love* finds its origin in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Our primary area of interest in Aristotle's model of friendship is the relationship between the love we have for ourselves and the love we direct towards others. The *Ethics* claims that a more virtuous person will have friends, that he will love them for their own sake, and that he will become virtuous by having them. Being virtuous is the highest goal of human life and will lead a person to "happiness." However, this confronts us with the question of whether or not the seemingly unselfish act of loving a friend hides a selfish motive. Are friends for improving character or are they truly loved for their own sake outside of any benefit that might result? Questions concerning the role of self-love will be our primary focus in our investigation of Aristotle's model because it is precisely this point Kierkegaard seizes upon, interpreting Aristotle in a way that makes every form of compassion found in friendship based ultimately on improper self-loving desires. We will ask whether this is a fair reading of Aristotle, if there are more accurate interpretations, and what reasons Kierkegaard may have had for choosing the reading he did.

In moving forward with a description of Aristotle's model of friendship I will rely on two main sources: Michael Pakaluk's, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* and Lorraine Smith Pangle's *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship*. Pakaluk's book is a

commentary specifically centering on the *Ethics*, while Pangle's book seeks to bring various perspectives together in a study of friendship through an Aristotelian lens. However, before directly confronting friendship in the *Ethics*, we should address a few basic assumptions that Aristotle uses to construct the ideal form of friendship. These assumptions will be critical in not only understanding how he constructs his model of friendship but also in comparing his model to Kierkegaard's conception of universal love.

Eudaimonia

According to Pakaluk, Aristotle believes every person shares the common goal of achieving the "good." The "good," or *eudaimonia*, can be translated in a number of ways including blessedness, happiness or prosperity. It is also bound up closely and somewhat synonymous with the ultimate goal of human life. Key to Aristotle's thought is that human beings have a specific teleology distinct from any other form of existence. However, in the course of life some human beings will get closer to this ideal than others. In Aristotle's view, those who strive towards their own ideal form are closer to fulfilling their teleology and are closer to *eudaimonia* than those who do not apply the needed effort. To achieve "happiness," a person needs to cultivate certain characteristics or virtues that perfect a person and help him move closer to the ideal. As Pakaluk puts it; "A *good* thing of a certain kind is that which has the *virtues* that enable it to carry out its *function* well." (Pakaluk 6) In order to illustrate this idea in concrete terms, Pakaluk uses the analogy of a knife. The function of a knife is cutting. Few other kitchen instruments are able to perform this task, and very few as effectively as a knife. Even within the category of knife there are higher and lower levels of fulfillment. Some knives are dull and may cut poorly, if at all. Others may be poorly constructed and fall apart, thereby

inhibiting their cutting function. These knives lack the virtues necessary to cut well and therefore lack the characteristics of the ideal. The knife that cuts well has features that include being sharp, having a blade shape that enables cutting, and having a well-constructed body. This knife can be seen as approaching the “good” of a knife; “the ultimate goal of a knife is to engage in cutting *in the way that a knife cuts when it has the “virtues” of a knife.*” (Pakaluk’s emphasis 6-7) Similarly, humans come closest to eudaimonia when they attain the characteristics that, when possessed, bring them closest to the human ideal. Generosity, courage, and fairness are examples of these virtues. As we will explore below, friendship helps a person to develop virtue.

Friendship in the Nicomachean Ethics

Before we begin to investigate these aspects it will be helpful to consider exactly what Aristotle is referring to when he speaks of *philia*, or friendship. In her book, *Aristotle’s Philosophy of Friendship*, Suzanne Stern-Gillet summarizes the scholarship on the term by pointing to the many relationships it could refer to, many of which we may not recognize today as friendship. These extended relations include the members of one’s household, guest friendships, or “those individuals whom blood, law, or custom have made one’s ‘nearest and dearest’” (Stern-Gillet 6) Today many of us think of the term friendship being separated from categories such as family or acquaintances and do not consider everyone we are thrown into contact with “friends.” Rather, our friends are chosen from these accidental encounters and remain in a separate category.

Despite difference in definitions, we can find many aspects of Aristotle’s description of friendship that we recognize today. In *Choosing to Feel*, Diana Cates presents us with a concise definition of Aristotle’s friendship as “a relationship of

mutually known and reciprocated affection and well-wishing in which each person wishes and does good to the other for the other's own sake." (Cates 50) This definition goes a long way in illustrating that Aristotelian friendship contains the same aspects of affection, goodwill and reciprocity we acknowledge today. Cates points out that this definition is true for all kinds of friendships, whether they be the most ideal character-friendships or those for utility or pleasure. Affection and wishing the other well play a key role, as well as perceiving that this well-wishing is reciprocated. It is obvious to Aristotle that a person cannot be friends with another unless each recognizes the mutual regard and returns it. This model supposes that the benevolence felt by one friend towards another is truly for the other person's own benefit—for his/her own sake. There are many people in our lives whom we may wish well for their own sakes: colleagues, acquaintances, next door neighbors, etc. However, not all those we wish well are our friends, or are those towards whom we also feel affection. Because of varying conditions many do not become our friends. However, there are times in which our goodwill is met by another's goodwill in a way that we are allowed to continue the exchange. These initial gestures may then grow into reciprocated affection and greater opportunities to share virtuous activities which is seen by Aristotle as the height of a virtuous life. Initially all that was present was the unselfish giving of our goodwill. Because of this basic goodwill and an initial level of affection, a reciprocal relationship is given a chance to develop. As the relationship grows stronger each person feels more closely bound to the other as "one," and wishes the other well for his own sake in the same way he wishes himself well.

Aristotle points out that if the attainment of affection and reciprocity were our goals to begin with we would not be wishing them well for their benefit, but rather our own.

For a person who has been benefited renders goodwill in exchange for what he has received, if he does as justice requires; and anyone who wishes that another flourish, hoping to be assisted by him, seems to have goodwill, not for the other, but rather himself (just as he is not in fact a friend if he attends to him on account of a particular sort of usefulness that he has). (1167a20-26)

In other words, if we act in goodwill simply for the intent to gain benefits in self-love, we do not act in a spirit of true goodwill.

But what about Aristotle's praiseworthy self-lover who looks for noble acts to accomplish so that he may reap the benefits? Would it be possible for someone to perform an act that appeared outwardly to be self-sacrificing, but inwardly be collecting benefits they considered to be worth more than material wealth? "And he gives up money on condition that his friends receive more, since the friend gets money, but he gets what is noble; thus he assigns the greater good to himself." (N.E.1169a28-30) Is it contradictory to label an act self-sacrificing when the person who performed it received what they considered to be (albeit, internal) superior rewards?

Pangle focuses on this apparent contradiction. Rather than an apparent sacrifice she observes that it appears to be "an exchange of lesser goods for greater goods." (Pangle 175) To gauge the merit of this objection, Pangle offers three interpretations of Aristotle's statement that; "...a good person does the very things he should do—because every mind chooses what is best for itself..." (1169a18-20) An analysis of the various manifestations of self-preference will go a long way to reveal the ultimate motivation

behind friendship and see whether its motivations are inherently selfish, selfless, or something in between.

The first interpretation Pangle considers is strictly hedonistic and difficult to find complete justification for in the *Ethics*. On this view, the mind views its powers of reason as the sole purpose of life and becomes strictly concerned with matters related to its expansion and fulfillment. Natural desires, such as those to eat or sleep, are accepted grudgingly because without them the mind will physically perish. Loving others for their sake in friendship has no room in this view because nothing outside of the individual's own good matters. One could have friends but they will simply be viewed as means to the end of a more rounded intellect. This formation frames the other person little like a friend and more like a servant or slave. Pangle quickly points out that such an interpretation does not take into consideration the practical focus of the text. Aristotle focuses on practical intelligence which directs the actions we undertake in regard to all parts of our being, including natural ones. Aristotle's reference to an intelligence that directs the person towards what is best should be interpreted to mean its constant guidance in every decision we make, whether that decision is an outward one like the treatment of other people, or the inward development of virtue and moral intelligence.

(Pangle 177)

Pangle next suggests a seemingly more legitimate interpretation of what a human intelligence chooses for itself. In this view, the intelligence of a virtuous person is directed outward toward natural pleasures and also the participation in the lives of people we love in order to help them achieve success. However, "all of these ends would be ultimately sought merely as components of one's own happiness or greatest good."

(Pangle 178) This will be a point Kierkegaard will seize with an unrelenting grip in *Works of Love*. In this interpretation, there is no conflict between the pursuit of the good and becoming immersed in the lives of people we hold dear. Pangle notes that this immersion may be so intense that the pain and happiness of the other actually becomes indistinguishable from our own, and in that way we have an important stake in their happiness. Despite this compassion, the source of our interaction with others is ultimately based on a judgment about whether it will bring us benefits and happiness. We are not really involved with others for their own sake, but rather for our own. We have friends, but it still remains far from the ideal in which we seek the best for them without considering ulterior motives. We will return shortly to analyze why Kierkegaard uses this interpretation, but its theme sounds familiar to readers of *Works of Love*.

