

4-1-2005

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Recommended Citation

Arroyo, Cristopher (2005) "Unselfish Salvation, Levinas, Kierkegaard, And The Place Of Self-Fulfillment Ethics," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol22/iss2/3>

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UNSELFISH SALVATION: LEVINAS, KIERKEGAARD, AND THE PLACE OF SELF-FULFILLMENT IN ETHICS

Christopher Arroyo

Levinas' ethics is often seen as implying a radical altruism, one which leaves no room for the subject's self-fulfillment. In fact, Levinas rejects Kierkegaard's ethics precisely because of the latter's concern for salvation and its seemingly egoistic implications. However, I argue (1) that Levinas misreads Kierkegaard on the issue of salvation, (2) that Kierkegaard's ethics and notion of salvation are non-egoistic and leave room for a notion of self-fulfillment that does not corrupt his selfless ethics, and (3) that Levinas, despite standard readings, creates a similar place for self-fulfillment in his description of the face to face encounter with the Other.

All philosophy is justification of oneself. The only original philosophy would be the one that would justify someone else.

Albert Camus¹

If we were to adopt Camus' criterion for an original philosophy, then it would seem quite appropriate to call the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas original. For Levinas does not hesitate in criticizing the history of Western philosophy for being primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with the experiencing, knowing, and acting subject. Levinas offers a radical alternative to this tradition by formulating an ethics that privileges the Other over the I, drawing attention to the radical asymmetry that obtains between the subject and the absolutely Other. It is this grounding of morality on the absolutely Other, seemingly to the detriment of the subject, that makes Levinas' philosophy novel.

Perhaps another candidate for the kind of originality we are attributing to Levinas would be the ethics Kierkegaard formulates in *Works of Love*.² Recognizing this similarity, M. Jamie Ferreira maintains that it is reasonable to "argue that the notion of the absolute and unconditional duty to love all without exception, dominating self-love's selfish preferential love (which we find in Kierkegaard), is parallel to the notion of absolute and unconditional and infinite demand placed on us by the very existence of the other (which we find in Levinas)."³ There are many striking similarities between the ethics found in *Works of Love* and the one found in *Totality and Infinity*,⁴ yet we find a significant objection to Kierkegaard's thought in the work of Levinas himself. At the very end of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas makes one of the very few references to Kierkegaard in this work. He writes:



The I is conserved then in goodness, without its resistance to system manifesting itself as the egoist cry of the subjectivity, still concerned for happiness or salvation, as in Kierkegaard. To posit being as Desire is to decline at the same time the ontology of isolated subjectivity and the ontology of impersonal reason realizing itself in history.⁵

Despite the seemingly Other-focused ethics of neighborly love found in Kierkegaard, Levinas takes issue with the Danish thinker's inclusion of an apparent concern for one's own salvation in the latter's discussion of ethics. This concern reveals, according to Levinas, traces of egoism in Kierkegaard's thought that Levinas rejects in his own account of the ethical.⁶

On most readings of *Totality and Infinity* it appears that Levinas successfully purges from his account of the Ethical Relation anything remotely resembling what the eudaimonistic tradition has understood as happiness (even happiness as understood by Kantian deontology). Inasmuch as this is the case, there is a striking difference between Kierkegaard's ethics and Levinas'; one might go so far as to say that insofar as an original ethics should purify itself of such selfish concerns, Levinas' account proves more innovative.

The aim of this paper is to reveal how Levinas, although offering a radical ethics of the Other, is not significantly different from Kierkegaard on the issue of "salvation," for he has created a space for happiness or fulfillment, as understood within the Aristotelian eudaimonistic tradition.⁷ In order to do this I will first discuss Levinas' notion of egoism and its corresponding notions of "freedom" as they are described in his treatment of Ontology and Enjoyment. I will contrast the egoism of Enjoyment with the selflessness of Desire as it appears in Levinas' metaphysical relation, drawing attention to how he seemingly precludes any notion of happiness from the Ethical. I will then move on to an examination of Kierkegaard's ethics in *Works of Love*, drawing attention to how he, too, rejects an egoistical ethics. Discussing the role of salvation therein, I will argue that it cannot be characterized as a concern for "happiness" as Levinas understands it. Finally, working from the understanding of salvation found in Kierkegaard, I shall argue that, in his account of the Ethical, Levinas does in fact have a space for a notion of fulfillment of the self.

