

LOVE'S PRAXIS: THE POLITICAL
IN KIERKEGAARD'S
WORKS OF LOVE

by

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this dissertation is to incorporate Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* into current theorization of love as a political concept by showing how it models political sensibilities that can be responsive to contemporary problems of political and social injustice. It will be shown that the themes of 'love' and 'the neighbor', as contained in *Works of Love*, represent a politics that are critical not only in combating individual commitments to what bell hooks calls, "...the will to dominate and subjugate..." (hooks 1995, 262-272), but the structures of discrimination and oppression that result from such individual commitments as well. This dissertation, then, is concerned with the political subjectivity of the individual as it is, potentially, oriented around the praxis of love of the neighbor, concepts that populate what Lukács termed Kierkegaard's "qualitative dialectic" (Lukács [1952] 1980, 256).

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Mom, Dad, Stacy and Gretchen.

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Kierkegaard begins *Works of Love* with a prayer. I would like to begin, in gratitude, with the same prayer. Kierkegaard writes,

How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you God of love, source of all love in heaven and on earth; you who spared nothing but in love gave everything; you who are love, so that one who loves is what he is only by being in you!

This dissertation on love would not have been possible if You, who spared nothing but in love gave everything, had been forgotten. I thank You for the strength, love and mercy that You gave me to complete this task.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER 1: WHY LOVE? WHY KIERKEGAARD?	
Why Love? Why Kierkegaard.....	1
A Hint of What Follows.....	9
Outline of the Dissertation.....	25
CHAPTER 2: THE CURSE AND BLESSING OF LONG SHADOWS	28
Critics of Kierkegaardian Politics.....	31
Supporters of Kierkegaardian Politics.....	49
CHAPTER 3: THE LAW AND THE ESTRANGED: KIERKEGAARD, ŽIŽEK, AND TILLICH	59
Žižek’s Love-as-Cruelty and Monstrous Neighbors.....	61
Tillich’s Love of the Estranged.....	71
CHAPTER 4: MONGOVEN’S ETHICS OF CARE AND KIERKEGAARD’S MERCIFULNESS	83
CHAPTER 5: CORNEL WEST’S “OTHER” KIERKEGAARDIAN INFLUENCES: FROM RADICAL HISTORICISM TO THE “RADICALNESS” OF CHRISTIAN HISTORICISM	112
<i>Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought with Comparisons to Works of Love</i>	128
<i>Prophesy Deliverance!</i>	140

CHAPTER 6: THE ACTUAL SHAPE OF KIERKEGAARD'S POLITICS OF NEIGHBOR LOVE	154
REFERENCES.....	175

CHAPTER 1: WHY LOVE? WHY KIERKEGAARD?

...the cure is precisely to learn all over again the most important thing, to understand oneself in one's longing for community. – Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

Love is a revolution. – Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

Why love? Why Kierkegaard?

In answering these questions, I point to the two quotes above. I point to the political questions they inspire. What cure is Kierkegaard talking about? A cure for whom? What? What does it mean to “learn all over again” how to “understand oneself” in one’s “longing” for community? How is love a revolution? These are beautiful, political questions. They are elusive, ambiguous, provocative and pregnant with possibility. I, myself, only realized such political possibilities having first made my way first through the thought of Malcolm X, Weber, Marx, Christopher Lasch, Nietzsche, Foucault, and so many others. All of these writers provided me, in their own special ways, the indispensable tools of social and economic critique that are needed for progressive politics. Yet, just as for Judith Butler, Cornel West, Wittgenstein, and so many others, Kierkegaard stood out amongst the rest.

For me, Kierkegaard stood out as describing the very politics that I felt got me to where I was. Those politics were embodied in the revolutionary systems of radical support that I had benefited from. These were not the politics of political and familial connections or support; rather, they were the politics of love. They were a politics of love that, as Kierkegaard described in chapters one, two three, and six of the second series of deliberations in *Works of Love*, abides,

builds up, hopes in all things and believes in all things, (Kierkegaard, 1995). They emanated from my parents and one professor in particular. In my dark days as an undergraduate, defined primarily by failures that my parents could not afford, the love of my parents and one professor abided and shored up the possibilities that I had in myself. They implicitly performed those politics of chapters five, seven and nine of the second series of *Works of Love*, politics such as the nurturing of autonomy and self-development along with mercy and forgiveness, (Kierkegaard, 1995). It was only after I reflected on them with a hindsight informed by my other readings that I began to imagine the roles that such love, mercy and care could play politically and socially.

At that point, I turned to *Works of Love* and the secondary Kierkegaard literature in general. The political Kierkegaard that we are afforded today, due to the efforts of the secondary literature, was the result of a rescue mission. This rescue mission by the secondary literature, sought to tear Kierkegaard away from the partial and mistaken readings that had plagued his work for decades. They succeeded well, by showing that earlier attempts at understanding the thought of Kierkegaard was not complex or whole enough to count as giving representation to his politics, (Malantschuk 1976; Fletcher 1982; Jegstrup 2004; Westphal 2008; Simmons and Wood 2008). In a sense, they have moved on, showing that Kierkegaard was not an asocial individualist. Yet, at this point, they seem unable to go any farther. While the literature has pointed out adeptly that Kierkegaard did in fact have a social element to his thought, they stop short of showing how this element can inform progressive politics concerned with issues such as poverty, racism, or environmental injustices. This is where I depart from the literature. What we need to advance studies into the nature of Kierkegaardian politics is to inquire how the politics of neighbor-love that Kierkegaard describes can transform, for instance, economic injustices,

combat hatred and racism directed towards the immigrant, and combat the racism and murder that defines environmental injustices? Hence, my guiding questions for the dissertation: What are the political possibilities afforded by Kierkegaard's political theory of neighbor-love, and in what ways can they be manifested in concrete practices? What, concretely, is love's praxis in *Works of Love*? My conception of the political here is informed by Levinas who sees ethics as first philosophy, the encounter of the other, the face, as the site of the ethical, the political and the responsibility needed for justice (Levinas 2001, 108).

Methodologically speaking, this dissertation is an exercise in political exegesis. It is not a work of retrieval. It is not seeking to retrieve Kierkegaard from conservative readings, nor to labor in the effort to show that he has a social element to his thought and is not solely focused on the individual. Instead, it seeks to read *Works of Love* in an exegetical sense. The exegetical approach here will not draw out the literary, grammatical or historical elements of *Works of Love* (Traina 2002), but rather, will critically discuss the latent political possibilities and sensibilities contained within it. The political problems identified since Kierkegaard, stretching through Marx's critique of the "bourgeois spirit" (Tucker 1978, 469-500), Nietzsche's critique of the "politics of vengeance" (Nietzsche 1956, 169), Weber's critique of the "spirit of capitalism" (Weber 2010) and Foucault's critique of the discourses of power and knowledge (Foucault and Gordon 1980), make, and have made, such exegetical exercises of a text like *Works of Love* possible and necessary. Such critiques speak to the politics of the individual as well as the structural elements of society, thus the use made of Kierkegaard by, among others, Judith Butler (Solomon and Higgins 1993, 363-392), Jacques Derrida (Llewelyn 2009), and Cornel West (West 1982, 1991). This dissertation builds on such exegetical work. In essence, I begin this dissertation in agreement with Mark Dooley who states

While I acknowledge that Kierkegaard was responding in his authorship to problems specifically endemic to his own cultural matrix, I am nevertheless committed to the task of demonstrating how those writings can and ought to be reconsidered in the light of contemporary philosophical, political and cultural developments. (Dooley 2001, xiv)

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to incorporate Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* into current theorization of love as a political concept by showing how it models political sensibilities that can be responsive to contemporary problems of political and social injustice. It will be shown that the themes of 'love' and 'the neighbor', as contained in *Works of Love*, represent a politics that are critical not only in combating individual commitments to what bell hooks calls, "...the will to dominate and subjugate..." (hooks 1995, 262-272), but the structures of discrimination and oppression that result from such individual commitments as well. This dissertation, then, is concerned with the political subjectivity of the individual as it is, potentially, oriented around the praxis of love of the neighbor, concepts that populate what Lukács termed Kierkegaard's "qualitative dialectic" (Lukács [1952] 1980, 256).

For me, then, answering the questions of why love and why Kierkegaard extend from the personal to the social. Based on my own development as a person and student, I *need* to explore and write about the politics of neighbor-love as contained in Kierkegaard. The literature on Kierkegaard's politics *needs* to be advanced in its application of the role of love in the material, political world. And finally, I think politics today *needs* the element of love in order to counter prevailing and, often violent, political trends. To show this last point, take the following examples from Alabama politics. Alabama, in terms of the politics of immigration and environmentalism, offers paradigmatic examples of what can happen in the absence of a politics of the neighbor.

On June 9, 2011, the governor of the state of Alabama, Robert Bentley, signed into law the now, infamous, immigration legislation titled, Alabama HB 56, also known as the Hammon-

Beason Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act. The ripple effect of this law on Alabama's, and America's, political and social waters has been large. It has commonly been referred to as the harshest immigration law in the country, followed summarily by statements that it exceeds even Arizona's own S.B. 1070, (Baxter 2012). The latter, more specific comparison highlights the law's relationship to a law passed in what is a state in which immigration and racial tensions run so high that portions of its populace demanded an artist to "lighten" the faces of Hispanic and Black children in an elementary school mural in Prescott, Arizona, (Wagner 2010). The state of Alabama has now eclipsed, in many eyes, the political climate of Arizona.

Alabama HB 56 "...required aliens to carry documentation, banned undocumented aliens from working or entering into contracts with the state, and gave law enforcement broad powers to detain those they had "reasonable suspicion" of being in the country unlawfully," (Lyman 2012). It led to the racial profiling and discrimination of children in its requirement that schools check the citizenship status of school children, (ACLU 2011). It has also led to "...crops...rotting in the fields as Latino workers have fled for fear of being harassed under the new law," as well as to forecasts that the law will shrink Alabama's economy by \$2.3 billion dollars causing employment fall...in the four sectors (agriculture, construction, accommodation, and food and drinking places) that are often alleged to employ migrant and unauthorized workers," (Bathija 2011; ACIJ 2012). The area of construction is an especially interesting one. Given that many areas of Alabama were destroyed on April 27, 2011 by horrendous tornados, it represents a shocking case of political bitterness and suspicion for the state to pass a law that would effectively eliminate its Hispanic population of construction workers at the very moment that they needed to foster a community with them the most. While this construction work represented, pitifully, one of the most visible forms of exploitative, cheap Hispanic labor, as it

does across the country, Alabama's legislative steps to remove this workforce in a time of its greatest need is evidence of the resentment that led to the law in the first place.

Due to the immense political backlash and criticism the law received from both economic and humanitarian standpoints after it was passed, as well the embarrassing incidents of two foreign auto executives being detained when they did not have sufficient paperwork with them required by law when they were stopped by the police, the law has recently undergone revisions, resulting in HB 658. Its notable changes include "...suspending a business license for 60 days, up from 10 days, for hiring an illegal immigrant; allowing schools an exemption from reporting the status of students; and granting more latitude to churches in ministering to those in the country illegally," (Gates 2012). This revised bill, however, still has its critics, as many feel that in one of the most egregious areas of HB 56, the latitude given to law enforcement to detain those they had a "reasonable suspicion" may be illegal, extends now to passengers in automobiles and not just the drivers (Lyman 2012). One of the most poignant comments made on Alabama's current immigration legislation came from Alabama Representative Darrio Melton from Selma, Al who stated, "Based on this immigration bill on the calendar, I don't think we love each other...I don't think we love ourselves."(Downes 2012).

Immigration politics, clearly, are highly contested in Alabama currently, but there are other issues just as contested. Alabama is also a hotbed for environmental injustice issues. Going beyond the familiar tropes of environmentalism such as animal species endangerment, atmospheric pollution, or soil and water pollution, environmental justice shows that environmental problems are intimately bound up with issues of race and class as well, (Schlosberg 1999; Stein 2004; Checker 2005; Bullard 2005; Sandler and Pezzullo 2007; Faber 2008). Alabama suffers greatly from such environmental injustices.

There are two very clear examples of environmental injustice in Alabama. One of the most recent, and famous, examples is that of Uniontown, Al in Perry County. Uniontown is home to the Arrowhead Landfill. The Arrowhead Landfill is home to the coal ash that was left after a massive spill at a Tennessee power plant in 2008. Coal ash contains chemicals such as arsenic, lead and mercury and has been known to leech into groundwater systems at other storage sites. The predominantly black and poor residents of Uniontown, though, have been assured by county leaders, state environmental leaders, and the EPA itself, that Uniontown represents an ideal and safe choice for the location of the coal ash due to the fact that the Arrowhead Landfill is "...a dry storage site dug into a nearly impermeable bed known as the Selma chalk, some 600 feet above the water table, lined with clay and polymer and equipped with a leachate collection system to suck up any water that filters through the ash and dislodges contaminants." Residents, however, "...feared equipment failure, flooding, tornadoes or lack of oversight at the landfill, where the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, whose notably lax regulation of coal ash permits most landfills to use it as a cover material for other waste, will be responsible for enforcement...Many said they did not believe the assertions by local officials that the ash was perfectly safe, particularly after one councilman insisted, contrary to widely publicized test results that showed dangerous levels of arsenic, that it contained no arsenic whatsoever," (Dewan 2009). Cynthia Maddox of Uniontown stated, "We were first the dump site of the state. Now we are being referred to as the ash hole of the nation," (Brooks 2009).

