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Love as a Relation to Truth: Envisioning the Person in *Works of Love*

Abstract: According to Kierkegaard, love plays a foundational role in human existence. In *Works of Love*, he identifies love as “the deepest ground” of existence and as “the source of everything,” a “passion of the emotions” that exerts its influence like a “hidden spring,” flowing from a single source “along many paths” and “forming the heart” of each human being. In this paper, I explain how love can provide grounding and orientation in the ways that Kierkegaard claims it can. Love is manifested in different forms, all of which are subject to the imperative of loving thy neighbor as thyself: it permits us to realize our own individuality *and* to appreciate the distinct existence of other persons, thus enabling us to inhabit a meaningful world. Thus, at the same time, love enables us *to be* and also *to know*.

It is a commonplace observation that love is not exactly *based* on reasons—i. e., that I don’t love a person *because* of X, Y, and Z, where these are justifying reasons. Indeed, as one philosopher has recently written, “love in general is not thought to require reasons,” adding: “the citation of particular reasons” may “seem like the bringing in of ulterior motives,” which “cast doubt on” whether one is accurately describing “the...state [in question] *as* love.”¹ In other words, although “the beloved invariably *is*...valuable to the lover,” nevertheless “perceiving that value is not at all an indispensable *formative* or *grounding* condition of the love.”² Even if this is true, it does not follow that love is utterly irrational, nor does the fact that love for a person is not based upon reasons rule out the

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1 Jerome Neu, *A Tear is an Intellectual Thing: The Meanings of Emotion*, New York: Oxford University Press 2000, p. 90. My emphasis.

2 Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2004, p. 38. I owe the phrase about love having “reasons of its own” to Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. by Roger Ariew, Indianapolis: Hackett 2005, p. 216: “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know.”

possibility that love may have “reasons of its own.” For instance, when someone is describing his or her love for another person, he or she *ought* to be able to say: “I love her, and there are so many good things about her.” Yet it would be odd if the speaker were to give the impression that the “good things” he or she cites are the premises in an argument leading inexorably to the conclusion: “therefore, she is objectively lovable, and I love her.” So this is what can seem puzzling. How is it that love for a person is attentive to who that person is, while at the same time this love isn’t merely a response to observed loveliness, or an inference drawn from our having observed that the person is worth loving? In other words, how can love *embrace* a person’s qualities without being *based* upon those qualities? Having formulated the question in this way, I hope to show how Kierkegaard’s writings might help us to answer it. Please keep in mind that, of all the concerns that motivate the Kierkegaardian works to which I will be referring, and all the things we might learn from those works, I’m singling out just this one particular theme. However, this one theme has very big implications.

“Loving the actual individual person,” according to *Works of Love*, requires “a form of openness” (as Alastair Hannay calls it) in which one is receptive and welcoming toward another human being in his or her particularity, neither *disregarding* the other person nor loving him or her *despite* his or her distinct peculiarity.³ Clearly, Kierkegaard believes that true love must focus on the unique being of the other person, and that the distinctiveness of the beloved is not something that exists *apart* from his or her concrete actuality. Keeping this in mind, let’s now turn to a passage from an October 1841 notebook entry of Kierkegaard’s, in which he is talking about Regine’s love for him. He says: “She did not love [me for] my shapely nose, nor my beautiful eyes, nor my small feet—nor my good mind—she loved only me, and yet she didn’t understand me.”⁴ Presumably, if she *had* loved him because of some attractive feature, even for his remarkable mind, then she would *not* actually have loved Søren himself. But she *did* love him, as he admits in this passage. For now I am leaving aside the remark

3 SKS 9, 164 / WL, 164. Italics removed from original. I also quote Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, p. 362. On how love is focused upon “the very being of the other,” see Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. by Peter Bush, London: Serpent’s Tail 2012, p. 21.

4 SKS 19, 226, Not8:5 / KJN 3, 222. One word of the translation is modified: I’ve rendered “*smukke*” as “beautiful” rather than “fine.” The original reads: “[H]un *elskede ikke min velformede Næse, ikke mine smukke Øine, ikke mine smaa Fødder— ikke mit gode Hoved—hun elskede kun mig og dog forstod hun mig ikke.*” Cf. *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, ed. by Peter Rohde, trans. by Gerda Andersen, New York: Philosophical Library 1960, p. 45.

about her not understanding him (although I will return to this later). First let's pause on this claim that she loves *only him* and doesn't love him for his well-formed nose, or for his beautiful eyes, or because he has a good head on his shoulders. Note that he doesn't imply that she utterly fails to appreciate these things: if Regine had a friend who met Søren for the first time and commented to her afterwards that her fiancé had lovely eyes and a fine Scandinavian nose, Regine would not say: "Oh? I hadn't noticed." At the same time, however, Kierkegaard is suggesting that to love a person is not simply to love his eyes, or his mind, or anything else about him.

Likewise, in the doubly-pseudonymous middle section of *Stages on Life's Way*, we are told that it would be "silly" to deliver a "lecture on the beloved," explaining that one loves her "for this reason and for that reason," as if a husband "really loved" his wife "because she had blonde hair."⁵ Once again, the point is not that he, the husband, is oblivious to her hair color, but that no particular feature of the beloved can be cited as the *justification* for his love. What the author of the passage is asserting, I think, is that love is not *only* a response to the lovable qualities of the beloved, even if the one who loves *is* attentive to these. We can see this quite evidently when he remarks that anyone who "dissolves love" into a search for the love-worthy, "instead of wanting to accept the beloved," being "grateful for what has been allotted to him," is mistaken.⁶ And Kierkegaard agrees: in a journal entry, accounting for the inner basis of a passionate conviction, he explains: "[It is] just as when a lover says: 'She is the one I love,' and doesn't...speak about his reasons for loving her."⁷ Here, it sounds as if love is what provides justification, rather than what needs to be justified. Still, even if it's true that love for a person is not based upon reasons, it does not follow that love is simply *contrary* to rationality. When the "Young Man" in *Stages* insists that love *must* be irrational—because the identity of "the lovable" is "inexplicable," a "lover cannot explain" why he loves *this* particular individual, and "not a single reason" or "antecedent criterion" can be provided "as to why he [loves] her"—this only shows that the Young Man doesn't know what he is talking about.⁸ He is exasperated by his own incomprehension, admitting that he has "never loved," and that he is "speaking as the blind person speaks about colors," or like someone on the outside of an inside joke. He doesn't "get

5 SKS 6, 115 / SLW, 121–122. Here the Hongs have "blond" rather than "blonde" for some reason.

6 SKS 6, 114–118 / SLW, 121–125.

7 From an 1849 entry: SKS 22, 107–109, NB11:179 / JP 3, 3608. Modified translation. See also *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. by Andersen, p. 164. Kierkegaard explicitly identifies the lover's knowledge *that* he loves as an example of "passionate conviction."

8 SKS 6, 36 / SLW, 31 and SKS 6, 40–42 / SLW, 36–38.

it,” we might say. And his analogy with color vision is instructive: consider how ridiculous or incomprehensible the notion of colors might seem to a blind man who has heard them described but never seen them. So, in the opinion of the Young Man who speaks in the first part of *Stages*, there is nothing visibly evident about the beloved—*any* beloved—that suffices to justify the love, nothing that warrants such a strong response to *this* person in any case. Why does the one who loves find the beloved so precious, after all?