Preferential love binds because it is pleasurable to us, and ultimately benefits us. The love that we have for others may seem to revolve around them, but ultimately returns to us. Pangle admits that this perspective is consistent with the ideas found in Aristotle. It is always a difficult task to isolate the benefits we render to others and those we keep for ourselves. In other words, when we help our friends flourish we also receive payment in the form of satisfaction with ourselves and the anticipation of the continued benefits of friendship. Pangle argues, however, that given the choice of doing good anonymously for a friend, where we will suffer negative consequences, and not doing good for a friend but receiving good consequences for ourselves, the virtuous person will choose to help the friend and face suffering. In her analysis, this scenario illustrates that selfishness cannot be the basis for true friendship and therefore this second interpretation falls short of an adequate model of friendship. To go even further, it is difficult to see how the

satisfaction of being virtuous would outweigh the genuine pain one might feel witnessing a friend who is suffering. It is noble to help that person because he/she needs our help, not because we see a chance to prove we are a good person. In this desire seems to be a deeper motive of compassion. (Pangle 177-178)

Pangle's third interpretation takes into account these selfless motives and is the model she feels best reflects Aristotle's meaning. It takes into consideration that even the most virtuous mind is "guided by a full understanding of its own deepest concerns, concerns which begin but do not end with the concern for the personal happiness of the being whose mind it is." (Pangle 179) In other words, even though we are immediately faced with our own situation and seek to resolve the problems we personally have, we may still extend concern to the lives of others. From this angle, a virtuous mind chooses what is best for itself in a systematic and rational way based on honest introspection to what is important to itself. Importantly, these concerns do not have to be centered on the self but can extend to the people we care about. Pangle points out that we enjoy helping our friends because we love them, we don't enjoy helping them simply because we desire to pat ourselves on the back. We are genuinely concerned with the lives of our friends, not necessarily because it affects us for good or evil, as the second interpretation stated, but rather for their own sake. Pangle maintains that there is a natural tendency in most humans to wish others well for their own sakes, and if this is indeed part of our nature then an intelligence that recognizes and cultivates it for virtuous ends will be the most consistent with Aristotle's model of eudaimonia. (Pangle 179-180)

We have explored these options not entirely to draw a conclusion about which is closer to the spirit of Aristotle's beliefs but to ask why Kierkegaard characterized them

the way he did in his devastating critique of the “other-I.” Given that there are multiple ways of interpreting Aristotle’s formation of self-love in relation to genuine, selfless love towards others, why does Kierkegaard choose an interpretation that centers around a self-love that may appear altruistic but really relies on selfishness? As we will see when we investigate Johann, Aquinas had already pioneered an interpretation of Aristotle that incorporated a self-giving love based on knowledge of God’s grace and the concept of similitude (a term we will address in the next chapter). By using this interpretation, Kierkegaard could have avoided the polemical tone of *Works of Love* in favor of a sympathetic reading of Aristotle. In addition, there is evidence that Kierkegaard had studied and considered parts of chapters eight and nine to be “valuable.” (Journals Vol. 3 - 50) In the translation of Kierkegaard’s *Journals and Papers*, Howard V. Hong notes that “according to Kierkegaard, friendship presupposes a common interest in a third, consequently an ideal of life-view. A friendship without striving for a common ideal does not deserve the name of friendship...” (Journals Vol. 3 – 563). This definition does not seem outwardly much different than the virtuous striving of two character-friends towards a common notion of the good. Despite these similarities, Kierkegaard chose to set the Aristotelian model up as a foil to Christian love. What were his motivations for doing so?

Aristotle, who had neither a conception of the Christian God nor the command to love, could only base his model on an incomplete metaphysical foundation and as a result created a partially correct model. In the next chapter we will try to see what Aristotle’s model could look like in the context of a Kierkegaardian faith. Our current aim will be to understand the context of Kierkegaard’s critique. As we will see, Kierkegaard believed

that many people in his time operated under the assumptions of Christianity but lacked the inner category of the Christian just as Aristotle did. An analysis of Kierkegaard's critique of his society will lead us directly into a discussion of the polemical motives Kierkegaard had in writing *Works of Love*. It is precisely these motives that led him to characterize natural love in such an unfavorable light. Although it will seem to many critics that his case is exaggerated beyond the point of being useful, if we understand the audience that he hoped would receive the work we can grasp the reason for its supposed overstatement.

Judge William's Appearance in *Works of Love*

Many of Kierkegaard's fellow Danes were intelligent, powerful and seemingly self-aware. Far from the unconscious masses, these self-confident men believed they were experts in the divine law and moral responsibilities. They attended church, knew the priests and bishops by name, and made sure they could cite appropriate Bible verses at the ready. Despite this outward prosperity, in Kierkegaard's eyes their lives symbolized a despairing illusion. They believed that merely by living in a country that defined itself as "Christian," they could go about matters of daily life and politics without thought of God but still under his protection. Instead of trying to reflect Christ's ideal they simply followed Christendom's norms and customs and believed that doing so assured them a spot in Heaven. To Kierkegaard, these beliefs reflected exactly the opposite of true Christianity. Instead of living a Christian life these men fell victim, consciously or unconsciously, to the deepest levels of spiritual despair.

A similar fate was also faced by Aristotle. Without knowledge of the revelation given in the person of Christ, Kierkegaard thought Aristotle was limited to describing

external categories in ethical terms, without the category of the religious (or more precisely, the Christian); “Aristotle has not the specification of spirit. Therefore he recommends even external goods, although only as an accompaniment, a drapery, but at this point he lacks the category for making a consummating movement.” (WoL 397) The inadequacy Kierkegaard finds in an “ethical” foundation of human goodness and purpose is best illustrated by the character of Judge William in Kierkegaard’s book *Either/Or*. Published in 1843, *Either/Or* was considered by Kierkegaard as the beginning of his formal authorship. (POV 29-30) Kierkegaard did not publish the book under his own name but used the pseudonymous editor, Victor Eremita. Eremita is given credit for finding and publishing the letters exchanged between two men representing an “aesthetic” way of living life versus an “ethical” understanding. On one side is the aesthete, who is concerned only with pleasure and avoiding boredom. This character has no interest in morals and values, seeing them as relative human constructs that could easily have been other than what they are. In light of this, the aesthete chooses his actions on the basis of what interests him and keeps him pleasantly occupied. Arguing against this position is Judge William, a character who is the epitome of moral thought and behavior. The Judge diagnoses the aesthete with despair, and proposes a remedy of “choosing himself in his eternal validity.” (*Either/Or* II, 224) Like Aristotle, the Judge recognizes certain values that correspond to the universally human and believes human fulfillment is attained by shaping oneself in the likeness of the “universal human.” (*Either/Or* II, 256) This likeness is not accidental, in all probability Kierkegaard was using an Aristotelian viewpoint to critique what he viewed as the ideals of the “ethical.” Evidence of this link can be found in the lengthy description Judge William offers of an

ideal friendship from his standpoint. This description sounds eerily similar to chapters eight and nine in the *Ethics*. Compare the Judge's exposition on the importance of a unity of vision to that of Aristotle:

The absolute condition for friendship is unity in a life-view. If a person has that, he will not be tempted to base his friendship on obscure feelings or on indefinable sympathies. As a consequence, he will not experience these ridiculous shifts, so that one day he has a friend and the next day he does not. He will not fail to appreciate the significance of the indefinable sympathies, because, strictly speaking, a person is certainly not a friend of everyone with whom he shares a life-view, but neither does he stop with only the mysteriousness of the sympathies. (Either/Or II, 319)

Similarly, Aristotle writes:

The friendship of good people alike in virtue is complete, since they similarly wish good things to each other as good, and they are good in their own right. And those who wish good things to their friends for their friends' sake are friends to the greatest degree, since it is on account of themselves that they are so disposed, and not accidentally. Their friendship, then, lasts as long as they are good, and virtue is a stable thing...Such a friendship is stable, with good reason: everything that should belong to friends converges in it. (1156b7-1156b13, 1156b19-1156b20)

The Judge even cites Aristotle's authority in support of his ideas; "I mentioned Aristotle only to remind you that he, too, realized that friendship contributes to a person's ethical achieving of actuality." (Either/Or II 322) One important thing to note is the conspicuous absence of any mention of God or a God-relation. The direct parallel between the thought of Aristotle and Judge William reveals what Kierkegaard finds ultimately lacking in the solely ethical mode of existence.

In his book; *Kierkegaard, Godly Deceiver*, M. Holmes Hartshorne isolates the root of the Judge's misdirection in a lack of humility before God. In Kierkegaard's eyes, one may not simply "deduce" the best way to live and what ultimately constitutes the highest for a human being, this is for God alone to mandate. However, in the Judges'

stated purpose of choosing oneself absolutely he seems to indicate that he can do just that:

It is when I choose myself absolutely, that I infinitize myself absolutely, for I myself am the absolute, for only myself can I choose absolutely, and this absolute choice of myself is my freedom, and only as I have chosen myself absolutely have I posited an absolute distinction, that namely between good and evil.” (Either/Or II 2:188)

Hartshorne points out how this passage resembles the story of Adam and Eve’s temptation by the serpent in the Garden of Eden. By eating of the forbidden fruit they “became like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5) The Judge prides himself in his ability to do just that by becoming absolute and positing the difference between good and evil. However, just as it was a sin for the first pair of humans to attempt to become like God, so the Judge falls into the same trap. God is the only being with the authority to posit good and evil.

From Kierkegaard’s point of view, humans are not in a position to judge what is truly good while under the shroud of sin. Just as clearly a parent has the best view about what is best for the child, only from a God’s-eye point of view can the ultimate Good of humanity be conceived. When human beings begin to posit their own ultimate good according to standards they themselves create, it reflects a lack of humility, and more accurately for Kierkegaard, sin. In some ways, Kierkegaard is pointing to the aspects of Danish society that pretend to be Christian but, by acting solely in the worldly realm without active interaction with Christ’s truth, instead posit that their actions reflect the “good.” Kierkegaard especially thought this true of the state-sponsored church.

