

On Neighborly and Preferential Love in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*
Matt Rosen, Colorado College

Do we not read in Luke's Gospel (14:12-13) these words of Christ's: 'When you give a dinner or supper, do not invite your friends or your companions or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.'

Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 82

The question of the possibility of the coexistence of *neighborly love* – love for the absolute stranger – and *preferential love* – love for those whose attributes we know, those we love because of or despite their qualities – has long perplexed interpreters of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*.¹ For some interpreters, the text is read as an attempt to subordinate preferential love, including friendship, romantic love, familial love, and so on, to a 'higher' form of love, i.e., neighborly love. In that sense, Kierkegaard is taken to be admonishing us to avoid preferential love, or at least to be wary of its sufficiency and potential primacy. For other interpreters, the text is read as being inconsistent in regard to any distinction between preferential and neighborly love; Kierkegaard is seen to be either equivocating between the two or condemning preferential love in some instances while praising it in others. In these cases, the text is taken to be in need of exegetical clarification or novel revision.

My intervention into this interpretive debate will be threefold. First, I will aim to show that privileging preferential love over and above neighborly love leads to the impossibility of the latter. A love without regard to the qualities of the Other must entail resistance to the totalization of that Other in a love because of or despite their given qualities. Second, I will reformulate both preferential and neighborly love in a topological model. To this end, I will call the topological structure of preferential love as such the "field of one," the "field of two" will be shown to be the topology of neighborly love as such, and the "field of three" will be shown to be an alternate, and in some instances more desirable, form of preferential love. Third, I will argue that preferential love can indeed coexist with neighborly love insofar as the latter is granted primacy to the former; neighborly love, in this model of coexistence, will unilaterally determine preferential love but will be foreclosed to what would be its reciprocal or dialectical determinations. I will

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term this topology, which clarifies the ideal² relationship between neighborly and preferential love, the “coexistent two-and-three.”

I: Preferential Love, Self-Love, and Angst

The coexistence of neighborly love and preferential love entails the coexistence of an *absolute* Other and an Other-*for-me*. On the one hand, the object of neighborly love must be precisely non-objectivizable, which is to say that the Other who is loved in a neighborly fashion cannot be totalized as *just* the object of that love, as merely what they are in the love relation and nothing besides, without the neighborly love becoming, by the very fact of the totalization, preferential love. The Other who is loved as a stranger is an Other who is loved without regard to their identities, positions in society, etc.³ On the other hand, the object of preferential love is the Other-with-qualities, the Other determined by their given attributes to be ‘eligible’ for one’s preference. The qualities of the Other are, in this case, *given by the self*. The subject who apprehends the qualities ‘of the Other’ provides the very givenness by which those qualities are given in the first instance. The prehension of the attributes of the Other, qua object of preferential love, is in fact a prehension of attributes given always by a self-same givenness. It is in this sense that the Other of a preferential love relation is ‘*for-me*’: the manifestation of their qualities is *from me*.

In *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes introduces a distinction between the primary and secondary qualities of a thing: the primary qualities of a thing are those that are in the thing itself, while the secondary qualities of a thing are given by the perceiver.⁴ Kant, in the first *Critique*, then declares such a distinction to be a product of the ‘diseases of the head,’ i.e., symptomatic of speculative and dogmatic metaphysics.⁵ For Kant, all of the perceived qualities

² As I will argue, this ‘ideal’ relationship is always and already the case; it can in this sense be said to be ‘real.’ Thus, the question of its attainment (the ideal) is a question of its recollection as being always and already the case, i.e., real.

³ What I name herein “the Other,” “the stranger,” or “the neighbor,” resists, by their very constitution as such, the nature of conceptualization. It is in this vein that I will aim to show that the Other is radically distinct from qualities, identities, positions, etc. The reader may find it helpful to reference my *Angst and Abnegation* §14, “The non-concept of the invert,” and §17, “Deliverance and the quietism of the no matter what,” on this point. For a discussion of the nature of the Other, the “infinity-(of)-alterity,” as the result of the recasting of the “quantum finitude” against their qualitative positions, see *Angst and Abnegation* §15, “A theory of material analogy.” Even if his evident influence goes unmentioned, and I am of course indebted to the whole of his oeuvre, it may be helpful throughout to contrast my positions with those of Emmanuel Levinas, especially as he sets them forth in *Totality and Infinity*. Cf. Emmanuel Levinas. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

⁴ See: René Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated and Edited by John Cottingham (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), “Sixth Meditation,” 57-72. In *After Finitude*, Quentin Meillassoux argues for the reintroduction of the primary/secondary quality distinction, with secondary qualities being given by the perceiver’s givenness (for-us), while primary qualities – which, for Meillassoux, are roughly those that can be mathematized – describe the thing-in-itself (hence, mathematics proves to be, for Meillassoux, a means of access to the Absolute). He writes: “The theory of primary and secondary qualities seems to belong to an irremediably obsolete philosophical past. It is time it was rehabilitated... as we shall see, what is at stake in it is the nature of thought’s relation to the absolute.” Quentin Meillassoux. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 1.

⁵ Badiou tells us that “Kant is the one author for whom I cannot feel any kinship. Everything in him exasperates me, above all his legalism — always asking *Quid Juris?* Or ‘Haven’t you crossed the limit?’ The critical machinery he set up has enduringly poisoned philosophy... I am persuaded that the whole of the critical enterprise is set up to shield against the tempting symptom represented by the seer Swedenborg, or against ‘diseases of the head’, as Kant

of a thing are for-us, or given by the perceiver's own givenness, in the sense that the thing-in-itself cannot be known. All of the known qualities of a thing, then, must be for-the-knower inasmuch as they are from the knower or given by the knower. If the thing-in-itself has what would be primary qualities, they cannot be the target of one's prehension. Nevertheless, Kant maintains the existence of the thing-in-itself in order to provide a source from which the thing-for-us might arise. Additionally, because we cannot know the thing-in-itself – what *is* whether we are or not – we are free to believe about it whatever we wish. For us, it can be anything whatsoever we want it to be; knowledge is divorced from faith. Kant's rejection of the 'ontological proof' of the existence of God, put forward by Anselm in its weaker form and Descartes in its stronger form, is a case in point. His argument can be roughly distilled into three constitutive theses: (1), God is of the in-itself, (2), we cannot know anything about the in-itself, and (3), therefore we cannot speak of a knowledge of God except insofar as we can derive such a knowledge from what is for-us. We can infer, for Kant, that God is required as the universal and necessary postulate for the possibility of morality, and so we must live *as if* God exists (belief). However, because there is no *knowledge* of God, we may believe what we wish; existence is not a predicate. Belief is a question of that which is for-us and no longer a question of correspondence with some absolute or necessary entity.⁶

After Kant's critical project, philosophy largely accepted the schism between the noumenal and phenomenal, although in a variety of forms of lesser and greater degree which present constraints of space and time will not allow us to address here in detail.⁷ In each case, though, philosophy dispensed with the possibility of a knowledge of the in-itself, and often with the possibility of an in-itself at all, as in Hegel and the speculative idealists. For Hegel, it is not just that we cannot *know* the thing-in-itself to which primary qualities would belong, but rather that the thing-in-itself is always and already included in what is for-me. To think the thing-in-itself is to think a thought *of* the thing-in-itself and so to think a thought. There can thus be no thought of being inextricable from thinking itself (i.e., from the thinker). It is only the correlation of thinking and being that is accessible to thought.⁸ If, for Kant, all perceived qualities are Cartesian secondary qualities, while primary qualities may exist but cannot be the object of perception or knowledge, then, for Hegel, there are only ever secondary qualities. In other words, what for Descartes were secondary qualities become, for Hegel, qualities as such.

puts it." Alain Badiou. *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*. Translated by Alberto Toscano (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 535-536. I am for the most part sympathetic to this polemic, though in a qualified way that should be evident herein and that has something to do with my dubiousness about the ethical import of a conception of the person as a subject in fidelity to the truth of an event. My suspicion is that such a conception of the acting subject impedes the sort of practical action most relevant to the moral matters of human life.

⁶ It is on this basis that Meillassoux critiques fideism in the 'return to religion' which seems to characterize much of contemporary phenomenology after what Janicaud termed the 'theological turn.' Meillassoux's concern is that the apparent incapacity of reason to access the Absolute opens the door to competing claims of faith which, given no higher standard of evidence by which they can be tested, can only become fanaticisms. The reader may find it helpful to refer to Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, "Metaphysics, Fideism, Speculation," 28-49.