We should remember that, in *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard has disparaging words for the stance of “worldly sagacity,” which encourages you to “take a careful look at whom you love.”⁹ The “sagacious” one, he claims, is “foolishly” thinking “one wastes one’s love by loving imperfect...people,” and as a result is unable to love anyone, since he finds no one who is sufficiently deserving. “It is a sad but altogether too common inversion,” Kierkegaard observes, to worry about “how the object of love must be so that it can be lovable.”¹⁰ Since love is an orientation toward “the good and the true,” it is appropriate to wish “for the sake of the other” that he or she, the one we love, will have “lovable perfections”; yet it is a serious error to love “an imaginary idea of how we think or...wish this person could be,” to the exclusion of loving “the actual individual person.”¹¹ In order to succeed in loving “what one sees,” we must “love the person...just as you see him, with all his imperfections and weak-

9 SKS 9, 75 / WL, 68. See also SKS 9, 68 / WL, 61: this section opens with a declaration that whoever seeks to learn how “to love the neighbor” is “not to cease loving the beloved because of this—far from it.” On how neighborly love is applicable to “special relations,” such as romantic love and friendship, see also SKS 9, 142–144 / WL, 141–142: here, Kierkegaard comments that “the friend” or the beloved is to be loved “in particular,” and “Christianity has nothing against the husband’s loving his wife in particular,” as long as one does not love her in such a way that she “is an exception to being the neighbor that every human being is.” This is why Evans rightly notes that, according to *Works of Love*, “special relations are not to be abolished, but purged of what Kierkegaard calls the ‘selfishness’ present in them” (C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love*, New York: Oxford University Press 2004, pp. 206–207).

10 SKS 9, 159–163 / WL, 159–163. “Come to your senses,” he entreats his reader: “the defect lies in your conception of love,” and this misconception condemns you “to waste love in vainly seeking, to waste it in empty space by loving the unseen,” never “applying one’s [capacity to] love,” by “making use of it.” This “lamentable error” causes us to waste a divine gift, “which he [God] implanted in the human heart.” On love as a fundamental, mysterious power “implanted in us by God,” see also Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 110–112.

11 SKS 9, 164 / WL, 164 and SKS 9, 335 / WL, 340–341. Italics removed from original. Regarding what is loved, Marion states that “to acknowledge it as goodness” means simply “to love it.” Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud, New York: Fordham University Press 2002, p. 148.

nesses.”¹² At this point Kierkegaard offers the example of “Christ’s love” for his friend Peter: “in loving Peter,” he fulfilled the ideal of “loving the person one sees.” When Peter violated his own vow of loyalty, Jesus did not respond by saying, “Peter must first change and become another person before I can love him again.” Instead, he “preserved the friendship unchanged,” in the hope that his love *could* perhaps help Peter to become a better person—and, more crucially, knowing that his “boundless” love for Peter was not conditional upon Peter’s never disappointing him. In this case, if one had been willing to love only insofar as the beloved was nothing but “excellence and perfections,” then his betrayal of one’s trust even once would have shown “that he is no longer worth loving.” Yet this friend, who was cowardly enough to deny his acquaintance with you during your hour of need, may also be capable of great dedication, as you suspected when you placed such trust in him, even if he realizes this potential only after you’re gone, and partly due to his shame at having failed you. Through this example we are shown what it means to “love forth the good” in a person, as opposed to viewing him with an “evil eye.”¹³ The Kierkegaardian ideal of love places emphasis on “loving the person,” in his or her “perfections [and] imperfections.” Notice how this differs from the idea that someone who loves must project or bestow worth onto someone who is in reality worthless: a guiding premise in Kierkegaard’s account is that each person is worth loving, possessing some actual or potential good and having intrinsic value as an end in himself or herself. Agapic *and* particularistic love, at its very best, “grants the beloved all his imperfections and weaknesses and in all his changes remains with him,”¹⁴ making the effort of attention to see the good in him—and, in doing so, sees him as he truly is.

12 SKS 9, 168–169 / WL, 168 and SKS 9, 174 / WL, 174.

13 SKS 5, 69–70 / EUD, 60–61. The notion that love for another person involves “bestowal” or “projection” of value is defended by Irving Singer, *Philosophy of Love*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press 2009, pp. 51–52. Responding to Anders Nygren and others who endorse the notion that love endows a person with an otherwise nonexistent value, Neera K. Badhwar points out that “the denial that the worth...of the individual has anything to do with the love” amounts to a “denial that the individual is loved for ‘himself.’” See Neera K. Badhwar, “Friends as Ends in Themselves,” in *Eros, Agape, and Philia*, ed. by Alan Soble, New York: Paragon 1989, pp. 171–172. Arguing on the side of discovery, not bestowal, Reeve notes that “love can discover value where nothing else can.” C.D.C. Reeve, *Love’s Confusions*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2005, pp. 21–22.

14 See SKS 9, 172–173 / WL, 172–173. I should add that, even if Kierkegaard is right to identify this conception of love as having an important place in Christianity, it bears a resemblance to ideals of love that we find outside this religious tradition altogether; no thinker or school of thought holds a monopoly on unselfish love.

In relation to either the romantically beloved or the dearly loved friend, Kierkegaard seems to be suggesting that the unique and irreplaceable worth of *this* person will not be revealed to us unless we love them first, before we have entirely discovered why they are worthy. And that a love directed toward them, in all their concrete particularity, should *gratefully accept* and appreciate the goodness and beauty which they possess (already or potentially, that is), while also embracing whatever in them is not obviously good or beautiful—not withdrawing one’s love whenever an imperfection or shortcoming is found. The need to “project non-existent perfections” onto another person, supplanting their concrete actuality with imagined fantasies of what we want them to be, threatens to put us affectively out of touch with reality.¹⁵ To love a person, according to Kierkegaard, means loving her *as you see her*—in her strengths and her weaknesses, her imperfections as well as her perfections—and remaining devoted as she changes over time, when she enchants or gladdens you *and* when she upsets or saddens you. The person who achieves this ideal would be “sensitive to the individuality and uniqueness of the other,” and capable of “discerning his or her value, and appreciating it,” in Sharon Krishek’s words.¹⁶ We would hardly be loving *the actual individual person* if our love had nothing to do with who he or she is, after all. The human *need* to be loved, as portrayed in *Works of Love*, includes a longing to be seen—that is, to be perceived as *this particular* being, loved in our utterly singular individuality. This is why we are dismayed when someone loves us based on a false ideal of who we are, or tries to love us without any recognition of what distinguishes us as the unique person we know and feel ourselves to be.

The character Beatrice, as portrayed in Dante’s “Purgatorio” and “Paradiso,” could be regarded as one model of the “true love” described in *Works of Love*, in which a distinct human being is loved “according to his distinctiveness,” his unique individuality. With regard to Dante, she views him with an honest vision that overlooks nothing, loving “what is the other’s own,” what identifies him as the person he is.¹⁷ Because any characteristic of Dante contributes, in a minor or

15 José Ortega y Gasset, *On Love*, trans. by Tony Talbot, New York: Meridian Books 1957, pp. 21–23.

16 Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, p. 156. On the “need to love and to be loved,” see *SKS* 9, 156–157 / *WL*, 155.