Similar to Uniontown, Al is Emelle, Al, another predominantly poor area of the state populated primarily by black residents. Emelle is the site of the largest hazardous and toxic waste dump *in the country*. According to Cray,

In 1978, Chemical Waste Management, a subsidiary of Waste Management Inc., purchased a landfill permit for a 300-acre tract of land near the village of Emelle in the

center of Sumter County, Alabama. In Sumter County, one of the country's most impoverished regions, one-third of the residents live below the poverty level. Over 65 percent of the residents are Black and over 90 percent of the residents near the landfill in Emelle are Black. Since acquiring the landfill, Waste Management Inc. has dumped millions of tons of hazardous waste on what was once lush farmland, creating the largest hazardous waste landfill in the United States, and possibly the world. Nearly 40 percent of the toxic waste disposed of nationwide between 1984 and 1987 under the federal Superfund removal program ended up at the landfill. The 2,700-acre landfill also sits directly over the Eutaw Aquifer, which supplies water to a large part of Alabama. (Cray 1991, 157)

Both of these issues, immigration and environmental injustice, represent painful areas of political indifference, operating in the absence of love, that plague current Alabama politics.

These are highly charged political issues defined by the various politics that surround them.

There are conservatives and liberals involved, there is support and protest, there are local, state and national leaders, there are grassroots movements and corporations, and there is legislation and money. And, yet, something else seems to be missing. Despite the hundreds and thousands of voices that speak in protest, the wheels of injustice continue to grind on. Toxic sites are strategically placed and suspicious people are brazenly detained. Hispanic children are afraid to go to school and pregnant Hispanic women are afraid to go to the hospital. Alabama is leading the way, legislatively, in a country that has reconciled itself with the forced separation of children and parents on the basis of citizenship. Representative Darrio Melton's statement about the immigration bill is applicable to all of these issues. When looked at together, such politics shows that we clearly do not love each other.

But what does this mean? I agree with Representative Melton. Love is a missing element in our current politics. Yet, how do we bring it in? How do we begin to speak about love politically in a way that could radically transform the issues of injustice discussed above? One particularly systematic, yet ultimately incomplete, example of inquiring into what I will call, love-as-a-political-concept, is provided by the literary and political theorist, Michael Hardt.

A Hint of What Follows

Michael Hardt, is perhaps most widely known as the co-author, along with Antonio Negri, of the trilogy, *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*. Their work in this trilogy has proven popular, enough so that Slavoj Žižek, in his review of the first volume, *Empire*, encapsulated the title in a question which asked simply, “Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Rewritten the Communist Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century?” (Žižek 2001). The concept of Empire, for Hardt and Negri,

...constitutes the ontological fabric in which all the relations of power are woven together—political and economic relations as well as social and personal relations. Across this hybrid domain the biopolitical structure of being is where the internal structure of imperial constitution is revealed, because in the globality of biopower every fixed measure of value tends to be dissolved, and the imperial horizon of power is revealed finally to be a horizon outside measure. (Hardt and Negri 2001, 354)

The domination of political, economic, social and personal relations inherent to Empire is manifested in a particular way. According to Hardt and Negri,

The most complete figure of this world is presented from the monetary perspective. From here we can see a horizon of values and a machine of distribution, a mechanism of accumulation and a means of circulation, a power and a language. There is no nothing, no “naked life,” no external standpoint, that can be posed outside this field permeated by money; nothing escapes money. Production and reproduction are dressed in monetary clothing. In fact, on the global stage, every biopolitical figure appears dressed in monetary garb...The great industrial and financial powers thus produce not only commodities but also subjectivities. They produce agentic subjectivities within the biopolitical context: they produce needs, social relations, bodies, and minds – which is to say, they produce producers. (Hardt and Negri 2001, 32)

Hardt and Negri’s approach to the ontological and political problem of Empire unites critiques such as those of Marx, Weber, Nietzsche and Foucault that we mentioned above. Not only this, it is also reminiscent of Kierkegaard’s critique of economic “earnestness”, to which he opposed love and mercy directly, (Kierkegaard 1995, 320; Kierkegaard 1998). Similarly, it is against the political problem of Empire’s dominating and ontological reach, a reach that extends the

monetary perspective into all relations, from the structural to the individual, that Hardt sets love as an antidote, as a possible source of resistance to Empire's structures.

Hardt's work on love, which I will summarize below, represents my hint of what follows in the dissertation. I begin with Hardt for two reasons. The first is precisely how he positions love, similar to Kierkegaard, as an antidote to the problem of Empire. Hardt, as a Marxist theorist, struggles to theorize how love can subversively undermine the structures of economic power that now exist at all levels, from the structural to the individual. Secondly, in his attempt to do this, he provides a five-part schema which is useful when beginning to think about love as a political concept. What he does well is provide an outline, yet outlines by nature are incomplete. Hardt, himself, refers to his work in this area as an annotated bibliography. This bibliography is incomplete in that much of the theoretical work is not done by Hardt and many of the most profound thinkers in the area of love and politics such as Kierkegaard (1995), West (1982, 1993) and King (2010) are left out.

Thus, it is for these two reasons that I start with Hardt in this introduction. Yet, Hardt will reappear throughout the dissertation. In each of the five areas that he proposes we talk about love as a political concept, Kierkegaard has much to say. So, in each chapter that I develop, politically, an area of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, it can be seen to be a deeper development of an area that Hardt has already, superficially, identified as crucial to thinking of love politically. In doing this, I will not only be tying the dissertation together from beginning to end, but I will, more importantly, be tying Kierkegaard's politics of love to current theorization on the topic.

While Hardt may be most well-known for his written work with Negri, it is his *unwritten* work, those of lectures and interviews where, for the last eight years, he has struggled through the theorization of love as political concept. Speaking in 2007 at the European Graduate School

(EGS), Hardt delivered a lecture on the possibilities and pitfalls of a political concept of love. At this point in time, this was not a new direction for Hardt as evidenced by his statement that he had decided, "...over the past few years to talk more about love," (2007). The earliest appearance of this research agenda is indeed in 2004 when Hardt was interviewed by *The Minnesota Review*, (Smith and Minardi 2004). Echoes of Hardt's work on the political possibilities of love are contained in numerous articles and interviews, (Hardt 1997, 2006; Schwartz 2009; Hardt and Negri 2009), but the EGS lecture, in my view, represents the fullest expression of his thought. The primary question that Hardt has at the center of his work on the politics of love is, "How can love function as a political concept?" His discussion in the EGS lecture is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the question, "Why love?" The second part looks at the successful and unsuccessful ways love has functioned as a political concept. The final part deals with the relationship between love and evil.

Love, as a political concept for Hardt, "fits into a larger political problem that he has facing the theory of the multitude." He starts from a presupposition, arrived at by analyzing the context and situation of the multitude in their oppression, i.e. the subject matter of *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*, that "people today are not able to rule themselves, not capable of democracy." (2007) In this, he does not seem to be speaking about human nature per se, and its relationship to self-governance, but rather, the controlled context that "prevents" them from ruling themselves. The iron cage that they exist in, i.e. *Empire*, does not allow for self-rule. In this type of situation, then, Hardt is interested in "the capacities that people have now that can lead them in the direction of self-government," (2007).

An apt Kierkegaardian analogy to such a situation comes in Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity*. In this work, Kierkegaard speaks of the abolition of the possibility for offense by

the Christian. The category and impossibility of self-rule for Hardt is similar to the category and impossibility of offense for Kierkegaard. Both name the abilities of self-determination and influence by the individual. When the system, structured as it is, prevents individuals from doing these things, especially when the system is ostensibly set up along democratic or Christian categories, the irony becomes apparent. It is precisely within the established order of Christendom, a Christendom that has been wedded to a deified state, that Christians have been stripped of all possibility for offense, individuality, and social impact. Kierkegaard writes,

...the more one deifies the established order, the more natural is the conclusion: ergo, the one who disapproves of or rebels against this divinity, the established order – ergo, he must be rather close to imagining that he is God. Very likely it is by no means the person in question who declares something blasphemous about himself...No, the blasphemy is actually a projection from the impiety with which one venerates the established order as the divine, an acoustic illusion occasioned by the established order's tacitly saying to itself that it is the divine...But that the established order has become something divine, is regarded as the divine, is a falsehood brought about by ignoring its own origin. When a commoner has become a nobleman, he usually makes every possible effort to have his *vita ante acta* [earlier life] forgotten. So also with the established order. The established order also began with that collision between the single individual and the established order, began with the single individual's relationship to God, but now that is forgotten, the bridge cut down, and the established order deified...In established Christendom...every possibility of offense is basically abolished – in established Christendom one becomes a Christian in the most pleasant way of the world without being aware of the slightest possibility of offense, (Kierkegaard, 1991, 87-88, 111).

For Hardt, the possibilities for self-government are increasingly, and ironically, being abolished despite the liberalization and democratization of the world. Similarly, for Kierkegaard's Christendom of Denmark, the possibilities for being a Christian were ironically abolished despite the Christianizing of the state.

Hardt feels, however, that when he begins to investigate possible capacities for self-government in the age that we live in, the age of globalization, that he is stuck in a “divide or a no-man's-land between spontaneity and dictatorship.” Love as a political concept, as he says,

“can function in that gap,” (2007). This represents Hardt’s productive and imaginative positioning of love. He begins fleshing out these ideas of dictatorship and spontaneity by discussing Lenin’s dictatorship of the proletariat. According to Lenin, the proletariat was not capable of immediately assuming the mantle of self-government given their long subjection to capitalist rulers and oppression. What was needed, rather, was a segment of leaders or managers, the vanguard, who would lead the revolution, overthrow the oppressive powers of the status quo, and manage the post-revolution life and civil society until the state withered away and true democracy was achieved, (Lenin 2007). This is all in the service of what Hardt calls, “getting new people,” (2007). This gap, though, between spontaneity and dictatorship, is where Hardt feels he finds himself and his theorization of love. Either people are immediately capable of self-rule and self-government, or they need a time of development and evolution led by those who are most capable and representative. How does Hardt and his notion of love fit into this?

He believes the spontaneous position is “naïve”, but questions whether the only other option we have is dictatorship. Are these our only two options or are there other alternatives? He asks, specifically, the following questions: “What is it that lies between these two? How can we become a new people by ourselves? What means do we have for collective self-transformation that can lead toward our being able to lead ourselves?” It is in this gap that he theorizes love and posits that “love could be a process or even a field of training for constructing a democratic society,” (2007). Struggling with how we become a new people, both individually and collectively, was a struggle Kierkegaard shared. In *The Present Age*, Kierkegaard states that it is not until “...the single individual has established an ethical stance despite the whole world...can there be any question of genuinely uniting,” (Kierkegaard 1978, 106). In this sense, then, Kierkegaard believes that we become a new people, united, and able to lead ourselves, by

first dealing with ourselves and understanding how love, as an ethical stance, functions in the space between ourselves and others.

So, we see here that Hardt, similar to Kierkegaard, attempts to theorize love as a preceding, foundational ground to self and collective democratic-education that can function not only in the midst of the constraints of Empire, but also as a force that can overthrow it. But why love? Hardt states that many have asked why he chose this concept over other, more familiar political concepts such as solidarity or friendship. According to Hardt, though solidarity is a familiar communist concept, love is different in that it “extends beyond our standard conceptions of rationality, beyond the rational calculation of interest,” (2007). We need to get beyond selfish, egotistical calculations of interest and towards a more expansive notion of community, a notion even more expansive than solidarity. He understands solidarity as “essentially, a calculation of interest in which we aid each other or unite with each other because of mutual interest.” Love, on the other hand, “develops a different relationship between reason and the passions, or a different kind of rationality... Love, as a political concept, [is not] strictly a passion. It is rather, a notion of reason that is not excluded from the passions,” (2007). In this sense, then, love runs deeper than merely a rationally created community of mutual self-interest.

With regard to solidarity, however, Hardt seems to make too strong of a contrast between it and love. It is not obvious that, conceptually, we need a necessary distinction between the two concepts. According to Jane Jacobs, in her *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*,

In real life, only from the ordinary adults of the city sidewalks do children learn – if they learn at all – the first fundamental of successful city life: people must take a modicum of public responsibility for each other even if they have no ties to each other. This is a lesson nobody learns by being told. It is learned from the experience of having other people without ties of kinship or close friendship or formal responsibility to you take a modicum of public responsibility for you. ... This is instruction in city living that people hired to look after children cannot teach, because the essence of this responsibility is that you do it without being hired (Jacobs 2011, 93-94).

In her discussion, while she does not discuss love per se, her discussion of solidarity between people without ties of kinship or close friendship or formal responsibility seems more expansive than Hardt's notion that solidarity represents, merely, a community of mutual self-interest. Thus, Jacobs' understanding of solidarity seems close enough to Kierkegaard's discussions of love and mercy as discussed in *Works of Love* to warrant Hardt's division here problematic. Love as praxis is a form of solidarity that is done without ties of kinship, etc.

His focus on love over friendship is due to the fact that "love, in contrast to friendship, involves transformation. In others words, we lose ourselves in love, or in love we become different...Friendship is primarily an interaction and a union or solidarity that does not transform the subjects involved," (2007). Love involves redefinition not only of the individual, but of communities as well. This emphasis on transformation by Hardt recalls, not only the quote above from Kierkegaard regarding genuine uniting occurring only after each individual assumes an ethical stance despite the whole world, but also the quote from Kierkegaard at the beginning of this chapter that "...the cure is precisely to learn all over again the most important thing, to understand oneself in one's longing for community," (Kierkegaard 1995, 153).

