

# KIERKEGAARD'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION WITHIN THE LIMITS OF REASON. DUTY AS LOVING PRACTICAL ACTION

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**Abstract.** Søren Kierkegaard's Christian ethics, as second ethics, identifies specific problems which arise within the limits of secular ethics, as first ethics. Kierkegaard's view of Kantian ethics is one of ambiguity: he praises Immanuel Kant's broader view of ethics which recognises the necessity of religion; and he rejects what he sees as Kant's attempt to: i) reduce religion to morality, and ii) confine faith within the limits of rationality. Kierkegaard's Christian ethics is grounded in love, as divinely commanded love. Kant would have wholeheartedly rejected Kierkegaard's definition of Christian ethics as an ethics of "commanded love". For Kant, there is no such thing as a duty to love. This apparent contradiction between Kierkegaard's and Kant's opinion of love as a proper object of a moral command can be reconciled by recognising that Kierkegaard's concept of "neighbourly love" relates directly to the Kantian concept of "willing the Good".

**Keywords:** ethics; love; morality; faith; religion; duty.

In the first section of the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant argues that love as an emotion or an inclination cannot be commanded<sup>1</sup>. For Søren Kierkegaard neighbourly love, as commanded love, ought to be the foundation of every loving relationship. This paper will argue that Kierkegaard's understanding of love, as it is presented in his *Works of Love*, does not relate to the Kantian notion of love as an emotion, or a volatile feeling; but rather, relates to the Kantian concept of "willing the Good". This form of love, according to Kierkegaard, is an infinite form of love which is enacted as a loving duty. This form of love, the spirit's love, is a response to a command by God to *love the neighbour as yourself*.

This paper will raise and respond to two specific questions:

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015), ed. M. L. Morgan, p. 836, p. 840.

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1. THE MAJOR THESIS WILL ADDRESS Q. 1: What is the nature of the relation between Kierkegaard's ethics of love and Kant's concept of "willing the Good"?
2. THE MINOR THESIS WILL ADDRESS Q. 2: What are we to make of Kierkegaard's ambivalence towards Kantian ethics – his confirmation and denunciation of Kant's systematic formulation of ethics?

Before fully addressing the first question I would like to draw attention to the structure of Kierkegaard's philosophical authorship as a way of showing the pride of place that Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* occupies in this extensive authorship (which also includes his master's thesis *The Concept of Irony*). The overall analysis in the major thesis will provide a brief introduction to *Works of Love*. This introduction will entail a brief analysis of deliberation II in the first series of *Works of Love*: which is Kierkegaard's analysis of the divine command to "Love your neighbour as yourself".

Kierkegaard's vast authorship is divided into three categories:

- a) The Aesthetic (indirect communications/pseudonymous authorship)
- b) The Ethical (direct communication)
- c) The Religious Discourses (direct communication)

The aesthetic category of Kierkegaard's authorship – the pseudonymous works – can be further sub-divided into the categories of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious. Each of these works contain themes from varying philosophical and psychological perspectives: Kierkegaard's indirect method of communication not only includes a collection of varied and contrasting authors. It also makes heavy-handed use of such literary tools as irony, paradox, sarcasm, and comedy. *Works of Love* belongs to the second category of Kierkegaard's authorship. It is an ethical work and it is a direct communication – which means it is written in Kierkegaard's own name. So contrary to the pseudonymous or aesthetic works, we can say that *Works of Love* conveys Kierkegaard's definitive formulation of Christian ethics. Interestingly, Kierkegaard's authorship relates directly to his existential philosophy, which recognises three specific levels of existence<sup>2</sup>:

- i) Aesthetic level: where the individual is driven by his own self-will.
- ii) Ethical level: where the individual is motivated by the good will or duty.
- iii) Religious level: where the individual, through a process of painful resignation, transforms or exchanges his own self-will, for the will of God.

So, with the relation between Kierkegaard's existential framework and the structure of his authorship in place as a context or a foundation, the focus of this analysis is moving swiftly towards the major thesis of this paper. As has already been indicated, Kierkegaard was truly inspired and influenced by, what he regarded as, the broader

<sup>2</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* II (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, pp. 21–22; Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, pp. 90–129, see also pp. 476–477.

view of secular ethics presented by Immanuel Kant in his philosophy of morality: the idea that morality is too difficult for human beings without divine assistance. Whilst Kierkegaard was praiseworthy of Kant's moral philosophy, he ultimately rejects what he sees as Kant's attempt to: i) reduce religion to morality, and ii) confine faith within the limits of rationality<sup>3</sup>.