⁷ Related investigations have been undertaken by many who are more capable than I am. See especially, Meillassoux's *After Finitude*, the anthology *After the "Speculative Turn,"* edited by Eileen Joy and Katerina Kolozova, and Graham Harman's *Speculative Realism: An Introduction*.

⁸ This is the argument that Meillassoux terms the "correlationist circle" or "correlationist two-step." He identifies it with the stronger version of what he terms "correlationism," viz., the view that being cannot be thought except as inextricably correlated with that thinking, as thinking-being. Weak correlationism says that there can be no Absolute (qua entity, etc.), whereas strong correlationism instead absolutizes the correlation itself. See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 37.

The collapse of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities renders problematic the very possibility of neighborly love because the neighbor can no longer be understood *as a neighbor*. If the perceived Other is always and already for-me, if the Other is given by a givenness necessarily self-same to me, then no genuine Other exists. Infinite alterity, which is non-qualitative (it cannot be for-me and still be infinite alterity), is no longer possible. In this framework, the only conceivable form of love is preferential: in thinking the Other of the love relation, I can only think the correlation of my thinking, of what is of me, and the Other whose qualities are given by the givenness of my thinking or perception. The Other cannot be thought as extricable from the love relation itself which, through the self, gives to the Other their qualitative ipseity. The Other is thus always determined as such by their qualities, attributes, identities, positions, etc.; they are always and already subsumed under my self-same categories of understanding, objectivated as the object of the love relation by the ‘externals’ – the qualities and so forth given by the self – that make them worthy of preferential love (which is here decisively equivalent to love qua love). This is precisely what Kierkegaard exhorts us to avoid when he writes: “When Christ says (Matthew 10:17), ‘Beware of people,’ I wonder if by this is not also meant: Beware of being tricked out of the highest by people, that is, by continual comparison with other people, by habit, and by externals?”⁹

With preferential love as the only possible sense of love itself, difference-in-degree likewise becomes the only viable sense of difference. If the Other differs from me, it is always by a degree of standard deviations from the mean or norm that I am as the source of the givenness of the Other as given. As the origin of noesis, or ‘I-pole,’ I totalize the Other as the noema, or ‘object-pole,’ of my experience of them: the Other is contained, assimilated, included, represented as x , and set in place.¹⁰ They are subject to a count. This standardizes their difference *from me*. The Other *qua Other*, the non-objectivable stranger whose existence neighborly love demands, is then declared unattainable, unthinkable, or akin to impossibility itself, perhaps accessible only by some mystical *via negativa* of faith. Even when we speak of “the Other” in our discourse, we give it its signification under the logic of the concept, which is of course a logic of the self-same (for the concept is my own). The very symbolization of the Other as a concept, through which we claim to grasp the Other in its totality, is the fruit of a self-same labor. And this is not to mention the contemporary prevalence of relational ontologies in which the Other is always the sum of roles or positions in various relations (it is assumed that if you added up all of the ways in which a thing is a relatum in conjunction with other things, you would have the full and total sense of the thing itself).

The primacy of preferential love vis-à-vis neighborly love – which, as we have seen, is the result of a metaphysic in which neighborly love is unthinkable inasmuch as the neighbor qua neighbor is impossible – is indicative of a topology that I will call the “field of one.” In the field of one, there is only the self and what is self-same to it. Here, love is always preferential and is expected to be reciprocal, subject to the logic of exchange. Difference is always a matter of degree, and the absolute Other does not exist. All is immanent to the one that I am, and there is nothing that is not in some sense *of me*, given by a self-same givenness.

Nevertheless, even when we inhabit the field of one, the stranger remains the answer to a certain need in us. The neighbor’s call elicits our response, no matter the topology in which we

⁹ Søren Kierkegaard. *Works of Love*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 27.

¹⁰ Cf. Edmund Husserl. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson (Abingdon, Oxon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), *passim*.

find ourselves. This is because every ethical system, each formulation of an ethical imperative, rule, principle, etc., demands the existence of a genuine Other. Even if, for Kant, there is no perceivable absolute Other, but only the Other-for-us whose qualities are self-same to us, the categorical imperative still requires us to *treat the Other* in such a way that our act could be universally willable. Even if, for Mill, the Other is always subsumed under the logic of the utility calculus, the weighing of relative evils for which no action is in the first place out of question, the principle of utility nonetheless demands that we prioritize the greatest good (in whatever sense) for the *greatest number of Others*. This is true even for an ethic concerned principally with self-cultivation: it is imagined that if *each and every Other* cultivated themselves, some form of morality would then be achieved, or else that self-cultivation is said to lead to the ethical treatment of *Others*. In any event, the need for the Others always persists. If we do not think that the Other qua Other exists, if we inhabit the field of one, the need for the Other *insists* all the same. And this need is a sign: as Kierkegaard writes, “Need, to have need, to be a needy person – how reluctant a person is to have this said about him! Yet we are saying the utmost when we say of the poet, ‘He has a need to write’ ... This is precisely the young woman’s greatest riches, that she needs the beloved; and this is the devout man’s greatest and his true riches, that he needs God.”¹¹

This persistent *need* for the Other, evident even in the field of one, should not be confused with a *desire* for the Other. Absolute difference in the sense of infinite alterity necessarily resists¹² the logic of subsumption under the categories of understanding, the logic of utter inclusion and totalizing identification. The Other as the one-I-desire would no longer be the Other as *absolutely* Other; instead, they would be comprehended in their entirety as the object of *my* cathexis, intentionality, or jouissance. If the Other was only the object of my desire, qua the one-I-desire, they would exist, in the sense of our relation, for-me. The need for the Other is not a desire precisely because it does not engage in any objectivation of that at which it aims. It is the result of an ethical yearning to respond to a call that cannot otherwise be fulfilled. This does not mean that the Other is *simply* the requirement-of-the-imperative, a means that would allow the moral subject to satisfy a duty. The Other, by the very fact of their infinite alterity, is, as the noematic target of my need, also very much in excess of this position (the coexistence of this position and this being-in-excess is evidently the same coexistence of preferential and neighborly love that we seek). And in fact, the need for the Other is the very need for that which is in excess of its identification as the answer to the need.

In inhabiting the field of one – a topology in which the Other is the impossible answer to the self’s ethical need – the self lives in what I will call the “condition of angst.” In angst, the self demands an outside that is imagined to be unthinkable for it. It demands what it, metaphysically speaking, cannot have. Heidegger’s Da-sein, for example, in being always constrained to the ‘there’ (*Da*), renders the Other inconceivable: there can be no Other uncorrelated with the ‘there,’ i.e., with the thereness of what is explicitly self-same or differs from the self only by degree from the norm that it thus is. This is why the analysis of being qua being must proceed,

¹¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 10-11.

¹² Latour tells us that the real is that which resists. See: Bruno Latour. *The Pasteurization of France*. Translated by Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: First Harvard University Press, 1993), 188. The relation of Latour to the work sketched herein is complex: in his earlier work on networks of relation, the nonexistence of the Other qua Other is quite clear. The Other is always the sum of positions within nexûs, even if his comment about the real would have us believe otherwise. In Latour’s more recent work, e.g., in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, the reality of the Other is less obviously determined in such a way.

for Heidegger, via an analytic of Da-sein itself.¹³ The prevailing form of the condition of angst in our contemporaneity is perhaps what I have elsewhere termed “shallow intensity.”¹⁴ In this form of angst, intensification becomes its own end and, as such, the intensification of intensification becomes the value par excellence. The principal thing that is to be intensified is the process of intensification itself; the consistent re-evaluation of all values, in which Nietzsche located the will-to-power and in which Heidegger located the nihilism at our doorstep proclaimed by Nietzsche, becomes the principal site of its own process, namely, evaluation by a subject. In shallow intensity, the Other is constantly subsumed under the forward march of an intensification which, in order to reach the utmost pitch, must subsume under it anything alteritous to it. Insofar as the Other resists the logic of shallow intensity (and, if it is to remain the Other, it must resist such a grasping totalization), it is stamped out or excised.¹⁵ In this contemporary condition, the angst of needing an outside that is declared impossible meets the fatigue of the intensification which takes as its precondition exactly this impossibility. The field of one becomes not only a topology characterized by angst, but one characterized by boredom and exhaustion.