At this point, he states that "love may be natural, but it is not spontaneous, or rather, the forms of love, are not spontaneous." He claims that "love requires organization or training. There are better ways of loving, there are different ways of loving and some of them are quite horrible...What we need is a kind of guide or training in love," (2007). Here, then, he seems to be making comparisons between types of love, love that can function politically and love that cannot. Certain questions can arise in response to his analysis here, such as: Are some forms of love set "higher" than others, such as agape and social love versus romantic love? Not only is he talking about the political utility of different types of love, but he also seems to be referencing a

certain rigor in love, a struggle involved in learning what it is to love. Simon Critchley, in his discussion of Kierkegaard and love in his book, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*, shows that Kierkegaard is concerned with the same rigor in love and believes that the individual choice to abide in that rigor is what transforms society. Critchley writes,

In the conclusion to *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard ponders the nature of the commandment of love that he has been wrestling with throughout the book. What is the status and force of the words “you shall love your neighbor”? Kierkegaard stresses the strenuousness and, in the word most repeated in these pages, the *rigor* of love. As such, Christian love is not some sort of “coddling love,” which spares believers any particular effort and which can be characterized as “pleasant days without self-made cares.” This easy and fanciful idea of love reduces Christianity to “a second childhood” and renders faith infantile. Kierkegaard then introduces the concept of “the Christian like-for-like”, which is the central and decisive category of *Works of Love*...and “makes every relationship to other human beings into a God-relationship.”... We need to cultivate the inner or inward ear that infinitizes the words and actions of the self. As Kierkegaard makes clear, what he is counseling is not “to sit in the anxiety of death, day in and day out, listening for the repetition of the eternal.” What is rather being called for is a rigorous and activist conception of faith that proclaims itself into being at each instant without guarantee or security, and which abides with the infinite demand of love, (Critchley 2012, 247-248, 251; Kierkegaard 1995, 376, 385).

This rigor that Kierkegaard and Critchley are talking about is precisely the training and self-transformation that I believe Hardt is calling to mind above.

One of the things he believes we need to do is “struggle over the concept” of love (2007). The word love, like the word democracy, is fraught with misconceptions, misunderstandings, and dangers. It is tempting to abandon such problematic concepts and start over. Yet, Hardt feels we must struggle through the concept, reimagining it and continually recasting it. He seems to employ a Platonic-type struggling over Forms or Ideas with the clear political goals of naming and moving toward their realization. The way that his trilogy of works with Negri struggled through democracy and the multitude is similar to how he approaches love.

The most important element of this lecture, however, is Hardt’s outlining of what he takes to be the five ways, or categories, that love has “been corrupted as a political concept, in

which love has been destroyed as a political concept,” (2007). He finds it pedagogically useful to begin with a concept that has been degraded in a sense, a concept of love that had at various times and in various ways functioned politically, but over time had been destroyed. He is aware of the Christian uses of love as a political concept and he refers, at times, to Paul’s epistles where love is written about in terms of community. Ultimately, though, his intention is not to return to any past notions of love. He is not conservative in this sense. Instead, he posits it as a “return to where we’ve never been, a love that hasn’t yet been realized,” (2007). This speaks to possibility, hope, and capacity. In this sense, then, he is completely in line with Kierkegaard’s notions of hope and possibility and their relation to love as expressed in his deliberation, “Love Hopes All Things”. Kierkegaard writes,

So we must define more accurately what it is to hope. In ordinary speech we often call something hope that is not hope at all but a wish, a longing, a longing expectation now of one thing, now of another, in short, an expectant person’s relationship to the possibility of multiplicity. When hope is understood in that way (when hope actually means only expectation), it is easy enough for the youth and the child to hope, because the youth and the child themselves are still a possibility. On the other hand, it is quite in order when one sees how possibility and hope, or the sense for the possible, usually decline in people over the years. This in turn explains why experience speaks deprecatingly about hope, as if it were merely something for youthfulness (which the child’s and the youth’s hope certainly is also), as if hoping, like dancing, were a youthful something for which older have neither the liking nor the lightness. Well, yes, to hope is indeed to make oneself light with the help of the eternal, that is, with the help of the possibility of good. And even though the eternal is far from being youthfulness, it has still much more in common with youthfulness than with the moroseness that is frequently honored with the name of seriousness, the slackness of old age that in moderately fortunate circumstances is moderately calm and contented, but above all has nothing to do with providing hope, (Kierkegaard 1995, 250).

The first way that Hardt claims that love has been destroyed as a political concept is that it has problematically been “closed within the couple and the family”. He states that “the love of the heterosexual couple and the family surrounding it is meant to represent all forms of love and ends up usurping them, becoming the only form of love,” (2007). As Hardt details, this

representation of love is most familiar to us. It is, after all, the representation that is most visible in our popular forms of media. Even something such as psychoanalysis, according to Hardt, is locked into viewing love in terms of the couple and the family. He points to Freud, Lacan, Žižek and Badiou as following this trend, and points to a moment when Freud apologizes for the monotony of solutions offered by psychoanalysis, what Hardt refers to as the monotonous “mommy-daddy-me” paradigm (2007). This, according to Hardt, is the perfect example of being unable to think outside the paradigm of the family and the couple. Love, as a political concept, is either absent here because it cannot escape these restraints, or it is severely limited in its applicability.

Hardt attempts to make the claim about love in the family more substantial by referencing it as an “identitarian” kind of love (2007). An identitarian love encloses love within the family or the race. Love here is directed towards those who are closest or most like you. Those who share the same identity as you, derived either from race, or from genetics, become the proper sites of love. The logical result of this is that one loves least, those who are furthest from them, either socially or geographically. The alternative to this is loving also those that are furthest from you. This notion of loving the furthest from you, which is an expanded, Christian notion of neighbor love, is a notion that Nietzsche praised in Zarathustra (Nietzsche [1883] 2006). It is identitarian notions of love such as these (family, race, nation) that “correspond to very limited notions of the love of neighbor.” What all of this boils down to is what Hardt calls, “love of the same” (2007).

The antidote to an identitarian love and the way towards reanimating love as a political concept, requires “a love that must be an open social concept that simultaneously applies both to those closest and those furthest away,” (2007). He gives three examples of how such a love

could manifest itself. The first is “rejection of the couple and the family in the name of eros” (2007). His examples here run from Sade (Sade 1990) to gay cruising for anonymous sex. The second example comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s wasp/orchid paradigm (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). This is another form of anonymous sex that works to undermine the couple/family paradigm that is so identitarian and rooted in closure. Finally, he suggests love of the neighbor as a type of love that can escape identitarian constraints. Approaching it this way, from a desire to undermine identitarian love, we could “think about love of neighbor as an expansive social conception, one that is not limited by identity or by proximity, similar to the Christian and Nietzschean notions described above. Love in this sense is a socially constructive force,” (2007). His example here is Franz Rosenzweig’s reading of the neighbor commandment in Leviticus (Rosenzweig 2005). Hardt says that another way of working in this same context is to proceed from a “love of difference” or an “ethics of alterity”, contexts that are familiarly Levinasian in nature (2007). He is clearly in line here with Kierkegaard’s thoughts on the nature of the difference between neighbor love and erotic love (Kierkegaard 1995, 31-32).

The second way that he sees love as being corrupted as a political concept is the “segregation of eros and agape” (2007). Hardt suggests that this is nothing more than a separation between the personal and the social/political. This tradition of a separated-out agape emanates from the work of Paul and Augustine, both of whom Hardt quotes. They both, problematically, saw agape as love that is *freed* from the instincts and the passions. For agape to be most effective as a social form of love, it must not be *polluted* with the passions and vicissitudes of eros.

Hardt identifies two, false ways to unite eros and agape. Such false attempts are characteristic of Freud and the current pope. Freud unifies all loves by saying that, love goes by

many terms, but at the foundation of all of them is libido. For Freud, agape is really only “eros repressed and sublimated”. Libido and sexual desire are the foundation of all loves equally, (Freud 1989). Conversely, the current pope’s views about eros and agape are that eros is subsumed under agape, (Benedict 2005). It is the exact opposite of the Freudian position (2007). In these attempts, then, eros and agape are not really complimentary, but rather, hierarchical in their own respective ways.

There are other attempts to unify these two forms of love. Hardt lauds the attempts by feminists of color such as Cherrie Moraga (2000), Chela Sandoval (2000), Rosemary Hennessy (2000), and bell hooks (2001; 2002; 2004) in this regard. He points to the emphasis in the writing of bell hooks on love in communities, (hooks 1995, 263-272) as especially promising. This kind of socially-informed personal love sustains and perpetuates politics. Another such attempt at unifying these two loves comes from Che Guevara. Hardt quotes from Guevara’s letters which discuss how the revolutionary leaders, the vanguard, must be guided by a strong love for the people, (Guevara 2003). In this way, Hardt equates the revolutionary’s love of the people with the priest’s love of the people in that they both deny themselves the full experience of romantic love as they commit themselves to service. Yet, in one of Guevara’s letters that Hardt quotes, Guevara expresses a sadness over the separation between romantic/familial love and social revolutionary love, of how the revolutionary’s life is lonely and his only comrades are his fellow revolutionaries, (Guevara 1965). Hardt particularly likes this sentiment, i.e., the need to unite these two loves. His desire to unite these two types of loves is complimentary to Kierkegaard’s position when he writes passages such as the following:

Go, then, and do this, take away dissimilarity and its similarity so that you can love the neighbor. Take away the distinction of preferential love so that you can love the neighbor. But you are not to cease loving the beloved because of this – far from it. If in order to love the neighbor you would have to begin by giving up loving those for whom

you have preference, the word “neighbor” would be the greatest deception ever contrived. Moreover, it would even be a contradiction, since inasmuch as the neighbor is all people surely no one can be excluded – should we now say, least of all the beloved? (Kierkegaard 1995, 61)

Kierkegaard clearly states here that love of the neighbor, or of community, does not cancel out love the beloved.

Through a similar misunderstanding of Christianity...people thought that it was Christian to...express in a worldly way Christianity’s indifference to friendship, to the family relationships...which is indeed false, because Christianity is not indifferent in a worldly way to anything; on the contrary, it is concerned about everything simply and solely in a spiritual way. (Kierkegaard 1995, 144)

The third way that love has been corrupted as a political concept comes when love “merges in unity”, where love is the “destruction [or destructor] of difference” (2007). Hardt states that these forms of love are related to the identitarian forms of love discussed earlier in that “they mutually reinforce each other, in a kind of a circle: love of the same and love making the same or love becoming the same,” (2007). Here, the focus is on love as a process, the process of love making the same. Earlier, Hardt was simply describing love of the same as they are given in existence, (race, family, nation), but here, love is a catalyst to making the previously different, same. The antidote to this form of love would be a new starting point, an accenting of love of difference rather than similarity. This position has resonance with Kierkegaard’s deliberation, “Love Does Not Seek Its Own”, (Kierkegaard 1995, 264-279)

The fourth way that love has been destroyed as a political concept is the reduction of love to charity, especially with regards to the poor. What is most at issue is the “notion of charity that is not for the creation of equality, but rather conceives the poor as object rather than subject of love,” (2007). This sentiment is echoed in Žižek’s recent critiques of charity and socially-responsible capitalism (Žižek 2009). Hardt contrasts this reductive love with a “love defined by the poor” (2007). He finds this love described in the contemporary work of Gustavo Gutierrez

(1988) and Leonardo Boff (1987) and their brand of liberation theology. What interests him most in their work is the dual sense of love that is present, both the love of the poor and the love that the poor have. Charity becomes a corruption of love if it is only an empty act done to an object that receives. This type of relationship is very hierarchical with no possibility of building true community capable of transforming the system. A love that is not based in charity envisages a more equal, subject-based relationship. Similarly, by privileging the love that the poor have, writers such as Gutierrez and Boff show them to be active agents in the self-transformation and self-education of democratic-love rather than merely passive objects of pity or charity. This renunciation of mere charity and emphasis on liberation theology are found also in *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1995, 13-14) as well the work of Kierkegaardian scholar Eliseo Perez-Alvarez who posits the late Kierkegaard as a crucial forerunner to liberation theology, (Alvarez 2009, ix).

The fifth and final way that love has been corrupted as a political concept is that “love has been conceived as powerless, in other words love as a passion or a sensation denying its productivity” (2007). Hardt, of course, is referring to our sense of love as “something that happens to us, rather than love as a productive act,” or, love as a feeling rather than action. The antidote to this problem is conceiving of a love that is a “productive concept”. This means “fundamentally...thinking of love not as a passion but as an action, as an act of creation in a field of difference, or even an act of differentiation. Creation here means nothing without the creation of difference or the creation of singularities,” (2007). Hardt is in agreement here not only with Cornel West who often states that “Love is not a sentimental view of the world, but a steadfast commitment to the well-being of others,” (West 2011), but also with Kierkegaard whose repeated phrase throughout *Works of Love* is that love is action. Kierkegaard, however, it will be

shown, will disagree with Hardt on the notions of power and powerlessness. For Kierkegaard, often when love is powerless is when, paradoxically, it is at its most powerful. This will be discussed later.

Finally, Hardt discusses evil which, for him, represents the opposite of love. More precisely, he sees evil “as an act of love, but of love gone bad”. His examples of this are fascisms, racisms, etc., areas where love is operating, but is operating as a corrupted love. Such states of being are “distortions of the multitude’s power of love...They are a consolidation of those five negative ways that love functions as a political concept...These fascisms, racisms, nationalisms, and fundamentalisms involve love too, but a horrible love that tries to unify the multitude into a unity, destroy all singularities that regards its neighbor, the object of love, in the most narrow identitarian sense, etc.” (2007)

In conclusion, love as a political concept involves: love as an expansive social concept not limited to the same; love as both eros and agape; love as the love of differences; the primacy of the love by the poor; and love as a productive force. Ultimately, “love would [should] be a kind of training ground for the creation of subjectivities capable of...democracy,” (2007).