Kierkegaard expresses the inadequacy of a life-view that excludes or ignores the active interaction between the revelation of God and human faith. On one hand,

Kierkegaard could not fault Aristotle for his lack of knowledge of Christ and the Christian framework of justification and sanctification. Aristotle never claimed to be a Christian, neither did he have access to the New Testament account of Christ. Although he lacked the Christian viewpoint, at least he was consistent with the one he had. This failure to acknowledge the revealed truth could not be excused however, when transplanted into a country with ready access to the Gospel. To make matters infinitely worse for Kierkegaard was the way Danish culture confused the ethical viewpoint with the Christian. Not only did he think some people of Denmark held a position similar to that of Judge William, but they also dared to call it “Christianity.” It is precisely on account of this frustration that we will locate the context for *Works of Love*. We seek to place it among the first of Kierkegaard’s open confrontations with the religious establishment of his time and to understand the societal factors that prompted such an adamant response.

Works of Love as Corrective

Perhaps one of the most thoughtful and, on the face of it, seemingly fair critiques of *Works of Love* is stated by Karl Barth in the fourth volume of his *Church Dogmatics*. In his two-fold objection, Barth criticizes the method in which Kierkegaard makes known the nature of Christian love. In particular, Barth objects to the strict severity Kierkegaard uses to force the reader into a decision in which they must choose between Christian neighbor love and all other forms of love.

If only the final impression left by [Works of Love] were not that of the detective skill in which non-Christian love is tracked down to its last hiding-place, examined, shown to be worthless and haled before the Judge! If only it were not so rarely that in its preaching of the Law and judgment we come across profound and beautiful reflections on the

Christian love which is so relentlessly marked off from its opposite!
(Barth 747)

Barth also finds fault in the way in which Kierkegaard uses the command as the key revelation that ensures one properly understands the nature of Christian love:

It is hardly surprising, then, that for all its individual beauties his book assumes on this presupposition the unlovely, inquisitorial and terribly judicial character which is so distinctive of Kierkegaard in general. It is not the case that we can be silent, as Kierkegaard is, about the creative, generous, liberating love of God, and speak instead only of the naked commandment: 'Thou Shalt,' as the basis of Christian love. (Barth 782)

It is reasonable to expect many Aristotelian scholars also to object to the way Kierkegaard seems to group love of the "other-I" in the same category as base self-love. They, like Barth in relation to Christianity, may insist that there are different ways to read Aristotle that highlight the ways in which virtuous friendship aids the flourishing of human beings instead of fostering a sense of "idol-worship." (WoL 57) *Works of Love* is relentless in probing the insufficiencies in preferential love and contrasting it repeatedly with Christian, neighbor love. If we are going to argue that Kierkegaard does not oppose friendship and other natural loves, how are we to understand the scathing critique of them? What is the root of the "judicial" character of the book? To answer this question we will pose the same question that Kierkegaard himself wrestled with: how to most effectively pose the truth of Christ to a society whom you believe not only rejects Christ's message but also believes in a worldly definition of what it means to be a "Christian?"

Whose recovery is more doubtful, that of the one who does not see, or that of the person who sees and yet does not see? What is more difficult—to awaken someone who is sleeping or to awaken someone who, awake, is dreaming that he is awake? Which is sadder, the sight that promptly and unconditionally moves one to tears, the sight of someone unhappily deceived in love, or the sight that that in a certain sense could tempt

laughter, the sight of the self-deceived, whose fatuous conceit of not being deceived is indeed ridiculous and laughable if the ridiculousness of it were not an even stronger expression for horror, since it shows that he is not worthy of tears. (WoL 5)

Works of Love stands at several major crossroads of Kierkegaard's authorship.

Before 1847 when *Works of Love* was published, the only books that appeared in Kierkegaard's name were the upbuilding discourses that presuppose that "people know essentially what love is and [seek] to win them to it, to move them." (WoL 469-470) Although he did write books that were critical of the religious atmosphere in Denmark, these books relied on a maieutic, indirect form of communication that required a pseudonym. *Works of Love* was the first book that sustained a critical stance to the notion of "Christendom" that appeared under Kierkegaard's own name. Rather than use indirect communication to produce self-examination in the reader, his appeal is stated directly and, as Hartshorne notes, "in an atmosphere entirely different from that of the pseudonymous works." (Hartshorne 46) In the years after 1847, his polemic would grow from the tempered suggestions found in *Works of Love* to a deafening level. These later years featured *Practice in Christianity*, the series of articles published in the newspaper *Fædrelandet* (xxix, *The Moment*), and the pamphlet series called *The Moment*.

The strong, direct polemic can be seen as originating in the "artful hinting" found in *Works of Love*. (Garff 660) After years of taking care that "with almost overly conscientious scrupulousness, to ensure that no passage, not a sentence, not a line, not a word, not a syllable, not a letter has been included that tends in the direction of suggesting changes in the external arrangements" (quoted in Garff 663) he confronted the problem that "hidden inwardness" can simply be a way to avoid taking responsibility for external actions. In other words, any action done in the name of "Christendom" can be

justified by appeal to “hidden inwardness” that cannot be verified (or discredited) by anyone else; “In established Christendom we are all true Christians, but this is in hidden inwardness.” (Practice, 216) “Inwardness” suddenly becomes a shield for hypocritical Christians to hide behind. In other words, although it may seem that my being paid to be a “witnesses to the truth” is contradictory, nobody can know the secret inwardness that guides my actions (perhaps I have the deepest inwardness and Christian faith of all) and therefore I may always appeal to it in my defense. Unsurprisingly, Kierkegaard deplored this same attitude he saw reflected in the Danish State Church. (Garff 732) Although Kierkegaard would not erupt in a frontal assault on this false inwardness until Bishop Mynster (head of the Danish church) died in 1854, *Works of Love* can be seen as advocating the primacy of passionate inwardness but also encouraging genuine external expressions of that inwardness.

Returning to Barth’s concern that *Works of Love* presents the truth of Christian love in terms of a harsh, confrontation between natural loves and Christian love that overstates the animosity at the expense of temporal goods, we will argue that this is one of the effects Kierkegaard intended. *Works of Love* is not meant to be a completely balanced description but rather was meant to provoke critical inward reflection and be a corrective to the form of Christianity present in 19th century Denmark. As Gouwens remarks;

...the rhetorical force of Works of Love is crucial for correctly understanding it; the dialectic of opposition is indeed offensive, and it would be a serious mistake to make this text inoffensive. The offensiveness functions to lead the reader to self-examination, to weigh the quality of one’s love, to prompt one to seek and give forgiveness. (Gouwens 190)

Although its character is distinctively upbuilding, it also contains a strong critique of the hypocrisy and complacency of the times.

It could be argued that the intent of Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole was to correct the religious institutions of his time and to mimic the transformation that Luther had been successful in enacting. Sontag, in his book chapter titled "The Role of Corrective," remarks that Luther's emphasis on grace had been a corrective in his own time, but in later generations it lost this characteristic and became normative. His emphasis on internal transformation eventually became translated into outer rituals that lacked the interiority that founded the movement. (147) Kierkegaard believed that the corrective he provided could prove that inner reform constantly needs to be renewed from generation to generation:

Luther's emphasis is a corrective—but a corrective made into the normative, into the sum total, is eo ipso confusing in another generation (where that for which it was a corrective does not exist). And with every generation that goes by in this way, it must become worse, until the end result is that this corrective, which has independently established itself, produces characteristics exactly the opposite of the original.

And this has been the case. Luther's corrective, when it independently is supposed to be the sum total of Christianity, produces the most refined kind of secularism and paganism. (Journals Vol. 1 – 333)

It was this secularism in the disguise of Christianity that Kierkegaard sought to eliminate through a renewed emphasis on inwardness.

One strategy Kierkegaard employed in pursuit of this goal and evidenced in *Works of Love* was analyzing the weaknesses of a target and then overstating the opposing viewpoint. This radical movement brings the reader up and completely away from the position they had occupied and allows contemplation of the distance between the two views. In his book, *Golden Age Denmark*, Bruce Kirmmse agrees that *Works of*

Love was not intended as a comprehensive, balanced analysis of the grace of God, but rather to wake readers out of their slumber. Its harshness was a prerequisite for opening eyes, and hopefully, hearts as well:

SK has been deliberately irritating to the social sensibilities of his reader in order to guarantee that the message, by its very abrasiveness, gets through, and the message is quite simply one of priorities, namely, the priority of the personal and spiritual sphere of Love (which is accessible to everyone without exception) over the realm of political action and social concern (in which, whether we like it or not, we act according to our differences). (GAD 328)

Kirmmse is referring to the surprise Kierkegaard's readers felt (and feel today) as they discovered that the preferential loves they valued so highly did not reflect the highest standard of love. Kierkegaard pulls no punches revealing this truth and repeatedly emphasizes neighbor love's superiority until his point is made absolutely clear. In this sense, *Works of Love* was written not only to "build up" but also to correct a false understanding of love that makes desire and inclination primary.