Love, in the field of one, is always preferential in nature.¹⁶ This is because the Other who is the object of the love – i.e., the Other-for-the-one-who-loves – is constituted by qualities given by a self-same givenness. In other words, the only possible love in the field of one is self-love.¹⁷ We can see here why Kierkegaard conflates preferential love and self-love throughout *Works of Love*: preferential love is precisely self-love in the sense that there is no genuine Other who could stake a claim to the expression of the love. Kierkegaard writes, “Your friend, your beloved, your child, or whoever is the object of your love has a claim upon an expression of it... The emotion is not your possession but belongs to the other; the expression is your debt to him,

¹³ “This guiding activity of taking a look at Being arises from the average understanding of Being in which we always operate and *which in the end belongs to the essential constitution of Dasein itself.*” Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1962), 27-28. Or: “Therefore *fundamental ontology*, from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 34).

¹⁴ For a further discussion of the condition of shallow intensity, see *Angst and Abnegation* §5, “The condition called shallow intensity.”

¹⁵ In some cases, this means that the need for the Other is excised to the extent that it can be. Intensification sometimes reaches such a terrifying pitch that the need for the Other is at least temporarily forgotten by many. The impossibility of the Other’s existence in the field of one, coupled with the dissolution of the need for the Other (for some time, until the shallow intensity dissipates in some way), is what I analyze as the “ethic” of the Nazis in *Angst and Abnegation* §14, “The non-concept of the invert.” There is also some discussion of this in §6, “The condition called angst.”

¹⁶ Insofar as one inhabits the field of one, even acts that would appear to be ‘works of love’ are, Kierkegaard tells us, actually acts of self-love: “But even giving to charity, visiting the widow, and clothing the naked do not truly demonstrate or make known a person’s love, inasmuch as one can do works of love in an unloving, yes, even in a self-loving way, and if this is so the work of love is no work of love at all” (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 13).

¹⁷ To some extent, even self-love, properly conceived, is not possible in the field of one. This is because I am, in a sense, Other to myself. Self-discovery is possible only because I am not transparent to myself, nor exhausted by the qualities that I give to myself via my self-same givenness. As Kierkegaard says, “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” (ibid., 22, emphasis added). This is because loving myself “in the right way” amounts to loving the Other, the neighbor, that I am to myself. This sense of self-love entails a self-denial, an abnegation to the Other that I am to myself. It takes the form of the resignation of the sufficiency of the givenness by which I give the qualities of myself that I apprehend or perceive. And perhaps I return to these qualities – to ‘having’ rather than ‘being’ them – while acknowledging their utter insufficiency, while recognizing my own non-totalizability, in something akin to the movement of faith as set forth in *Fear and Trembling* (this would, of course, be the form of the coexistence of preferential love and neighborly love).

since in the emotion you indeed belong to him who moves you and you become aware that you belong to him.”¹⁸ In the field of one, the Other to whom your emotion would ‘belong,’ to whom you owe the expression of your love, does not exist. The only love there can be is for the self or what is self-same, viz., the Other-for-the-self, the one who is granted a preferential status due to the qualities given to them by the self. If the preferential love of the field of one essentially amounts to self-love, or love of the self-same, then neighborly love is entirely unthinkable within the bounds of this topology. Indeed, Kierkegaard warns us of this: “Do not delude yourselves into thinking that you could bargain, that by loving some people, relatives and friends, you would be loving the neighbor...”¹⁹ For neighborly love to be possible, then, we will have to conceive of an altogether different topology which we might then inhabit, and in which it might then be thinkable to love the neighbor as the neighbor. If we are to love the stranger, we must think the “field of two.”

II: Neighborly Love, Deliverance, and Abnegation

Kierkegaard tells us, in the opening of *Works of Love*, that the text is “not about love but about works of love.”²⁰ But what sort of *work* is love? If love is to be anything other than self-love, if it cannot be simply equated with preferential love, then the work of love must be the sort of praxis that would grant the one who loves access to the outside of the field of one. That is to say, the work of love must allow the one who does it to know the Other; and, if it is to be a love of the Other qua Other, this knowing cannot be a grasping. Kierkegaard makes the nature of this praxis explicit when he writes, “the task and requirement of love [is] to deny oneself.”²¹

The Other can be known as Other in the praxis of abnegation. The Other is the very truth of this form of practical action, as we shall make clear. The abnegation of the self to *x* is a form of access to *x* in which *x* is precisely *that* vis-à-vis which the self finds itself in an abnegational position. As *that* which condemns the self to responsibility for it, to an abnegational position, the Other is known *as whatever they may be*. The Other retains their infinite alterity and is not totalized in the praxis of abnegation because such a praxis does not consist in any qualitative determination or representation. Abnegation is never ‘because of’ nor ‘despite,’ but is always done ‘without regard’ to any given qualities. The Other is known as that which interrupts the sufficiency of the field of one, inverting²² its topology such that the self is no longer in the position of the totalizer of all else but is instead in abnegation to the Other (which is not a relation in the sense that the Other is given-without-giveness,²³ i.e., the Other is not determined by attributes given by any self-same givenness). In this non-relation to the Other, the self inhabits the topology that I will call the “field of two.”

The field of two is the topology in which the self encounters an Other who condemns it to a position (in non-relation to it) of abnegation. This field thus consists in a self and an Other (the

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 12.

¹⁹ Ibid., 62. Additionally, Kierkegaard makes it clear that “love is not a being-for-itself” (ibid, 233).

²⁰ Ibid., 3, emphasis removed.

²¹ Ibid., 7.

²² The reader may find it helpful to refer to *Angst and Abnegation* §14, “The non-concept of the invert.”

²³ “For it could be that contemporary philosophers have lost the great outdoors, the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, *and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is*, existing whether we are thinking it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory – of being entirely elsewhere” (Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 7, emphasis altered).

two) who are not related to each other in any third term; the two are not related or terms of some larger and more fundamental correlation but are entirely extricable from one another. The Other can be known as whatever they are, through the praxis of abnegation, whether I am or not. They are not set in place by me. The condemnation to the field of two is indifferent to what would be the determinate qualities of any Other. It is blind to attributes given by my givenness: “But love for the neighbor makes a person blind in the deepest and noblest and most blessed sense of the word, so that he blindly loves every human being as the lover loves the beloved.”²⁴

We can further specify the praxis of abnegation – the self-denial of neighborly love – as love *in the fashion of the no matter what*. The “no matter what” is the axiom of the field of two: in abnegating to each Other *no matter what*, without regard to their given qualities, I strip the Other of my determinations and self-same givenness. The no matter what is a razor that cuts to the singularity that the Other is whatsoever they are, and no matter what or whether I am. In loving the Other axiomatically in the fashion of the no matter what, I do not love them ‘because of’ or ‘despite’ any particular attribute, quality, identity, or position, or any set thereof. The no matter what is precisely the axiom that defines the practical action of abnegation, which in turn structures the topology of the field of two. Kierkegaard tells us that the “distinction *friend* or *enemy* is a difference in the object of love, but love for the neighbor has the object that is without difference. The neighbor is the utterly unrecognizable dissimilarity between persons...”²⁵ That is, love for the neighbor is love for that which is without *qualitative* difference (difference-in-degree); it is a love for that which is different in kind from all else (“the utterly unrecognizable dissimilarity between persons”), that which is singular in the fashion of the no matter what. And the work of this love is the praxis of abnegation.

Loving the Other in the fashion of the no matter what, as whatever they are without regard to their attributes given by a self-same givenness, is not, as Sharon Krishek argues in *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, a “sameness.” She writes: “The problem with this model of love [viz., neighborly love as primary] is not that it implies sameness in the object of love... but rather that it implies the sameness of the love itself.”²⁶ Each neighbor loved as a neighbor is not the same, Krishek admits, but she nevertheless worries that the love in question is, as such, uniform and not, as in preferential love, appropriately molded to the concrete or particular Other at hand.²⁷ Such a love might be an acceptance of the Other, it might be a compassion for the Other, but it would not, according to Krishek, be legitimate love. Kierkegaard has an answer to this concern when he writes that the way in which one should love the neighbor is ‘as oneself.’²⁸ The form of love in the fashion of the no matter what may seem to be uniform, whereas the content of the love (i.e., the Other) is absolutely singular, but this distinction between a form of “sameness” and a content radically different in each case is the product of a misunderstanding. In abnegating to the singular Other, the content *determines* the form. This is what it means to love the neighbor *as oneself*. Krishek reads the imperative to ‘love the neighbor as yourself,’ along with other interpreters, as ‘love the

²⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 69.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 68.