Enjoyment, Happiness, and Desire

As mentioned above, Levinas offers us an ethics that grounds itself in the Other. In his effort to develop his ethics, he is diligent in avoiding what he terms "Egoism." Egoism, as Levinas articulates it, is the subject's exclusive concern with itself, which is manifested in a variety of ways throughout the history of philosophy. One such way is through Ontology. Ontology involves "a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being."⁸ Ontology reveals egoism at the level of representation or theoretical philosophy, for it is in my attempt to understand the world that I also seek to comprehend it; that is to say, through the application of concepts I make the world *my*

own, reduce its otherness to sameness by incorporating it into my being. What is interesting to note is that ontology, through its reduction of the other to the same, "promotes freedom—freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other."⁹ "That reason in the last analysis would be the manifestation of a freedom, neutralizing the other and encompassing him, can come as no surprise once it was laid down that sovereign reason knows only itself, that nothing other limits it."¹⁰ As we shall see, this freedom is not authentic freedom, for it is grounded on a more fundamental freedom, the freedom that arises at the Ethical relation. Although Ontology reveals the egoism that Levinas is so wary of, it is not the only level at which egoism plays a dominant role.

Egoism is perhaps most strongly characteristic of what Levinas calls Enjoyment, and this is where he locates the subject's search for happiness. Levinas provides us with a telling description of the egoism that permeates Enjoyment early in the text: "The possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, an other relative to me, is the way of the same. I am at home with myself in the world because it offers itself to or resists possession."¹¹ In Enjoyment, I am concerned solely with *my* needs. I seek to satisfy them, and I see the world I inhabit and the objects it contains simply as means to this end. Levinas' preferred image for articulating these needs is through nourishment, for it "is the transmutation of the other into the same, which is the essence of enjoyment: an energy that is other, recognized as other, recognized, we will see as sustaining the very act that is directed upon it, becomes, in enjoyment, my own energy, my strength, me."¹² It is significant that the wants and desires the I seeks to satisfy in Enjoyment are primarily, if not exclusively, sensual, for this helps to underscore the self-centeredness of Enjoyment.¹³ And the satisfaction of these wants and desires is equated with happiness. "Behind theory and practice there is enjoyment of theory and practice: the egoism of life. The final relation is enjoyment, *happiness*."¹⁴

Given Levinas' characterization of Enjoyment and happiness as a concern with satisfying wants and desires, it is fair to say that Levinas' notion of happiness is very Kantian. In fact, Levinas' definition of happiness is identical with Kant's. "Happiness is made up not of an absence of needs, whose tyranny and imposed character one denounces, but of the satisfaction of all needs."¹⁵ In fact, Levinas associates happiness with what he terms "Need", and Need is much like Kant's understanding of sensible inclinations and desires. "Need indicates void and lack in the needy one, its dependence on the exterior, the insufficiency of the needy being precisely that it does not entirely possess its being...."¹⁶ Because happiness is the end that Enjoyment seeks, and because happiness is achieved only through the satisfaction of my needs, Enjoyment exhibits a strong tendency to egoism, for I see the other exclusively as a means to my end: "Everything is here, everything belongs to me."¹⁷ Once again, the I seeks to reduce the other to the same. Yet, it is important to note that, for Levinas, my experiencing enjoyment and feeling at home in the world is a step on the way to recognizing the Ethical.¹⁸ Yet it is still a concern primarily for *myself*, *my* well-being and *my* happiness, that constitutes Enjoyment.

In describing Enjoyment, Levinas uses the phrase "living from...." This

phrase “delineates independence itself, the independence of enjoyment and of its happiness, which is the original pattern of all independence.”¹⁹ In describing ontology, we noted that egoism reveals itself as the tendency to reduce the other to the same, and in this tendency purports to affirm freedom—at least as it is understood at the level of representation. This same kind of affirmation of freedom takes place in Enjoyment. In living from the things I find in the world, in taking possession of them and using them as a means to my happiness, I am asserting my independence and “freedom”. In taking possession I am “at home,” yet this home “is not a container but a site where *I can*, where, dependent on a reality that is other, I am, despite this dependence or thanks to it, *free*.”²⁰ Of course, as with ontology, the freedom that is asserted is inauthentic inasmuch as it is grounded on a more fundamental freedom, that which is found in the Ethical relation. But we must postpone a discussion of this freedom until later.