### 1. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE RELATION BETWEEN KIERKEGAARD'S ETHICS OF LOVE AND KANT'S CONCEPT OF "WILLING THE GOOD"?

Kierkegaard argues that love can be a proper object of a moral command; his second, or Christian ethics, as it is formulated in *Works of Love* sets out to show his reader how. The forthcoming analysis will show that whilst Kierkegaard states that finite love is transformed into infinite love by becoming a duty; it still, however, remains a certain kind of passion. Rather than being a first immediacy as it is on the aesthetic level existence; Kierkegaard argues that finite passion is transformed through the spirit's love into a new form of immediacy. It is at this point that the lover's will is replaced by God's will on the ethico-religious level of existence. So, it is by virtue of being *consciously* related too rooted in the eternal, that love transforms into a second immediacy or a "spontaneity after ethical reflection" – this reflection is of course "infinite reflection" or religious reflection. One could argue that from a Kantian perspective the idea of commanded love stands in an irreconcilable tension with such concepts as the spontaneity and freedom. These are the concepts that are generally associated with love in terms of inclinations or feelings. Sylvia Walsh raises this question: "has not Christianity set itself against spontaneous love in such a way as to substitute duty for feeling and inclination?" Walsh goes on to argue that, the situation is quite the opposite:

in Kierkegaard's view, duty and inclination, law and love, coincide in Christian love [...] What Kierkegaard sees in the transformation of love, is a change of heart that makes passion one with duty; so that what the law requires, love freely gives<sup>4</sup>.

According to Kierkegaard there is, in *essence*, only *one* kind of love: the *one true love* (the spirit's love); but he does make a distinction between love as "Neighbourly Love" (the spirit's love) and love as "Preferential Love" (romantic love and friendship). For Kierkegaard, Preferential Love is a form of emotional love: the feeling of love associated with one's natural inclinations, desires, or preferences. In *WL* Kierkegaard also distinguishes between two forms of self-love:

<sup>3</sup> Rudolph Z. Friedman, "Kierkegaard: First Existentialist or Last Kantian?", *Religious Studies* 18, No. 2 (1982): 160.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia Walsh, "Forming the Heart: The Role of Love in Kierkegaard's Thought", in *The Grammar of the Heart*, ed. Richard H. Bell, 1988, p. 244.

- i) A “selfish” exclusive love of self, which is at odds with the good of the other.
- ii) A “proper” inclusive love of self, which encompasses the good of the other.

#### PREFERENTIAL LOVE: ROMANTIC LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP (FINITE LOVE)

Kierkegaard goes on to highlight the problem with Preferential Love: as romantic love and friendship. His argument is that at the level of the aesthetic, preferential love is a selfish form of self-love. The problem with preferential love, according to Kierkegaard, is that the one and only beloved or friend is the object of a *passionate preference* that Kierkegaard considers akin to *self-love* (I benefit). He argues that preferential love (on the aesthetic level of existence) is a selfish form of love: on the basis that “I” have something to gain from such a relationship. This form of love is based on partiality or favouritism, which means that it is exclusive. In loving preferentially, Kierkegaard argues that “I” (or my will) is the middle term in this type of relationship. He warns however, that whilst it is easy/or natural to love our partners, family, and friends, there is also a problem associated with preferential love. The problem is that the desires and feelings which constitute preferential love, can sometimes change or be altered – even if there is no change in the other person.

#### NEIGHBOURLY LOVE: THE SPIRIT’S LOVE (INFINITE LOVE)

Kierkegaard argues, in *Works of Love*, that the transformation of preferential love as aesthetic love, to neighbourly love as ethical love – or loving duty – secures against the kind of mutability that could eventually destroy erotic love and friendship. He argues that: “only if love of neighbour is a duty [...], can it be rendered invulnerable to changes in the lover’s emotions, moods, and tastes, in virtue of being motivated by a stable sense of duty”<sup>5</sup>. In contrast to preferential love, Christian love of neighbour involves the challenge of self-denial or selflessness, which is the transformation of selfish self-love into proper self-love. This form of love is based on equality which means that it is all-inclusive. Here my will is replaced by God’s will: in this relationship God is the middle term.