17 See *SKS* 9, 267–271 / *WL*, 269–272. See also M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving*, New York: Oxford University Press 2001, pp. 115–116: “Genuine love, in this account, amounts to an honest...vision of concrete individuals, focusing on them ‘as they are’ rather than trimmed to our measure.” Claudia Welz observes that Kierkegaard “characterizes the domineering person who wants everyone to be...transformed in his or her own image,” as well as “the small-minded

a major way, to his “personal distinctness,” her love does not neglect or disregard any of his particular traits. She knows and cares about his literary ambition—indeed, what would it mean to love Dante without being aware of this guiding passion? Yet she is also conscious of (and concerned about) his deviation from the goals that ought to be governing him, the ways in which he has not lived up to his own standards. In the final three Cantos of the “Purgatorio,” Beatrice admonishes Dante in a way that reminds him of his own aspiration toward the good: how *could* you have lost your way, she asks, awakening his own conscience; and she reminds him gently, with a smile, aiding his own vision. All the idiosyncrasies of his biography so far, including the way that she herself has inspired him, are part of what she loves in him. Knowing that Dante is more than his history, she does not limit her love for him to only what has been already manifested in his life, but she loves him also as a subject with rich possibilities who is still in the process of becoming, and whose immeasurable value surpasses even his greatest undisclosed potential. Furthermore, “his very body is, for her, a part of his identity: she calls him by name, recognizes him” upon seeing him, and “looks at him with love.”¹⁸ She embraces his unique specificity, acknowledging his most worthy pursuits as well as his faults, and regarding the latter she seeks what is described in *Works of Love* as a “mitigating explanation,” regarding Dante in a way that is clear-sighted and fair, yet merciful and forgiving. Viewing him with a friendly eye, and making a charitable interpretation, she apprehends much about Dante that would be missed by another observer—one who was guarded or distrustful, or who focused on his faults. We might be reminded, in considering this example, of a phrase by Iris Murdoch: “a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality,” which when directed toward a person “sees [her] as she really is,”¹⁹ in the best light available. And this illustrates why it is that, as Kierkegaard argues, we cannot dispense with love without losing access to potentially truthful insights. As an affective disposition or comportment, love gives us an enhanced mode of awareness; it enables us to perceive what we would not be able to see without it.

person,” who for different reasons cannot accept “unfamiliar distinctiveness” (Claudia Welz, “Love as Gift and Self-Sacrifice,” *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 50, 2008, pp. 239–240).

18 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, pp. 571–572. See Dante, *Divine Comedy*, “Purgatorio” XXXI: 28–30 and XXXIII: 94–96. Regarding what follows see *SKS* 9, 286–289 / *WL*, 289–292.

19 Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Peter Conradi, London: Penguin Books 1997, pp. 327–329.

In each of the cases that I have examined so far, either a friendship or a romantic love exemplifies the unselfish, other-centered orientation of neighborly love. Love for one's neighbor means "loving each one individually," Kierkegaard writes, with a love that does not remain "proudly independent of its object," but which embraces the person himself or herself; and, he adds, it means "to will to exist" for every person unconditionally, affirming his or her very being.²⁰ Similar formulations can be found in Max Scheler, for instance, who suggests that our most reliable mode of access to others is an unselfish love that "wants the [being] to be," and "to be nothing other than what it is," while flourishing in its distinct existence.²¹ Love, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, means wanting the other person "to be, and to have good things."²² And the wish for another person's life to be going well is impossible to define without reference to what he or she loves; so this is what it means to take an interest in the life and well-being of another person. It means loving what is *their* own just as we love what is *our* own, or at least in a similar way—that is, to care about the existence of this person, to want them to be doing well. Jesus models this in relation to Peter, as does Beatrice in her relation to Dante. Here we can see that the Kierkegaardian understanding of love is built upon a particular notion of what a person *is*. If a person were nothing but the vehicle of impersonal rationality, then to love Socrates would be simply to love the principle of reason that happens to be embodied in him, but not in him only, so it would make no sense to mourn his death. On the other hand, if Socrates is defined by what he loves, then the pursuit to which he was wholeheartedly devoted *does* define him as a human being, although not in the same way: on this account, we could not love Socrates without appreciating his dedication to philosophy, yet we appreciate *his distinctive manner* of practicing the love of wisdom. That includes the way in which he raises questions, how he loves to talk, his tone of voice, and his characteristic gestures and expressions, including the peculiar way in which he sometimes

20 See *SKS* 9, 73 / *WL*, 66–67 and *SKS* 9, 89 / *WL*, 83–84.

21 Max Scheler, "Love and Knowledge," in *On Feeling, Knowing, and Valuing*, ed. by Harold J. Bershady, trans. by Peter Haley, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992, p. 153. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 39, *Hölderlins Hymnen 'Germanien' und 'Der Rhein'*, Frankfurt: Klostermann 1980, pp. 82ff: "Love...is a willing...that the beloved should, in being as it is, stand firm in its essence," a way of being "devoted" to another that "uplifts" the other and frees this other being to realize his or her "own good." Thanks to Ben Crowe for directing me to this passage from Heidegger's 1934–1935 lecture course. See also the distinction between liberating and dominating care, in Heidegger's 1925–1926 course, *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. by Thomas Sheehan, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010, pp. 187–188.

22 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II.28.2–3, quoted by Edward C. Vacek in *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics*, Washington: Georgetown University Press 1994, p. 295.

gets lost in thought and falls into a trance. According to the Kierkegaardian view of what it means to love a person, we recognize that Socrates leads the examined life in a way that is uniquely his own, and we love how he shares this life with those who are drawn to him, displaying a playful kindness toward his friends, along with a sense of humor that cannot be separated from his tendency to pester us relentlessly with questions. We believe in the reality and value of his existence, we rejoice in his distinct being, and we will miss him irreparably after he is gone. “*The one who loves presupposes that love is in the other person’s heart,*” knowing that “*love forms the heart*” of this singular individual in the sense that his unique identity is defined by what (and how) he has loved.²³ This demonstrates that, if loving a person includes appreciating him in terms of what *he* loves (and in his way of loving), then love for a person will be incomplete unless it encompasses all that the person loves—and what he loves is not limited to his love of other people. As in each of the other examples I have mentioned, to love Socrates is to care about him as a specific individual with his own conception of the good and a distinct set of passionate concerns; it is to love him as a valuing subject with an unrepeatable perspective on the world. Love of neighbor thus demands the kind of particularized attention that is frequently associated with preferential love: it means affirming another person’s existence, seeking to aid and encourage his or her pursuit of the good, and viewing his or her finite life as an end in itself.

Love is what enables us to apprehend features of reality that are not of our own invention, but that would not be apparent to someone with a dispassionate or unloving outlook. This is especially clear in the case of loving another human being. No matter what we may think about Søren Kierkegaard’s decision to break his engagement, and whether it was what the “truly loving” person in his shoes ought to have done, we do find evidence that he regarded his fiancée with this kind of attentive appreciation, and sought to live up to what his love for her demanded of him. This can easily be seen, even if we confine ourselves to the early entries written in the green notebook where he recorded his thoughts on the way to Berlin, just after breaking his engagement: *Notebook 8*, which includes the first passage by Kierkegaard that I cited above. Of course he men-

23 SKS 9, 219 / WL, 216–217 and SKS 9, 20 / WL, 12. Emphasis in original. In referring to Socrates I merely allude to a vast range of literature on his character, especially as represented in Plato’s *Phaedo* and *Symposium*. Both of these dialogues obviously lend support to the “philosopher as vessel of impersonal reason” view, while also *perhaps* supporting an alternative view, of Socrates as a singular individual. On the deficiencies of love as interpreted through the lens of Platonic rationalism, see Gregory Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1981, pp. 31–32. See also Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 486–496.

tions her beauty, but (much like Dante, in speaking of Beatrice) he doesn't simply go on about her beautiful eyes, and leave it at that; instead, he writes about what he sees in her when she looks at him. The impression made on him by Regine, and what he perceives in her gaze, includes: her unlimited devotion, which makes him dizzy; her purity and youthfulness; how she is animated by a lightness of spirit as well as a depth of soul; that her glance can be joyful and also imploring; and that she is someone "who loves with all her heart and mind."²⁴ And when, at last, he begins to glimpse in her eyes the impact of his decision to leave her, he knows that he cannot be happy at all as long as she remains heartbroken. So, as he initiates a lifelong project of explaining this decision to himself, he sadly admits what he feared to let her know: that he has loved her all along, and that it was "out of love for her" that he broke up, somehow thinking it best *for her*, although it differed from what she wanted. We can be wrong about these things, even though we try: wrong, that is, about what is really in the best interests of someone we love, or whom we are trying to love. Not all of our failures *in* loving, however, can be justly depicted as failures *to* love. For she, the beloved (leaving aside any relation she bears to me), is equally a human being with an entire world of her own;²⁵ she is, in other words, "an individual person for whom a world exists," someone with a particular history *and* with a future in which she hopes that what she has loved most will remain with her in some way. In the case of Regine, this includes a concern for Søren, which survives longer than the relationship between the two of them, which she also cared about. Encountering him years later, she says: "May it go well with you."²⁶ *To say that I love you is to say that I want you to be.* To seek, not what is one's own, but what is in the best interests of another person, requires acting upon one's best sense of how the world appears from her vantage point, what matters to her and why, and how much it does, as well as how she conceives of her own life and ideals, and (as if that were not enough) what she might become if she were to actualize God's idea of what she ought to be. As I pointed out above, loving another person essentially means caring about her well-being. Yet I can do this only to the extent that I know what it means for

²⁴ See SKS K19, 299–302. I cite SKS 19, 230–231, Not8:20 and SKS 19, 233, Not8:27, while alluding to many other nearby passages.