I present, at length here, Hardt’s attempts to theorize love as a political concept for the two reasons mentioned previously: he specifically positions love as a political concept as an antidote to the political and economic problems of Empire, and he does so with a useful, five-part schema in the process. He provides insightful questions that must be broached if we want to talk about love politically. When Representative Melton says that love is a missing element in politics, he is right. If we are going to begin talking theoretically about what that lack entails and how we can rectify it, we need to ask questions very similar to Hardt’s. If one works through Hardt’s written and unwritten work, one will find the EGS lecture discussed here to be the most

fully formed and systematic discussion he presents on the topic. Earlier, though, I said that it was incomplete. His work here is clearly superficial, meaning that he is only touring and organizing the problem areas and questions of conceiving of love as a political concept. By Hardt's own admission, he refers to his work in this field in general, and to this lecture in particular, as an annotated bibliography of sorts, one that shows the various ways others have approached love as a political concept, (2007). This is fine and he does a good job of this, but his approach here is incomplete in other ways.

The first major fault that Hardt has as he begins to discuss this topic is that he attempts to show that he is forging new ground; that he is trying to reanimate a concept that people have forgotten about. That people have forgotten about it is simply not the case. In his annotated bibliography, he neglects to mention many people, including some of his own contemporaries who are working at a much deeper level than his own in this field such as Cornel West (1982, 1991) and Ann Mongoven (2009) as well as earlier thinkers such as Soren Kierkegaard (1995) and Paul Tillich (1954). These are glaring absences, none more so I argue than Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* is an eminently political text as we can already see from the preliminary relationships drawn between it and Hardt's work on love. We have seen how Hardt completely avoids Kierkegaard, even though every single area that he discusses in terms of love being destroyed as a political concept, Kierkegaard addresses. Bringing Kierkegaard into inquiries such as Hardt's will help us achieve the primary aim of the dissertation that was mentioned earlier: to incorporate Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* into current theorization of love as a political concept by showing how it models political sensibilities that can be responsive to contemporary problems of political and social injustice. It is crucial to advance a theory of love-as-a-political-concept and answer the introductory questions that Hardt poses, especially in a

country that currently separates children from parents based on citizenship and poisons the poor and minority in increasing numbers. In advancing this theory, it is crucial to draw upon Kierkegaard's work as he is the deepest thinker on the subject.

Outline of the Dissertation

I will achieve the overall aim of this dissertation by putting the Kierkegaard of *Works of Love* in dialogue with other, accepted thinkers on the subject of love-as-a-political-concept. These dialogues will roughly follow, organizationally, Hardt's schema. The rationale for these dialogues is to provide forums within which to accent the diverse political elements of *Works of Love*. With these political elements at hand, we can then begin to locate, in concrete political practices, the politics that *Works of Love* prescribes.

After a literature review in chapter two in which I explain in depth why I chose to turn to *Works of Love* and why my particular focus on and use of the text is different from others who have engaged it, chapter three will put Kierkegaard in dialogue with both Paul Tillich (1954) and Slavoj Žižek (2005). Reading Kierkegaard and Tillich together will draw out Kierkegaard's thoughts on difference, alterity, unity and the Other, all eminently political concepts. While Kierkegaard's relations to these concepts has been analyzed before, they have not been analyzed relative to the work of Tillich. This is a shame given Tillich's politics and his political legacy. Doing this helps us redress a difficulty in the Kierkegaard literature of not being able to tie Kierkegaard's politics of love successfully to concrete political practices. As we saw, the issues of alterity and unity comprise the first and third categories of Hardt's work, so reading Kierkegaard and Tillich together will certainly provide an interpretation of love-as-a-political-concept. Reading Kierkegaard and Žižek will give us a perspective not addressed by Hardt, that of love's relationship to law. This relationship is primarily discussed in relation to the political

concept of justice. In chapter four, I will position Kierkegaard in relation to the political and radical historicism of Cornel West and the problem of economic justice/injustice. This will allow us to address the fourth category of Hardt's thought; that of love reduced to charity. In chapter five, I will read Kierkegaard in relation to Ann Mongoven's recent feminist work on the segregation of the personal and political and its impact on civic virtue. The feminist approach to political theory that privileges what are known as "care ethics" will be to this discussion. Care ethics are tied to issues of citizenship and democracy in interesting ways, all the while employing a powerful critique of agape (Sevenhuijsen 1998, Held 2006). Putting Kierkegaard in dialogue with this area of thought will situate him in insightful discussions of substantive democracy. Doing this will also allow us to address Hardt's second category, that of the segregation of eros and agape. Finally, in chapter six, I will provide concrete, material examples of what I believe Kierkegaard's political theory of love can look like in contemporary society. By looking at Cornel West's brand of democratic socialism, with its current emphasis on the needs of the poor, the American Sanctuary movement and its law-flouting assistance to (im)migrants, and the environmental justice movement with its attacks on the poisonous and distinguished corruption of community-poisoning corporations and governments, we can begin to explicate practical examples of the politics of neighbor love.

The meat of the dissertation is chapters 3-5 where Kierkegaard's political theory of love and the neighbor is put in dialogue with other profound thinkers on the problem of love-as-a-political-concept. As it is, I do not have any chapter at any point giving a commentary on *Works of Love*. I do not feel this is necessary given the existence of Jamie Ferreira's commentary (2001) which is more than satisfactory for such purposes. Instead, I wish to have the most relevant political passages of *Works of Love*, those that round out Hardt's schema more fully,

engage in dialogue with political thinkers Kierkegaard can be usefully put into dialogue with. We will see Kierkegaard's political thought concerning love develop slowly over these chapters, and after suggesting models for practical applications, we will see that *Works of Love* is Kierkegaard's most political text. It will also be shown that his voice is required in the contemporary attempt to theorize love-as-a-political-concept.

CHAPTER 2: THE CURSE AND BLESSING OF LONG SHADOWS

The secondary literature that approaches Kierkegaard from a political standpoint suffers, it appears, from a mild case of resentment, (Nietzsche 1956). That is, the works that comprise it, as stimulating as they are, as groundbreaking in their rescuing of Kierkegaard from sloppy and mistaken readings as they are, seem unable to escape the long shadows of earlier critics that came before them, (e.g., Paradiso-Michau 2007; Stokes 2006; Matthis 1994, 2006; Harding 2007; Ferreira 1999, 2001; Strawser 2007; Minister 2003; Hall 2000; Piety 1998; Perkins 1995, 1998; Andic 1998; Pyper 1998; Dooley 1998, 2001; Matustik 1995; Fletcher 1982; Westphal 2008; Jegstrup 1995; Assiter 2009). They simply cannot move on. The primary critics, Theodor Adorno, Martin Buber, Georg Lukács and Emmanuel Levinas, have a presence in all secondary work that attempts to read Kierkegaard from the point of view of the political (Adorno [1933] 1989; Buber [1947] 1958; Lukács [1952] 1980; Levinas 1975). They are present either directly, mentioned by the author as a specific target at which they are aiming at, or they are present in their absence, as a shadow whose figure looms in the text without ever being identified or named. You know, though, when the author is aiming for them, they do not even have to identify them. The code words acosmic, irrational, egotistical, reactionary, bourgeois, individualistic, violent, abstract, etc., name their presence even in their absence. The secondary literature that attempts to read Kierkegaard from the point of the view of the political cannot stop addressing these claims made by Kierkegaard's early and most profound critics. This continual

defining of itself over and against those that are mistaken has consequences for the secondary literature.

First, the secondary literature has been at great pains to prove that Kierkegaard was not abstracted from society, nor did he construct a philosophy that was abstracted from society. It has been the literature's great aim to show that Kierkegaard himself cared about society and its members that lived alongside him, as well as that his philosophy has a social and political component to it. Without such efforts, or in the absence of such aims, Adorno, Buber and Lukács would be right; Kierkegaard could be interpreted as nothing more than a depressed, crotchety, bourgeois poet who bemoaned the loss of the monarchy and feared his own loss of economic and political power (Adorno [1933] 1989; Buber [1947] 1958; Lukács [1952] 1980). I believe, though, the secondary literature has successfully put such ideas to rest, and shown these readings for what they are, as partial and selective readings of certain texts of Kierkegaard's authorship. The literature has shown that attention was not given in these critical texts to Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole, nor to Kierkegaard's developing authorial methodologies. It is on the foundation of these efforts from which this dissertation proceeds.

Emerging from the tradition of the secondary literature as I am, I recognize the need to build upon and, ultimately, move beyond its preoccupations. The literature itself, taken as a whole, runs the risk of now abstracting itself from society and becoming, purely, political philosophy rather than a resource of practical, material politics or praxis. In the effort to reinterpret Kierkegaard's work, struggling to define a social and political component inherent to it, it has neglected to tie the theory to practices.

Some have attempted this. Eliseo Perez-Alvarez is the most important. His 2009 book, *A Vexing Gadfly: The Late Kierkegaard on Economic Matters*, struggles to show that the late

Kierkegaard had a radical, economic dimension to his later work, as well as attempts to connect Kierkegaard to the politics of liberation theology. This economic dimension, according to Perez-Alvarez, informed Kierkegaard's proto-liberation theology and was embodied in his desire to structurally change the economic elements of society that perpetuated poverty. Perez-Alvarez does a fine job of attempting to locate Kierkegaard's development into an organic intellectual by 1855 (Perez-Alvarez 2009, 177-185; Gramsci 1971). My only contention with Perez-Alvarez's work is the profound oversight that Kierkegaard was already an organic intellectual concerned with economic injustice, and the overturning of it, in 1847 when he wrote *Works of Love* (1995).

Another example is Mark Dooley, whose Derridean-inspired approach to Kierkegaard has, what he believes, practical political implications (Dooley 2001, xxiv). In his sustained comparison of Kierkegaard's and Derrida's shared commitment to the singularity of the lame and the leper, the outcast and the sinner, and the widow and the orphan, and how this commitment can inform both Derrida's democracy to come and Kierkegaard's community of neighbors, Dooley neglects to present a sustained description of what those politics look like, (Dooley 2001, 206-246).

The questions we must ask that are not being asked in any comprehensive way is, what does a Kierkegaardian politics, specifically a Kierkegaardian politics of love, look like amidst the problems inherent to race? To immigration? To the environment? To economic injustice? What we need is to wed the theory that has been produced by the secondary literature to concrete practices and start contemplating what love actually looks like as it moves in public amidst the myriad social injustices we are subject to. In doing this, we will move the discussion of Kierkegaard's relation to the political to a new place. This is what I will do in this dissertation.

First, though, is a review of the literature. It is important to provide this for two reasons. First, it contextualizes what I will be saying in the subsequent heart of the dissertation. It gives a useful grounding of my approach. Even in my critique, I share resonances with this work. I would not wish it to be any other way. I want to move the literature in a new direction and put Kierkegaard into conversation with other thinkers and problems that he has not been before. Second, by going through a sample of the literature, both the secondary literature that is sympathetic to the notion of a political Kierkegaard, as well as the critics who are not, we are afforded a departure point, a jumping-off point for the dissertation. I will show that the secondary literature arrived at love as a profound element of Kierkegaard's politics, but they have not gone further. By starting from the edge of the secondary literature, and putting Kierkegaard into conversations with Paul Tillich, Slavoj Žižek, Cornel West and Ann Mongoven, as well as the issues of immigration and environmental justice, we begin to see the politics of love in Kierkegaard in a wider scope than we have seen them before (Tillich 1954; Žižek 2005; West 1991; 1982; Mongoven 2009).

First, I will review the primary critiques of Kierkegaard's writings. These are just as important as the secondary works that have more recently made them problematic. They contextualize my argument no less. Then, I will review some of the major names, but more importantly, some of the best representations, of those who want to unmask a political Kierkegaard. Taken together, they provide this dissertation with its departure point for the next four chapters.

Critics of Kierkegaardian Politics

In *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* ([1933] 1989), Adorno levels a critique against the possibility of Kierkegaard having a sense of the political. More specifically, Adorno

critiques the notion that Kierkegaard could, in any way, be a friend of the masses or democracy, let alone someone who has love for them. To accomplish this, the two aspects of Kierkegaard that Adorno critiques most strongly are his actual social position in Denmark and his use of the commandment to ‘love your neighbor’ in *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1995; Adorno [1933] 1989, 1939).

Adorno, in historicizing Kierkegaard in a Denmark that was experiencing rapid economic and political processes of liberalization, paints a picture of a philosopher who is not only bourgeois, but whose philosophy is disingenuous in its use of the Christian commandment to ‘love your neighbor’ (Adorno [1933] 1989). The potential for the latter is, by far, the most egregious accusation given that much of the contemporary work that supports the idea of a political-Kierkegaard focuses on his use of love. For Adorno, anything that sounds social in Kierkegaard is dubious at best and ultimately only leads to the glorification of the subjective self and the individual (Adorno [1933] 1989).