Immanuel Kant argues in his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, that Love as an emotion or an inclination cannot be commanded<sup>6</sup>. Therefore love (in the romantic or emotional sense) could never be the proper object of a moral command. Ironically, as the analysis has revealed this far, Kierkegaard agrees with Kant’s conclusion, which is why he rejects the primacy of “preferential love”. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard states that selfish, self-centred preferential love is a finite form of love. What he is arguing for in *WL*, is the supremacy of the selfless, God-centred, infinite form of love, the Spirit’s love, or neighbourly love.

<sup>5</sup> Philip L. Quinn, “Kierkegaard’s Christian Ethics”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. A. Hannay and G. D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 355. See also, Kierkegaard, *WL*, Deliberation II A, pp. 29-43.

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015), ed. M. L. Morgan, p. 836, p. 840.

The problem that this section of the paper will have to reconcile is the fact that Kant would have wholeheartedly rejected Kierkegaard's definition of Christian ethics as an ethics of "commanded love". In the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that there is no such thing as a duty to love<sup>7</sup>. According to Kant, feelings of love (as inclinations) are not subject to the will and cannot be brought about at will: therefore, love cannot be the proper object of a moral command. This paper will endeavour to show that the apparent contradiction between Kierkegaard's and Kant's opinion of love – as a proper object of a moral command – is not a real contradiction. This is because Kierkegaard's understanding of love, as neighbourly love, does not relate to the Kantian notion of love as an emotion, or a volatile feeling; but rather, relates to the Kantian concept of "willing the Good".

### KIERKEGAARD'S *WORKS OF LOVE*

The duty to love one's neighbour is at the core of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. In the Christian tradition, it is taken for granted that divine commands impose obligations; obligatory love can be represented as either commanded as loving duty by a divine lawgiver: God; or demonstrated by a divine exemplar: Jesus Christ as the son of God. While Kierkegaard recognises that life is enriched by different *experiences* of love, he argues that this multiplicity must not mislead us into thinking that there are *many* kinds of love. There is in *essence* only *one* kind of love: the *one true love*, infinite love, or the spirit's love.

Kierkegaard states in the first deliberation of *Works of Love* (series I) that in creating us, God implanted love in our hearts – this gift of love is the gift of a deep need which longs to be expressed. In his first deliberation, Kierkegaard writes that: "there is a place in a person's inner most being, from this place flows the life of love 'for from the heart flows life'"<sup>8</sup>. The question is if we have received a gift of love from God which needs to be expressed, then why do we need to be commanded to love? One aspect of Kierkegaard's argument is, that because neighbourly love itself is infinite and eternal, it is only by means of making it understandable in finite terms, by means of language, that the infinite nature of love – our intense desire to love – becomes in some way intelligible or rational. In Kierkegaardian terms, the command to love presupposes the gift of infinite love from God; and like God – who is hidden to us – this form of love is hidden within us. So, the only way that it can be revealed is when we actively respond to the command to love others the way that God loves us; and for Kierkegaard, because God loves us first, our love is always in response to God's love. He states in the conclusion of *WL* that:

the commandment is that you *Shall* love, but if you will understand yourself and life, then it seems that it should not need to be commanded, because to love people is the only thing worth living for, and without this love you are not really living<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love (WL)* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

With this in mind, it could be said that the divine command is more like a beacon that guides us in “how” we love (*WL*, p. 67) and thereby requires us not to restrict this infinite form of love by loving preferentially. So, who is the Neighbour? Kierkegaard writes:

Every human being is the neighbour. In being king, beggar, rich man, poor man, male, female, etc., we are not like each other – therein we are indeed different. But in being the neighbour we are all unconditionally like each other. Dissimilarity is temporality’s method of confusing that marks every human being differently, but the neighbour is eternity’s mark – on every human being<sup>10</sup>.

Take many sheets of paper, write something different on each one; then no one will be like another. But then again take each single sheet; do not let yourself be confused by the diverse inscriptions, hold it up to the light, and you will see a common watermark on all of them. In the same way the neighbour is the common watermark, but you see it only by means of eternity’s light when it shines through the dissimilarity<sup>11</sup>.