Our brief investigation into the corrective nature of *Works of Love* does not decide the conceptual issue we started out to resolve but instead provides an explanation for the rhetorical method by which Kierkegaard distinguishes between preferential and neighbor love. The nature of a corrective is to emphasize certain aspects and viewpoints in order to bring the reader to a point where they are confronted with a radical and thought-provoking perspective. It is undeniable that throughout the book, preferential and neighbor love are often seen as incompatible; however, this division is intentionally created and does not automatically eliminate the chance of reconciliation. In Kierkegaard's mind, if a corrective was not introduced to the Denmark he lived in, the concepts of Christianity would continue to be confused and corrupt. In order to escape

this conception, an alternate needed to be presented, and the difference strongly highlighted.

The Next Step: A Christian Transformation of Aristotle's Model of Friendship

The model of neighbor love Kierkegaard proposed against the popular notions of his time sought a return to Lutheran principles of inwardness and personal responsibility. Although Aristotle's model was educative in illuminating the various forces at work in friendship and gave us some idea as to the possible goals it should aspire to, we have seen that Kierkegaard rejected the model as incomplete. Although it has explanatory power in the ethical realm, it lacks the essential Christian category. As Kierkegaard's critique of Golden Age Denmark revealed, without subjective knowledge of the neighbor all friendships, as well as individual selves, can only end in despair. Admittedly, this may seem to be an utter destruction of friendship, especially since Kierkegaard does little to explicate what a preferential yet self-denying, God-as-middle-term, Christian friendship actually looks like. In part this was to avoid entering into an objective description and thereby risk misunderstanding. Kierkegaard wants to bring his readers maieutically to the point where truth can be born and then, presumably, they will be able to answer their own questions about what it means to concretely live out the truth in daily life.

In pursuit of a model of friendship grounded in neighbor love we will turn to Robert O. Johann, a philosopher who constructs a metaphysical framework that describes the very origin and teleology of our love and uses it to reconcile erotic and universal love. By starting with the Aristotelian model and applying the Christian category to it, Johann will be able to describe a friendship that first and fundamentally regards the friend as a

neighbor and only then, in addition, as a friend. In chapter five we will test his model of friendship against the standards found in *Works of Love* to determine whether it meets their demands.

CHAPTER IV
CHRISTIAN TRANSFORMATION OF THE
CLASSICAL MODEL OF FRIENDSHIP

Thus far we have followed Kierkegaard by associating erotic love and friendship with “natural” (as opposed to spiritual) loves, and neighbor love with a spiritual responsibility that seeks the true basis of other people’s value independent of inclination and desire. In many ways Robert Johann’s characterization of love possesses many neighbor-love qualities, as when he describes direct love as loving another in their intrinsic worth without thought to personal gain. However, Johann also takes seriously the attachments we develop with other people simply as a consequence of being human. Rather than disparaging what Kierkegaard lumps together as “inclinations and desires” Johann seeks to develop a model of sanctified *eros* in which the desire for communion with friends coincides with our responsibility to love the “neighbor.”

As we can see from a preliminary assessment of Kierkegaard’s objections, the Aristotelian model of friendship and the metaphysical structure it stands on lack a “Christian” element which explains not only *that* humans flourish by having friends, but *why* they have that specific teleology. Why are humans equipped with the rational faculty that looks outward from themselves in the attempt to complete themselves, so-to-speak? The missing category, from a Christian point of view, is the God-relation. This additional element in ethical deliberation began to be addressed by the Dominican theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas in the middle ages. In the middle of the twentieth century Robert O. Johann produced a Christian analysis of love that was influenced heavily by the Thomistic tradition. In it, he attempted to resolve the seeming tension

between *agape* and *eros* and by doing so preserve relationships like friendship that are critical to a well-rounded human existence. While *Works of Love* seeks to display the tension between preferential and nonpreferential loves, Johann seeks a resolution of this tension.

The Meaning of Love

Johann's model of love is ideal to compare to Kierkegaard's because both authors approach love as a subjective reality, namely, a phenomenon that can be known only by a human subject who stands in conscious relation to another human subject. If one wishes to love and to understand love, other people cannot be viewed as objective things in terms of physical and psychological characteristics alone but rather they must be viewed as fellow subjects. Just as we recognize that we are mysterious to ourselves at the deepest level, we must attribute this same depth to other people. Investigating the nature of love will help illuminate this mysterious level and also bring into better focus the nature of being itself:

For the moralist, love is the first and greatest of the commandments, the epitome of 'the whole law and the prophets'... Our aim is to examine the reality itself, to search out the very nature of love, its ontological structure, its situation and import in the realm of being. This is the most fundamental question that can be asked about love; it is also the more important. For however meager our findings, they will color our understanding of love on all its levels. They will provide an inkling, at least, of the why of the commandment to love; in them also must be searched the reason for love's creative role. Anything one can say about love and its meaning in human life will have its ultimate justification in the ontological structure of reality itself. (Johann 11-12)

Kierkegaard argues that love's basic nature can be found in the commandment: "You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*" (my emphasis). Johann, like Aristotle, argues along similar lines that we ought to love others as we love ourselves. This presents a problem,

however, for the other isn't myself or an extension of myself, but a distinct other. Johann holds that a conception of love will be adequate only if it preserves a form of true diversity within a framework of unity. "If the other has to be one with myself for me to love him as myself, he will have to be so in his very otherness. That very trait which irreducibly separates him from me must also unite us; in our very diversity there must be sameness." (Johann 36)

In order to explain this link it is first necessary to understand the nature of our uniqueness and understand how we love ourselves. What is it about ourselves that we love? From Johann's point of view, self-love requires a cherished introspection of our unique existence. If we are unable to recognize our own worth and irreplaceable value these same features will be impossible to recognize and cherish in others. The awareness each of us has of ourselves is not an abstract knowledge but a rich, infinitely engaging experience we are more confident about than anything else. Johann believes that this immediate and joyful encounter at the very core of our being can help us become aware of our own participation in an Ultimate Source of being. Each time we marvel at ourselves and the unique aspects that make us distinct personalities we celebrate our special value and, for Johann, the likeness we have with God. The community of selves is united in the relation to such a Source, which does not lie outside human subjectivity but partly composes it.

But this unique Value, as participated, is indistinguishable from that core of reality most proper to each creature, its own subsistence. It is the presence of this Value in the creature that is the creature. Hence each creature is a unique value, yet communing in its uniqueness with every other creature in the Unique Value. Since, therefore, what I love in being is the presence of the Absolute, I can love it in the other as well as in myself. And since as in myself it is myself, and in the other it is himself, so my own proper good, loved in myself, can be found by likeness in the

other in the very trait that irreducibly distinguishes him from me, his proper subsistence. (Johann 39)

With this knowledge it becomes impossible to view another simply as an object with notable features. Our intimate experience of our own inner life and value gives us insight into the life and value present in others. “To love the other directly, I must somehow be present to that unique principle of action which he is in himself, to the veritable subject with all his depth and mystery.” (Johann 43) Johann describes a difference between perceiving the other as “he” and perceiving him as “thou.” As “he,” the other’s interiority is hidden from me but as “thou” he is present to me in full subjectivity (although his subjectivity cannot be appropriated by me). As we will see, this statement will have implications for a theory of Christian friendship.

The difference between “thou” and “he” is reflected in the difference between what Johann calls direct love and desire love. Direct love seeks the source of goodness in a person’s being—in his being a unique subject with an unfathomable source in the power of being itself. It is principally with this form of love that we love ourselves, although it could be that few of us are conscious of loving ourselves in this way. While we appreciate our good traits, more than this we appreciate being alive and the intrinsic goodness of being alive. Desire love, by contrast, seeks to attain specific “goods” or benefits by relating to another. These benefits may not be merely physical satisfaction but also the development of virtues as we saw in Aristotle’s model in the last chapter. Aquinas also recognized love’s dual objectives:

It follows then that a thing can be loved in two ways. It can be loved as a subsisting good—and then we really and truly love it since we wish good to it. (Such love has been called by many a love of benevolence or a love of friendship.) Or we can love it rather as an inherent good, as when we love something to which, however, we do not wish good...Nor are we

prevented from loving in this second way things which are in themselves substances. But then we do not love them for what they are substantially, but rather in view of some perfection to be derived from them. (quoted in Johann 22)

Johann expresses this double tendency in human love by comparing the difference between saying “I love you” (direct love) and “I want you” (desire love). In saying the latter, I am able to back up my assertion with one or more characteristics that satisfies my desire. As we know, humans are finite and limited creatures that lack certain goods we are not able to completely provide for ourselves. Our desire for affection or fellowship, for personal items and for the outlet of our passions all require help that we can get only from each other. I may “love” (desire love) someone because he is rich and can provide for my material needs, or because he plays the same sport as I do and the shared participation makes the experience more beneficial. In a sense, the “I want you” hidden in desire’s “I love you” is unable to stand by itself and is necessarily accompanied by a “because.” It lacks the unselfish and unconditional affirmation and benevolence that our deepest love seems to convey.

In the direct “I love you” one may not have a list of reasons justifying the love. This love’s existence is predicated on the simple existence and irreducible goodness of the object of love. “Why do I love you? Because you are—*you*.” (Johann’s emphasis 19) Without concrete justification this love seems indefensible and irrational yet most of us recognize a basic validity in it. While desire love concentrates on certain characteristics of the object at the expense of its incommunicable subsistence in being, direct love attempts to approach the essence of the other. It wishes to gaze with reverence into the interiority of the subject and uphold the inestimable value that it finds there. However wonderful this direct love, though, it presents the philosopher with an apparent paradox:

“how can the proper, independent, and incommunicable subsistence of a being other than ourselves be in any way considered our good?” (Johann 28) How do we reconcile Aquinas’ statement that “what is loveable to each one is his own good” with the fact that those we love exist independently of our own good? (Johann 28) This is a pressing question for the love of friendship, too: how can the good of another person, who is loved for his unique subjectivity and separateness from me, be considered my own good?