²⁶ Sharon Krishek. *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126, emphasis removed. We might also consider: “We are the same to the Emperors as we are to the neighbors.” Tertullian. *Apology in Tertullian and Minucius Felix*. Translated by T. R. Glover (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977), 167.

²⁷ The assumption here is evidently that being singular requires the determination of qualities. As we have shown, the Other determined by ‘their’ qualities is not at all singular but is rather always for-the-self. What is qualitatively particular, then, isn’t in any sense what is singular.

²⁸ See, for example, Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 20.

neighbor as *you love yourself*.²⁹ But Kierkegaard does not add these two words which would seem to predicate neighborly love on a sort of self-love. He, instead, says that one should love the neighbor *as oneself*. In other words, neighborly love is a kenotic love: she who loves the Other empties herself of herself such that she can ‘fill herself up,’ so to speak, with the Other. He who loves abnegates himself to the Other such that there is room to love the Other as himself. The love of the neighbor is, as Kierkegaard puts it, “self-denial’s love.”³⁰ Self-denial’s love – love in the fashion of the no matter what – is not uniform because its form is, in the sense of kenosis, determined by the singularity of its content, which is to say, by the Other.³¹

This is why “the one who loves does something to himself”,³² it is why the one who loves the neighbor is thereby ‘contemporary’ with Christ. Kierkegaard makes it clear that “[w]herever the essentially Christian is, there also is self-denial, which is Christianity’s essential form.”³³ After all, Christ “emptied himself” on the cross,³⁴ crying out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”³⁵ To love the Other *as oneself* is to empty oneself, imitating Christ. It is to abnegate to the Other in a no matter what fashion and thus to inhabit the field of two. If abnegation is the action that structures this topology, though, it cannot be the means *by which* the self comes to inhabit it. This would be the case if the field of one was originary, if the movement of the self was from the field of one into the field of two, but, as we have said, the primacy of the field of one would render the field of two unthinkable inasmuch as it would render the Other akin to impossibility itself. Thus, coming to inhabit the field of two is not a movement from out of the primary field of one but is rather a movement *back* to the primary field of two from the field of one characterized by the forgetting of the two. Abnegation to the Other in the fashion of the no matter what is in this sense *always already acted*. Coming to inhabit the field of two therefore entails the *recollection* of one’s always already acted abnegation to the Other. It is a matter of the anamnestic faculty. It is for this reason that neighborly love compels one “to will to exist equally for unconditionally every human being.”³⁶ Neighborly love does not *cause* the Other to come into being (thus, bringing about the constitution of the field of two from out of the field of one). Rather, it consists simply in willing the Other to exist, which is always and already the case. After all, we are thrown in the first instance into a world of Others. One *recollects* that they are in an abnegational position to the Other, that such an abnegation in the fashion of the no matter what is always already acted, and so *returns* to the topology of the field of two in remembering it. This recollection is immanent to the

²⁹ Krishek writes of “the duty to love the neighbor, any neighbor, as one loves oneself...” (Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, 113, emphasis removed). See also: 115-116.

³⁰ “[P]assionately preferential love is another form of self-love... self-denial’s love, in contrast, loves the neighbor, whom one shall love” (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 53, emphasis removed).

³¹ Kierkegaard tells us that he who loves the neighbor “bears the burdens” (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 220). These burdens are unique, evidently, to the Other who is loved. But the singularity of these burdens is not only due to the Other’s qualities; in kenosis, the Other, whatsoever they are, condemns the self to a position of responsibility for their *non-qualitative* ipseity (what I have elsewhere called the “quantum finitude” or “the generic”). This responsibility is shaped by that ipseity, even though whatever the *qualitative* ipseity (given by a self-same givenness) would be is disregarded. We will see that neighborly love, in this abnegational sense, and preferential love, which would pay attention to the qualitative ipseity, can indeed coexist.

³² Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 219.

³³ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁴ Philippians 2:7, ESV.

³⁵ Matthew 27:46, ESV.

³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 84. Kierkegaard contrasts this with willing the Other to exist “according to one’s advantages of earthly dissimilarity,” i.e., for the sake of ‘earthly’ qualities and attributes and their dissimilarities according to degree, which he identifies as symptomatic of vices such as “pride and arrogance.”

inhabiting of the field of two, and we are spurred to this recollection by the insistence of the Other, by the need for the Other which persists even in the field of one. It is in this sense that the Other is the organon of our deliverance from the field of one.

There are three objections to our construction of the topology of the field of two with which we must contend. The first is the *objection from resistance*: the field of two seems to demand capitulation to the will of the Other, when sometimes we must resist the will of one Other for the sake of another.³⁷ The second is the *objection from the temporal*: in time, the Other seems ephemeral and transitory, determined by qualities given by the march of time and subsumed under the twin logics of memorialization and hope. And the third is the *objection from the communal*: in the world into which we have been thrown, there are not only Others who condemn us to abnegation.³⁸ Rather, there is always and already the introduction of a ‘third,’ i.e., a relation between the self and the Other in the form of a structure, framework, schema, analogy, etc. Thus, the field of two does not seem to be originary. I will reply to the first two objections – those from resistance and the temporal – in this section, and the third objection – that from the communal – will occupy our inquiry in the subsequent section.

The objection from resistance takes the following form: let’s suppose that, one night, as we sit comfortably in our home, listening to the pitter-patter of the rain outside while reading next to the warm fireplace, we hear a knock at the door. Annoyed at being shaken out of our quiet enjoyment of the rain – the sort of enjoyment available only to those who know that it’s raining but are not in the rain – we open the door. After all, who are we to turn away the drenched and hungry stranger? At our doorstep, we see not one stranger but two. We invite them both in for a cup of tea and a warm meal. The strangers are not acquainted with one another but soon get to talking. One of them, we learn, is an observant Jew who was out in the rain because it is the Sabbath and driving is prohibited. At this point, the other stranger grows angry and demands that the Jew be asked to leave, forced back into the cold rain and denied the comfort that warm food brings to the hungry. Confused, we inquire further, only to discover that our other guest is obstinately anti-Semitic. In abnegation to the Jewish stranger, we are aware that our welcoming cannot be denied, certainly not for the sake of the relief this would bring to the anti-Semite. And yet, are we not also in a position of abnegation vis-à-vis the anti-Semitic stranger? According to the objection from resistance, inhabiting the field of two gives us no ground to proceed. It seems as if we cannot welcome both strangers.

Let’s recall, though, that inhabiting the field of two entails remembering the abnegation to the Other *in the fashion of the no matter what*. We said that the no matter what is a razor that ascetically strips away the qualities of the Other, leaving behind only the Other as whatever they may be. As Kierkegaard puts it, “the object of both erotic love and of friendship has preference’s name, ‘the beloved,’ ‘the friend,’ who is loved in contrast to the whole world.”³⁹ Neighborly love, though, does not “make exceptions, neither of preference nor of aversion.”⁴⁰ Anti-Semitism is, of course, a quality – it is a set of attributes, behaviors, positions, and so forth – to which the

³⁷ This objection is formulated in more detail in *Angst and Abnegation* §16, “The topology of the coexistent two-and-three.” It is formulated alternatively in “For a Theory of Queer Insurrection: The Good News at the End Times,” forthcoming in *Oraxiom* 1. See also, n. 40.

³⁸ This objection is formulated in more detail in *Angst and Abnegation* §15, “A theory of material analogy.”