Kierkegaard argues that the recognition of the spirit’s love as “the one true love” does not make the diversity of the loves that we experience in our daily lives unimportant or less valuable. While he is calling for us to love everyone equally; the goal is also to preserve neighbourly love within romantic love and friendship to preclude the instability (in terms of mutability) of finite preferential love. Ultimately, he wants to ensure that neighbourly love, as the eternal quality of love, permeates every expression of friendship and romantic love. Kierkegaard writes: “Christianity [...] knows only one kind of love, the spirit’s love, but this can lie at the base of and be present in every other expression of love”<sup>12</sup>. Kierkegaard’s argument is that Christianity is opposed to preferential love only insofar as it is characterised by selfishness (aesthetic level of existence). Thus, as Sylvia Walsh states, “it does not stand *simply* opposed to [romantic love and friendship] but seeks instead to purify, sanctify, and make them new through [...] the renunciation of selfishness in them”<sup>13</sup>.

It is only through a certain transformation of our natural or emotional love that the elements of selfishness – from our expressions of, or our works of, love – can be eradicated. This means that it is necessary for our natural expression of love, as finite love, to undergo a transformation process which Kierkegaard names “the transformation of the eternal”<sup>14</sup>. This means that our natural expressions of love undergo transformation: from the limitations of finite human love to the boundlessness of eternal and immutable spiritual love. This transformation, or reclamation, of eternal love is an internal transfor-

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>13</sup> Sylvia Walsh, “Forming the Heart: The Role of Love in Kierkegaard’s Thought”, in *The Grammar of the Heart*, ed. Richard H. Bell (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), p. 238.

<sup>14</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love (WL)* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, pp. 32–42.

mation of finite love (aesthetic level) into infinite love (the ethico-religious level): which means that the outward form of preferential love remains the same. This idea of loving the self, others, and God, in a “proper manner” reveals a characteristic of the spirit’s love: the spirit’s love is transforming – it transforms finite love into infinite loving duty. Through this transformation, the inward form of preferential love is infinitely changed: love is now also matter of conscience-an inward relation to God; as well as an outward display of God’s love.

Kierkegaard writes:

If it were not a duty to love, the concept ‘neighbour’ would not exist either; but only when one loves the neighbour, only then is the selfishness of preferential love rooted out and the equality of the eternal preserved<sup>15</sup>.

Figure 1. Preferential Love and Neighbourly Love

<i>WL</i>	In Summary:
Neighbourly love	= <i>Infinite Love</i>
Preferential love	= <i>Finite Love</i>
Neighbourly love	is <i>the one</i> true love (spiritual)
Preferential love	is different <i>experiences</i> of love (natural)
Neighbourly love	is Theocentric, God is the middle term
Preferential love	is Egocentric, ‘I’ am the middle term
In Neighbourly Love, human will is replaced by the best will, God’s will.	This description of Neighbourly Love equates, in Kantian terms, to the Good Will.

So, it is only through our understanding and obedience to God’s command to love neighbourly, that love is transformed into a duty, and duty here is understood as loving practical action. For Kierkegaard, the reader of *Works of Love* is really a “listener” on whom a practical demand is being placed: “You Shall Love the Neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39)<sup>16</sup>.

The reflection upon the divine command to “Love your neighbour as yourself” is undertaken in deliberation II (A, B, C) in the first series of his *Works of Love*. Kierkegaard’s tripartite deliberation consists of a set of three discussions, each of which focuses on a different element or aspect of the love command. M. J. Ferreira states

<sup>15</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love (WL)* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, p. 44 (Kierkegaard’s italics).

<sup>16</sup> Jamie M. Ferreira, Jamie M., *Loves Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 13–17: “Gospel of St. James 2:8–17 – the Royal law, Jesus’ teaching which originated in Levitical law (God’s speeches /instructions to Moses in the old Testament): thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself [ ...] the instructions of Leviticus emphasize legal and moral practices (613 commandments) rather than a set of religious belief”.

succinctly that what Kierkegaard is doing in Deliberation II is breaking down this command in order to reveal the three elements of Love's Law: A) duty, B) equality, C) relatedness (which highlights our relatedness to each other and our equal connection to God)<sup>17</sup>. Throughout the whole discussion in Deliberation II what Kierkegaard is doing is highlighting the elements of Love's law in terms of their place in the command. Whilst he distinguishes between the three elements of the command "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (duty, equality, and relatedness)<sup>18</sup> he insists on keeping them together within the unity of the second deliberation.