Johann seeks an answer to these questions throughout *The Meaning of Love*. He seeks to reconcile *eros* (love based on desire and need) and *agape* (direct, benevolent love) by orienting both toward God’s love and benevolence. Rather than focus on points of tension between the two (as Kierkegaard does), Johann asks how these two loves can work toward the same ultimate goal despite operating on fundamentally different premises.

Taleity

Taleity, or *amor concupiscentiae* to Aquinas, is a love that orients one toward a relative good outside oneself. The object of such love is affirmed not for its proper subsistence but rather for some good to be derived from it, namely, the relative perfection of the lover who unites with that good. (Johann 25) This form of love is grounded in the ontological structure of potency and act. The relationship between lover and beloved is passive from the subject’s point of view, as the perfection enters the “perfectible” subject. (Johann 57) For Johann, taleity is in some respects an unavoidable consequence of our basic humanity. Our temporal natures cause us to pursue goods in ways consistent with that nature. Rather than being able to achieve immediate and complete union with

ourselves, as God can, we must reach outside ourselves and in a sense *complete* ourselves with a good that we have only partial access to:

...there is always a distinction in creatures between themselves as actual and that by which they are actual. In God alone there is no comparison; He alone is identical with that by which He is good. Pure actuality Himself, He is also the source of all actuality in creatures, substantial and accidental, and consequently is, as it were, the transcendent and inaccessible term of all becoming. For the search of creatures for that by which they are rendered actual and perfect, a principle of goodness inherent in themselves, is really a search for an analogue of the divine goodness. In seeking a good for themselves, they do therefore in a sense seek God. (Johann 61)

This understanding is not shared by Aristotle, who rejects the Platonic Idea of the Good in favor of a teleology that is embedded in the ordinary world. For Aristotle, something is good not because it fits an abstract template but because it fulfills *itself*, its very nature: “Hence it is in the individual, and not in a transcendent reality, that [Aristotle] seeks the explanation of action and finality...each one truly endowed with efficacy and tending by action to a more perfect realization of its form, to its perpetuation and propagation.” (Johann 64-65) Although Aquinas’s thought takes a major step beyond Aristotle by introducing the added dimension that nature itself is founded by God and it is in becoming similar to this ultimate Good that one is perfected, it is still a perspective that tends to conceive of goodness and perfection in terms of the actualization of potential.

For the existent is still approached from the side of essence, as *actuality*, as a composite of matter and form, or at least of potency and act. Consequently, the good is still formally considered a *principle of actuation*; its basic characteristic is still to be *perfective*...For, as St. Thomas remarks elsewhere, there is no real difference between desiring God and desiring the greatest of goods which come to us from Him—just as when we desire wine, it is really its effects in us we look to. (Johann’s emphasis 66)

Johann notes that this viewpoint continues to imply that operations of knowledge and love are self-regarding and limited to the actualization of the self in a way that fails to respect the object as an end in itself. (Johann 66)

In Johann's view, if I regard the other simply as a way to attain my own perfection, I do not love him with direct love but rather desire love. Johann observes that "instead of being *in himself* a unique and irreplaceable value, the individual is reduced to the state of being simply the bearer of the universal as if he had no other ontological function than to permit that to exist. (Johann's emphasis 63) Johann further notes that the outcome of this view will be that something (or someone) is only "good insofar as it is perfect, and perfect insofar as it is actual, insofar as it recedes from potency...[I]t is thus the perfection as a principium quo, as perfective, that is the formal object of desire." (Johann 63) Aquinas identifies similitude with God as being the ultimate goal, and each individual's own perfection:

For since, in a creationist metaphysics, nothing will be good and desirable except insofar as it participates [in] the likeness of God...the last end of a creature will be that by which it acquires the greatest possible (i.e. in accordance with its nature) likeness to God. (Johann 65)

Johann believes direct love is not a strategy for realizing our own fulfillment, but a way of relating to another whom we perceive to be an end in himself or herself. The people we love may indeed help to perfect us but this fact remains independent of our direct love for them.

Iipseity

Johann's theory must walk the fine line between insisting that the lover and the beloved are separate and distinct, which risks the reduction of love to an illusion, while also avoiding the danger of fusing two subjects into one and dissolving each person's

inner subjectivity. To set up the groundwork for such a theory, Johann employs Aquinas' concept of "similitude."

For the very fact that two men are alike, having, as it were, one form, makes them to be, in a manner, one in that form: thus two men are one thing in the species of humanity, and two white men are one thing in whiteness. Hence the affections of one tend to the other, as being one with him; and he wishes good to him as to himself. (quoted in Johann 33)

The likeness between two people, the fact that they are both human beings and personal subjects, draws them together. Because we share a nature in common with our friend we are able identify with their needs and wish them well for their own sakes, just as we wish ourselves well for our own sake. From this perspective, everyone's unity in the category of "human being" allows me to love another person and feel "as one" with him or her.

However, Johann does not believe this to be the entirety of the explanation:

In this light, there will be no difficulty about loving in another what I love in myself, since in either case I love, not what is incommunicably proper to the being in question, but a specifically unique determination common to each. But if there is no difficulty, it is not because the problem has been solved, but because it has been sidestepped. Such a notion of community, where the individuals are united only by ignoring their positive diversity, solves the antimony of love only by destroying its realism. It achieves unity at the expense of multiplicity. The singular as such ceases to be of value; it terminates love only materially. What is now loved is rather the total formal perfection in which the individual participates and into which, as a distinct value, he is absorbed. (Johann 34-35)

Although there must be common ground on which we can stand, our love cannot fail to engage the mysterious, unique, and irreducible depth of the subject, which emerges from this common ground; "the unity then discovered is necessarily abstractive, it is achieved only by ignoring the positive aspect of what is proper and peculiar to each of the distinct terms." (Johann 34) What a subject loves in himself is his unique, interior experience of being human. It is his *participation* in the power of being that makes him unique; it is

this that he most loves in himself. At the same time, it is this uniqueness in the person of another that he seeks to affirm in direct love.

Synthesis of Taleity and Ipeity

For Johann, the two dimensions in human love are expressed in the differences between taleity and ipseity. One dimension looks to actualize or perfect itself in relation to the other. The other dimension is based on “man’s participation in the eternal presence of Being to Itself, and achieved through the inwardness of consciousness, it looks to the progressive fathoming by the Infinite self of the Unique Value, the Unique Self in whom he actually participates.” (Johann 78-79) This too is a drive, not for appropriation or possession, but for communion with the source of the human personality.

It is not essentially founded on the division of potency and act. It does not look to a transformation or actuation of the subject by the material reception of what is now absent and, as it were, exterior to the subject. Its term, instead of being envisaged as a perfective principle relative to the potential, is seen rather as a subsistent, self-communicating plentitude, absolute ipseity, to whose proper abundance the subject somehow has access, and which he loves and cherishes for itself. Hence, even in the finite person, who is not wholly identical with the plentitude of value that solicits his love, the dynamism is still not oriented to the acquisition of something that the subject lacks, but rather to entering more deeply into the self he is, or, more precisely, into the unfathomable Source whose presence in himself founds and constitutes that very self. (Johann 71-72)

While the deficiencies in the desires of taleity can be fulfilled to some extent, communing with the true source of our being presents a more profound challenge: “For this Good, precisely as Absolute and Total, can in nowise be considered a principle of actuation relative to the subject. It is not loved as an inherent determination of the subject but in and for itself” (Johann 73)

Johann states that God’s love for himself has no element of desire since He is identical with His own existence. As Perfect Actuality, God has no need for anything

outside of God's self. Humans on the other hand are composed only in part by this eternal grounding and thus necessarily seek to be reunited with the whole that "is not exterior and ready to be acquired, but the unfolding of something already present."

(Johann 72) The only way to succeed in this endeavor is "through operations that are distinct from himself and that are actuations of the nature in which he subsists," i.e. operations of other human subjects. (Johann 74) It is through union with other people that the apparent contradiction between *eros* and *agape* is resolved:

Although, indeed, the End is to be loved for itself (*agape*), still, union with the End, with the God who makes a gift of Himself to man, represents a real advance for this finite person. It is a state or condition in which he is not placed at the outset (however radical his orientation towards it), but which by his free effort he must acquire and constitute—and so it is something to be desired (*eros*). (Johann 72)

Although the End is loved *directly*, as ipseity, my nature (divided into eternal and temporal components) is unable to actualize this love and therefore continually *desires* to love more directly.