²⁵ Cf. Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, p. 152. The quotation that follows is from Troy Jollimore, *Love's Vision*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2011, p. 90.

²⁶ Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, p. 408. See also Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2001, p. 73: "When one truly loves another person, one loves precisely what is *not* generic about them, what cannot be substituted for by someone else," that is, "what is irreplaceable" about the person.

her *being* to be *well*, and I will never be fully aware of that. Thus what may appear like the simplest task to describe, loving another person, becomes *the* most difficult in practice.

We can see, therefore, why the one who loves faces “an endless task.”²⁷ It is because the project of coming to know another person is never finished, since that individual (while living) is never yet entirely disclosed, nor fully known by us. The attention directed toward the beloved never exhausts the particular complexity of this independent being; so the effort of attention, by the one who loves, is always ongoing. Moreover, the effort to appreciate and understand another person is bound up with the constant project of responding to the beloved, caring for his or her well-being, which one tries to aid and encourage, and being moved (passionately, that is, and also sometimes moved to action) by whatever significantly impinges upon one’s beloved for better or worse. And the life of a finite being who is striving to realize his or her conception of the good will invariably contain painful trials and struggles, difficulties which will be distressing to anyone who loves them. Love recognizes the value of a being “by focusing on its uniqueness and irreplaceability, which arise precisely from its finitude,”²⁸ as Ralph Ellis says. When the beloved other has sorrows and occasions for pride, these will concern and affect us as if they were our own sufferings and joys. This way of emotionally “remaining with” the beloved broadens and augments the world of the one who loves, a world in which meaningful truth now appears not only in relation to what is one’s own (one’s own passions, loves, or concerns), but also in relation to what is *the other’s* own, for each other who is loved.

That is how the unselfish love of others lends a determinate identity to oneself, and how the self comes to be “grounded in...an eternal, unfathomable, inexhaustible...source.”²⁹ To love another person includes presupposing love in the

27 See Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 321: “Love is knowledge of the individual. M confronted with D has an endless task.” See also Bridget Clarke, “Iris Murdoch and the Prospects for Critical Moral Perception,” in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, ed. by Justin Broackes, New York: Oxford University Press 2012, pp. 236–237.

28 Ralph D. Ellis, *Love and the Abyss*, Chicago: Open Court 2004, pp. 75–76.

29 Arnold B. Come, “Kierkegaard’s Ontology of Love,” in *Works of Love*, ed. by Robert L. Perkins, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press 1999 (*The International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 16), p. 91. Cf. Arnold B. Come, *Kierkegaard as Theologian*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press 1997, p. 86. On how each of us becomes “a distinct self by forming bonds of love” with the surrounding world, see Rick Anthony Furtak, *Wisdom in Love*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 2005, pp. 98–99. Badiou agrees that, for Kierkegaard, it is via “the experience of love” that the self becomes grounded “in its divine source” (*In Praise of Love*, pp. 13–14).

ground of his or her being, and this has an edifying influence on the life of that other person and on one's own life. Love is thus able "to form the heart," and in this way each of us is made to "be something" in his or her distinctness through the manifestation of a higher power which in some sense is *from God*.³⁰ The one who loves becomes who he is through other-centered unselfish love, presupposing love in the other, the beloved, who is herself a loving person and, by virtue of this, becoming who she is. In short, love defines a person's distinctive identity, establishing the contours of significance in his or her world. Wholehearted love for another person allows that person's existence to become real in the eyes of the one who loves, and it is "only the person who loves" who can have an accurate "conception of who he is," since his own being is constituted by love.³¹ This provides one answer to the question of what it means to know oneself, as Nietzsche spells out in a remarkable passage: "How can the human being get to know himself?" Well, he suggests, ask yourself:

What have you up to now truly loved, what attracted your soul, what dominated it while simultaneously making you happy? Place this series of revered objects before you, and perhaps their nature and their sequence will reveal to you a law, the fundamental law of your authentic self...Your true being does not lie deeply hidden within you, but rather immeasurably high above you, or at least above what you commonly take to be your ego.³²

Note the "perhaps," since we are never certain that we have found the law of our authentic being, as well as the idea that what unfolds in time for the loving subject provides the best intimation of who we are destined to become as this unique individual person, whose existence always remains unfinished. Our "very being" is never an accomplished fact, since we are centers of possibility

30 SKS 9, 20–21 / WL, 12–13 and SKS 10, 138–139 / CD, 128. To say that love is "from God" is actually not the strongest plausible way of construing Kierkegaard's claims about the relation between love and the divine, but for now it's sufficient to point out that he means *at least* this. In SKS 22, 220, NB12:130, Kierkegaard notes that "God, who sees your love and who is love" allows "your love for [another] human being" to "work for the good." Here, I am assuming that the distinctiveness of a person includes that "elusive something" which "may be called their total vision of life, as shown in their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words...their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive or praiseworthy, what they think funny," all of which partially compose "the texture of a man's being or the nature of his personal vision" (Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, pp. 80–81).

31 SKS 3, 124–125 / EO2, 125. See also Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, Albany, New York: S.U.N.Y. Press 2005, p. 86, on how, "through love," the "subjectivity of another" becomes "a reality" for oneself.

32 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator," in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. by Richard T. Gray, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 1998, p. 174.

who strive to realize our highest potential in the midst of the finite circumstances into which we are thrown; this is why *who we are* is “higher,” in Nietzsche’s terms, always something more than what we have already been. And yet nothing is a better indication of who we might become than what we have actually loved. If I am loving *you*, then I must remember that you are more than your describable characteristics, although these also manifest something of who you are—it would be absurd to insist that Dante is *not at all* present in his act of writing, or that he is essentially a “beautiful soul” who has nothing to do with the finite world. You *are* somewhat revealed in your greatest loves, yet never *entirely* revealed, so for me to care for you *qua* human being is also to be attentive to the deepest ground of your individuality—that is, the love that forms the heart as it flows from the heart—and receptive toward whatever is disclosed from this hidden source.

Unlike the “knight of infinite resignation,” who has the assurance that his hopeless love “is the substance of his life,” defining his identity,³³ someone who loves another person in a manner that is open-ended and ongoing is *not* sufficient unto himself or herself. The “young lad” who is described in *Fear and Trembling* will always know that this was the story of his life: his unhappy love for the princess constitutes his distinctiveness, and he will stay true to it. That shows a noble constancy of purpose: for the young lad, “the meaning of reality” will always be traceable to this love. Nonetheless, maintaining integrity in this sense is easier than remaining true to a love that is unfinished, within the context of a finite existence—since *that* kind of love must continuously be oriented toward another life which is unfolding over time.³⁴ Let’s imagine that the life-defining loves of one beloved other include her love of Mendelssohn: especially, of his short lyrical compositions for the piano. Let’s imagine also that she has a particular joy in playing these songs, that they move her in a way that anyone who loves her should want to understand, for it is a significant part of who she is. And yet even this is something that we could talk about for any length of time without completely understanding it; why and how this per-

33 See SKS 4, 136–138 / FT, 42–44. On the nobility as well as the limits of “resignation,” see Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, pp. 53–56.