Deliberation II (A, B, C): Love's Law – brings into the circle of my responsibility those who are not the object of my inclination or preference; but it also secures those who are the object of my preference within the circle of my obligation. So, the commandment instructs us to love those who are before us even if we are not naturally inclined to love them; and where our love is filled with preference, the commandment directs us to be faithful because preference is contingent, mutable, and unstable.

Figure 2. A Summary of Structure of Deliberation II in the First Series of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*

<b>WL Deliberation II A, B, C</b>	<b>You shall love the Neighbour as Yourself</b> [see footnote 15]
II A is labelled: <b>Duty</b>	You <i>Shall</i> Love: the emphasis on "Shall" = the command i) So, duty is the first element of Love's Law
In II A:	the 'You <i>Shall</i> Love' could be understood as: "You <i>will be able</i> to love" (Ferreira, p. 41).
II B is labelled: <b>Equality</b>	You shall love <i>the Neighbour</i> : the emphasis is on "neighbour" ii) so here, equality is the second element of Love's Law.
In II B:	<i>the Neighbour</i> is understood as the object of love. It is the element of equality contained in the Love Commandment that consolidates the ontological relation of human beings to one another as creations of God: thereby, we are all equal in God's eyes.
II C is labelled: <b>Relatedness</b>	You shall love the Neighbour: the emphasis is on the "you". iii) So here, kinship is the third element in Love's Law. Everyone is equally connected to God.
In II C:	the discussion continues as an analysis of "equality" in terms of the neighbour, the other, the object of our obligation; but also with respect to the <i>agent</i> – who is the subject of the "you shall".

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29–63.

<sup>18</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love (WL)* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, p. 44.



Kierkegaard was indeed inspired and influenced by, what he regarded as, the broader view of secular ethics presented by Immanuel Kant in his philosophy of morality: the idea that morality is too difficult for human beings without divine assistance. Whilst Kierkegaard was praiseworthy of Kant's moral philosophy, the analysis in the minor thesis of this paper will show that Kierkegaard also rejects what he sees as Kant's attempt to: i) reduce religion to morality, and ii) confine faith within the limits of rationality<sup>19</sup>.

## 2. WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF KIERKEGAARD'S AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS KANTIAN ETHICS? KIERKEGAARD'S CONFIRMATION AND DENUNCIATION OF KANT'S SYSTEMATIC FORMULATION OF ETHICS

What the overall analysis in this section of the paper will be endeavouring to show is that there is a relation between Kierkegaard's concept of love in his *Works of Love*, and Kant's concept of "willing the Good" in his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. According to Kant:

A good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes, nor because of its fitness to attain some proposed end; it is good only through its willing, i.e., it is good in itself. When it is considered in itself, then it is to be esteemed very much higher than anything which it might ever bring about merely in order to favour some inclination, or even the sum total of all inclination<sup>20</sup>.

For Kant, the "Good will", like neighbourly love for Kierkegaard, is good without qualification. Kant describes the Good Will as a good that shines like a jewel, but by its own light<sup>21</sup>.

He describes it as something that has full value in and of itself. Kierkegaard's argument is that while neighbourly love itself is infinite and eternal, it is the very formulation of the command itself into words that makes it comprehensible to reason. For Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* is about love in its "works": love as action, in terms of relating to the other; and love as conscience, in terms of relating to God. So, within this ethico-religious framework, true love is not merely a volatile loving feeling. Kierkegaard sees this form of love as a rational, ethical duty: duty as loving practical action, and as a matter of conscience. This form of love is a total relatedness to all others and to God.

Kierkegaard's analysis of God's command for us to love everyone equally in deliberation II (A, B, C) follows the Kantian moral structure to a certain extent: the Kantian part of Kierkegaard's project is really his insistence on the disinterested nature

<sup>19</sup> Rudolph Z. Friedman., "Kierkegaard: First Existentialist or Last Kantian?", *Religious Studies* 18, No. 2 (1982): 159–170, p. 160.