We have seen how Need characterizes the egoism that is present within Enjoyment. It is this understanding of Need that Levinas contrasts with Desire. In Need, the I seeks to satisfy its inclinations and wants, such as the need for food, drink, a home, etc. On the contrary, Desire cannot be satisfied, for it is a desire for something that does not indicate a drive to possess or reduce the Other but rather “tends towards something else entirely, toward the absolutely other.”²¹ Metaphysical desire “desires beyond everything that can simply complete it. It is like goodness—the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it.”²² Desire is fundamentally different from the Need characteristic of Enjoyment and happiness: “in need I can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the other; in Desire there is no sinking one’s teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before me.”²³ Desire is radically different from Need because it is completely selfless, concerned exclusively with the Other. It is not a craving for sensual satisfaction but is a “Desire for the Infinite which the desirable arouses rather than satisfies. A Desire perfectly disinterested—goodness.”²⁴

Given these descriptions of the Desire one has for the Other, it comes as no surprise when we find Levinas asserting that this Desire “is absolutely non-egoist.”²⁵ And here is where we see how there can be no place for happiness at the level of the Ethical relation, at least insofar as Levinas has defined happiness. For happiness, because of its essential connection with Need, necessarily involves egoism and the drive to possess the other in order to use the other as a means to satisfying my egoistical drives. Levinas sees such egoism inherent in the self’s “concern” for salvation as described by Kierkegaard. Yet one may ask whether Kierkegaard’s “pre-occupation with salvation” is justly characterized as a concern for happiness—as Levinas understands it. Furthermore, one may inquire as to whether there is a space within the Ethical for the kind of fulfillment or “happiness” that is more characteristic of the eudaimonistic tradition. And in order to answer both questions we must turn to an examination of Kierkegaard’s ethics in *Works of Love* in order to draw out its similarities with Levinas’ ethics, so that we may investigate into the nature of Kierkegaard’s concern for salvation.

Kierkegaard's Ethics of Neighborly Love

Perhaps in examining Kierkegaard's ethics in *Works of Love* it would be best to begin where he does, namely with the opening prayer. We find at the end of the prayer a succinct characterization of an authentic work of love: "[B]ut in heaven no work can be pleasing unless it is a work of love: sincere in self-renunciation, a need in love itself, and for that very reason without any claim of meritoriousness!"²⁶ Even in this short passage we can see strong similarities with Levinas. First of all, it is important to note that Kierkegaard rejects an ethics concerned with improper self-love (i.e., Egoism), as does Levinas. His next statement regarding the *need* of love may seem to belie this self-renunciation, but, as we will see, this need should be understood more akin to Levinas' Desire rather than his notion of Need.²⁷ Finally, In opposition to the reading Levinas gives him, Kierkegaard insists that a true work of love makes no claim to meritoriousness.

If Levinas is highly critical of the egoism that pervades Enjoyment, then Kierkegaard is just as critical of the self-love that infects what he calls preferential love, namely erotic love and friendship. Kierkegaard calls these two kinds of love preferential because each "has preference's name, 'the beloved,' 'the friend,' who is loved in contrast to the whole world."²⁸ It is because the beloved is different in certain respects from other persons that she is loved. "Just as self-love selfishly embraces this one and only *self* that makes it self-love, so also erotic love's passionate preference selfishly encircles this one and only beloved, and friendship's passionate preference encircles this one and only friend."²⁹