In one passage that critiques Kierkegaard’s material inheritances from his father and bourgeois identity, Adorno states,

By denying the social question, Kierkegaard falls to the mercy of his own historical situation, that of the rentier in the first half of the nineteenth century...[he]...is economically independent...not dependent on borrowed capital, not required to sell his labor power...His knowledge goes beyond the pure immediacy of his “milieu,” in which the “philistine” is immured; the necessities of his own social position do not block an overview of the whole and the “essential”; hence the vain self-irony of the tone with which he refers to himself as a simple pensioner... What today appear as Kierkegaard’s petty-bourgeois characteristics correspond to his exclusion from economic production...[Kierkegaard’s]...moral rigorism derives from the claim of the isolated person...The material contents of the autonomous ethic of the absolute person, however, give evidence of its dependency on bourgeois society. The concrete self is for Kierkegaard identical with the bourgeois self. (Adorno [1933] 1989, 48-49)

In this passage by Adorno, the demarcation made between the rentier who is independent and morally rigorous and the philistine who is mired in his own immediacy is an implied critique of Kierkegaard's famous three stages of development for the individual, as well the distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical contained in *Either/Or*. Adorno, here, is critiquing Judge William directly, (Kierkegaard 1987). Kierkegaard held the lowest stage to be the aesthete who is governed by immediacy and lacks a conception of the other two higher stages, the ethical and the religious, what Adorno refers to here as the "bourgeois" ([1933] 1989). For Adorno, it is Kierkegaard's favorable circumstances that allow him to construct such a "petty-bourgeois" philosophy ([1933] 1989). Overall, this critique can be problematic for Kierkegaard scholars. It could lead one to ask, how conservative and reactionary was he given his station in life? Was his whole philosophy of the Christian individual really just a defense of a bourgeois ethic incognito? If he was defined so strongly by his economic position and inheritances, then the context of a liberalizing Denmark, both politically and economically, would be a ripe situation to generate resentment, (Nietzsche 1956). Adorno implies that Kierkegaard was a member of the economic elite burdened by the potential loss of the social order he once enjoyed ([1933] 1989).

Disallowing Kierkegaard a commitment to "the social question" due to his economic position is a strong critique, but the stronger one is the critique that Kierkegaard's use of the neighbor commandment is, really, only self-serving. According to Adorno,

...this world is omitted. It supplies the subject with the mere "occasion" for the deed, with mere resistance to the act of faith...Participation in "meaning" is not one of its potentials. In Kierkegaard there is so little of a subject/object in the Hegelian sense...there is only an isolated subjectivity, surrounded by a dark otherness. Indeed, only by crossing over this abyss would subjectivity be able to participate in "meaning" that otherwise denies itself to subjectivity's solitude. (Adorno [1933] 1989, 29)

What is implied here is that love for the other is really only instrumental. It is only an "occasion for the deed", an occasion to perform an ethical act meant only to serve the interests of the one

“providing” the love (Adorno [1933] 1989). The relationships that exist in the world exist in a world that is “omitted”. That is, the world falls outside of the essential meaning that Kierkegaard believes individuals should strive for and the only thing we really have to be in the service of is “isolated subjectivity” surrounded by a “dark otherness”. Helping someone in this sense is only done to further one’s own salvation. Egoism prevails here (Adorno [1933] 1989).

There is much that Adorno’s critiques would have to contend with in order to remain valid. Since Adorno did not contend with all of Kierkegaard’s work or thoughts, his views here remain partial, mistaken, and invalid. We must ask how Adorno would respond to this passage of Kierkegaard’s where he writes in *The Moment*,

And you, you powers and princes and kings and emperors, alas that you at some moment could let yourselves be deceived by these wily people [pastors], as if God in heaven were only the supreme superlative of a human majesty, as if he had, humanly speaking, a cause, so that it would of course be infinitely more important to him that a man of power, not to mention a king, an emperor, was a Christian, than that a beggar is that! O my God, my God, my God! No, if in the Christian view there is any difference for God, then the beggar is infinitely more important than the king, infinitely more important, because the Gospel is preached to the poor! But see, to the pastors the king is infinitely more important than the beggar. “A beggar, how will he help us?” You rag of velvet, did Christianity come into the world to have help from human beings, or in order to help them, the poor, the beggar, since the Gospel is preached to the poor? “A beggar, how will he help us; we might even have to contribute money!” You shameless scoundrel; indeed, Christianity does mean to contribute money. “But a king, a king – this is extremely important to Christianity.” No, you liar, but it is extremely important to you. If the king is a Christian, then the circle of the powerful who surround him immediately follows (and this is why, Christianly, there is something so precarious about a king who is a Christian, lest a transition is initiated to being a Christian that becomes nothing more than a change of costume). And when the king and his powerful circle have become Christians or are called that, more and more follow and at last the whole nation... And when the whole nation has become Christian, then – see, therefore it is so infinitely important that the king is a Christian! – then come silk and velvet and royal decorations of stars and ribbons and most select of all refinements, and the many thousands per year. The many thousands, that blood-money! After all, it was blood-money Judas received for Christ’s blood – and it also was, of course, blood-money those thousands and millions that are procured for Christ’s blood...(Kierkegaard 1998, 43-44).

It is clear that Kierkegaard's critique here is of the intimate relationship between wily pastors and kings, the established order as it was, as well as the confusion of Christianity into something to procure political power with instead of changing the lives of the poor to whom the Gospel was preached to in the first place. According to Perez-Alvarez,

...in 1852 another significant turning point took place in the Dane's mind. In that year there is no doubt that he left behind his conservative political position. He refused Communion. He radicalized his speech and entered into a period of voluntary silence. As a result, by 1855, very apparent was the way that Kierkegaard lifted up his new subject (the "ordinary" person) in the theological enterprise...Kierkegaard's political love for the ugly, his conversion to the cause of the poor, can be very well appreciated in his last essay, published a month before he collapsed in the street (Perez-Alvarez 2009, 175).

Though I disagree with Perez-Alvarez that it was 1855 in which Kierkegaard radicalized his speech in service of the ordinary person, I do agree that his last essay contains an example of the radical possibility contained in his politics and theology. Kierkegaard writes,

Thou plain man! The Christianity of the New Testament is infinitely high; but observe that it is not high in such a sense that it has to do with the difference between man and man with respect to intellectual capacity, etc. No it is for all...Thou plain man! I have not separated my life from thine; thou knowest it, I have lived in the street, am known to all; moreover I have not attained to any importance, do not belong to any class egoism, so if I belong anywhere, I must belong to thee, thou plain man...[in respect to the superior people] I have never definitely united with them but merely maintained a looser relationship...Thou plain man!...shun the priests...a paid member of the State Church, or the National Church, or whatever they prefer to call it. Shun them. But take heed to pay them willingly and promptly what money they should have. With those whom one despises, one on no account should have money differences, lest it might perhaps be said that it was to get out of paying them one avoided them. No, pay them double, in order that thy disagreement with them may be thoroughly clear: that what concerns them does not concern thee at all, namely, money; and on the contrary, that what does not concern them concerns thee infinitely, namely, Christianity. (Perez-Alvarez 2009, 176).

Martin Buber was critical of what he saw as Kierkegaard's extreme emphasis on subjectivity as well. Given that one of Buber's most famous works was *I and Thou* ([1947] 1958), a work that famously described in rich and profound ways the essentialness of the meaning gained through non-I-It interpersonal relationships, Kierkegaard's ostensible focus on

the individual's solitary striving with God would certainly appear problematic to him. In his book, *Between Man and Man* ([1965] 2002), Buber addresses Kierkegaard's philosophy directly and highlights what he sees as its inherent problems. First, Buber addresses Kierkegaard's views of the "world" and the "crowd" when he states,

The relation to individual men is a doubtful thing to Kierkegaard, because in his view an essential relation to God is obstructed by an essential relation to human companions...The connection with the faceless, formless, nameless many, with the "crowd", with the "one", appears in Kierkegaard, and following him in Heidegger, as the preliminary situation which must be overcome for self-being to be attained...The genuineness and adequacy of the self cannot stand the test in self-commerce, but only in communication with the whole of otherness, with the medley of the nameless crowd.(Buber [1965] 2002, 211-212)

This tendency in Kierkegaard to see the world as something that must be overcome is not, according to Buber, inherently wrong, but the idea that it must not only be metaphorically or religiously overcome, but socially overcome as well, is dangerous ([1965] 2002). The religious life for Buber cannot happen without the nameless crowds, it simply does not exist. The nameless crowds are needed to "draw out the spark of self-being". For Buber, Kierkegaard's conception of the religious stage of life simply invests too much in the drive by individuals to reach God, namely the abdication of the world socially and ethically ([1965] 2002). Buber describes the religious stage of Kierkegaard as the 'third living relation' when he states,

Man's third living relation is that which is called respectively the relation to God or to the Absolute or to the mystery. We have seen that this is the sole essential relation for Kierkegaard...The essential relation to God...presupposes...a renunciation of every essential relation to anything else, to the world, to community, to the individual man...(Buber ([1965] 2002), 211-212)

Robert Perkins, in his essay, "The Politics of Existence: Buber and Kierkegaard", provides a more nuanced perspective on the relation between Buber and Kierkegaard. Characteristic of the secondary literature's approach, it shows that Buber and Kierkegaard were not so different in their worldviews, despite what Buber might have thought himself. Perkins

shows well that Buber was operating with a partial reading of Kierkegaard's work, one that clearly did not take enough notice of *Works of Love*. According to Perkins,

The differences between Buber's and Kierkegaard's ethics are more matters of expression, philosophic sources, and history than substance. The fundamental similarity between them is that their final mode of judgment in understanding the political is religious... Both thinkers are philosophers of the word, of dialogue, of the dynamics of communication, and understand that one's life and will can be changed when one hears the word of the other. Thus they affirm the politics of existence while at the same time they critique much of the malpractice of politics as a violation of existence. (Matustik and Westphal 1995, 175, 180).

This is borne out by reading *Works of Love*. There, Kierkegaard's views on the unseen and the seen, and the escapist nature of loving God, thoroughly undercuts Buber's notions that for Kierkegaard, the world must be omitted or renounced in order to get closer to God. According to Kierkegaard,

The matter is quite simple. A person should begin with loving the unseen, God, because then he himself will learn what it is to love. But that he actually loves the unseen will be known by his loving the brother he sees; the more he loves the unseen, the more he will love the people he sees. It is not the reverse, that the more he rejects those he sees, the more he loves the unseen, since in that case God is changed into an unreal something, a delusion. Such a thing can occur only either to a hypocrite and a deceiver, in order to find an escape, or to someone who misrepresents God, as if God were envious of himself and of being loved, instead of the blessed God's being merciful and therefore continually pointing away from himself, so to speak, and saying, "If you want to love, me, then love the people you see; what you do for them, you do for me."... With regard to loving, the most dangerous of all escapes is wanting to love only the unseen or that which one has not seen. This escape is so high-flying that it flies over actuality completely; it is so intoxicating that it easily tempts and easily imagines itself to be the highest and the most perfect kind of love, (Kierkegaard 1995, 160-161).

According to Kierkegaard biographer, Alistair Hannay, Georg Lukács had an early appreciation of Kierkegaard, most notably in his work *Soul and Form* ([1910] 1974), in which he discussed how Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer had some of that "good faith" and "consistency" which other existentialist philosophers had "cast off" as they became "apologists for bourgeois decadence", (Lukács [1910] 1974, 253). But the later revolutionary Lukács had a decidedly

different tone towards Kierkegaard. Contrary to his earlier readings of him, and now sounding much like Adorno, Lukács sees Kierkegaard as having become an antidemocratic apologist for bourgeois decadence and the destruction of reason (Hannay 2001, 429). In striving to make a poem out of his life, he had really only served to separate himself from the real social problems that surrounded him. In *The Destruction of Reason*, Lukács attacks three aspects of Kierkegaard: his commitment to anti-Hegelian irrationalism rather than scientific reason, his denial of the social, as well as his methods of indirect communication ([1952] 1980, 243-262).

One of the biggest problems with Kierkegaard's dialectic is its timing. Lukács sees Kierkegaard's irrationalism as coming right at the moment when the dialectical method was making its greatest advancement on Hegelian idealist dialectics ([1952] 1980, 245). Just as materialist dialectics was advancing towards identifying and solving concrete problems, Kierkegaard is seen as providing a bourgeois refuge in an inward-looking, 'qualitative dialectic'. Lukács' accusation of irrationalism is contained in the following passage when he states,

Kierkegaard, so as to be able to challenge Hegel in the name of a new, more advanced irrationalism, had to clothe the latter in the guise of an allegedly superior dialectic, the 'qualitative' dialectic...this had to do with the attempt, typical in the history of irrationalism, to thwart the further development of dialectics by inverting the true forward-looking problem of the period, to lead dialectics astray and to present the inverted proposition in a mythico-mystificatory form as the answer to the concrete question. (Lukács [1952] 1980, 245)

Lukács, then, shares the same critique of asocial-ness as Adorno and Buber. Echoing Buber who saw the essential nature of humanity to be relational, based in I-Thou relationships, Lukács sees essential nature as being "historical" and "social" (Lukács [1952] 1980, 256). In order to critique Kierkegaard's conception of the social, Lukács compares him to Marx and states,

In the new, scientific dialectic, man is comprehended as essentially historical and social, so as to make us clearly recognize that to overlook his essential nature at any time is to turn our concept of him into a distorted abstraction. In contrast, Kierkegaard's irrationalism and his qualitative dialectic rest on the fact...[that]...the distorted

abstraction is presented as the sole true reality...Hence history and society need to be abolished in Kierkegaard's philosophy in order to create space for the existence of the artificially isolated individual...(Lukács [1952] 1980, 256).