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015), ed. M. L. Morgan, p. 836.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 836–837.

of neighbourly-love and the requirement for purity of *intention*, or selflessness in our expression of this form of love. It is in this sense that Kierkegaard's notion of "love" relates closely to what Kant calls "willing the good". Implicit in Kierkegaard's description of neighbourly love, is the Kantian idea that "even if I bring about a good outcome for the other, it can only be regarded as a work of love if I did it in love, with the *intention* of love"<sup>22</sup>. What the analysis has revealed about the nature of the relation between Kierkegaard's concept of "Neighbourly Love" and Kant's concept of the "Good Will" is that on the existential level of the ethical, there is indeed a relation between these two concepts. Kant supports this argument when he states, in the first section of his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, that:

One should promote their happiness not from inclination but from duty 'and thereby for the first time does his conduct have real moral worth. Undoubtedly in this way also are to be understood those passages of Scripture which command us to love our neighbour and even our enemy. For love as an inclination cannot be commanded; but beneficence from duty, when no inclination impels us, and even when a natural and unconquerable aversion opposes such beneficence, is practical, and not pathological, love. Such love resides in the will and not in the propensities of feeling, in principles of action and not in tender sympathy; and only this practical love can be commanded<sup>23</sup>.

Whilst this passage in Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* confirms the close, and strong connection between these two philosopher's highest ethical principle – which indeed supports my primary thesis – my argument is that what Kierkegaard really admires about Kant's moral philosophy is the fact that Kant's broader ethical perspective includes the recognition and endorsement of the connection between morality and religion. Kant recognises that each of us becomes sinful by means of our own moral weakness and moral failure; and that due to this continual weakness and failure to be moral, we create a gap between the moral demand on us and our natural capacities to live by it<sup>24</sup>. In his *Religion within the limits of reason alone*, Kant writes:

<sup>22</sup> George Pattison, "Foreword", in Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (London: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2009), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, p. xiv.

<sup>23</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015), ed. M. L. Morgan, p. 840. "The moral law leads through the concept of the highest good, as the object and final end of pure practical reason, *to religion; that is, to the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions – that is, chosen and in themselves contingent ordinances of another's will – but as essential laws* of every free will in itself, which must nevertheless be regarded as commands of the supreme being because only from a will that is morally perfect (holy and beneficent) and at the same time all-powerful, and so through harmony with this will, can we hope to attain the highest good, which the moral law makes it our duty to take as the object of our endeavours."; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), transl. by Mary Gregor, p. 104.

<sup>24</sup> Philip L. Quinn (2008), "Kierkegaard's Christian Ethics", in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Hannay and Marino, p. 355. See also, Kierkegaard, *WL*, Deliberation II A, pp. 29–43. See also, J. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 32–37.

First, there is the weakness of the human heart...or in other words, the frailty of human nature; second, the propensity for mixing unmoral and moral motivating causes...that is, impurity; third, the propensity to adopt evil maxims, that is, the *wickedness* of human nature, or of the human heart<sup>25</sup>.

In his *Religion Within The limits of Reason Alone*, Kant concludes that due to our human weakness and propensity to moral failure an ethical commonwealth can be thought of only as a people under the divine commands of God, i.e., “as a *people of God*, and indeed *under laws of virtue*”<sup>26</sup>. He thereby represents the moral law, which is a deliverance of our practical reason, “as a divine command and thus to represent transgressions of it, as sins”<sup>27</sup>. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant also states that the moral law “leads through the concept of the highest good, as the object and final end of pure practical reason, *to religion; that is, to the recognition of all duties as divine commands*”<sup>28</sup>. Kierkegaard was truly inspired and influenced by, what he regards as, the ethical framework presented by Immanuel Kant in his philosophy of morality: the concept of “the Good Will” and the idea that morality is too difficult for human beings without divine assistance.