But the problem with preferential love is deeper than this, for preferential or celebrated love is motivated by self-love. Celebrated love is driven by a one's needs and inclinations, by the need to be loved in return by the beloved, and it is under the guise of "altruistic" erotic or philial love that the self pursues these needs and inclinations. "In the beloved and the friend, it of course is not the neighbor who is loved, but the *other I*, or the first *I* once again, but more intensely."³⁰ Although Kierkegaard does not speak of self-love in terms of the satisfaction of basic needs, as Levinas does, there is fundamental agreement between the two thinkers on this issue. For Kierkegaard, the self seeks to possess the beloved for himself, and in this way, his account of self-love is analogous to Egoism as discussed in Levinas. Where a difference between the two thinkers begins to emerge is in Kierkegaard's remedy for this self-love, for the commandment is not merely to love the neighbor but to "love the neighbor as yourself." Here is a point where Levinas would take issue with Kierkegaard's ethics, for it appears that it is still infected with Egoism insofar as love for the neighbor is connected with love of the self, despite Kierkegaard's insistence that it be "proper" self-love.

In his own defense, Kierkegaard is quick to qualify what is meant by "as yourself." "Christianity presupposes that a person loves himself and then adds to this only the phrase about the neighbor *as yourself*. And yet there is a change of eternity between the former and the latter."³¹ The "self-love" involved with the commandment to love the neighbor as oneself is radically different from the self-love one finds in celebrated or preferential love.

In fact, it is a misrepresentation to call this “loving as oneself” self-love. “[I]f one is to love he neighbor *as oneself*, then the commandment, as with a pick, wrenches open the lock of self-love and wrests it away from a person.”³² In fact, Kierkegaard describes the Christian commandment to love the neighbor as oneself as an exercise in “self-denial, which is Christianity’s essential form.”³³ This self-denial, which is essential to the Christian call to love, is what precludes loving oneself from being infected by improper self-love. It is not the case that in loving the neighbor as myself I merely think of the ways in which I need to be loved and then simply love the neighbor in these ways; rather, there is a “change of eternity” between the self-love of preferential love and this notion of loving as oneself.

Yet there remains a passage in Kierkegaard that would lead one to believe that although he seeks to purge his ethics of any self-love or egoism he does not truly respect the alterity of the neighbor, for the neighbor is understood in terms of the self. “The concept of the ‘neighbor’ is actually the redoubling of your own self; ‘the neighbor’ is what thinkers call ‘the other,’ that by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested.”³⁴ It would be very easy to read this passage as indicative of Kierkegaard falling into the tendency to reduce the other to the same. Yet, given his categorical rejection of self-love, it would be more consistent with the ethics outlined thus far to read him as merely emphasizing in a slightly different way what he has already said about loving the neighbor as oneself—a loving, which I have argued, is in fact *not* egoistic.³⁵ This point is brought to light further in the text where Kierkegaard writes, “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*.”³⁶

Still, the question arises as to what is meant by this “change of eternity” Kierkegaard speaks of, for it is this difference that purports to purge self-love/egoism from the love of the neighbor. Here we arrive at the most striking difference between Kierkegaard and Levinas. As is well known, Levinas articulates an ethics of the absolutely Other, an Other that is my *human* other, my neighbor. Kierkegaard offers an ethics that is grounded on the absolutely Other as well, yet his *absolutely* Other is not my human neighbor but God.³⁷ God stands as the “middle term” between the neighbor and myself, making the difference of eternity. The essential role of God in loving the neighbor is brought to light by Kierkegaard in the following passage:

*Worldly wisdom is of the opinion that love is a relationship between persons; Christianity teaches that love is relationship between; a person—God—a person, that is, that God is the middle term. 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, even though everyone has praised this relationship—if God and the relationship with God have been omitted, then this, in the Christian sense, has not been love but a mutually enchanting defraudation of love.*³⁸

It is only in relating to the neighbor through God that one may achieve an

authentic work of love.³⁹ God stands as this middle term because God is the "God of love, source of all love in heaven and on earth...you who are love, so that one who loves is what he is only by being in you."⁴⁰