Had Lukács even read more carefully such an early work as *Either/Or*, he would have plainly seen that the isolated individual was of no interest to Kierkegaard. *Either/Or* comprises two volumes. The first details the existence of A, or the aesthete. This volume is meant to convey the emptiness of a life committed to nothing more than immediacy and enjoyment with no concern for the ethical. The representation of the ethical comes in volume two with the letters of B, or Judge William, written to A in an attempt to persuade him to choose a higher stage of existence. Even in this early work, a work that Kierkegaard would advance from greatly, an attack on isolated individuality is already present. It is telling that it is A who praises isolation while the voice of the ethical, Judge William, conveys the opposite view. A states,

There is so much talk about man's being a social animal, but basically he is a beast of prey, something that can be ascertained not only by looking at his teeth. Therefore, all this chatter about sociality and community is partly inherited hypocrisy and partly studied perfidy, (Kierkegaard 1987, 288).

Judge William counters this view with an appeal to A concerning the value of relationships.

Judge William writes,

Alone in his kayak, a person is sufficient unto himself, has nothing to do with any person except when he himself so wishes. Alone in his kayak, a person is sufficient unto himself – but I cannot really understand how this emptiness can be filled, but since you are the only person among my acquaintances about whom this is true to a degree, I also know that you do have a person on board who can help fill up the time. You should say, therefore: Alone in one's boat, alone with one's sorrow, alone with one's despair – which one is cowardly enough to prefer to keep rather than to submit to the pain of healing. Allow me to point out the dark side of your life – not as if I wished to make you fearful; I do not have anything to do with playing the bogeyman, and you are too clever to let yourself be affected by such things. But nevertheless think of the pain, sadness, and humiliation involved in being in this sense a stranger and an alien in the world, (Kierkegaard 1987, 85).

Emmanuel Levinas continues the attacks on isolated subjectivity and extreme individualism that Adorno, Buber and Lukács developed, but he offers something new when he turns to Kierkegaard's manner of philosophy and his reading of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* in which Kierkegaard develops the concept of the "teleological suspension of the ethical" (Levinas 1975; Lukács [1952] 1980; Adorno [1933] 1989; Buber [1947] 1958; Kierkegaard 1983). It is here, according to Levinas, that Kierkegaard becomes much worse than decadent or bourgeois, he becomes violent (Levinas 1975, 66-79). Regarding the familiar problems of individual subjectivity, Levinas writes, "...protesting against the absorption of subjectivity by Hegel's universality, he bequeathed to the history of philosophy an exhibitionistic, immodest subjectivity (Levinas 1975, 76).

By far, the most original contribution Levinas makes to the critiques of Kierkegaard comes in his analysis of Kierkegaard's transcending of ethics and its propensity to translate to ethical and political violence (Levinas 1975, 66-79). What Levinas is referring to is Kierkegaard's analysis of the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac in *Fear and Trembling* (Kierkegaard 1983). Kierkegaard reads the story as exemplifying a "knight of faith" who, in complete faith and obedience to God, transcended the ethical demand for a father to love and protect his son and accepted the terrible role of executioner (Kierkegaard 1983). Kierkegaard sees this story as representing the paradoxical, the evidence that faith can go beyond reason. For Levinas, though, this is very dangerous. Levinas states,

Kierkegaard's violence...shocks me. The manner of the strong and the violent, who fear neither scandal or destruction, has become, since Kierkegaard and before Nietzsche, a manner of philosophy. One philosophizes with a hammer. In that permanent scandal, in that opposition to everything, I perceive by anticipation the echoes of certain cases of verbal violence that claimed to be schools of thought, and pure ones at that. I am thinking not only of National Socialism, but of all the sorts of thought it exalted. The harshness of Kierkegaard emerges at the exact moment when he "transcends ethics".(Levinas, 1975, 76)

Levinas continues,

Kierkegaard's entire polemic against speculative philosophy supposes subjectivity tensed on itself, existence as the care that a being takes for its own existence, and a kind of torment over oneself. The ethical means the general, for Kierkegaard. The singularity of the *I* would be lost, in his view, under a rule valid for all. (Levinas, 1975, 76).

This last statement is a curious one and one that I believe begins to show Levinas' partial understanding of Kierkegaard's work. How could he attribute to Kierkegaard the notion that the *I* would be lost under a rule valid for all when *Works of Love* itself is Kierkegaard's attempt to explicate the nature of the command to love the neighbor as oneself? Is this not a rule that Kierkegaard is working through. Indeed it is. Kierkegaard works meticulously to show that the not only is the I, or the yourself, not lost under the rule of the love commandment, but that this rule that is valid and possible for all is the best way to achieve true individuality. As the quote at the beginning of the dissertation stated, "...the cure is precisely to learn all over again the most important thing, to understand oneself in one's longing for community," (Kierkegaard 1995, 153).

Levinas is important in understanding the secondary literature's rescuing of Kierkegaard. Many of the most prominent scholars who have reinterpreted Kierkegaard are Levinasians themselves (Ferreira 2001; Simmons and Wood 2008; Westphal 2008). When one reads through Levinas, it becomes apparent that he talks about love in remarkably insightful ways, but about Kierkegaard in the most partial of ways. It is not clear if Levinas read *Works of Love*. Had he, he most likely would have found great resonances with thoughts of his own such as,

The encounter with the other is straightaway my responsibility for him. That is the responsibility for my neighbor, which is no doubt the severe name for what we call love of one's neighbor: love without eros, charity, love in which the ethical aspect dominates the passionate aspect, love without concupiscence. I don't very much like the word *love*, which is worn out and debased. Let us speak instead of taking upon oneself of the fate of

the other. That is the “vision” of the face, and it applies to the first one to come along, (Levinas 2001, 165).

The resonances with Kierkegaard here are numerous. Love without eros, (Kierkegaard 1995, 66), love without charity, (Kierkegaard 1995, 13-14), and the application of it the first one that comes along, (Kierkegaard 1995, 159). Levinas, in his writings, is primarily a reader of *Fear and Trembling* (Kierkegaard 1983). What the secondary literature has shown, however, is that the Levinas who writes about love and the neighbor is remarkably similar to the Kierkegaard of *Works of Love*.

Other critics have carried on the tradition set forth by Adorno, Buber, Lukács and Levinas (Adorno [1933] 1989; Buber [1947] 1958; Lukács [1952] 1980; Levinas 1975). The more contemporary critic, Mark Taylor writes,

Kierkegaard is convinced that when spirit is so conceived, the journey to selfhood cannot culminate in spiritual community but must be a solitary sojourn that separates self from other...[He] asserts that “to become spirit means to become the single individual”...; isolation is a condition sine qua non, an indispensable condition. Since identity does not arise from internal relation with otherness, but is a function of contrast with or opposition to otherness, “spirit is exactly this: not to be like others.” The Kierkegaardian “formula for authentic selfhood” constantly is: “individual in opposition to the others.” Rather than forming concrete selfhood, social relations abrogate unique individuality...Kierkegaard argues that “this precisely is spirit, that everyone is an individual before God, that “community”...is a lower category than “the single individual,” which everyone can and should be. (Taylor [1980] 2002, 179)

Here, Taylor sounds very much like Buber with his emphasis on the apparent need for the “solitary sojourn” that “separates self from other”. Existence in Kierkegaard, as discussed by Taylor, is shown to be nothing more than a continual state of war against community, against being defined in any way by “social relations” and instead striving to create a perpetual “opposition” that can preserve authenticity (Taylor [1980] 2002).

Kierkegaard wrote, “To make the ethical reality of the subject the only reality might seem to be acosmism.” (Hong and Hong 1975, 115-116), with seem being the operative word here.

According to Louise Carroll Keeley, however, Louis Mackey could not agree more. Keeley says that Mackey attributes a kind of “ethical acosmism” to Kierkegaard (Keeley 1992; Mackey 1972). We can see this when Mackey writes,

[Kierkegaard] means to say that the individual is really isolated from other beings, receiving from them neither support, insistence, opposition, nor allurements. The world is only a cluster of possibilities for him, and as such does not offer him matter, content, locus, opportunity, or exigence for action – these he must generate out of his own freedom...his will to preserve freedom untrammelled led him to sweep away all order, participation, and community. His insistence that the question of the reality of the world is ethically irrelevant, and that only an indirect possibility-relation holds between the ethical subject and other realities, implies a sort of freedom that is separative only and is not supported by the cosmos. (Mackey 1972, 279)

Mackey echoes Buber here by supporting the idea of an isolated subjectivity, but he differs from Adorno by stating that world offers no “...content, locus, opportunity, or exigence for action...” (Mackey 1972, 279; Adorno [1933] 1989; Buber [1965] 2002). For Adorno, the presence of the world, the dark surrounding “otherness”, presented precisely that, an opportunity to further individual salvation by performing acts of love ([1933] 1989).

Other critics such as Linnel E. Cady and Mark L. McCreary, critique Kierkegaard directly on the efficacy of the universal, agapeistic, love ethic that he presents in *Works of Love* (Cady 1992; McCreary 2011; Kierkegaard 1995). For them, the love that Kierkegaard describes is essentially a dangerous enterprise, one that results in either social inequality or the corrupting of personal relationships. Cady proceeds from the familiar position that Kierkegaard’s ethics entail a radical separation or isolation from the world in order to be one with God. We see this when, in discussion of Kierkegaard’s journals she writes,

The concept of faith designates the greatest degree of inwardness attainable by any existing human being. However, it abstracts the individual from the world insofar as it focuses on the God/self-relation to the exclusion of any other of the self’s relationships (Cady, 1992, 240).

Cady understood, however, that Kierkegaard sought in *Works of Love* to correct an over-emphasis on individuality in his writings (Cady 1992; Kierkegaard 1995). However, she misinterprets his strategic, earlier employment of a focus on individuality as a mistake, an “incompleteness” that “dawned” upon him as something that needed rectification. She writes,

In order to depict this other dimension of Christian life, Kierkegaard employs the concept of love. With his dawning realization of the incompleteness of his characterization of Christian existence in the pseudonymous works, he begins to voice apprehension that this characterization would be construed as a complete picture rather than a "corrective." Giving expression to this fear he laments the inability of his readers to understand his dialectical presentation of Christian existence. (Cady 1992, 240)

The famous passage of Kierkegaard’s that she quotes does not support her argument of a “realized mistake” on the part of Kierkegaard as she believes, but instead supports the notion of a strategic employment of a particular focus. Kierkegaard states,

Despite everything people ought to have learned about my maieutic carefulness, in addition to proceeding slowly and continually letting it seem as if I knew nothing more, not the next thing - now on the occasion of my new upbuilding discourses they will probably bawl out that I do not know what comes next, that I know nothing about sociality. You fools! Yet on the other hand I owe it to myself to confess before God that in a certain sense there is some truth it, only not as men understand it- namely, that when I have first presented one aspect sharply, then I affirm the other even more strongly. Now I have my theme of the next book. It will be called: *Works of Love*. (Hong and Hong 1975, 390-391)

Cady counters this attempt of Kierkegaard’s by writing,

As we shall see, however, even though Kierkegaard intends to affirm the importance of "sociality," an examination of his interpretation of love discloses the relative insignificance that is given to relations to other humans. His ontology of the self, in which authenticity is achieved through a private relationship to God, establishes the parameters for his discussion of love. His belated attempt to address the social dimension of Christian existence does eventually alter his position on what constitutes a genuine Christian life, but it is dubious that this life can be designated as one of sociality, as was his intention. (Cady 1992, 241)

Ultimately, for Cady, it is the components of “inwardness” and “self-sacrifice” in Kierkegaard’s agapeistic love ethic that makes it unusable and dangerous in the world. For it is

precisely these two components that support continued social inequality and legitimate a problematic status quo. In essence, she sees Kierkegaard's politics in *Works of Love* as being very conservative (Cady 1992; Kierkegaard 1995). She writes,

Instead of aiming to ameliorate the extreme inequalities in the world, Kierkegaard's conception of neighbor-love has the opposite effect of legitimating such inequality. While he insists that such legitimation applies only to the temporal sphere and is ultimately invalid, an eternal equality is no panacea for those who are presently oppressed. By interpreting love in terms of a subjective transformation, even if an infinite transformation, Kierkegaard has rendered it impotent to transform the world. On the contrary, it serves merely to reinforce the status quo by limiting love to a subjective disposition. Instead of circumscribing behavior to the other, Kierkegaard's view of love circumscribes one's attitude toward the other. (Cady 1992, 248)

Cady continues,

Although his interpretation of love as self-sacrifice avoids the simple legitimization of the status quo which marks his earlier understanding of love, in my opinion it is still not adequate. It fails to provide any leverage for the powerless and disenfranchised to gain any temporal equality. Furthermore, the equation of authentic existence with persecuted existence not only provides no basis for seeking temporal equality but legitimates situations of persecution. In this interpretation of love, the individual is given a model of persecuted existence to emulate. To seek equitable treatment would, according to this theory, be a sign of the absence of love. The greatest expression of love is to be the willing victim... While this interpretation of love may function as a needed corrective to those who wield power and enjoy social and economic advantages, the role it plays in reinforcing social and economic inequities must also be acknowledged. (Cady 1992, 254)

We can counter such sentiments with a passage from Kierkegaard's *The Point of View* in which he writes,

The neighbor is the absolutely true expression for human equality. If everyone in truth loved the neighbor as himself, then perfect human equality would be achieved unconditionally. Everyone who in truth loves the neighbor expresses human equality unconditionally; everyone who, even if he confesses, as I do, that his striving is weak and imperfect, is still aware that the task is to love the neighbor; he is also aware of what human equality is, (Kierkegaard 1998, 111).

We saw in the introduction that Hardt (2007) begins to move in the direction of answering some of these claims, especially with regards to love's supposed powerlessness and

typical reduction to charity. We will see that Kierkegaard, contextualized by Tillich (1954), Žižek (2005), West (1991; 1982) and Mongoven (2009), has much to say to Cady's position (1992) as well as in support of what he states in *The Point of View* (1998).