The problem, from Kierkegaard's perspective, is that Kant's moral philosophy, ultimately, reduces religion to ethics. Throughout the course of Kierkegaard's authorship his authors clearly and repetitively document the tendency of theology, from Kant to Hegel, to reduce religion to ethics and genuine religious faith to reason: where Jesus is viewed more as a profound ethical teacher, rather than the divine saviour of sinners. Kant explicitly states that true religious faith is closely linked to the ethical life. In his *Religion within the limits of Reason alone*, Kant states that: “*Whatever, over and above good life-conduct, man fancies he can do to become well-pleasing to God; is mere religious illusion and pseudo-service of God*”<sup>29</sup>. What this suggests is that true faith for Kant is strictly a pure moral faith in God, a religion within the limits of reason alone. Kant writes:

Thus, the moral law, by means of the concept of the highest good as the object of pure practical reason, determines the concept of the original being as the *supreme being*, something that the physical and so the whole speculative course of reason could not effect. The concept of God, then is one belonging originally ... to morals<sup>30</sup>.

Kant's moral philosophy makes it clear that the moral law, or the good will is the highest object of reason. So, the concept of God (as immanence) belongs within the Kantian framework of the moral law. Kierkegaard's problem is that in Kantian ethics,

<sup>25</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1960), transl. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, pp. 24–25.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37–46. See also, Philip L. Quinn, “Kierkegaard's Christian Ethics”, p. 351.

<sup>28</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 104.

<sup>29</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1960), transl. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, p. 158 (Kant's italics).

<sup>30</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), transl. by Mary Gregor, pp. 112–113.

the concept of God is derived from the moral law which makes Christian faith synonymous with reason. Contrary to Kant's view of God belonging to the moral law, Kierkegaard argues that:

Faith's paradox is this, that the single individual is higher than the universal [he] determines his relation to the universal through his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute through his relation to universal<sup>31</sup>.

Kierkegaard is claiming here that it is because faith is a paradox (both immanent and transcendent) that it could never be fully grasped by reason. According to Kierkegaard, the paradox of faith can also be put another way, by saying that there is an absolute duty to God or a relation to God that is above and beyond the ethical. The question that was raised in the opening paragraph of this paper was: what are we to make of Kierkegaard's ambivalence towards Kantian ethics? – his confirmation and condemnation of Kant's systematic formulation of ethics which entails faith in God within the limits of reason alone. Whilst Kierkegaard is praiseworthy of Kant's ability to recognise the problems associated with man's inability to conform to morality's demands<sup>32</sup> (and hence the need for religion); he wholeheartedly rejects what he sees as the Kantian reduction of religion to morality and faith to reason<sup>33</sup>. The idea that "the essential kind of faith is strictly a pure moral faith in God". From Kierkegaard's viewpoint, Kant's ethical position seems to regard all relationships with God as simply obedience to the moral law. The Kantian reduction of faith to reason presents Kierkegaard with a serious problem regarding his highest existential level: Religiousness B. The problem is that although Kant's ethical theory nominally recognises God as the highest principle; his ethics is already implicitly secular in terms of his assertion of human autonomy. For Kierkegaard, Kant's ethical theory restricts the individual from having a personal relation with, the infinite spirit (religiousness A), and ultimately with God (religiousness B)<sup>34</sup>. So, within the construct of the secular ethical framework there is no room for a personal relation with, or a direct experience of, God.

Within the confines of the Kantian ethical system, the individual (as the particular) can never be higher than the universal. Kierkegaard argues that within this form of ethical framework, the subjective or personal aspect of faith is completely eradicated. Within the framework of Kantian ethics, the individual who steps outside of the universal due to moral weakness (or sin) has no higher court of appeal for his ethical failure beyond the ethical itself. In short, there is no room for exceptions within the realm of the universal, which means that: i) there is no direct or personal duty or relation to God, and, ii) the individual who steps outside of the universal due to moral

<sup>31</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1960), transl. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Friedman, Rudolph Z., "Kierkegaard: First Existentialist or Last Kantian?", *Religious Studies* 18, No. 2 (1982): 159–170, p. 160.