³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Consider also: “The neighbor is the one who is equal. The neighbor is neither the beloved, for whom you have passion’s preference, nor your friend, for whom you have passion’s preference... He is your neighbor on the basis of equality with you before God, but unconditionally every person has this equality and has it unconditionally” (*ibid.*, 60).

abnegation of the field of two pays no attention (it does not make exceptions). This is true, equally, of the quality of Jewishness of the Jewish Other. That being said, the quality of anti-Semitism is particular in that the one who ‘has’ it engages in *the imposition of qualities onto specific Others who are then totalized as such* (it shares this particularity with qualities such as sexism, homophobia, racism, transphobia, and so on). For the anti-Semite, the Jewish Other is not actually an Other but is totalized by a given identification: “Jew.” This identification is, as we have noted, given by the anti-Semite’s self-same givenness. The anti-Semite sees the Jew as *just that*, as entirely captured by this given identity, this name. Resistance to the anti-Semite can thus be *derived* from the recollection of the abnegation to *each and every* Other whom we encounter. Indeed, resistance is always a question of precisely this derivation.⁴¹ In recollection of the always already acted abnegation to the Jewish stranger, we are compelled to resist the anti-Semitism, *qua* attribute, of the anti-Semitic stranger. This is because such an attribute is colonizing of the Jewish Other: it totalizes that Other as “the Jew,” and thus the anti-Semite does not inhabit the field of two in non-relation to the Jewish Other.⁴² The quality of Jewishness, while it is evidently stripped away in the ascesis of the no matter what, is not an *impositional* quality, and so resistance to it cannot be derived from the axiom of the field of two (even if it is set aside in the abnegation ‘done’ without regard to qualities). Thus, in inhabiting the field of two, the recollection of our abnegation to all Others in the fashion of the no matter what necessitates that we deny the request of the anti-Semite and resist their anti-Semitism. This does not mean that we must deny our hospitality to the anti-Semite *qua neighbor*, but that we must resist the quality of anti-Semitism *qua attribute* if we are to remain in the field of two in non-relation to our Jewish guest. The objection from resistance can therefore be answered: abnegation does not entail capitulation. Resistance can, in some instances, be derived from the singular axiom of the no matter what. When such derivation is possible, the resistance follows from the field of two and is thus in keeping with the imperative of neighborly love. When the derivation is not possible, the resistance does not follow from the field of two and can thus be said to be at odds with the imperative of neighborly love.⁴³

Unlike the objection from resistance, the objection from the temporal does not set one stranger against another, but rather sets the stranger against the inevitable flux of time. Kierkegaard writes: “Everywhere he [viz., the one who loves the neighbor] looks, he naturally sees the dissimilarities... and those who in a worldly way have clung firmly to a *temporal* dissimilarity, whatever it may be, are like ravenous wolves.”⁴⁴ Time seems to wreak a twofold havoc on our construction of the field of two. *First*, time gives the Other certain qualities: these are qualities of age, qualities that serve to illustrate the amount of time that one has been in the world – wrinkles, a hunched back, trouble walking, heart conditions, the need for a greater amount of rest each day, insomnia, which is sometimes the inability to get that much needed rest, decreased appetite, increased nostalgia, the deaths of loved ones that seem to pile up each year until too few are left,

⁴¹ The relationship between the field of two and resistance (which is a unilateral relationship of derivation in which the latter is determined by the former, and the former is foreclosed to the latter) suggests the nature of the relationship between ethics (the field of two) and politics (the field of three, see section III of this paper, “The Third, Analogy, and Coexistence”). We can say of derived resistance that we get it from the in-itself inasmuch as it is derived from the axiom of the field of two in which the self encounters the Other and is condemned to an abnegational position.

⁴² Likewise, resistance to the Jewish stranger’s totalization of the anti-Semite as “the anti-Semite,” should such a totalization occur, could be derived from the axiom of the field of two.

⁴³ See my “To Not Lose Sight of the Good: Notes on the Zapatismo Ethic” for more on the derivation of resistance from the axiom of the no matter what, specifically in the context of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional.

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 73, emphasis added.

indeed, the deaths of the Others. These are just some of the effects that time has on each of us, no matter who we are. Heidegger made us aware that none of us can escape our own death, but neither can we escape aging. And aging, along with the deaths of those we love, deaths to which we are called to bear witness, is one way in which we come to know that we too, like the Others, must die. Time foregrounds the way in which we, ourselves, are changing. And this can all too easily become a sort of self-absorption as we watch ourselves age and fade, approaching the horizon of our life, a horizon we know that we must one day not merely approach but cross, as the Others have. As we become more and more aware that we too will die, as we see signs of this very fact on our own face in the mirror, in the way in which just getting around has become more of a burden, we sometimes neglect the deaths of the Others. It is true: we cannot die for them. But this does not mean we cannot attend to them in their deaths. It does not mean that we cannot really be there for them, with them, next to them, as they pass away from what they were, absent but not forgotten in that absence. In light of the forward march of time, facticity and loss – the very fabric of our finitude – present a hurdle to our remembrance of the field of two, of the abnegation to each Other in the fashion of the no matter what. But it is only a hurdle. As we have noted, the no matter what is a razor that cuts away the apparent gravity of given qualities, and those qualities cut away include those of age. By applying such a razor to ourselves, we can better attend to the deaths of the Others, and in the end, to the death of the Other that we are to ourselves.

Second, in a certain light, time seems to necessarily include the Other within it, comprehending the Other or assimilating them within its movement. Even if we refuse the field of one, recollecting the originary field of two, time seems to hold both the self and the Other within its grasp, as if, for and in time, there is no Other but only change, growth, decay, and monistic process. In this sense, the weight of the temporal appears to diminish the infinity of the Other's very alterity: in time, all difference is a matter of degree. Kierkegaard remarks: "And now the differences between human beings! How infinite!"⁴⁵ But in time, as in death, all difference seems to be rendered stale or trivial. Like the rest, I must die. Like the rest, I must age. Like the rest, I must grow, and then decay. As each day passes for the Others, so it passes for me. As each night is full of waking anxiety for the Others, full of the insomnia which results from knowing that they are, so too do I stay awake, knowing that I am. As each day includes the whole of my lived experience, incorporating it into its own fabric, into its own consistency, it does the same for the Others. I feel as if I am held captive in time, so too do the Others. Where is there genuine difference in time?

The Other-in-time is finitized insofar as the Other is taken to be only *in time*, only *in the world*. They are totalized by the fullness of this location, by the way in which being-in-time seems to have no outside. In this way, we begin again to feel the angst of the field of one: there is no Other whose cheek time does not irrevocably brush. And if we could know the whole extent of the time of the Other, the time in which the Other is, was, or will be, then we imagine that we would know them in their totality, as whatever they are. The Other-in-time is thus no longer *absolutely* Other, for time holds them entirely in its hands. There is no infinite difference in the temporal.

But then the moment of recollection, the moment of abnegation, strikes. Abnegation is a refusal to surrender to the logics of time and the world. The praxis in which one recollects the always already acted abnegation to the Other in the field of two, a praxis immanent to that field, is decisively kairotic (or uchronic). It is here and now, or perhaps no-where and no-time.⁴⁶ Put

⁴⁵ Ibid., 230.

⁴⁶ I am indebted here to François Laruelle's discussion of uchronicity throughout his oeuvre, but especially in *General Theory of Victims* and *Intellectuals and Power*. It should be acknowledged, also, that everything about

simply, inhabiting the field of two entails the rejection of time's sufficiency: the Other is indeed in time, but the Other is not *just* in time. The Other is indeed in the world, but the Other is not merely of the world. If the Other is to remain the Other, time must grasp it only insufficiently, only partially.

It will be objected, of course, that the Other dies: is not this time's revenge, time's total hold? We witness this throughout our lives: the Other does die. But death is the signification *we* give to the Other, the name *we* employ, based on particular qualities, specific signs of death: a drop in body temperature, the failure of the heart to circulate blood, the cessation of the functioning of other organs, a decrease in brain activity. The Other who is dead is absent, as they once were present.⁴⁷ But death comes from outside; it is a set of qualities, attributes, eventual causes, and so on. It happens *to* the Other. In the fashion of the no matter what, in the field of two, there is no death.⁴⁸ And so, time holds no sway here. The apparent primacy of time, which either compels us to hope in something to come that will right the wrongs that have been done to the Others throughout history and allow future Others not to suffer similar wrongs,⁴⁹ or else compels us to a memorialization⁵⁰ in which the Others are fixed, set in place for all posterity, is refused in the recollection of our always already acted abnegation.⁵¹ Because there is the now of the field of two, time only ever tells a partial story.

being able to write this very paper stands in time. The state of philosophy is subject to historical accumulation. What I have read is the product of my place and time (among other factors). My very ability to do philosophy owes itself to the time into which I have been thrown. And yet, much of the impact of time is on *how* something is said, and not *that* it is said (or lived). And even when the impact is on the latter, it should be noted that this paper and its author can indeed be said to be subject to the temporal, but they are not merely these subjects. One can be in time without being only in time: abnegation is a refusal to capitulate to the logics of time precisely insofar as it is a refusal to capitulate to time's claim to totalize or comprehend in full what stands within it.

⁴⁷ Tristan Garcia has an excellent discussion of the way in which presence and absence characterize death in his *Form and Object*. See: Tristan Garcia. *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*. Translated by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 410-429.