Johann indicates that desire is an essential element of human life, as is direct love. Both qualities are synthesized in each individual and as a result neither can be ignored. Consequently, if I desire only my own perfection I do so at the expense of an apprehension of the intrinsic value of myself and others:

...so long as a man is explicitly and in his conscious life equal to his basic orientation, *eros* will be restricted to egoism. Loving merely himself, deeming that ipseity alone worthy of direct love which subsists within the limits of his proper nature, he reckons himself, practically speaking, as Absolute, the center of the universe, and his only insufficiency as that of the nature in which he subsists. Every other being is treated simply as an object, a thing existing only to satisfy his needs. (Johann 75)

My ultimate desire is to be complete in my whole being, both body and soul. However, when I focus on actualizing my potential I do not attain all that I desire because I have

not given thought to the communal element that seeks union with the Absolute ground of existence. Only when I take both of these loves into consideration can I satisfy the entirety of my desire. This does not necessarily translate into sacrificing temporal goods that allow me to become more fully actual, for then the imbalance has simply been reversed; instead, it entails a fair accounting of both the need to become more fully myself in relation to others and the tendency to commune with that which is already powerfully present to me, in me and in the other. Johann gives legitimacy to the natural desire we have towards our friends, but he maintains that this desire must be sanctified by an unconditional affirmation of the other. Although I may enjoy someone's sense of humor I should not isolate its value from the subject from whom it originates. While enjoying myself I also find pleasure in the personality of the other person and in the creative gift of God we both share: "in [my friend] I am newly intimate to the plentitude of Being whose presence constitutes each of us in his proper subjectivity. My love for him is therefore a deeper fathoming of the unique plentitude which is the very foundation of the order in which he and I are situated as distinct." (Johann 71) Our enjoyment of other people should be a satisfaction of our pursuit of perfection and also an affirmation that we are only capable of realizing ourselves because of the gift of existence we have been given.

It is the potential for egoism that is the real danger of *eros*, not *eros* itself. Kierkegaard would agree with Johann that "A love that is exclusive, that is restricted to one finite self within the narrow limits of a nature, when its real object is Subsistent Perfection in all its plentitude, is a love that never realizes its hidden promise. It is a love that fails even as love." (Johann 77) The danger of neglecting the mysterious depth of

the other is the reason why Kierkegaard takes measures like setting God as the middle-term in every relationship. By keeping the neighbor, the true object of our regard, continually in focus our love will not be motivated by self-oriented intentions alone but will be directed “with an ever increasing awareness [toward] the value which [the other] is, that substantial participation in the Subsistent Plenitude whose creative presence constitutes him to be himself.” (Johann 79) I recognize that the ground of my being lies in this source, but I also realize that it is only partially present in myself. I cannot be united with it as myself (something reserved only for God) so I must seek encounters with it outside myself. In other human beings I recognize the same source of the divine that I have inside myself and that inspires me to join in communion with them.

As a result, the good of the other person becomes my own good. I wish another well as I wish myself well. When I wish the best for myself, there are no conditions attached to this well-wishing. I simply affirm myself and based on that affirmation wish good things to happen to me. Similarly, because the love I have for others is the same direct love I have for myself, I wish them well for their own sake. This love is grounded in the communion with, and the desire for, the Absolute, which I understand to be the creative presence that founds my unique subjectivity. In my subjective awareness, I am irresistibly drawn to this presence within myself, glorying in its existence and my participation. Because I am drawn to God’s presence in myself, I am also drawn to His presence in others. By communing with other people in deeply personal, self-giving ways I am allowed to approach the source of our shared being even more closely. I desire this closeness with all my heart and gladly give myself in order to find myself. The focus of my direct love is the eternal source of my being, whose presence in myself

and others founds the basis of a friendship between subjects who, by mutual self-giving, approach what Kierkegaard terms “the neighbor.”

When we place Kierkegaard’s idea of neighbor love on the metaphysical foundation laid by Johann it seems clear that Johann’s other is valued in the highest way—truly for the good of him or herself. However, does Johann indicate what this valuing and well-wishing might look like in friendship? In “*A Meditation on Friendship*,” Johann discusses friendship within the context of Christian faith.

Friendship Based on the Christian Metaphysic of Love

For Johann, Christian conceptions of friendship are more accurate to human nature than other philosophical versions. Because Plato’s notion of friendship is based on desire and simply fills a need humans have, it is not consistent with benevolent love. Although Aristotle’s version does incorporate a love of the other for the other’s own sake, he lacks a conception of the self and the other who are conscious of the ground of their being and the way in which they share in the divine life. Going a step beyond the ethical into the Christian category allows Johann to formulate a definition of friendship that takes into account the ultimate basis for human love in the all-encompassing love of God. According to Johann, friendship is a *benevolent, mutual affirmation of another self existing in God’s love, founded on a superabundance of perfection*. In the passages below we will separate these elements and justify them in light of the metaphysic identified above. We will also illustrate how these features relate not to abstract characteristics but to models of friendship we would recognize today.

Benevolent, Mutual Affirmation

We have returned to the topic of mutuality in love and friendship repeatedly in this investigation. This cannot be avoided when speaking of friendship, which is reciprocal, and its apparent conflict with neighbor love, which seeks to eliminate all traces of selfishness. With this being said, Johann's definition of Christian friendship as a "*mutual* benevolent affirmation" may seem problematic. Is it even possible for "Christian" and "friendship" to form the singular expression "Christian friendship?" Remembering the conflict Kierkegaard set up, doesn't the term cancel itself out in the conflict between *agape* and *eros*?

There is no need to extensively reiterate the ground we covered with Johann and the way in which both direct love and desire love may exist simultaneously if the friend is loved in his basic and infinite worth. Love is being reaching out to being. Direct love's natural tendency is to overflow from itself and is "essentially generous and seeks to give as opposed to take." (Meditation 126) However, in friendship our love is returned to us, and, as Johann quotes Aquinas, "*Amicus est amico amicus*" (A friend is a friend to a friend)." (quoted in Johann 47)

The very definition of friendship requires reciprocity, which may seem contradictory in conjunction with a benevolent form of regard that is unselfish in its self-giving. On one hand, friendship's love is distinguished from love of concupiscence and as a result it appears to be a direct love. On the other hand, friendship appears to include both direct love and desire, which cannot be separated in the human. Is Christian love equivalent to friendship's love, a love that is both direct and desire at the same time?

Johann argues that “Because we are one by likeness, we can really share our hearts in friendship and approach as nearly as possible on a purely natural plane the ineffable friendship that is God.” (129-130). In other words, what better way to approach God than to engage in a friendship in which each person shares the goal of participating in the Subsistent Plentitude found in the other person? As we have seen, *Works of Love* is sometimes interpreted to mean that in order to love by the standards of neighbor love we must eliminate all forms of special attachment. But what is left once these special loves are taken away? Friendships and beloveds give us opportunities to affirm one another’s value in a deeply personal way and oftentimes this is a significant and powerful experience in life.

By Kierkegaard’s standard, “To love God is to love oneself truly; to help another person to love God is to love another person; to be helped by another person to love God is to be loved.” (107) If loving another person is equivalent to helping them love God, the best way of doing this is communion with them on a frequent basis, sharing life’s joys and sorrows together. When we are in pain, not just physical, the best person who can help us is someone who knows us and is a friend to us. A stranger may be apt to help us if we are lying by the side of the road, but when we are in a spiritual crisis, the helpful words of a stranger are generic comfort that may do little to encourage us. However, a friend who knows the intimate details of our life will be familiar with our particular situation and will know how to help us turn our sufferings to God. Christian love is not limited to random acts of kindness but also requires the bonding with others found only in special loves. The best way to both help someone to love God, and to be helped oneself, is in the context of a friendship.

By desiring to reach ever more deeply into another's personality in friendship we have the opportunity to draw closer to the unique quality of the "neighbor" we love directly. This communion is more than simply an "exchange" of love but rather a "joining" together to affirm and explore more deeply the shared ultimate grounding of existence. Kierkegaard sees the real danger behind preferential love as stemming from an "exchange" view in which we give our love with the intent of receiving self-regarding benefits. If we enter and sustain a friendship without viewing the "neighbor" in the other person, we are not relating to the true basis of the other person. Only by seeking and affirming the subjective presence in another person do I have the opportunity to engage them at their most essential level. Without this concept of neighbor, love relates to aspects of the other person that are non-essential and merely focus on features that, more or less, benefit me by fulfilling my desires and inclinations. Johann agrees that the deepest part of another person is contained in the "neighbor" and further emphasizes the way in which reciprocity helps discover not only this element in other people, but ourselves as well:

When I love another directly, I break the little circle I form with myself where I would lodge the other simply as an idea. I discover a new existence; I am present to a new and transcendent revelation of that value I love in myself. And by that fact, I cure myself of the exclusiveness, the poverty, the solitude that are my lot and my curse when, through egoism, I constitute myself the center of the universe and the absolute...so long as I love myself exclusively, I fail to realize the transcendent and absolute character of the value present in myself; it is loved precisely where its participation in plenitude is interrupted, precisely as detached and alone...I cannot really love myself without loving other selves. Only when drawn into communion with other selves is my own person confirmed in being and my own love equal to the perfection to which it secretly aspires. (Johann 52)

The key to a full existence and a proper self-love is giving myself to another, by drawing into communion with another “neighbor” who also apprehends my Absolute worth. By loving in a self-giving way I exist in the hope of communing with the neighbor and his ultimate grounding. I seek reciprocity not only as a way to fulfill strictly temporal inclinations but also to gain greater access into the fullness of his existence—I seek *him*, and end up finding the source of our shared ground, and myself, in the eternal spring of being. This does not conflict with friendship as commonly conceived. The same shared activities and reciprocal affection normally associated with friendship may exist perfectly well alongside a notion of mutual benevolence and neighbor love—as long as this spiritual love is the essential component of the relationship. When the primacy of the mutual regard for the intrinsic worth of the other is supplanted by the desire for fulfillment of solely temporal perfections the status of the relationship as “friendship” remains but it can no longer be considered Christian.