34 See Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the love which says “*Amo: volo ut sis*,” and the “unconditional acceptance” of the other which she discusses in relation to Augustine and Duns Scotus in *The Life of the Mind*, vols. 1–2, New York: Harcourt 1971, vol. 2, pp. 103–104 and p. 144. See also Karin Nisenbaum, “Notions of Divine and Human Love in Jewish Thought: An Interview with Warren Zev Harvey,” *Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought*, vol. 3, 2012, pp. 1 ff. I am also indebted to Iain Thomson’s “Thinking Love: Heidegger and Arendt,” a paper presented at the Second Annual Southwest Seminar in Continental Philosophy (Denver, Colorado, May 2011).

son loves those piano compositions, and what exactly it is that they speak to *in her*, is sufficiently intricate and elusive that it's hard to account for. Gradually, someone who loves her might be able to develop an incrementally better sense of this, but if her love of Mendelssohn continues to be a living part of her existence, then we could only be self-deceived if we believed that we had ever reached the end of it, and that there was no more remainder, nothing left to understand or appreciate. And, needless to say, this is not her only love, so it hardly exhausts who she is. Although it may be true that “it is impossible to love [what] is wholly unknown,” as Saint Augustine says,³⁵ it is unfair to complain of someone who loves *you* that she doesn't entirely know or understand who you are. That is an impossible demand, since one may reasonably hope only that she appreciates your unique, distinct being *to some degree*. Within the realm of temporality and becoming, anyone who loves in such a way as to also “believe in the distinctiveness” of every other person—each of whom “becomes a distinctive individuality” through love—has more than an infinite task, since to love a single human being is always an incomplete work in progress. Kierkegaard makes it clear that “only true love loves every human being according to the person's distinctiveness,” or unique individuality.³⁶ To love another person in the specific integrity of his or her being, as this particular incomparable person, is a difficult and continuous task.

Each person who is a loving, valuing subject in his or her own right thereby forms an identity and becomes who he or she is. If to love or care about another person is to value who they are, then it requires attending to their particularity as it is distinguished by their own capacity to love. This is why Kierkegaard states that “the one who loves...has been God's co-worker” insofar as he or she has loved another in such a way as to enable the other to attain “every human

35 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, book 10, chapter 2, ed. by Gareth B. Matthews, trans. by Stephen McKenna, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, p. 46. On that complaint about the other person's failure to understand me, if I am Kierkegaard and the other is Regine, see also the 1849 journal entry (SKS 22, 230–231, NB12:141) quoted by John Lippitt in his *Guidebook to Kierkegaard and Fear and Trembling*, London: Routledge 2003, p. 6: “I had been engaged to her for one year and yet she did not really know me.” On p. 46, Lippitt says of the “young lad” that “his love for her is unconditional, and to a large extent his sense of self is determined by it.”

36 SKS 9, 269–271 / WL, 270–272. Regarding what it means to believe in the unique individuality of every other person, each of whom has an immeasurable worth, see Arnold B. Come, *Kierkegaard as Humanist*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1995, pp. 354–355 and pp. 390–391. On p. 395, Come remarks that love thus understood would honor “the unique identity [Eiendommelighed] of both the lover and the beloved.”

being's destiny," that is, "to become free, independent, oneself."³⁷ The God of love who gives each being distinctiveness, permitting us to become who we are, lets us achieve selfhood through the love indwelling within us. In order for each of us to realize our potential to become independent, or to "become oneself," we must accept that the self we thus become is not of our own making. It is a self freely received, empowered by another, rooted in a basic affective capacity that has been entrusted to us. Knowledge is not always gained by dispassionately holding oneself apart from what we seek to know, due to the way that love allows for the realization and appreciation of human individuality. Dispassionate rationality cannot lead anyone to be a distinct person, and it is insufficient for perceiving other human beings as they truly are. Rather, as Kierkegaard explains in an 1848 journal entry, "it is generally true that something manifests itself to the one who loves it,"³⁸ and this is especially true in the case of knowing another person. "To love and to know are essentially synonymous," he adds; "just as to love signifies that the other becomes manifest, so it...also means that one becomes revealed oneself."³⁹ The Kierkegaardian understanding of love thus prefigures Scheler's claim that "individual personality" is known only through "the act of loving," as well as Marion's thesis that "only love opens up knowledge of the other as such."⁴⁰ In Kierkegaard's existential phenomenology of the human being, love is the basis for the manifestation of self and other, the power in which a person is rooted and grounded.

Now, what it means to say that one who loves is revealed or disclosed *could* be only that how one loves *shows* something about one's character: for instance, how a person remembers a loved one who has died discloses who she is, how

37 SKS 9, 276 / WL, 278–279. Edward F. Mooney notes that love is "to value the valuer," or to "prize the personal center of caring, the heart," and also discusses "self-reception" in relation to Kierkegaard's thought: see *On Søren Kierkegaard*, Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate 2007, p. 39 and pp. 159–161. See also Gerald W. Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 2001, p. 53: for us, to love as God loves means "loving the creature for and as what God lovingly created it to be." On what it means to be a "co-worker" with the divine, see Sharon Krishek and Rick Anthony Furtak, "A Cure for Worry?: Kierkegaardian Faith and the Insecurity of Human Existence," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 72, 2012, pp. 163–166.

38 SKS 21, 172, NB8:63 / JP 2, 2299. On love as passion, emotion, or feeling, see SKS 9, 50–57 / WL, 43–50 and SKS 9, 116 / WL, 112. As Kierkegaard states in SKS 9, 69 / WL, 62–63: "God is love, and therefore we can be like God only in loving."

39 SKS 21, 172, NB8:63 / JP 2, 2299.

40 Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. by Peter Heath, London: Routledge 1970, pp. 166–167. See also Jean-Luc Marion, "What Love Knows," in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. by Stephen Lewis, New York: Fordham University Press 2002, p. 160.

faithful and true to what she has loved, and how unselfishly loving she can be.⁴¹ Whether a person is primarily distrustful will reveal something about who *he* is, and in this sense he will also be “disclosed,” by either loving or not. Yet there is also a deeper sense in which the one who loves “becomes revealed”: namely, that a person is himself or herself defined by what, whom, and how he or she loves. Due to the way that love shapes my existence, my distinctive identity cannot be abstracted from the fact that I love, nor would I wish “to distinguish myself” apart “from that which I love.”⁴² If you love Dante, or Beatrice, or Mendelssohn, or Kierkegaard, then this dictates how you live, what summons your attention and calls forth your care: it establishes what matters to you and, therefore, who you are. For this reason, “what we are is what we love.”⁴³ Because love is the *principium individuationis*, to love another person is to be caring and attentive toward that other person *as* a loving being. How else *could* we love a concrete individual? What else could it mean to will that he or she exist?