Of course, we must now ask what this relationship with God consists of, and with this question we may now turn to the charge Levinas makes against Kierkegaard regarding the latter's concern for personal salvation. From what we have seen thus far, it would appear that this charge would, in the very least, be in tension with the selfless ethic Kierkegaard presents us with. But one sees a potential ground for Levinas' critique in Kierkegaard's elaboration on the self's relationship with God and his discussion of hope. Kierkegaard, in the third chapter of the *Second Series of Works of Love*, asserts that love hopes all things. He goes on to describe this notion of hope as relating "to the future, to possibility...the possibility of advance or retrogression, of rising or falling, of good or of evil."⁴¹ To be sure, this hope is in one sense directed toward the neighbor, concerned with her goodness. But Kierkegaard also says, "Christianity's hope is eternity, and Christ is the Way; his debasement is the Way, but he was also the Way when he ascended into heaven."⁴² Here, then, we see why Levinas thinks that Kierkegaard is ultimately concerned with salvation; for in love's hope it appears that the self loves in order to achieve eternal salvation in union with God.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard discusses this notion of hope in relation to despair. For him, "despair is the lack of the eternal."⁴³ So it would seem that only in obeying God's commandment to love the neighbor, only in relating to (i.e., loving) God in "the right way" can the self secure itself against despair. Hence, it appears that Kierkegaard implicitly introduces into his ethics an egoistic motive on the part of the self in obeying God's commandment. However, Kierkegaard goes on to characterize despair, not as a lack of "happiness" (as Levinas understands it) in the subject, but as "a misrelation in a person's innermost being...For this reason there is only one security against despair: to undergo the change of eternity through duty's *shall*."⁴⁴ Of course, one could read this statement as asserting the kind of egoism that Levinas sees in Kierkegaard's ethics. But as I stated above, to quickly dismiss Kierkegaard's discussion of hope and despair as a reversion to egoism would be to grossly ignore the detailed arguments he gives *against* love that is motivated by self-love.

So how should one read Kierkegaard's discussion of hope? It should be clear from the discussion above that, like Levinas, Kierkegaard argues for an essentially relational self, not the autonomous self that is so distinctive of classical modern philosophy; this is apparent in his description of despair as a "misrelation." Moreover, we must remember that thus far Kierkegaard's understanding of the divine command to love the neighbor is not motivated by self-love but arises from a proper relation to God that leads us to selflessly obey God's command. "Yet only in self-denial can one effectually praise love, because God is love, and only in self-denial can one hold fast to God...in self-denial he must become (since self-denial is related to the universally human and thus is distinguished from the particular call and election), an instrument for God."⁴⁵ Therefore, when Kierkegaard speaks of the hope of the lover for the eternal and the eternal

as correcting this misrelation within the self, this should not be seen as the *motivation* for the self's actions but rather as an unintended consequence to participating in an authentic love relationship with God and the neighbor. The lover does not love the neighbor and God *in order to* receive eternal salvation or right relation within himself; rather, this right relation, this authentic selfhood, comes about as a "side effect," for lack of a better term.⁴⁶ Of course, this "side effect" does indeed have consequences for the self, for it is now in right relation to God, neighbor, and itself, and, therefore, is authentic, but in no way does the self in his obeying the commandment pursue this "right relation".

This reading of the role of hope and salvation in Kierkegaard's ethics is further supported by his repeated emphasis that the command to love must not be obeyed out of requirement for reward—it must be self-sacrificing.⁴⁷ Kierkegaard considers the possibility of requiring a reward from the beloved neighbor, even a reward that is love in return. No such reward may be expected.⁴⁸ He asserts that commanded love "belongs entirely to God, or in it the person belongs entirely to God," yet,

There is only one who sees the true connectedness, and he does not admire, since God in heaven does not admire any human being. On the contrary, while the true sacrifice has only one single abode—God—it nevertheless in turn seems to be forsaken by God, because it understands that before God it has no merit at all....⁴⁹

So it is not the case that by obeying the command to love that one impresses God and therefore merits salvation. If the self does in fact receive salvation, if it does gain right relation within itself because of its relation to the eternal, this is not because it is concerned with its own "happiness" or *eudaimonia* but rather because right relation with God is the sole intended effect on the part of the self in its effort to selflessly obey God's command.⁵⁰ It is with this understanding of the non-egoistical role of salvation in Kierkegaard's ethics that we can now return to Levinas and inquire as to whether his ethics contains a space for such a conception of "salvation."