Another “Self”

This aspect of Christian friendship has a dual quality. On one hand, the other person, or self, we love in friendship is a distinct individual. However, each of us is a unique manifestation of a common nature that finds its origin in God’s love: “For if a person is like me, he is at once distinct from me and able to receive a real communication, since similitude implies distinctiveness; and at the same time he is one with me, one precisely by likeness.” (Meditation 129)

Both Kierkegaard and Johann emphasize this point at length. Kierkegaard calls attention to the distinctness of the individual in his criticism of the concept “other-I.” For him, “other-I” signifies that “the lover is actually relating himself to himself in self-love.”

(WoL 55) Love of the “other I” is merely an extension of a selfish self-love that reduces the individuality of another person: “Whether we speak of the first I or of the other I, we do not come a step closer to the neighbor, because the neighbor is the first you.” (WoL 57) In order to avoid viewing other people as means to our selfish ends Kierkegaard recommends keeping this distinctiveness in mind.

This rings true in our everyday experiences with friendship. Although friends are drawn together by an array of factors, if the sovereignty of each is not recognized the friendship fails. Undeniably affection plays a prominent role in a successful friendship, but respect plays an equally important part. Being friends with another entails both the characteristics we have *in common* and also an apprehension of *individual uniqueness* and distinct “otherness.” Part of this recognition is based on the subjective experience I have of being “me.” I am intrinsically valuable simply by merit of existing—no other attribute is necessary to justify myself. This subjective apprehension of my own worth necessarily influences my interactions with other people. “One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself” is a moral statement that reflects this intrinsic value. As Johann notes, although I may be separated from the subjective core of another, I must presume it exists because of its existence inside me. Friendship is defined in many ways by the process in which this “otherness” is revealed to me. Acts of friendship like conversations and shared activities are ways in which I engage the friend and draw him or her closer to myself. At no point is the critical level reached where we are the same (even though we share an ultimate basis for our existence), and at no point may I cross the boundary where the other person becomes something to gratify my inclinations

desires without thought to his/her well-being. The familiar maxim that where there is no respect, there is no love and no true friendship is undoubtedly true.

On the other hand, Christian friendship also involves two distinct selves drawing together in communion:

Because we are one by likeness, I extend my love for myself to this other as to another self and freely communicate the innermost secrets of my being. Because we are one by likeness, we can really share our hearts in friendship and approach as nearly as possible on a purely natural plane the ineffable friendship that is God. (Meditation 129-130)

Viewing my friend as “another self,” can be a very valuable experience if the line into total immersion is not crossed. Knowing that the other person has a similar subjective experience allows me to share myself in the expectation that I will be understood and affirmed. My friend shares in this experience and together we seek the spring of our inner being.

Superabundance of Perfection

The reception of God’s overflowing love encourages all who recognize that love to mirror their own love after His. Johann sees this desire reflecting the truth that our own love finds its origin and existence in God’s love; “unless God should give us himself, no human friendship could ever be more than the giving of one faint image of God to another.” (130) God’s generous act of grace sanctifies our own love and makes it possible to apprehend the “neighbor” inside every human being. Christ’s sacrifice affirms the ultimate worth of every person and allows us to share that knowledge with a spiritual love that transcends the temporal relations that can sometimes separate us from God. This benevolent love becomes the ideal that a Christian strives for and implies that

our own love should not be based on thought of reward but simply overflow from itself in superabundance. Johann sees this expression as the most basic characteristic of true love:

We see that true friendship is based solely upon the richness, the expansive wealth, of being. Love is not founded on poverty and need, as Plato thought, but rather on an abundance of perfection, the superabounding character of act...true love is the procession, the expansion, of act unto act; it is the expression of that urge perfection has to communicate itself. (Meditation 126-127)

Love as an abundance based on God's perfection is a theme also found in *Works of Love*.

Although love originates in a "hidden spring" the lake it supports is a reality in the world.

In his opening prayer, Kierkegaard reflects a belief that the founding source of this love is

God:

How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you God of love, source of all love in heaven and on earth; you who spared nothing but in love gave everything; you who are love, so that one who loves is what he is only by being in you! How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you who revealed what love is, you our Savior and Redeemer, who gave yourself in order to save all. (WoL 3)

For Johann, God's love is given existence in our very being; to imitate this love in human life is to unite God with God, being with being, and thereby mirror "the expansive tendency of being towards itself." (Johann 128) More than a simple movement of will or a thought-experiment, love is a lived reality.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have outlined the Christian metaphysic in *The Meaning of Love* and analyzed a model of friendship built on that metaphysic. By situating friendship on a metaphysic of the love of God, we were able to define the structure of a "Christian friendship." We noted that much of Johann's perspective seems congenial to Kierkegaard's. In the final chapter we will more directly subject Johann's model of

friendship to Kierkegaardian scrutiny. Using the defining features of Kierkegaardian love found in Sylvia Walsh's *The Grammar of Love*, we will determine whether the "Christian friendship" found in *The Meaning of Love* is a friendship that has undergone the "transformation of the eternal" and thus legitimized itself with regard to the standards outlined in *Works of Love*. This will be important in resolving the stated goals of our investigation to determine what the either/or of *Works of Love* really consists of. Does it refer to friendship versus Christian love? If we can present an account of friendship that is both recognizable as friendship while also meeting the demands of neighbor love, we will go a long way in resolving the apparent, irreconcilable tension between a spiritual love of God and the natural love of friendship.

CHAPTER V
A KIERKEGAARDIAN ACCOUNT OF FRIENDSHIP

Is Friendship “Unchristian?”

Lorraine Smith Pangle makes the claim in her book that; “Kierkegaard with bold intransigence, rejects friendship as unchristian.” (Pangle 3) Throughout this paper we have sought to determine whether this sentiment is actually reflected by *Works of Love*. Our goal in this chapter is to test the validity of this claim by presenting a model of a Christian friendship that Kierkegaard would endorse. Our analysis will focus primarily on whether friendship can be characterized as undergoing the “transformation of the eternal” and meeting the many demands of neighbor love. Kierkegaard states that “Christianity, however, knows only one kind of love, the spirit’s love, but this can lie at the base of and be present in every other expression of love.” (WoL 146) A form of love founded upon neighbor love must not only display the characteristics intrinsic to itself but also reflect the “spirit’s love” that gives it true existence. This will it make it possible for a friend to be loved as a friend but also as a neighbor. In “Grammar of the Heart,” Sylvia Walsh recognizes this and outlines the seven essential characteristics of the spirit’s love that allow a friendship to retain its distinctive characteristics while also respecting the “neighbor” in the friend: transcendent, transforming, inclusive, edifying, abiding, spontaneous, and its indirect and inverse nature.

We will apply all but two of these concepts to an ideal Christian friendship influenced by Johann that we started to outline in the last chapter to see if it leaves room for the neighbor. While the two concepts have different premises, if they are able to co-exist at the same time then Christian friendship is a valid possibility. We will not explore

Walsh's sixth and seventh standards. "*Spontaneous*" stresses the element of erotic love while "*Inverse and Indirect*" is not essential to the universal nature of neighbor love. She characterizes "*Inverse and Indirect*" in terms of opposition to the world and uses it to find several weak points in Kierkegaard's explication of love. Since our goal is not to critique neighbor love but rather to understand its operation, we will pass over this standard.

Transcendence and Transformation

Transcendence and transformation are two related concepts. Kierkegaard refers to transcendence as the hidden depth of being where the fount of true love springs forth. All neighbor love is fed by this concealed, eternal spring. Walsh states that all loves are based on this subsistent origin whether the individual admits it or not. Rejecting this knowledge does not free one from the nature of love any more than denying the existence of one's own self-aware consciousness prevents one from existing. No matter how fervently we oppose reconciling ourselves with the source of our personality, we cannot rid ourselves of it.

When our eyes are opened to the transcendent nature of love we recognize the "neighbor" in every friend, beloved, or stranger. The eternal source of the other person, and ourselves, becomes visible and we assume a personal responsibility to respect and cherish it. This transformation does not happen out of the blue but rather through the process of deliberately revealing God's presence in the relationship and allowing his love to illuminate new levels of interiority we never knew existed. The transformation, though profound, is primarily one of inwardness:

Christianity has not changed anything in what people have previously learned about loving the beloved, the friend, etc., has not added a little or

subtracted something, but it has changed everything, has changed love as a whole. Only insofar as a change of inwardness in erotic love and friendship results from this fundamental change, only to the extent has it changed these. (WoL 147)

Johann's account exhibits a similar tendency that can be observed in how this realization changes the subjects themselves as they try to imitate the source of divine reality they have discovered: "the person feels a real need to communicate himself in friendship—a need based not on lack of perfection, but precisely on its superabundance." (Meditation 128) The transformation caused by the realization of transcendence takes place within the subjects themselves and consequently they become conscious that their own personalities participate in the creative process of God. The discovery of this transcendence alters a person so profoundly that every human interaction thereafter is infused with the understanding that others also share in the same Subsistent Plentitude.

If the metaphysical law of being is, as it were, the envelopment of the multiplicity in the one, friendship is the access to a life that is actually the expression of that truth...that is why, it seems to us, friendship is so moving;...it makes us enter into that profound law of reality where all is in communion and nothing is absorbed. (Johann 52)

Both Johann and Kierkegaard's model stress the important inward transformation that results from the subject's new comprehension of the transcendent reality that supports existence. What they do *not* stress is the dissolution of natural forms of love but they instead seek a fundamental way in which natural loves can be embraced and transformed of their essentially self-regarding character.

Inclusive

The fundamental division between neighbor love and friendship is the scope of each love. Neighbor love is inclusive of everyone I encounter regardless of their relation to me. Friendship, on the other hand, is based on specific characteristics and reaches out

to a certain few. At first glance this appears to be a contradiction. How are we to understand this potential incompatibility?