What I have just said should apply to any love of another person, whatever form this might take, as long as it is unselfish, and has therefore undergone what Kierkegaard calls the “transformation” that “particular” love must undergo in order that it may live up to the ideal of neighborly love.⁴⁴ It’s debatable whether or not our particular (or “preferential”) loves are *so* devoid of unselfishness on their own, but perhaps when Kierkegaard speaks about eros or friendship he is making a stipulatory definition. *Mere* friendship, *mere* romantic love, only “knows how to watch out for its own,” being allegedly preoccupied with a concern for equality or a fear of being duped.⁴⁵ Rather than taking this as an empirical assertion to the effect that *no* love of either kind has ever been unselfish, we could view it as a technical definition of terms, such that if either a romance or a friendship involves unselfishness, it must be something more than a *mere* romance or a *mere* friendship, in the sense that Kierkegaard means. Let’s reflect on what he says in this passage:

“But do not eros and friendship love the beloved and the friend according to his distinctiveness?” Yes, it is true, and yet it is not always entirely true. Eros and friendship have a limit;

⁴¹ See SKS 9, 236 / WL, 234 and SKS 9, 341 / WL, 347. Cf. Rolf M. Johnson, *Three Faces of Love*, DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press 2001, p. 56, about how our way of caring attests to our character.

⁴² Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. by Stephen Lewis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2007, p. 9 and p. 195. A similar claim is made by Ortega: see *On Love*, p. 47: “In truth, nothing characterizes us as much as our field of attention.”

⁴³ John M. Rist, *Augustine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 188. My emphasis.

⁴⁴ SKS 9, 141–143 / WL, 139–141.

⁴⁵ SKS 9, 267 / WL, 269.

they can give up all things for the other's distinctiveness but not themselves, love and friendship....Suppose the lover saw, to his delight, that he was loved, but he also saw that it would be extremely damaging to the beloved's distinctiveness, would warp it...then eros *as such* is unable to make this sacrifice. Or suppose the beloved saw that the relationship would become the lover's ruin...then eros *as such* does not have the power to make this sacrifice.⁴⁶

Considering the possible objection that special relations *do* involve attention to the distinctness of the one who is loved, at least in *some* cases, Kierkegaard answers that eros and friendship *as such* are unable to be so wholeheartedly devoted to the good of the beloved as to sacrifice the relationship itself if needed. This indicates that actual friendships, and actual cases of romantic love, *could* be unselfish to the highest degree. Yet if they are *at all* unselfish and other-centered, they are more than *mere* personal love. They are, instead, personal love that qualifies as *Kjerlighed* or neighborly love. If they involve partiality, then this need not be regarded as a shortcoming, for love of neighbor (as we have seen) demands particularized attention. It means affirming another person's existence, seeking to aid and encourage his or her pursuit of the good, and believing in the reality and value of his or her finite life as an end in itself. That is what it means to love a person, whether oneself or an Other, and this also accounts for how love makes it possible for us to know something true—namely, because it serves as a condition for each person's distinct being to be disclosed, known, and appreciated. Furthermore, although Kierkegaardian love must not be tainted by selfishness on the part of the one who loves, self-denial for the other person's sake is not always necessary, since it would not always do that other person any good. If we are indeed “not to cease loving the beloved” but only to love unselfishly in every case, including toward best friend or spouse,⁴⁷ mother or brother, then we may find ourselves caring about that person independent of any interests of our own, wanting what is best for

46 SKS 9, 270–271 / WL, 273. My emphasis. Modified translation, in only one respect: whenever the Hongs render “Elskov” in its nominal form with the awkward phrase, “erotic love,” I've replaced it with “eros,” because this is a perfectly acceptable word in English, and in my opinion it captures more accurately the emphasis intended. See also Furtak, *Wisdom in Love*, pp. 178–179.

47 SKS 9, 68 / WL, 61. See also SKS 9, 144 / WL, 142. Other scholars agree that what is crucial for neighborly love, in our particular attachments, is that we love the person in a way that is “purged” of “selfishness”: see Sylvia Walsh, *Kierkegaard*, New York: Oxford University Press 2009, p. 163. See also Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, pp. 205 ff. It is noteworthy that only loving one's neighbor while also loving oneself “in the right way” upholds both aspects of the imperative to love thy neighbor as thyself: this differs both from loving only oneself (and not another) *and* from only loving another (and not oneself).

them, and wanting nothing else that conflicts with this. In this case, we will be fulfilling the ideal of selfless, neighborly love—that is, loving the neighbor as oneself—*without* being required to make any drastic choice between another and oneself. The apparent conflict between loving what is “one’s own” and being “selflessly devoted” to the other person disappears when “caring selflessly about the well-being of a beloved” is what the one who loves wholeheartedly longs to do.⁴⁸ We are never so emphatically ourselves as when we are moved by unconditional love for another person whose existence matters to us. Since the Kierkegaardian self is constituted by its relations, both the beloved other and my relationship with her or him are aspects of my personal identity—that is, realities in which I am implicated.

The challenge of truly loving the Other, then, is not primarily “getting oneself out of the way,” as Iris Murdoch suggests that it is.⁴⁹ More difficult, and more important, is the effort of charitable attention, the just and loving gaze directed upon another individual human being, which attempts to see that person as he or she really is, in the best light, and to know and appreciate his or her distinct existence. Leaving aside the question of whether some people are more worthy of love than others, the kind of reality that an individual person represents is eminently love-worthy, since that person (*any* person) is a unique loving subject for whom a world exists, with a complexity in his or her set of concerns and way of being oriented toward ideals and final ends, *as well as* in the sense of reality and way of seeing that he or she embodies. If an infinite mind had the opportunity, and the capacity, and were able to take the time, then this unlimited being might find it possible to love each and every person. The notion of a God who *does* love each of us as though there were only one of us is among the most magnificent beliefs in the entire Christian tradition. For us finite beings, it *may* be commendable to aim toward the standard of attempting in every case to love the person we see, to the degree that we can;⁵⁰ however, we are not gods, and we do not have

48 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 61.

49 See, for example, Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 342: “In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego.” And, as she says on p. 353, “selfish concerns vanish” in the disinterested mode of vision in which “nothing exists except the things which are seen”: thus, “to perceive what is true” ostensibly requires “a suppression of self.” In relation to this topic see also Roger Fjellström, “Love and Equal Value,” *Essays in Philosophy*, vol. 12, 2011, pp. 121–122.

50 Regarding the obligation “to care for all without exclusion,” see Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving*, p. 44. On what this might actually mean in practice, see Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love*, pp. 122–123: “Loving my friend preferentially *does not mean* that I am blind to my upstairs neighbor and that if he needed help I would not give him this help.” It “*does mean*,” however, “that the well-being of my friend is of a more focused concern to me, and...since we are limited creatures,” we “cannot dedicate our maximal efforts to *everyone*.” Emphasis in original.

inexhaustible cognitive and emotional resources, so this attempt will only be a partial success in the best of cases. No one loves everyone, nor *could* anyone do so, and this point is relevant to *all* forms of love, the neighborly kind as well as any other. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in its praise of love, promises a fulfillment of vision in which we will know fully, as we have been fully known.⁵¹ Within the bounds of this finite existence, we may approach closer in a few cases to fully knowing and appreciating someone we love, yet—for reasons that I've already pointed out—we will never reach the end of the endeavor to know and appreciate another person. When we love someone, he or she appears to us as harboring much that still remains to be revealed and acknowledged.

What one sees “depends upon how one sees,” and “the one who loves” is in a position to discover what is good in the other person, as nobody else could.⁵² Kierkegaard implies that someone who loves is capable of perceiving aspects of the beloved that most observers would be likely to miss. Contrary to what the Young Man in *Stages* contends, however, this is not evidence that love is irrational but proof that it has a reasonableness of its own: that “inexplicable quality of which [the lover] cannot give an account” may be, first of all, something that those who do not love her are missing; and, secondly, something as difficult to account for as why Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* affect her in the way that they do, when she plays them on the piano.⁵³ And yet “the individual lover” could still be correct when he “believes that he knows” something about her that is truly lovable, that he has insight into this. What the Young Man is unable to understand is precisely what cannot be known by anyone who doesn't know what it's like to love. And, as Kierkegaard explains elsewhere, only if “you yourself have loved” are you aware of what is disclosed to a just and loving gaze, whereas one who has not loved will have no inkling of this, just as “the blind

That we find beauty in our friends, in “their eyes, their smile, the way they carry themselves,” is noted by Alexander Nehamas in *Only a Promise of Happiness*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2007, p. 59. See also Nehamas, “Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 15, 2007, p. 10, on how there is always “more to the beloved” that is yet to be known and celebrated.