Finally, McCreary attempts to read Kierkegaard's notion of love in the context of his use of the "maieutic" approach (2011). Kierkegaard is well-known for his Socratic, indirect, maieutic approach to writing and communication (2001; 1991). His use of pseudonymous authors was for this very purpose. Kierkegaard created a stable of characters, each representing a different "approach" to existence and life, all for the benefit of the reader to make their own decision about which seemed "best". Kierkegaard felt this was necessary because the problem of figuring out how to live, or, more precisely, how to appropriate Christianity as a way of life, was a wholly subjective issue. It matters not, according to Kierkegaard, how much "objective" proof, principles, paragraphs or knowledge is given over to an individual concerning Christianity, in the end, each individual, subjectively, must decide for themselves not only whether it is true, but whether it is true for their lives. For Kierkegaard, this was especially necessary in the "Christendom" that was Denmark.

At the time Kierkegaard was writing, the State and the Church were completely wedded. This is an important contextual point for McCreary (2011). This notion of a state church was completely offensive to Kierkegaard. In essence, it deprived Christianity of its contrary character, its critical and subversive nature, and made Christianity so easy that it made it impossible. In one humorous passage in the "attack" literature, Kierkegaard bemoans the "reach" of state Christianity by speaking of the despair of the freethinker to be able to escape it (Kierkegaard 2001; 1991). Kierkegaard writes,

Here is an attempt of mine; and I flatter myself that it really does make clear to what a degree we are all of us Christians. We are Christians to such a degree that, if among us

there live a Freethinker who in the strongest terms declared that the whole of Christianity is a lie...in the strongest terms declared that he was not a Christian – there is no help for him, he *is* a Christian; according to the law he may be punished, that is a different thing, but a Christian he is. “What stuff and nonsense!” says the State. “What would this lead to? If once we allowed a man to declare that he is not a Christian, it soon would come to pass that all would deny that they were Christians. No...let us hold fast to principles. We now have everything well tabulated, all under proper headings, everything perfectly correct – under the assumption of course that we are all Christians – ergo he too is a Christian. Such a conceit, which merely wants to be eccentric, one must not humor, and that’s the end of it.” (1968, 75)

Kierkegaard continues,

If he dies...and leaves behind him so much that the man of God (the priest), the undertaker man, and several other men, could each get his share – then all his protests are of no use, he *is* a Christian and is buried as a Christian – to that degree it is certain we all are Christians. If he leaves nothing...literally nothing – that would be the only case in which his protests might be taken into account, since by being dead he would be prevented from defraying the costs of Christian burial by corporal labor – to that degree it is certain that we are all Christians. (Kierkegaard 1968, 75-76)

For Kierkegaard, the state of affairs that resulted from a state Christianity was so oppressive that, if a freethinker had any money that could be paid out to the burial staff, he would be buried as a Christian against any living will that he might have had. If he was poor, this would be the only situation in which Christendom might recognize his freethinking, since why bother with the trouble of a state burial if there is nothing to be gained from it. Not only is the commodification of Christianity under attack here (Kierkegaard 1995, 315-330; Tucker 1978, 319-329; Marx 1988, 137-140), but so is the notion of how Truth operates in such a system. The notion critiqued is that when *all* reside in a particular country, *all* live the Truth of Christianity since it is a Christian country. Here, the argument runs from the whole to the parts, the parts are identified by the structure of the whole. In this situation, communication of the Truth becomes a very difficult thing, one that cannot be done directly, by giving *more* knowledge, knowledge that everyone is already, in essence, choking on. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard writes,

Because everyone [in Christendom that is] knows the Christian truth, it has gradually become such a triviality that a primitive impression of it is acquired only with difficulty. When this is the case, the art of being able to *communicate* eventually becomes the art of being able to *take away* or to trick something away from someone. This seems strange and very ironic, and yet I believe I have succeeded in expressing exactly what I mean. When a man has filled his mouth so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat and it must end with his dying of hunger, does giving food to him consist in stuffing his mouth even more or, instead, in taking a little away so that he can eat? Similarly, when a man is very knowledgeable but his knowledge is meaningless or virtually meaningless to him, does sensible communication consist in giving him more to know, even if he loudly proclaims that this is what he needs, or does it consist, instead, in taking something away from him? When a communicator takes a portion of the copious knowledge that the very knowledgeable man knows and communicates it to him in a form that makes it strange to him, the communicator is, as it were, taking away his knowledge, at least until the knower manages to assimilate the knowledge by overcoming the resistance of the form. (2001, 275)

It is in this context that McCreary critiques Kierkegaard's use of love (McCreary 2011).

One aspect of love for Kierkegaard is that to love someone is to, in effect, help them to love God.

McCreary sees this as comparable to Kierkegaard's overall project, both pseudonymous and signed, outside of *Works of Love*. To love someone, as McCreary reads Kierkegaard, entails a "mystification", "deception" or "tricking" of them in order to "lovingly" get them to love God and to avoid mistaken Truths or idolatry (2011). Love, here, is a secret, manipulative, indirect weapon meant to superficially gain a hearing with someone, pretend to be sympathetic, but all the while working to change their Truths to your own. Ultimately, for McCreary, such "mystification" or Socratic "deception" may work fine for an author who has an already-existent distance between himself and his readers, but to expect such trickery to work in personal relationships is mistaken (2011). McCreary has five objections to such use of deceptive love:

1. "Things were different in Kierkegaard's Christendom. Almost all were agreed that they were Christians, that they lived in a Christian society with a Christian government and carried out their lives in a Christian manner. It was this pervasive, single, uniform delusion that Kierkegaard believed warranted mystification and deceiving into the truth. Today, however, there is simply no single or predominant illusion regarding Christianity that must be removed prior to direct communication.

Our society has experienced rises in pluralism (other religions), spiritualism (vague religiousness), and also atheism. Therefore, given the degree to which Kierkegaard's position was formed in response to his unique situation, and given this incongruity between our situation and Kierkegaard's, we ought not to embrace mystification for current use."

2. "...it can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to know with certainty that idolatry is present within any given personal relationship. That is, in many cases it may be impossible to determine with confidence that one's relationship is hindering the other's God-relationship. For even if one can determine that the other's God-relationship is being hindered generally, being able to pinpoint the relationship itself as the specific cause of that hindrance is not an easy task."
3. "Third, even in cases where one is confident that the relationship is hindering the other's God-relationship, it can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to foresee the probable results from an act of mystification. According to Kierkegaard, the aim of such deceptive action is to direct the other toward receiving God's love and respond in love for God. However, one must first be able to determine that mystification will not be likely to do even more damage to the other's God-relationship. How it is that one would go about making this determination is not at all clear."
4. "Fourth, even if one has evidence that mystification is likely to help another person focus on their God-relationship, such action still should not be undertaken unless other courses of action have been exhausted or ruled out. For if one's relationship clearly is a hindrance to the other, one may be able to help the other love God by using direct communication. All things being equal, honesty and direct communication ought to be employed over dishonesty, deception, and indirect communication."
5. "Finally, even though Kierkegaard develops his thoughts on mystification and the use of incognitos as a result of his emphasis on the imitation of Christ, that same emphasis also can be used to caution against the method of mystification. While it is true that Jesus found and met others where they were, he did not do so by lying about who he was or by pretending to be anyone other than who he was. Likewise, while Jesus frequently spoke in parables and sometimes evaded direct questions with indirect answers, he did not employ the Socratic tactic of feigning ignorance or of deceptively agreeing with something false simply to gain a hearing with a particular audience." (McCreary 2011, 41-43)

Supporters of Kierkegaardian Politics

Probably no one has done more to help dispel the criticisms of Kierkegaard's radical individualism than Jamie Ferreira (2001). Her full commentary on *Works of Love*, entitled,

Love's Grateful Striving, moves chapter by chapter in conjunction with Kierkegaard's work, extolling the richness that typically goes unnoticed when familiar phrases are trotted out as representative of the text itself, phrases that are meant to underscore Kierkegaard's acosmism, individualism and praise of God-relationships that lead to isolation. The resiliency of the traditional criticisms is puzzling to Ferreira as well. As she states,

The fact that these sorts of criticisms of *Works of Love* have had such a long life is significant...What has long intrigued me is that this extremely negative picture of the ethic in *Works of Love* has come to be the dominant one even though the bulk of the textual material found in the fifteen deliberations themselves belies that picture. At the very least there is much to put alongside the few texts that are repeatedly brought forth in criticism. (Ferreira 2001, 7)

What Ferreira does so effectively is show that the other and alterity are central to *Works of Love*. Her alternative reading shows that the neighbor-love that *Works of Love* extols is not instrumental as Adorno feared, nor is the God-relationship that functions as the middle-term between neighbors meant to induce asocial isolation (Ferreira 2001; Adorno [1933] 1989; Buber ([1965] 2002)). She also shows, contrary to feminist critics of agape and unconditional love such as Mongoven (2009), that Kierkegaard's neighbor-love does not necessarily require a divorce between the personal and the social or between eros and agape. She shows, in effect, that *Works of Love* is a much more complicated and densely rich book than many of its critics have superficially given it credit for. In an effort to entice the reader of her book, Ferreira trots out her own chosen phrases of *Works of Love* to counter the "phrase-dependent" approach that underlies the criticisms of the text. According to Ferreira,

Early in the book, Kierkegaard expresses his agreement with the view that "life without loving is not worth living"; in the Conclusion, he elaborates: "To love people is the only thing worth living for, and without this love you are not really living...to love people is the only true sign that you are a Christian". From beginning to end, Kierkegaard emphasizes how deep and valid is the human need for love and to be loved. When he exclaims: "How impoverished never to have loved", he is not talking about love for God but is referring to our "innate need for companionship"; indeed, "so deeply is this need

rooted in our human nature, and so *essentially* does it belong to being human that...even our Lord Jesus Christ, even he humanly felt this need to love and be loved by an individual human being” (Ferreira 2001, 7-8).

Kierkegaard’s passage on Christ’s need for love and companionship that Ferreira refers to here is central in dispelling notions that Kierkegaard believed that personal relationships of any kind must be abandoned in order to get closer to God.

“Kinship” with others is also a constant theme, but a kinship that does not alienate us from other groups. He refers to the “kinship of all human beings,” a “kinship secured by each individual’s equal kinship with and relation to God in Christ”. He speaks of the “inhumanity” and “unchristianness” of “wanting to deny kinship with all people, with unconditionally every person”... (Ferreira 2001, 7-8).

This ode to the “kinship of all human beings” also forms a part of Kierkegaard’s critique of slavery in *Works of Love* as well as any other form of social distinctions that exist between people.

...relationships are two-sided – “Without a *you* and an *I* there is no love” – and concrete: “When it is a duty in loving to love the people we see, *then in loving the actual individual person it is important that one does not substitute an imaginary idea of how we think or could wish that this person should be.* The one who does this does not love the person he sees but again something unseen, his own idea or something similar” (Ferreira 2001, 7-8) (emphases are Kierkegaard’s).

Central to *Works of Love* is this preservation of the you and the I, the distinctiveness of each.

...as if anticipating charges that his ethic polarizes God and human beings or renders the relation to human beings only an indirect one, he insists that “God is changed into an unreal something, a delusion,” if a person believes that “the more he rejects those he sees, the more he loves the unseen,” (Ferreira 2001 7-8).

In these few chosen phrases from *Works of Love*, we see how Ferreira counters the critics of *Works of Love* and shows in the process that Kierkegaard does not employ a myopic focus on the individual alone.

As we discussed earlier, Cady (1992) argues that one of the social and political mistakes that Kierkegaard’s love ethic makes is that it overly emphasizes personal or inward

transformation. Accordingly, such a love becomes impotent in the world and powerless to change external conditions. If Kierkegaard did indeed believe this, if his “profound revolution” was solely interiorized and held no hope for impacting the world, then not only would his politics be useless, but his Christianity would be as well. It is doubtful that Kierkegaard would have dedicated his life to a system of Truth that he felt held no promise of impacting the world.

The most important interpreter of Kierkegaard today who has criticized positions such as Cady’s is Eliseo Perez-Alvarez (2009). Alvarez makes the leap to discussing the practical and material implications of Kierkegaard’s politics and social thought in his book, *A Vexing Gadfly: The Late Kierkegaard on Economic Matters* (2009). The work focuses on the last four years of Kierkegaard’s authorship, the years 1852-1855, which comprise Kierkegaard’s famous attack on the established Danish state Church.

He begins where the rest of the literature that is sympathetic to the notion of a political Kierkegaard leaves off. The literature, according to Alvarez, has not taken enough notice of the economic perspective that functions in Kierkegaard’s later politics. According to Alvarez, “Kierkegaard studies...have been undertaken from the biographic, hagiographic, and pseudopsychological approaches...I will place Kierkegaard within his sociopolitical and economic context.” (Perez-Alvarez, 2009, xix) In doing this, Alvarez is not only meeting head on critiques such as Cady’s (2009), but he is also critiquing positions such as Adorno’s ([1933] 1989) who felt that Kierkegaard’s own bourgeois station in life made him unsuited to participate in progressive politics. Alvarez discusses the “portrait of Kierkegaard as a bourgeois” (Alvarez 2009 xxi) as well the Danish colonial context of slavery (Alvarez 2009 190-199). By focusing on Kierkegaard’s writings of the last four years, including his journal material, Alvarez makes the argument that Kierkegaard became an organic intellectual (Alvarez 2009 175; Gramsci 1971)

during these years, displaying in his writings a “solidarity with the rural and urban ‘ordinary’ folks, with the working class, with women, with children, etc.” and with attempting to describe a politics that aimed at the structural transformation of society in order to combat poverty (Alvarez 2009 178). The argument that I make in this dissertation is that Kierkegaard did not become an organic intellectual concerned with economic justice in 1852 or 1855, rather, his thought was “radicalized” earlier in *Works of Love*. For it is in *Works of Love* that we not only have the critique of capitalist economics that Alvarez (2009) is looking for, but we have the praxis intended to overthrow it as well. This is my biggest issue with Alvarez’s approach, that he locates the meaningful, material politics of Kierkegaard a bit too late.