<sup>34</sup> Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 122.

weakness (in terms of sin) has no higher court of appeal for his ethical failure beyond the ethical itself. If the universal is the highest telos, then there is no hope of true forgiveness or absolute salvation for the sinner. Kierkegaard's argument is that unless the ethical can be preserved in something higher (a higher telos / religiousness A & B); there can be no justification, forgiveness, or salvation for any sinner. Kierkegaard's argument in *Fear and Trembling* is that without a higher court of appeal, a higher scale of value, or different form of truth – being precisely the telos of the ethical – then all sinners are lost. Kierkegaard's argument and concern is as follows, without the possibility of the paradox of faith, all that can exist in the world is an objective (moral) form of faith. If faith, as objective faith, is all that exists in the world; then true faith has never existed in the world<sup>35</sup> – which amounts to the reduction of true Christianity to first, or secular ethics. Kierkegaard's reflection on the nature of true Christianity endeavours to release faith from the constraints of the moral law (first/secular ethics). What makes Kierkegaard's Christian ethics a form of second ethics: one that can deal with the manifestation of sin, is precisely that it allows for the propriety of the sinner to have recourse to God's forgiveness and God's grace (unmerited mercy). The message that is embedded in this larger Christian perspective: is that the object of true faith is a loving God who, in his supreme greatness as an immanent and transcendent presence, can be in a relation with the individual: i) through loving duty and conscience<sup>36</sup> (the transformation of the eternal, ii) or directly through true faith (the single individual as the particular stands in an absolute relation to the absolute)<sup>37</sup>.

The main aim of the overall analysis has been to show that the nature of the relation between Kierkegaard's notion of "Neighbourly Love" and Kant's concept of the "Good Will" is only evident up to a certain point: that is, within the boundaries of rational ethical existence.

The problem is that whilst Kierkegaard sees duty as loving practical action; he also sees it as a matter of conscience in terms of infinite resignation, as Religiousness A; and/or in terms of true faith, as Religiousness B. Which means that on the highest point of the religious levels of existence, it is possible to have a restored, or a direct, personal relation to God (as immanence or as transcendence). What Kierkegaard's ambivalence towards Kantian ethics – that is, his confirmation and his denunciation – amounts to is this: whilst i) his concept of "neighbourly love" relates closely to Kant's concept of the "good will" and, ii) he is praiseworthy of Kant's ability to recognise the problems associated with man's inability to conform to morality's demands<sup>38</sup> (and hence the need for religion); Kierkegaard wholeheartedly rejects, what he sees as, Kant's attempt to reduce religion to ethics and faith to reason. He argues that the

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1960), transl. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Relatedness to others (loving duty); Relatedness to God (loving conscience).

<sup>37</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 85.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

fundamental problem with first ethics is, that it is ‘shipwrecked’ in the sinful nature of the human person<sup>39</sup>. He argues that second ethics is the solution to the Kantian reduction of religion: either as the boundlessness of the infinite spirit or the eternal consciousness (infinite resignation), or as absolute transcendence (true faith).

What the analysis of the major thesis and the minor thesis of this study has revealed is that while Kierkegaard’s Christian Existentialism focuses on existence as ethical existence; ethical existence for Kierkegaard is the level before the highest level of existence. So, it is at this point (the level of secular ethics) that Kierkegaard ultimately takes a leap beyond Kant’s metaphysics of morals. The highest level of existence, according to Kierkegaard, is the religious level: Religiousness A & B – here the sinner is transformed through the experiences of repentance, and forgiveness; it is at this point, Religiousness B, that individual receives God’s grace, and ultimately experiences the joy of salvation: which is the particular’s absolute unity with the transcendent God – and this, for Kierkegaard, is true Christianity. Contrary to the Kantian view – of an objective or rational form of faith – Kierkegaard defines faith as a paradox, which makes it something that reason cannot fathom. Faith is an infinite passion that is both immanent and transcendent. A passion that relates inwardly to the infinite spirit, and directly to the God of transcendence. This analysis has endeavoured to show that Kierkegaard, as the first Christian existentialist, moves beyond the safety of reason – and for this reason his description of reality extends far beyond the rational horizons of Immanuel Kant. Kierkegaard warns his reader that if we choose faith then we must be prepared to suspend our reason and believe in God as love on an irrational basis: that is, *by virtue of the absurd* (beyond reason). So, faith for Kierkegaard is a rational risk. The Kierkegaardian leap of faith entails a double movement of love: a movement where I win my eternal consciousness: an immanent awareness of my authentic self as spirit; and then a joyful leap beyond reason to absolute unity with the transcendent God<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), transl. by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson, pp. 20–21.

<sup>40</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), ed. and transl. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, pp. 75–77.

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