Conclusion: Levinas' Face to Face and the Other as "Savior"

We have seen how Levinas, in formulating his ethics of the Other, has repeatedly insisted on the radically selfless position the subject must take towards the Other. I have sought to draw attention to this through a discussion of Levinas' critique of egoism. One thing which has been emphasized throughout this discussion, both in the Egoism that reveals itself in Ontology's drive to reduce the Other to the same and the Egoism that seeks to possess the Other in an effort to use the Other as a means to its happiness, is the self's repeated attempts to promote or assert its freedom. Yet freedom as it is asserted in Ontology and Enjoyment is not authentic freedom, for these kinds of freedom are grounded on a more fundamental freedom, the freedom which arises in the Ethical relation. It is in his discussion of this fundamental freedom, which grounds all freedom, that Levinas reveals a space within his ethics for a notion of fulfillment or salva-

tion as I have argued appears in Kierkegaard's ethics.

It would seem that the relationship Levinas presents us with in his description of metaphysical Desire would not only preclude Egoism or a concern with oneself but also lead to an oppression of the self in its recognition of its obligation to the Other. That is to say, it appears that in acknowledging its debt to the Other, the self not only renounces its own claim to freedom (the freedom that occurs in Representation or Enjoyment) but also is *oppressed* by the Other.⁵¹ Yet we find Levinas asserting at the beginning of *Totality and Infinity* that "This book then does present itself as a *defense* of subjectivity, but it will apprehend this subjectivity...as founded in the idea of infinity."⁵² So how does Levinas reconcile this seemingly oppressive encounter with the Other and his assertion that he is defending subjectivity? He is sensitive to this issue and addresses it in the chapter titled, "Ethics and the Face." He reassures us that the Other "does not purely and simply negate the I."⁵³ Moreover, he continues, "The resistance of the other does not do violence to me, does not act negatively; it has a positive structure: ethical.... I do not struggle with a faceless God but I respond to his expression, to his revelation."⁵⁴ It is in this positive ethical relation that Levinas reveals the place for the self's fulfillment in his ethics.

It is the Ethical relation that grounds the freedom of the I, but not because it is within this relation that the autonomous I truly asserts its freedom; rather, freedom is grounded in the Ethical because it is only in the face to face encounter that I *receive* my freedom. "But the absolutely other—the Other—does not limit the freedom of the same; calling it to responsibility, it finds it and justifies it. The relation with the other as face heals allergy."⁵⁵ Levinas also says that "in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness. The order of responsibility, where the gravity of ineluctable being freezes all laughter, is also the order where freedom is ineluctably invoked."⁵⁶

Here we see that despite Levinas' insistence on the non-egoistic nature of Desire and the selflessness that characterizes the Ethical relation, the self does in fact receive from the Other the very freedom it has sought to promote throughout Levinas' analysis. Might one not say that within Ontology and Enjoyment, insofar as these are seen as being the ultimate grounds of freedom, the self is in a "fundamental misrelation"? Is it not the case that in opening up to and entering into the right relation with the infinite Other (the eternal for Kierkegaard), this misrelation is corrected? And, in this sense, could not one describe the self as receiving "salvation" from the Other, achieving a fulfillment that does not qualify as sensual happiness yet nevertheless brings the self out of "despair" into right relation with the Other, thereby fulfilling the self?

It is not surprising that Levinas avoids this kind of language in discussing the founding of the self's freedom in the absolutely Other, for his writings are an attempt to overcome the egoism that has infected Western philosophy. Yet given the role salvation plays in Kierkegaard, namely not one of sensual self-satisfaction but one of unintended self-fulfillment, it seems that in designating the Other as the giver of my freedom Levinas has created a space for a fulfillment of the self, a kind of "happiness". And we

can, therefore, see that despite the initial appearance of stark dissimilarity on this issue, both Kierkegaard and Levinas are more in agreement than their readers have been led to believe.⁵⁷

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NOTES

1. Albert Camus, *Notebooks:1935-1951*. (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1965), 122.

2. It is important to keep in mind that "ethics" as discussed in *Works of Love* is different from "the ethical" as discussed in *Fear and Trembling*. The former is Kierkegaard's attempt to articulate a genuine Christian ethics, while the latter is meant to indicate Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit* rather than normative ethics in general. For a good discussion of "the ethical" in Kierkegaard see Merold Westphal "Kierkegaard and Hegel," in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 101-124 and Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Reason and Society* (University Park, PA: The University of Pennsylvania State Press, 1987) Chapter Five.