⁴⁸ Michel Henry makes a similar point in *Incarnation*: "Augustine leads this Christian structure of salvation, which we find in all the Fathers as well as in the councils, to its furthest point, where the becoming-man of God, which makes possible in turn the becoming-God of man, must be taken literally – as meaning deification, *the identification with incorruptible Life that alone allows man to escape death.*" Michel Henry. *Incarnation: A Philosophy of the Flesh*. Translated by Karl Hefty (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 234, emphasis added. Henry likewise speaks of "life's own temporality" and the conception of death to which it leads in *I Am the Truth*: "Life's self-engendering, in which each living ego is engendered, signifies for that ego an absolute-Before... And when this Before is Life, a Life that is always already accomplished, always already living, so that from it can be born all livings, then is not... the one who comes after Life's Before... forever cut off from it, separated from this absolute Life in which it alone could escape death? What Christianity obliges us to find is an entirely new and unusual conception of temporality – one that is the essence of Life's own temporality." Michel Henry. *I Am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*. Translated by Susan Emanuel (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 158. Or consider: "Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present." Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), Proposition 6.4311. On death, see also: *Angst and Abnegation* §17, "Deliverance and the quietism of the no matter what."

⁴⁹ I critique Meillassoux's ethics of immanent hope (as set forth in his "Dilemme Spectrale," in *Critique* 704, January/February 2006) on this basis in *Angst and Abnegation* §12, "A topology of the field of two."

⁵⁰ This is what Kierkegaard critiques as "recollection's love." It may be helpful to see Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, 24-28.

⁵¹ This is precisely why we can still love the dead Other in the sense of the recollection of our always already acted abnegation. See Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, "The Work of Love in Recollecting One Who Is Dead," 345-358. While there is not room here to give it the appropriate consideration, there is evidently a relation between the ability

III: The Third, Analogy, and Coexistence

The world into which we are thrown in nascency is indeed a world full of Others, but it is also a world full of institutions and structures that bridge and fuse those Others in particular patterns and forms of relation. In this world, we find ourselves not only face to face with Others but positioned within communities and networks. According to the objection from the communal, the third objection that we must consider in regard to our understanding of the field of two, this field cannot be originary because we never find ourselves in a world devoid of a third term.⁵² That is to say, the introduction of the third – the relation between the self and the Other – is always and already the case. In birth, I enter a complex array of relational schemas, including a family, the functional apparatuses of local government, a nation, a system of education comprised of primary schools, secondary schools, universities, and so forth, perhaps a religion, a culture, a heritage; I later may enter a job-market, a business, a marriage, a new parent-child relation, a different religion or culture; and I may discover that I belong in networks of relation of which I was previously unaware: a family lineage recently unearthed, a heritage forgotten and then brought to light, an identity that I had to come upon in myself in time, a detail of past connections freshly disclosed, an old friend who returns again to a place of priority within my life.⁵³ Regardless of the stage of life in which I presently am, whether just born or on death's threshold, I am never unrelated to the Others. To be in the world at all seems to be a communal sort of existence.

The basic topological structure that the objection from the communal brings to bear is what I will call the “field of three,” and it takes the form of an analogy. In the field of three, the self and the Other are two terms which are ostensibly inextricable from their relation in the third (i.e., the analogy itself). The self *qua analogizer* and the Other *qua analogand* exist for each other in the *analogy*, i.e., in the field of three, the self is for-the-Other and the Other is for-the-self. The ‘for’ is not transitive, hence the dual structure of the analogy. Insofar as the analogical structure of the field of three entails a basal expectation of reciprocity or exchange, we can say that the field of three is “as-one.” The self, as the analogizer, colonizes the Other *qua analogand*, who is subsumed under the relation itself as for-the-self. In this sense, the field of three mimics the logic of the field of one; we will call this topology the “three-as-one,” for the three terms – the self, the Other, and the analogy – exist in necessary correlation with one another, inseparable from the whole. In the three-as-one, there is no self who is not for-the-Other, there is no Other who is not for-the-self, and there is no analogy without these two terms. While the Other is evidently totalized in the three-as-one, they are also positioned as the analogizer *vis-à-vis* the self, who, as the analogand, is likewise subsumed under the relation as for-the-Other. Thus, the analogical structure of the three-as-one forces both the Other and the self into the dialectical roles of colonizer *and* colonized, analogizer *and* analogand, criminal *and* victim.

to (continue to) love the dead, to inhabit the field of two and be condemned to an abnegational position in non-relation to the dead Other, and the critique of Meillassoux's ethic mentioned in n. 49. We said previously that the Other is the organon of deliverance from the field of one; insofar as the need for the Other, the Other's insistence, compels us to recollect the field of two, we can now see that the Other is thereby also the organon of deliverance from time's sufficiency.

⁵² This objection is formulated in more detail in *Angst and Abnegation* §15, “A theory of material analogy.” It can be found in perhaps its strongest form in the work of Badiou and Zizek.

⁵³ Regarding the correlation of the self to the Other in birth and the question of the extricability of these two ‘terms’ – self and Other – from the third of the relation, see *ibid.*, §4, “The correlation is born/in birth.”

The topology of the three-as-one is constituted by a *normative analogy*: the self and the Other each serve as the norm or mean of the relation (the analogizer) from which their respective Other (the analogand) exists as different only in degree.⁵⁴ As in the field of one, love in the three-as-one is inescapably preferential in nature. Often, this takes the form of an empathetic love: I put myself into the Other's proverbial shoes, I try to imagine the world from the vantage point of the Other.⁵⁵ The relation of this empathy – in which I intend to construct for myself the being of the Other – is normatively analogical, i.e., it is predicated on a relation of likeness. I empathize with the Other insofar as that Other has qualities that I can 'try on for size,' so to speak, without too much trouble. Empathetic love is a love *because of* or *despite*, rather than a love *without regard*. Difference here is in degree, which is necessary if there is to be a relation of this sort. It is not a love in the fashion of the no matter what because the relation concerns precisely qualities that matter to some subject: namely, those that said subject has in common with the Other (or, perhaps, the relation also involves a sustained effort to set aside those qualities that this subject does not have in common with the Other). Inasmuch as I have empathetic, or normatively analogical, love for the Other, I anticipate the same in return. After all, I can empathize with the Other who I am like, and so this Other ought to be able to do the same. Kierkegaard describes the love of the three-as-one when he writes: "There is a lower view of love, therefore a lower love that has no view of love in itself. This view regards loving as a demand and being loved as an earthly good..."⁵⁶ That is, the neighborly love of the field of two, which is non-reciprocal and non-relational, is foreclosed to anyone who inhabits the three-as-one. In this sense, the love of

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that Kierkegaard writes, "in love for the neighbor, God is the middle term" (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 58). Insofar as God, qua middle term, comprehends the self, qua lover, and the Other, qua beloved, the structure of the analogical relation is normative; this is precisely the form of the three-as-one. This view – that the three-as-one is the topology of neighborly love, a topology in which the third (the analogy or relation) is itself identified as "God" – is one potential reading of Kierkegaard's claim that "God is the middle term," but it does seem to be at odds with the view otherwise presented in *Works of Love* and reformulated herein. Alternate readings might include: that neighborly love is "Godly" in some sense, or of the Good; that God 'dwells' in a particular way in the (non-)relations of those who love in a neighborly fashion, i.e., in the field of two; that God precisely is the non-relation between the self and the Other, in which the Other condemns the self to an abnegational position; that neighborly love leaves no room for a middle term, and this empty space of the non-relation is inhabitable only by God, or is open to such inhabiting because no relation fills it up; that the Other, the neighbor, is in some sense the Godhead and so God, qua God, emanates from this Godhead of the Other into the space of the non-relation, into the field of two. As we can see, there are many ways in which Kierkegaard's statement might be interpreted, and I do not think that an interpretation contra the model of neighborly love sketched herein is necessary. Such an interpretation would, all else aside, have to find a compelling manner in which to deal with the critique that it bears a striking resemblance to the occasionalism of Al-Ghazali or Malebranche (God makes possible every relation of love rather than every causal relation), or to the object-oriented ontology of Harman, et al., which I have critiqued elsewhere on the basis of its ethical implications and relationism (see, for example, *Angst and Abnegation*, §3, "A conception of death"). How Kierkegaard's statement here fits in with the picture I've given – a picture I think preferable to alternative pictures of the relation between neighborly and preferential love for reasons ethical and descriptive, thin and thick – is an open question. I'm not sure it's all that consequential for what I've said in this paper, and I'll have to leave it to others for the time being.