The solution is found in the fact that friendship and neighbor love can co-exist in the same relationship. Just because I am friends with someone does not necessarily mean that I do not also apprehend him as a neighbor, nor does it mean that I cannot view everyone else as a neighbor as well. As Walsh notes:

To love others as neighbors means to love them first of all on the basis of our common humanity, as fellow human beings, rather than on the basis of personal preference. Secondly, it means to exercise an eternal equality in loving by existing on an essentially equal basis for every person. Christian love, more specifically identified as neighbor love, is thus inclusive in nature and has its task the love of all human beings. (Walsh 240)

Loving the neighbor in a friend corresponds to recognizing the neighbor in everyone.

When we love one person as a neighbor, we love everyone as a neighbor. Loving the neighbor expresses our understanding of the fundamental worth of someone and the knowledge of God's love that is its source. Without these realizations we could not love anyone as a neighbor, but with them we love everyone as a neighbor, even though we may only be confronted with one other person (or even just ourselves, WoL 21).

Conversely, if we seemingly respect the intrinsic value of everyone, but love the intrinsic value in one person a little more than everybody else, we show our unfamiliarity with true neighbor love. As Kierkegaard explains:

Thus Christianity has nothing against the husband's loving his wife in particular, but he must never love her in particular in such a way that she is an exception to being the neighbor that every human being is, because in that case he confuses what is essentially Christian—the wife does not become for him the neighbor, and thus all other people do not become for him the neighbor either. (WoL 142)

The very nature of erotic love and friendship is preferential and exclusive. However, the relation of friends may involve more than simply the preferential quality that defines it—it may also contain an element of neighbor love:

Neither does neighbor love prohibit us from entering into or continuing special relationships with one or more individuals. But the friend or beloved should be loved first and foremost, like others, as a neighbor. The Christian view, Kierkegaard claims, is that ‘what is eternally made basic must also be the basis of every expression of what is special.’ (Walsh 241)

If the essential way in which I view my friend is as a neighbor, then I regard everyone equally in that love. If, however, we understand friendship as consisting only in preferential love inherent to friendship’s love, then it is exclusive and does not live up to Kierkegaard’s ideal. Walsh believes these conclusions justify the possibility for special relations like friendship to exist between those who apprehend each other primarily as “neighbors.” While we see everyone as neighbors, we *also* see some select number as friends. There is no contradiction in this. We respect our neighbors in their intrinsic worth. Friendship adds additional layers of temporal and spiritual benefit but they do not replace the original foundation.

Edifying

Walsh echoes Kierkegaard’s notion that proper love believes in the infinite worth of every person, and helps to bring others to an awareness of it. In the deliberation entitled “Love Build Up,” Kierkegaard states that where upbuilding is present, love also exists. Because Kierkegaard has defined loving others in terms of helping them to love God, a large part of edifying and upbuilding centers around helping in the process the best we can. Nobody can “implant” love in another person; the best we can do is to draw it out by assuming a loving disposition and “loving forth” love in another. We cannot

take a direct role but must instead help them, sometimes without them even recognizing it. As we saw in the last chapter, the communion in friendship can also help us draw closer to the unique subsistence of our friends and allow us to participate in neighbor love to a greater extent. However, if we were to take credit for the help we gave them to become richer in the fullness of God, it would not allow the other to take full responsibility and thus enjoy full participation in the love they had discovered:

Yet the upbuilding in nature is this: you see all the glory and then it grips you in an upbuilding way when you begin to ponder the amazing fact that you do not see the one who brings it forth. If you could see God with the physical eye, if he, if I dare say this, stood alongside and said ‘It is I who have brought forth all this,’ the upbuilding would vanish. (WoL 218)

For Kierkegaard, to love another is to presuppose the existence of love within the other. Similarly Johann locates each person’s essential being in love itself. Although a person may not reflect a loving disposition, nonetheless they are constituted in the very same love that everyone else is. This is a consequence of God’s creative, loving presence in every single person. There is little difference between the conceptions of Johann and Kierkegaard at this point; both locate the term of love not on any spontaneous feeling of affection or reciprocity alone but situate its presence in the “neighbor.”

Abiding

One of the most important differences between neighbor love and love in friendship is the stability of each when faced with challenges. Neighbor love declares that no matter what circumstances arise, it will eternally love in the same way and with the same strength. Friendship, however, never claims this ever-lasting quality and it is normal for friendships to dissolve and the love supporting it to dissipate. Kierkegaard

finds the source of this disparity in a misunderstanding of God as the middle-term of any Christian friendship:

When love ceases, when in erotic love and friendship...that love ceases, then the two, as we humans say, break up...Christianity, however, does not know this language, does not understand it, refuses to understand it. When one says it comes to a break, this is because one is of the opinion that in love there is only a relationship between two, rather than that it is a relationship among three, as has been shown. (WoL 303)

Walsh notes that for neighbor love to exist alongside the transitory nature of special relations, the essential basis for the relationship rests in the category “neighbor,” not “friend.” If our friends lose the unique features we are attracted to, our fundamental love of them would not be modified in the least because what we fundamentally love about them (their intrinsic worth) remains unmodified; “No change, however, can take the neighbor from you.” (WoL 65) The two may exist side-by-side as long as there is an understanding within the individual that, if the friendship ends, neighbor love will remain.

Conclusion - The Either/Or of *Works of Love*

Gouwens points out that *Works of Love* is a maieutic communication (akin to an act of midwifery) that intends to make the reader aware of the nature of his or her own love and the ground from which it originates. (Gouwens 206-207) This observation is important in determining the real choice Kierkegaard wants to invoke in his readers. As we have gone to lengths to illustrate, the options are not friendship or love of neighbor, for this would deny a necessary aspect of human existence. Both Kierkegaard and Johann fully realize that each human being has both temporal and spiritual features. When critics interpret Kierkegaard to mean that it is impossible to be both a Christian and friend because the two loves inhabit two distinct spheres of existence, they disregard the

context of Christian theology in which the duality of human nature exists in precisely such a contradiction. Kierkegaard neither calls for the abolition of friendships, nor does he expect temporal beings to live a strictly spiritual existence:

Neither is it required of the Christian that he, in blind and unwise zeal, would go so far that he could no longer bear to read a poet—any more than it is required of the Christian that he must not eat ordinary food with others or that he should live apart from other people in the inclosure of separateness. No, but the Christian must understand everything differently than the non-Christian does, must be conscious that he knows how to make distinctions. A person would not be able to live exclusively at all times within the highest Christian conceptions any more than he could live only on the food at the Communion table. (WoL 47)

Kierkegaard repeatedly emphasizes that when the neighbor becomes the true object of love, friendships are not *eliminated* but *transformed*. Although my friend does have unique characteristics that I enjoy, the fundamental basis for my regard is my internal affirmation of his existence as a “neighbor:” a distinct other who is united with me in God’s unlimited and generous love. I cannot will this affirmation in anyone else, I may only attempt to make sure that, with God as the middle-term, I express my inner resolve to presuppose love in other people. The revolution Kierkegaard seeks to introduce is in the way we inwardly seek to engage the essential humanity of other people.

Because God is the essential ground of my existence and that of others, by loving the “neighbor,” in myself and other people I draw closer to Absolute love. This explanation is perfectly suited for friendship in which the goal is interaction with the innermost personality of another. A selfish love of another person falls short of approaching his eternal origin and basic humanity. In other words, if we desire to love the other we must determine the fundamental character of that other. If a human being is viewed outside of the context of his foundation in neighbor love, Kierkegaard argues that

the essential human is missing and that the resulting love is simply a matter of fulfilling our natural desires and inclinations. These desires demand to be primary but only serve to conceal the only source of fulfillment that can truly satisfy us. Kierkegaard argues that ignoring this true origin of our personality does not answer the either/or but only results in an existential despair bound up in a conflict between the spiritual and the temporal. In a journal entry written the same year as *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard finds this despair echoed in the impossibility of serving two masters found in Matthew 6:24:

No one can serve two masters. This does not mean only the vacillating, irresolute person who does not quite know what to choose. No, the person who defiantly breaks with God and heaven in order to serve his desires and drives also serves two masters, something no one can do—for he has to serve God whether he wants to or not. The situation is not this simple: choose one of the two. The situation is rather this: there is only one choice if one is actually going to serve only one master, and that is God. (Journals Vol. 1 – 417)

Johann agrees that the choice is not between two objective options but lies in the subjective embrace of the task of love: “His basic choice is not what good to acquire, but what orientation to assume. Will he be attentive to the presence of Being? Will he respond to the invitation of the Infinite? Only by answering the gift of Self with the gift of himself can he ever fully and consciously be what he is.” (Johann 79-80)

We began this investigation with the stated desire to preserve our common-sense beliefs about friendship while also inquiring into its relation to the ultimate source of our personalities. By elucidating one interpretation of our basic affirmation of the intrinsic worth of our friends, and neighbors, it is hoped that many of the conclusions reached in this thesis have been coherent and supplemental to those basic intuitions. Outward actions are important in a healthy friendship, but they cannot be understood as the limit of our responsibility. We also have a duty to love the neighbor who is present in the friend,

regardless of the specific merit we find in him and the pleasure our relationship brings us. In this deeply inward process the infinite value of individual human life is revealed and we are allowed to joyfully grasp a transcendent reality that gives meaning to life. There can be little doubt that this understanding takes nothing away from friendship but rather supplements it in the highest way.

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