3. M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 128. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as *LGS*.

4. There has been an increase in the interest scholars have in drawing parallels to these two thinkers. See, for example, Andrea Hurst "Kierkegaard, Levinas and the Question of Escaping Metaphysics," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 19.3 (2000): 169-187; Peter Kemp "Another Language for the Other: From Kierkegaard to Levinas," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 23.6 (1997): 5-28; Merold Westphal "The Transparent Shadow: Kierkegaard and Levinas in Dialogue" in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* ed. Martin J. Matustik (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 265-282.

5. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 305. Hereafter this work will be referred to a *TI*.

6. Levinas does not reject happiness, egoism, or Enjoyment as necessarily evil or as evils in themselves, as I will discuss below. Rather, it is only when these aspects of human existence are seen as one's highest calling or primary responsibility that they become problematic.

7. Because of Levinas' understanding of "happiness," I will refrain from using the term to describe what I will argue remains available at the level of the Ethical Relation. Rather, I will use the term "fulfillment," yet this, too, must be understood in qualified sense, as I will argue below.

8. *TI*, 43.

9. *Ibid.*, 42. Of course, though Levinas' critique of ontology is meant to apply to the history of Western philosophy, it is most easily seen in modern philosophy, especially Kant's notion of autonomy.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, 38.

12. *Ibid.*, 111.

13. "[T]he independence of happiness, always depends on a content: it is the joy or the pain of breathing, looking, eating, working, handling the hammer and the machine, etc." (*TI*, 110).

14. *TI*, 113. Cf. 115, "Enjoyment, in relation with nourishment, which is the *other* of life, is an independence *sui generis*, the independence of happiness."

15. *TI*, 115.

16. *Ibid.*, 102. Cf. *Groundwork* 4: 399 where Kant discusses happiness and need in a similar fashion. A difference between Kant and Levinas obtains because of the dualism the former sets up between sensible and rational nature. Kant is more adamant in his insistence that these needs pose a serious threat to one's ability to obey the moral law, whereas Levinas paints a less grim picture of Need and Enjoyment (see notes 6 and 18).

17. *TI*, 37.

18. The specifics of Levinas' argument as to how one moves from Enjoyment, via labor and dwelling, to the Ethical are not of concern here. It is important to realize that insofar as Enjoyment does allow one to move from a preoccupation with one's own happiness to recognizing the Ethical relation, Enjoyment and happiness are not in and of themselves evil. Levinas states that "Happiness is a condition for activity" (113), and as this condition, it is not evil. Levinas goes so far as to say a human being "thrives on his needs; he is happy for his needs" (114).

19. *TI*, 110.

20. *Ibid.*, 37, emphasis mine.

21. *Ibid.*, 33.

22. *Ibid.*, 34.

23. *Ibid.*, 117.

24. *Ibid.*, 50.

25. *Ibid.*, 67.

26. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. and ed. by Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 4. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *WL*.

27. Ferreira makes this comparison as well. *LGS*, 26-7.

28. *WL*, 19. Cf. p. 63, "Forsake the dissimilarities so that you can love the neighbor." Although this was not emphasized above, Levinas also warns against preferences based on differences. In *Totality and Infinity* he speaks of the "nudity of the face," where this should be understood as an abstracting from all personal and individual differences (e.g., gender, race, culture, religion, etc.) that might lead one to judge or prefer the Other in a biased fashion. "The things are naked, by metaphor, only when they are without adornments: bare walls, naked landscapes" (*TI*, 74).

29. *WL*, 53.

30. *Ibid.*, 57

31. *Ibid.*, 18.

32. *Ibid.*, 17.

33. *Ibid.*, 56.

34. *Ibid.*, 21. It is interesting to note that there may be yet another similarity between Levinas and Kierkegaard on this score, for the concept of "substitution" discussed in Levinas' *Otherwise Than Being*, has many striking similarities to Kierkegaard's notion of the "redoubling of the self". I thank Amy Leigh Peters for drawing my attention to this similarity.