⁵⁵ For a critique of empathy in this vein – and especially of the Kohutian conception of empathy as "vicarious introspection" – see *Angst and Abnegation*, §15, "A theory of material analogy," and note IV.7. While not comparable with my views regarding empathy and normative analogy, the concerns set forth in Philip Rubovitz-Seitz's consideration of the Kohutian self-psychological method may prove interesting in conjunction with my worries here and as elaborated in *Angst and Abnegation*. See Philip Rubovitz-Seitz. "Kohut's Method of Interpretation: A Critique" in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* (Vol. 36, Issue 4, August 1988, 933-959), especially the section on "epistemological liabilities" and the "conclusions," 941-954 and 954-955, respectively.

⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 237.

the three-as-one, which is only preferential, is not at all distinct from that which we previously considered in regard to the field of one.

The topology of the three-as-one cannot coexist with the field of two. This is because, as in the field of one, the three-as-one involves in its very constitution ‘as-one’ the forgetting of the primacy of the two. This is what allows for the totalization of the Other by the self – the ‘as-one’ – which renders the inhabiting of the two impossible. Only in the recollection of the always already acted praxis of abnegation, a recollection immanent to the two, can such inhabiting of its field be realized. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard describes the love of the three-as-one as ‘pagan love’: “Paganism... is precisely that kind of despair; it is despair but has no knowledge of it.”⁵⁷ He then writes, “for what characterizes despair is just this – that it is ignorant of being despair... the pagan was not conscious of himself before God...”⁵⁸ Inhabiting the three-as-one – in which love is always preferential, and thus is self-love or ‘pagan love,’ a love of despair or what I have named “angst” – is a twice-forgetting: one must forget the primacy of the field of two, and then one must forget that one has forgotten.⁵⁹ To remember only the second of these forgettings is to be called, in that singular recollection, back to the originary inhabiting of the two. We can say that if the two is the topology of the Good, as I contend, then to do Evil is to lose sight of the Good, and to do so twice.

If the choice is to inhabit the three-as-one *or* to inhabit the two, then surely we must choose the recollection of the two (indeed, the consciousness of the choice is enough to enact such a recollection). But what of the objection from the communal? As we have said, the world into which we are thrown is a world of Others and also a world of relations and communities. How is it possible to have community with the Other who, as the Other and if they are to remain the Other, necessarily resists inclusion, assimilation, and the logics of relations, even those of time? We can rephrase this question in topological terms: how can the neighborly love of the field of two coexist with the preferential love of the field of three without the latter totalizing the Other and thus rendering the former unthinkable?

On the one hand, the field of two is the space of the moment of always already acted abnegation, a field that can be inhabited in the recollection of its primacy, in the act of attunement immanent to it. The axiom of this topology is the axiom of neighborly love, the axiom of ‘self-denial’s love’: abnegation to the Other in the fashion of the no matter what. The field of three, on the other hand, is the space of preferential love for the concrete, qualitative Other who is, in this sense, for-the-one-who-loves. The field of three is characterized by the analogical milieu in which the self and the Other are always and already in relation. This

⁵⁷ Søren Kierkegaard. *The Sickness unto Death*. Translated by Alastair Hannay (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2004), 75.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 75-76. Consider also: “Compared with the person who is conscious of his despair, the despairer who does not know he is in despair is simply one negativity further from the truth and deliverance” (*ibid.*, 74).

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard writes: “To believe nothing at all is the very border where believing evil begins; in other words, the good is the object of belief, and therefore someone who believes nothing at all begins to believe evil” (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 234). For Kierkegaard, we cannot exist in the world without belief in something: in being thrown into the world, we perhaps believe even before we can know. The Good, Kierkegaard tells us, is the “object of belief,” i.e., the Good is originary (and I take this to be the field of two). And “someone who believes nothing at all,” someone who forgets the primacy of the Good, then – in that forgetting – can begin “to believe evil.” Note also that the movement from this twice forgetting of the Good back to inhabiting the Good of the field of two bears a clear resemblance to the movement from unconscious despair, through conscious despair, to faith in *The Sickness unto Death*. Like that movement, the movement toward the field of two is one of risk. And, indeed, it has a price to pay. But it is either risk or angst, and I submit that in setting this choice before us, it is already made. See *Angst and Abnegation* §6, “The condition called angst.”

topology, insofar as it renders neighborly love unachievable through the mechanism of the twice forgetting that allows for the primacy of preferential love, is what Kierkegaard calls ‘the crowd,’ “the multitude of people... busied with all sorts of worldly pursuits.”⁶⁰ It is a distraction from the originary field of two. For a critic of Kierkegaard such as Buber, it seems then as if one can either be in relation with other people, or else in abnegation to the Other (perhaps in the form of being-before-God), but cannot do both. As Buber puts it, for Kierkegaard, “[e]veryone should... essentially speak only with God and with himself.”⁶¹ He elaborates: “One must have essential intercourse only with God, says Kierkegaard. It is impossible, says Hasidism, to have truly essential intercourse with God when there is no essential intercourse with men [i.e., in community].”⁶² For Buber, the field of two cannot exist without the field of three (“it is impossible”), but we have already noted that the field of three cannot exist without the field of two except as-one. Thus, if we are to answer Buber’s concern and yet retain the originary field of two, the space of neighborly love in distinction from the preferential love of the fields of three and one, we must be able to construct a topology of the *coexistent two-and-three*.⁶³

The field of three becomes ‘as-one’ in the totalization of the Other as for-the-self, as merely what they are in and for the analogy. The analogical structure of the three-as-one is thus ‘normative.’ This is possible because of the twice-forgetting of the field of two. But is the three-as-one the only conceivable sense of the field of three? Is normative analogy the only thinkable sense of analogy?

Let’s imagine that we are sitting at a table across from our friend, with whom we are having a conversation. We are in relation with our friend, and the sort of love we have for them is preferential, viz., friendship’s love. Our preferential love for our friend is predicated on a set of qualities that we particularly value: e.g., kindness, generosity, political views with which we agree or at least with which we can peaceably disagree, shared attributes such as, say, children of the same age or geographical proximity, perhaps an activity we both like to do and sometimes do together. In other words, our friendship is premised on a considerable degree of likeness and a minimal (or optimal) degree of unlikeness; in any case, the difference of our friend from us, within the bounds of the preferential love, is a difference in degree. In our conversation while sitting at the table, our friend delivers shocking news: everything they have told us, everything upon which our friendship was founded, has been a lie. Not only do we, in fact, have nothing at all in common, but we are outraged that they have lied to us, and we are angry at ourselves for having been so easily fooled. We look across the table and no longer recognize the person sitting there. In this instance, our preferential love for our friend quickly dissipates. In its place, we feel only resentment and exasperation. Who is this person who sits across from us?

Insofar as we inhabit the three-as-one vis-à-vis our friend, the *form* of the relation remains the same. Previously, the friend was objectivated as “the friend.” In the normative

⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 63.

⁶¹ Martin Buber, *Die Frage an den Einzelnen*, 31, in *Werke*, Vol. 1, 228, “The Question to the Single One,” 50.

⁶² Martin Buber, “Gottesliebe und Nächstenliebe” in *Werke*, Vol. 3, 865. English translation: “Love of God and Love of Neighbor” in Buber, *Hasidism* (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1948), 165. Krishek has a similar critique of the primacy of neighborly love: “to consider romantic love merely as a manifestation of neighborly love is to diminish the importance of the former and to neglect its distinctive and unique nature” (Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, 4). It seems to me that Kierkegaard’s view, reformulated in the perhaps heterodox topological model I have employed herein, has the resources to answer both Buber’s worry about community and Krishek’s critique regarding preferential love’s distinctive quality.