51 1 Cor 13:1–12.

52 SKS 5, 68–69 / EUD, 59–60 and SKS 9, 278–287 / WL, 280–290. Expanding upon this idea, Ferreira explains that “what we see” when we approach another person “lovingly, generously, will differ from what we see when we” look “for something to find fault with.” See *Love's Grateful Striving*, p. 105.

53 SKS 6, 39 / SLW, 35. The quotations in the following sentence are from this same passage. On why it might be difficult to capture in words what one loves in another person, see also Jollimore, *Love's Vision*, p. 20.

person cannot know color differences.” It does not follow that colors are merely illusory, or that what we perceive as colorful is only a subjective projection:⁵⁴ in the instance of what is apparent to the loving person, rather than to someone with normal color vision, the fact that love allows us to see a person “in a different way from the way in which others see them” need not be due to any fantastic distortion of what they actually are, as Troy Jollimore also notes.⁵⁵ The one who loves another person may discern what is good in that person more accurately than anyone else does. An honest and loving viewpoint offers us a form of cognitive awareness that provides us with deeper insights into the world than any that might be attained from a detached perspective. To propose just one more brief example: a teenager who has difficulty with language and doesn’t perform well in most classes at school may have musical gifts that are detected and encouraged by a loving friend, parent, or teacher, and that no one else would have seen unless he or she directed the same kind of attention toward them.

Of course, this does not mean that one who loves has an infallible perspective; as I stated earlier, it’s possible for us to misinterpret another person, to see what is not there and fail to see what *is*, or to form a mistaken idea of what truly serves their well-being. None of us always succeeds at “getting it right,” and Kierkegaard himself was liable to fall short of his own standard, as anyone else would be. If the question is what our ideal ought to be, however, then we have good reason to accept that unselfish love *does* allow for a way of seeing the unique reality and significance that is incarnated in the life of another person, providing us with insight into who they are. While love does not guarantee either *complete* or *completely accurate* perception of a human being, it is a pre-

54 The passage about how the blind person is unaware of colors is from *SKS 10, 244 / CD, 237*. Scheler is also fond of this metaphor: as he points out, love as well as affective perception in general can be viewed as having its own reasons, which dispassionate rationality does not know. Via this mode of experience, we can see things that are at least in some cases there to be seen, yet to which impersonal reason is blind, “as ears and hearing are blind to colors.” Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press 1973, pp. 254–255. That is why, for Kierkegaard, “loving another...often defies rational analysis or explanation”: love is not *based* on reasons, yet it doesn’t follow that love is wholly irrational, unless the Young Man in *Stages* is interpreted as having said the final word on this topic. See Ronald M. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant on Time and Eternity*, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press 2011, pp. 234–235.

55 Jollimore, *Love’s Vision*, p. 71. On the way that love helps us to recognize “less obvious aspects of what is really there,” see also John Armstrong, *Conditions of Love*, New York: Norton 2003, pp. 94–96. It may be that, in a given case, the worth of a person is “in principle accessible to others,” yet that “in fact” only one knows her well enough to see it, as John Davenport observes: see *Will as Commitment and Resolve*, New York: Fordham University Press 2007, pp. 518–519.

requisite for knowing and appreciating him or her, in the absence of which we close ourselves off from gaining an appreciative understanding. It is for this reason that one who fails to love “defraud[s]” himself of knowing certain profound truths about human existence, and that love is aptly portrayed as a hidden source of light “from which flows every ray that illuminates the world,” like the sun that “invite[s] a person to behold the glory of the world,” since it brings into view for us what otherwise could not be seen.⁵⁶ As a passionate or affective disposition, it lets us have cognitive access to the particular values that orient us as moral agents, thereby affording us our mode of access to the world of others. *Works of Love* stands out most prominently in the Kierkegaardian *corpus* as a text that distinguishes between more and less adequate “ways of seeing,” and it articulates an exacting ideal of what love might be.⁵⁷ It is also where Kierkegaard provides his most positive account of how love enables us to know something true, and how we can be deceived by not viewing another person charitably *enough*—because it is not as though the risk of error lies only in the opposite direction, as if we could go wrong only by seeing the beloved with *excessively* generous attention.

In order to love “the actual individual person,” he claims, we must not seek to make acquaintance with “the badness of others” by viewing them with an “evil eye” that is biased against finding any good in them. He places the burden on the eye of the beholder, to discover what is truly good and beautiful in the other person, such that the one who loves “discovers nothing” that is *only* worthy of blame.⁵⁸ that is, there is nothing that he or she views exclusively as a fault. Whatever good may exist in a person, or in the world more generally, becomes apparent to us only if we adopt a charitable vantage point. To demand objective

56 SKS 9, 14–17 / WL, 5–9. See also Jollimore, *Love’s Vision*, p. 3: “love functions as a source of illumination, in the sense that it helps us to see what we could not see” in its absence. On love and its relation to the “inner glory” of a person, as well as “the exalted majesty of the good and the true,” see SKS 9, 93–94 / WL, 88–89 and SKS 9, 335 / WL, 340–341.

57 Here, as in many other places, I am in agreement with Patrick Stokes: see his *Kierkegaard’s Mirrors*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 2010, p. 136: “*Works of Love*, perhaps more overtly than any other Kierkegaardian text, is concerned with the place of *vision* in our moral engagement with others.” The way that one who loves sees no evil *as such*, without a “mitigating explanation,” and is mainly cautious of being deluded by failing to be adequately charitable or appreciative, is depicted in SKS 9, 227–238 / WL, 225–236. Cf. Jollimore, *Love’s Vision*, pp. 62–64: “If the lover is blind to certain...interpretations,” namely, those “that tend to see the beloved in unflattering or negative terms,” then a “detached observer is blind” toward “more sympathetic” interpretations, and often “the detached observer’s blind spot will...be more epistemically disabling.”

58 SKS 9, 164 / WL, 164 and SKS 9, 283–284 / WL, 285–286. See SKS 5, 68–70 / EUD, 59–61.

“loveworthiness” in advance, prior to loving, is to assume a detached stance that prevents us from finding what we are ostensibly searching for. When we refrain from loving someone because we are unsure as to whether he or she is sufficiently worthy, the result is that we “do not really see” that person at all. And we do not appreciate all that is susceptible of being loved if we insist that love for a person must be strictly in proportion to his or her value or worthiness, *as it appears* to an impartial observer. We are simply not in a position to recognize all that is worthy of love in a person as long as we stand at a critical distance, because that impartial standpoint represents a disabling prejudice. It is through love that we learn what it means for each human life to have intrinsic value, or to be an end in itself.