35. Ferreira points out that the command to love the neighbor "more than yourself" is in fact inconsistent with a non-egoistical ethics. She states that this is so for two reasons. First of all, only God is capable of loving more than himself. Secondly, we should never obey another human being unconditionally, for often times this would lead us to be complicit in allowing another person to pander to human weakness. *LGS*, 130-131.

36. *WL*, 57. Cf. 53. "For this reason 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 difference in language used by Kierkegaard is meant to emphasize the selflessness of neighborly love as opposed to the selfishness of self-love. The description of the neighbor as “third party” will be discussed below in my treatment of God as the “middle term” in the love relationship.

37. It is interesting to note that there is a passage where Kierkegaard speaks of the neighbor as “eternity’s mark on every human being” (89). This seems to echo the trace of the divine in the Other that Levinas speaks of, yet, for Kierkegaard, this “mark” can only be seen “by means of eternity’s light” (i.e., through right relation to God).

38. *WL*, 106-7.

39. Some critics of Kierkegaard fault him for his insistence that God is the “middle term.” They charge that such an understanding of the self’s relationship to the neighbor reduces the neighbor to nothing more than an occasion to love God. Ferreira gives an extended and nuanced discussion of what Kierkegaard means by “God as the middle term” and how he is not susceptible to this criticism. See *LGS*, 71-6.

40. *WL*, 3. Cf. p. 121 where Kierkegaard writes, “The love-relationship requires threeness: the lover, the beloved, the love—but the love is God.” M. Jamie Ferreira effectively describes the role of God as “middle term” in *Works of Love* when she writes, “What makes Christian devotedness to the other different [from merely human devotedness in the form of celebrated love] is that our determinations of what counts as loving in a given case are stabilized by relating first ‘to God and God’s requirement.’” *LGS*, 72.

41. *Ibid.*, 249.

42. *Ibid.*, 248.

43. *Ibid.*, 41.

44. *Ibid.*, 40.

45. *Ibid.*, 364.

46. The point I am arguing can be elucidated by reference to Aristotle’s discussion of pleasure in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X Chapter 4 sections 5 and 8. Aristotle argues that the pleasure which accompanies a certain activity completes this good, but it does not do so in any intended or sought after way. Rather, pleasure is “a sort of consequent end” (1174b33-35).

47. *WL*, 130.

48. In his criticism and rejection of preferential love, one point Kierkegaard repeatedly makes is that preferential love is always reward. This is especially true of his discussion of “exchange” within erotic and philial relationships, for “an exchange by no means abolishes the distinction ‘mine and yours,’ because that for which I exchange myself then becomes mine again” (*WL*, 267).

49. *WL*, 131.

50. This “right relation” is directed towards the self’s relation with God in obeying his commandment and not with the self’s own recovery from despair. If one were concerned with one’s own salvation from despair in the effort to enter into right relation with God, this selfish concern would undermine that effort. Moreover, anticipating my conclusion, it should be noted that Ferreira gives a thoughtful discussion of the issue of merit/reward and “interestedness” in Kierkegaard and Levinas by drawing on Derrida’s work on the concept of the “gift.” *LGS*, 163-6.

51. In his discussion of infinite debt, Levinas is often charged with subjugating the I to the Other so radically that the I is no longer able to respond to the Other as a moral agent (i.e., the self becomes “morally paralyzed” on

Levinas' view). My argument is that Levinas' call to openness to the Other does not necessarily preclude a self who is a moral agent; in fact, it is what makes moral agency possible. A good defense of Levinas against the charge of moral paralysis is offered by M. Jamie Ferreira in "'Total Altruism' in Levinas's 'Ethics of the Welcome,'" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 29.3 (2001): 443-470. Ferreira makes a similar claim as mine using both the early and later published works of Levinas, though her paper specifically defends Levinas against the version of the "moral paralysis" critique put forth by Ricoeur.

52. TI, 26. Emphasis mine.

53. Ibid., 194.

54. Ibid., 197.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 201. Cf. 203.

57. I would like to thank Dr. Merold Westphal and Amy Leigh Peters for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper, though responsibility for its shortcomings lies solely with me.