⁶³ At this point, the reader may find it helpful to refer to *Angst and Abnegation* §16, “The topology of the coexistent two-and-three.”

analogy that held us together as friends, they were for-us and we were for-them, and they were nothing besides this. Now, after their deceit has been revealed, the friend remains objectivated, but the *content* of this objectivation is different: no longer “the friend,” the person who sits across from us is now “the liar,” “the cause of our outrage,” etc. From this position within the three-as-one, we have a choice: we can remain in the three-as-one and view the Other who sits across from us as “the liar,” totalizing them in that quality, or else we can recollect the field of two in which our abnegation to the Other is always already acted (and, as we have said, consciousness of the choice is enough to choose the latter). Recollecting the two is a renunciation of the sufficiency of the three (which, precisely in its sufficiency, is ‘as-one’). This does not mean that we must ignore the quality of the Other’s duplicity, but rather that we must resign our own totalization of the Other in this duplicity. In moving from the three-as-one to the field of two, it is the as-one-ness of the field of three that is ascetically stripped away in the fashion of the no matter what, not the field of three as such. From the vantage point of the remembrance of the two, we still see our friend as having lied to us, but we do not see them as “the liar.” We see them both as having lied to us and as being in excess of that act, as having been our friend and in excess of their role in that relation. Thus, from within the field of two, we can then re-inhabit the field of three⁶⁴ while having resigned its as-one-ness, its sufficiency or its claim to totality.

This movement from the three-as-one, to the two, and back to the three that is not ‘as-one’ illustrates the nature of the topology of the coexistent two-and-three: if the field of two is to coexist with the field of three, the former must unilaterally determine the latter while being foreclosed to what would be its reciprocal determinations. It is in this way that the vicious dialectic of the three-as-one – analogizer-analogand, criminal-victim, colonizer-colonized, etc. – is suspended. To put it simply, when it comes to the fields of two and three, order matters. The two and three can only coexist insofar as the former precedes the latter, i.e., insofar as one inhabits the three from the stance of the prior inhabiting of the two. Only in this order of inhabiting can we defend the Other a priori; only in this way is it possible to “not go under,” as Kierkegaard puts it.⁶⁵

In the topology of the two-and-three, the *finite* Other who is for-me and the *infinite* Other who is a stranger to me can coexist as senses of the Other.⁶⁶ This is possible not because, in inhabiting the field of two, I renounce the relation *as such* between myself and the Other, but because I refuse that relation’s claim to totality or sufficiency, its as-one-ness.⁶⁷ The movement

⁶⁴ The form of the analogy characteristic of the three that isn’t ‘as-one’ is what I have elsewhere called “material analogy.” There is not space or time here to appropriately consider its structure, but the reader can find such a consideration in *Angst and Abnegation* §15, “A theory of material analogy.” For an application of the theory of material analogy to empirical science, especially archaeology, see *Speculative Annihilationism: The Intersection of Archaeology and Extinction* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2019), especially “Analogy and Assemblages,” 45-51.

⁶⁵ “The believer sees and understands his undoing (in what has befallen him or what he risks) in human terms, but he has faith. Therefore, he does not go under” (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 69, emphasis removed). In other words, the one who has faith still inhabits the three (he “sees and understands his undoing... in human terms”), but he does so from the stance of the originary inhabiting of the two (“he has faith”), and so “he does not go under.”

⁶⁶ For the way in which the recasting of the infinite (or immaterial) sense of the Other against the finite (or material) sense of the Other is the production of alterity itself, see n. 3. Consider also: “The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude... whose task is to become itself...” (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 59).

⁶⁷ Krishek writes, “To renounce something, it seems to me, means first and foremost to renounce the *relationship* (the *actual, worldly* relationship) that one sustains with that something” (Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, 89). I disagree with Krishek inasmuch as her conception of this resignation entails an exclusive disjunction (an ‘either/or,’ perhaps) in which one can inhabit *either* the two *or* the three, and not both. She, like Buber, thinks such a choice is problematic. But I do not think such a choice is necessary. One must simply resign the *sufficiency* of the

from the three-as-one, to the field of two, and back to a sense of the field of three that is no longer ‘as-one’ parallels the ‘double movement’ of resignation and faith in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*.⁶⁸ For Kierkegaard, the knight of infinite resignation gives over the whole of his claim upon the finite in order to dwell in the abode of the infinite. This movement of infinite resignation, from the finite and its givenness to the infinite in its being given-without-givenness, is precisely the movement from the three-as-one to the two, from the Other-for-me to the Other qua Other, from preferential love to neighborly love. The knight of faith, having already made the movement of infinite resignation, then returns to dwell in the abode of the finite. This movement of faith, from the infinite back to the finite in order to dwell in the abode of the world but to do so differently, is precisely the movement from the two back to the three that is no longer ‘as-one,’ from the Other qua Other to the topology of the two-and-three in which the Other qua Other and Other-for-me can coexist, from the field of neighborly love to the field in which neighborly love and preferential love are both possible. This movement of faith – from the field of two to the coexistent two-and-three – “allows us to reaffirm our place in the world.”⁶⁹ It allows us to inhabit the field of three in a novel manner from a stance in the originary field of two.⁷⁰

Consider the story of Abraham that Kierkegaard tells us in *Fear and Trembling*: in renouncing Isaac, in preparing to sacrifice his son to God, Abraham is given Isaac anew. In resigning his given son, Abraham sacrifices the objectivation of Isaac as “his son.” This is the movement from the three-as-one to the field of two (the movement of infinite resignation), in which Isaac is then the Other as whatever he may be. From this stance in the field of two, Isaac is then given once more to Abraham, but he is no longer totalized in the three-as-one, for Abraham has renounced that topology’s claim to totality. This is the movement from the field of two to the coexistent two-and-three (the movement of faith). In a similar vein, consider Kierkegaard’s example of a “thorn in the flesh”:⁷¹ in refusing the *sufficiency* of a quality in ourselves that we

relation, not the relation *as such*. Krishek pursues the point: “Can it really work – can preferential love be subsumed under neighborly love without compromising either the meaning of preferential love (as preferential) or the rigorousness of the ‘commitment to human equality’?” (ibid., 121, emphasis removed). As we have demonstrated, preferential love is not subsumed under neighborly love in the coexistent two-and-three. But this topology is only possible if the two precedes the three, unilaterally determining it while being foreclosed to it. Krishek maintains that we must choose between the two and the three, but there is no reason why this would be the case.

⁶⁸ Søren Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*. Translated by Alastair Hannay (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2003). Similarly, Krishek draws a parallel between the double movement of resignation and faith in *Fear and Trembling* and love in her *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, but she does so in a distinct manner from the way in which I conceive of this parallel. For her, it is a sort of double movement that allows *Kjerlighed*, or love qua love, to differentiate into neighborly love and preferential love; in this way, she aims to preserve preferential love’s ‘distinctiveness’ or ‘uniqueness.’ This is not at all the way in which I think that the double movement of resignation and faith bears on the relation between neighborly and preferential love.

⁶⁹ Sharon Krishek and Rick Anthony Furtak. “A cure for worry? Kierkegaardian faith and the insecurity of human existence” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (Vol. 73, Issue 3, December 2012, 157-175), 165.

⁷⁰ And is it not, in this sense, a *repetition* of the inhabiting of the field of three? Cf. Søren Kierkegaard. *Repetition in Fear and Trembling/Repetition, Kierkegaard’s Writings, VI*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 125-231. In addition, cf. Deleuze’s discussion pertaining to repetition (in light of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Péguy) in *Difference and Repetition*: Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), especially “Repetition and Difference” and “Repetition for Itself,” or 1-27 and 70-128, respectively. It may be interesting to note – given our discussion herein of time and the Other – the way in which, in Deleuze’s text, repetition and difference stand in, in a certain sense, for time and being.

⁷¹ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 101-102.

think of as a defect – a ‘thorn in the flesh,’ so to speak – in denying its claim to our totality, its claim to grasp the whole of the Other that we are to ourselves, we move from the three-as-one to the field of two. From that stance, in inhabiting the field of two, we can now return to having the thorn in our flesh without being subsumed under it. The thorn is in our flesh, but we are neither captive to the thorn nor to the flesh in which it is embedded.

This is what it means to inhabit the coexistent two-and-three: to give up our angst and shallow intensity in aprioristic responsibility for the Other, who is the organon of our deliverance; to live in a world of communities and relations, but not only to live in that world; to have preferential love for Others who are thus for-us, but also to have neighborly love for each Other, each stranger, as whatsoever they may be; to enjoy the company of specific people, and to welcome all who knock on our door; to dwell amidst the qualities of ourselves and Others, to resist qualities when such resistance can be so derived, but also to cut away the hold of such qualities in our recollection of the two; to bear witness to age, death, and the ceaselessness of time, and yet also to house ourselves in the moment of the abnegation; to pay attention to both the thorns in our flesh and the majesty of our flesh, and yet to refuse to allow that flesh to grasp us in our entirety; to love the Other for what they bring to the table or despite what they do not, and nevertheless to love the Other in the fashion of the no matter what.