The puzzle with which I began can be resolved once we reject the following alternatives: that what we love in another person must either be plainly evident to a disengaged spectator *or else* a mere illusion fabricated by the one who loves. A third option, which is put forward in Kierkegaard’s writings, ascribes to love a specific intelligence; it accounts for the blindness of those who are unloving in terms of what is inevitably overlooked by anyone who is not suitably attuned, while regarding what is apprehended by one who loves as truly there to be seen in the beloved person, at least in some cases. That is, what is perceived in the beloved is not necessarily of the lover’s own invention, and when it is—as when one judges another from the perspective of a dispassionate observer—this represents a failure to love. In the main characters of *Repetition*, we have an illustration of two ways in which we can fail to love another person, by assuming that what appears lovable in that person must either be plain to anyone at a glance or else a distortion of the lover’s own making. Constantin Constantius embodies the former, and the “young man” whom he advises exemplifies the latter: both are in contrast with Kierkegaard’s injunction in *Works of Love* that we must find truth in the actual world, not in a fantasy land, while also loving a person himself or herself. It seems that the young man replaces “the girl” herself with an image formed in his own mind such that her actual existence becomes irrelevant: by his own admission, she no longer seems *real* to him, and he is like one of those who love only “the unseen, a mirage,” or an imagined ideal.⁵⁹ “The actuality in which she is supposed to have her meaning remains but a shadow for me,” he writes, “a shadow that sometimes makes me laugh and sometimes wants to enter disturbingly into my existence. It would end

⁵⁹ SKS 9, 163 / WL, 162. The form of love that “flies over actuality completely” is described in SKS 9, 158–164 / WL, 157–164. Regarding this, in relation to the following example, see Furtak, *Wisdom in Love*, pp. 127–128.

with my fumbling for her as if I were grabbing at a shadow or as if I stretched out my hand after a shadow.”⁶⁰

Constantin, on the other hand, asserts that the young man’s love cannot be justified by “the girl’s lovableness” as he judges it; what has captured the attention of his young friend, in his view, “is not [her] lovableness at all.”⁶¹ He resembles those people described in *Works of Love* who allegedly cannot “find any object of love,” yet who “prevent themselves from finding it” by virtue of how they are disposed.⁶² Neither the young man nor the older one in *Repetition* succeeds at getting in touch with the real world, by loving this concrete person as she is. As we have already seen, an understanding of the beloved in her distinctive particularity is not available except from an unselfishly loving vantage point. If we remain detached and indifferent (on the one hand), or if we are trapped in unrealistic fantasies (on the other), we cannot see this person both *as she is* and *in a charitable light* at the same time. This is the positive ideal that we can arrive at through a *via negativa*, by contrast with Kierkegaard’s examples of what love is not, which point toward what it might be. Love *is* what lets the distinctive significance of each person become manifest, moving us to acknowledge and affirm the existence of the one loved, unconditionally and for his or her own sake.

That is how axiological truth comes to light, through the process in which the subject comes to exist as lover and the surrounding world as beloved. The affective disposition that is a necessary condition for recognizing value in others is a state in which one “perceives [them] *as they are* and *with loving eyes*.”⁶³ This

60 This is from the young man’s letter, dated October 11th: *SKS* 4, 69 / *R*, 201. His words appear to confirm the impression recorded by Constantin that, “[i]f the girl dies tomorrow, it will make no essential difference,” since “[r]ecollection has the great advantage that it begins with the loss; the reason it is safe and secure is that it has nothing to lose” (*SKS* 4, 14 / *R*, 136).

61 *SKS* 4, 55 / *R*, 184; see also Kierkegaard’s late draft of this passage in *Pap. IV B* 97:8 / *R*, Supplement, 277.

62 On how we can preclude ourselves from discovering anything that is worthy of love, see *SKS* 9, 162 / *WL*, 161–162. A similar point is made by Armstrong in *Conditions of Love*, p. 34: “The searcher can say: ‘I am loving, I am capable of love, only I haven’t found the right person yet,’ but the ‘right person’ is specified so closely that they will never find such a person; they will always be disappointed,” for anyone they find “will fall short in some way.” Although “in their own eyes, this is...simply bad luck,” it is actually “a way of not loving.” Here we see the cruel logic that links Constantin’s demand for what is objectively lovable (she must be perfect, in order to be lovable) with the young man’s abstraction from the beloved’s concrete reality into a fantastic realm of his own making (if I love her, then she must be [viewed as] perfect).

63 Furtak, *Wisdom in Love*, pp. 138–140. Thus, as Come points out, love “conditions the entire universe of ‘things’” (*Kierkegaard as Humanist*, p. 353). On love as middle term, see *SKS* 9, 124 / *WL*, 121 and *SKS* 9, 259 / *WL*, 260. Returning to the image of love as a source of light, Luce

allows love as “middle term” to illuminate a meaningful world of experience for the person who loves, while disclosing the unique being of the one who is loved. “The love-relationship requires threeness: the lover, the beloved, the love—but the love is God.”⁶⁴ In other words, wherever there is love, there is one who loves (the first person), one who is loved (the second person, as in: “this is my Son, my beloved”), and love itself (the third “person” in this triadic or Trinitarian conception: *love itself*, that which is neither you nor me). Through the utterly specific attention directed by the Kierkegaardian unselfish lover toward the other person, life comes to be meaningful, and we experience nothing less than the “intrinsic value of being,” especially as “instantiated in conscious beings,” most of all in other finite human subjects,⁶⁵ persons for whom there is in each case a unique point of view, way of being, and orientation toward values and ideals. To love other human beings is to appreciate who they are, to recognize and celebrate the worthiness of their existence, as defined by what is “their own,” in a sense that includes everything they love and care about. Borrowing from another scholarly account that recaps some relevant aspects of the interpretation I am offering here, let me summarize by noting that love “forms the heart” because it is “love itself” which “creates the lover,” whose own “need to love and be loved” is “rooted in human nature” and “implanted [in us] by God.”⁶⁶ That is how human love is based in “the love which sustains all existence.”⁶⁷ Although Kierkegaard accepts the commandment that we *shall* love, he also points out (in the “Conclusion” to *Works of Love*) that this “should not need to be commanded, because to love [others] is the only thing worth living for,” and without love we do not truly exist.⁶⁸ Love is associated with *being*, and with *knowing*, because of what is realized through love—“realized,” that is, in both senses of the word. Through love, the reality of the person comes to be *established* and *understood*. A beautiful although tragic image provided by one of Kierkegaard’s journal entries from 1847, the year that *Works of Love* was written and published, can serve as one final illustration of this. Imagining a bird, a swallow, which longs to be loved by a particular girl, he says:

Irigaray characterizes it as a “sun that illuminates in us and between us.” See *I Love to You*, trans. by Alison Martin, London: Routledge 1996, p. 150.

64 SKS 9, 124 / WL, 121.

65 Ralph D. Ellis, *Love and the Abyss*, pp. 4–5 and p. 17.

66 Claudia Welz, *Love’s Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2008, p. 156.

67 SKS 9, 299 / WL, 301.

68 SKS 9, 368 / WL, 375. See also SKS 9, 240 / WL, 239: the “highest good” and “greatest blessedness” is “truly to love,” and “truly to be loved.”

[T]he girl would not be able to recognize the swallow, not from a single one of the 10,000 swallows. Imagine [the bird's] agony when, on arriving in spring, it said "It's me," and the girl answered "I can't recognize you." The swallow indeed has no individuality. One sees from this that an individuality is a presupposition of love, this distinctness in singling out...The greater the distinctness...the more marked the individuality, the more traits there are, [and] the more there is to recognize [or, "to be known"].⁶⁹

Each of us becomes an individual person through loving, and one must be distinguished as an individual in order to be known and loved. In the passage about the girl who cannot love the swallow, we hear Kierkegaard repeating that love must focus on the unique being of the other person, and explaining that the distinctiveness of a person does not exist *apart* from his or her particular qualities or traits. What "singles out" an individual, distinguishing his or her identity, is nothing so much as what he or she loves. For Kierkegaard, what love means for human beings cannot be rendered intelligible in terms of anything else, because there is nothing else that holds such a fundamental place in our existence. Love is therefore capable of disclosing actual truths, even though what it reveals cannot (of *course*, it cannot) be verified by the neutral observer. And this is the sense in which the heart has reasons of its own, to which *mere* reason—that is, dispassionate reason—is blind.

⁶⁹ SKS 20, 273–274, NB3:59 / KJN 4, 273–274.