In keeping with the tradition of those sympathetic to the notion of a political Kierkegaard, however, Alvarez begins his book similar to any other Kierkegaard scholar. He writes, “A one-dimensional and sometimes unsympathetic reading of Kierkegaard has prevailed. That approach has portrayed him as an asocial, acosmic “single individual...” (Alvarez 2009, xvii) Alvarez attempts to do what I have not seen any other Kierkegaard scholar do, that is, attempt to look seriously at the practical and material implications of Kierkegaard’s political and social thought, mainly its economic implications.

Mark Dooley begins his book, *The Politics of Exodus: Kierkegaard’s Ethics of Responsibility*, by positioning himself securely within the camp of those sympathetic to a political Kierkegaard. Dooley writes, “In this book, I argue that the work of Soren Kierkegaard contains a strong social, political, and ethical dimension that is often overlooked by contemporary commentators.” (Dooley 2001, xiii) Dooley sees his work as building on such Kierkegaard scholarship by providing a “Derridean perspective” (2001, xiii). Dooley attempts, similar to Alvarez (2009), to draw out practical, political implications from Kierkegaard’s work,

specifically works such as *The Present Age* (1962) and *Works of Love* (1995); though, ultimately, this project is not as defined, it seems, as it is in Alvarez's work, nor in his own project of drawing out the comparisons between Kierkegaard's thought and Derrida's thought. It is Dooley's aim, though, to show how Kierkegaard prefigured the postmodern deconstruction of Derrida and the politics that accompany it (2001). More precisely, Dooley shows how both Kierkegaard and Derrida share an antipathy towards systematization as well as a concern for the "needs of singularity" (Dooley 2001, 230; Caputo 1997). This is seen when Dooley writes,

...the ethics of responsibility defended by both Kierkegaard and Derrida [is what I call] a "politics of exodus" or of the émigré – a politics...of one who places the needs of the singular over the universal, of one who takes up the cause of the outcast and the marginalized, the victims of injustice, the lepers and the lame, as a means of destabilizing the establishment, (Dooley 2001, xxi)

He goes on to say,

For both Kierkegaard and Derrida, I will contend, the ethics of responsibility and the politics of the émigré need to be cultivated if genuine community is to emerge. Derrida's recent pronouncements on democracy and what he calls an "open 'quasi'-community of people help us greatly in trying to understand the type of social philosophy that one can find echoes of throughout Kierkegaard's authorship. (Dooley 2001, xxi)

The genuine community that Dooley believes results from the ethics of responsibility and politics of the émigré is what he calls the community of neighbors (Dooley 2001, 229). Dooley begins to situate the practical nature of Kierkegaard relative to Derrida by writing,

Kierkegaard's notion of community of neighbors, one founded on self-sacrificing love, challenges the inhospitable "perfect community" in which individuals, in loving the other, seek only their own. The former is a community in which universality gives way to the requirements of singularity, and one in which justice, compassion, and mercy keep the law from becoming unremitting and cruel...In such a community, "the law articulates with difficulty," but "love speaks the word plainly". For Kierkegaard [and] Derrida...the "infinite renunciation" which is *Gelassenheit* is the way "to love and trust and seek justice, to seek the kingdom, which is here and now, which is for the lame and the leper, the outcast and the sinner, the widow and the orphan." Such indeed amounts to a politics of exodus, a politics of conviction and responsibility in the name of those whose only aspiration is for a room, no matter how modest, at the inn. (Dooley 2001, 246)

Within the literature of those who seek a politics in Kierkegaard, perhaps no one else has achieved the historical rigor and depth that Bruce Kirmmse has (1990). As a historian, Kirmmse has his sprawling *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* contextualizes Kierkegaard within all of the major social and political currents that Denmark experienced immediately preceding Kierkegaard's life and during (1990). Kirmmse covers the Peasant Awakening of the 1820's and the rise of Liberalism in the 1830's, the fall of the monarchy in the 1840's, as well as the cultural influence of writers, philosophers and religious leaders such as Oehlenschläger, Mynster, Heiberg, Martensen, and Grundtvig (1990). That comprises the first part of the book while the second part works through major texts of Kierkegaard's authorship, including *The Sickness Unto Death*, *Works of Love*, *The Present Age* and the *Attack Upon Christendom*.

In this book, Kirmmse takes to task the criticism that Kierkegaard was, throughout his life, a conservative reactionary, a bourgeois poet who bemoaned his country's liberalization and attacked liberalism in the name of the previous monarchy's legacy. According to Kirmmse,

...there are major obstacles to assimilating Kierkegaard's view of politics and society to the view which was shared by his elitist colleagues. First of all, it seems indeed strange that Kierkegaard, who fell out with his Golden Age colleagues on practically every important point concerning religion and philosophy, should share their political conservatism and their elitist obliviousness that what has happened in the society around them. Secondly, and even more damaging, the tradition, conservative interpretation of Kierkegaard's politics always breaks down when it attempts to account for the very remarkable and vociferous "attack on Christendom" which he carried out...He called for nothing less than the total dismantling of the traditional aristocratic-conservative synthesis known as "Christendom"...(Kirmmse 1990, 3)

This is a very important paragraph in the secondary literature on Kierkegaard's politics in that it counters the interpretation many have developed based upon statements of Kierkegaard's, particularly within the journals, that seem to support the contrary position. For instance, Kierkegaard wrote,

...Therefore the king is no *incarnation*, not a being we should worship; he is a weak, fragile human being like the rest of us, but he is king *by the grace of God*, and it is this religious boundary which limits and terminates the state, and thereby all the abstract nonsense about the wisest individual of all is demolished, because all differences in human wisdom are still relative and vanishing over against the divine wisdom of Divine Governance which calls and designates the individual. (Hong and Hong 1975, 314-315)

Written early in Kierkegaard's career in 1839, (his first book *Either/Or* (1988) would not be published until 1843), this certainly appears to be a passage that praises the divine right of kings. Kierkegaard did not see the king as anything *better* or *higher* than the average man, he only saw him as the designated individual. Kierkegaard also stated in 1848 that "Of all tyrannies, a people's government is the most excruciating, the most mindless, unconditionally the downfall of all greatness and elevation" (Hong and Hong 1975, 15-18). Is this another instance of monarchist sympathies? No, and this is where Kirmmse's explication of the development of Kierkegaard's thought is so useful.

By 1848, Kierkegaard had already written *The Present Age* as well as *Works of Love*. He already had begun to critique systematically the power structures of society, calling into question what makes or constructs a people, a public, and public opinion, as well as develop his notion of the individual to a greater degree. What was needed, Kierkegaard felt, was a greater understanding of the role that quality played over quantity. Modern political movements are obsessed with numbers, are obsessed with getting the most people on board behind a particular issue. For Kierkegaard, though, any movement not made up of individuals who had struggled to understand themselves in the context of community and their neighbors, who had not struggled to unmask their own desires for power, were on the road to the tyranny of a people's government. Despite the claims to justice, if the masses are composed of un-self-examined individuals, they would be no better than what they replaced. Kierkegaard wrote in a journal entry in 1847,

What makes my position in public life most difficult of all is that men are not at all able to grasp what it is I am fighting. Most people believe that taking a stand against the crowd is utter nonsense, for the crowd, the majority, the public are, after all, the saving powers, those freedom-loving societies from which salvation shall issue – against kings and popes and public officials who want to tyrannize over us... This, you see, is the result of centuries of fighting against popes and kings and the powers that be and, on the other hand, regarding the people and the crowd as holy. They do not dream that historical categories change and that now the crowd is and will be the only tyrant and the root corruption. – But to the crowd, of course, this is the most incomprehensible of all. – The crowd is sick for power and considers itself fortified against all reprisals... (Hong and Hong 1975, 25-26)

Kirmmse supports Kierkegaard's sentiments above in his essay, "Call Me Ishmael – Call Everybody Ishmael" (1992). There, Kirmmse addresses discussed the role of the neighbor with regards to individualism, social change and community. According to Kirmmse,

...the individualism that Kierkegaard finds so absolutely necessary in the modern age is not an exclusive, self-interested individualism at all. The highest Good – loving one's Neighbor in one's equality with one's Neighbor before God – differs from the worldly goods of the market society in that the latter can only be enjoyed exclusively, while the Good "is the greatest thing. You can have it in common with all." Kierkegaard's individualism is tailored to modern individualistic society, but it is anything but asocial. Under all its fine talk of "society" and "the people" it is the self-interested individualism of the modern *Gesellschaft* that is truly asocial. (1992, 157-158)

I end here by returning to my reductive position that started this chapter. The various foci of contemporary Kierkegaard scholars have afforded us a new Kierkegaard. Yet, if one begins to spend any amount of time within this secondary literature, one thing becomes very clear; it remains locked into defining itself over and against those earlier, partial readings offered by Martin Buber, Theodor Adorno, Georg Lukács and Emmanuel Levinas. These partial readings are the long shadows that populate Kierkegaard scholarship. The curse is that they are still so present, inhibiting any further movement in reinterpreting the political in Kierkegaard. The blessing, of course, is that the secondary literature, in its reaction to these earlier and partial readings, has shed new light on Kierkegaard's political possibilities and provided a starting point

for new directions. To move to the next step, we need to ask, where to look for concrete examples of Kierkegaardian politics of love

CHAPTER 3: THE LAW AND THE ESTRANGED: KIERKEGAARD, ŽIŽEK, AND TILLICH

This chapter, and the chapters that follow, form the core of this dissertation. Taken together, their primary aim is to provide a clear explication of the political theory of *Works of Love*. These chapters will accomplish this by reading *Works of Love* at times in critical distinction to, and at other times sympathetic conjunction with, contemporary ruminations on the politics of love. In a similar manner of speaking, I aim for the substance of these chapters to achieve the same goal Žižek had for his “Short Circuits” series of books which included the title, *The Puppet and Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Žižek 2003). In the forward to that text, Žižek explains not only what he wants the text to accomplish, but what he wants the series which inspired it to accomplish as well. Žižek writes, “Is not one of the most effective critical procedures to cross wires that do not usually touch: to take a major classic (text, author, notion), and read it in a short-circuiting way, through the lens of a “minor” author, text, or conceptual apparatus (“minor” should be understood here in Deleuze’s sense: not “of lesser quality,” but marginalized, disavowed by the hegemonic ideology...), (Žižek 2003, vii). That is what I hope to do with *Works of Love*. As I have already intimated, to read *Works of Love* as offering a “politics” or praxis of love is to cross particular wires, to short a circuit.

To this point in the dissertation, I have only prepared the way for looking at *Works of Love* as a political text. I have done this by looking at the limitations in the dominant ways others have attempted to locate a politics in Kierkegaard. In these chapters, however, I present my argument for why *Works of Love* is, relative to the rest of his authorship, Kierkegaard’s *most*

political text, the one that we should turn to if we desire to include Kierkegaard as a viable thinker of revolutionary politics. In this chapter, I want to begin by reading *Works of Love* in relation to Paul Tillich's and Slavoj Žižek's explorations on the political nature of both love and neighbor-love.

It is important to put these three in conversation for a couple of reasons. Tillich is important in the history of progressive Christianity, not only for his relationship to Martin Luther King, Jr. but also for his lectures on the ontological and political natures of love, power, and justice. We can position him, and his form of Protestantism, in a particular lineage that extends from Martin Luther King, Jr. on to Cornel West today, whose work I will explore in more depth in chapter five. Žižek's own brand of Marxist/Lacanian discourse and progressive politics make his explorations of love unique in very different, but critical ways. Both Tillich and Žižek have interesting views on the political nature of love that are worthy of attention from a Kierkegaardian angle. I am most interested here in particular moments in Tillich's and Žižek's writings. Specifically, Tillich's ontological analysis of love in his 1954 Nottingham lectures, *Love, Power, and Justice*, and Žižek's chapter "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence" in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Žižek 2005). These moments are particularly interesting to me for their approaches to the politics of love.

On the face of it, Tillich and Žižek could not be more different. Tillich saw Freudian psychology, particularly the pleasure/pain principle, as reductionist, while Žižek sees it as a superior form of ethics. Tillich's love-as-reunion-of-the-estranged, and Žižek's love-as-cruelty, provide problematic, yet fertile spaces, in which to theorize Kierkegaard's own politics of love by having him push against these readings.

I will show that Kierkegaard's approaches to neighbor-love, primarily in his appropriation of the story of the Good Samaritan, anticipates many of the positions/problems both Tillich and Žižek highlight. By setting Kierkegaard's politics of love in relation to Tillich's and Žižek's own political discourses of love, we can begin to see more clearly the political import of *Works of Love*. It will be seen that, at times, Kierkegaard is sympathetic to the views of Tillich and Žižek, at other times, he goes beyond them in more radical ways, thus offering an alternative vision of how love can be made political. I will also show how we can, using Kierkegaard as a starting point, go beyond him and talk of love in even more productive ways. I will first outline Žižek's position, followed by Tillich's.

Žižek's Love-as-Cruelty and Monstrous Neighbors

...pity is the failure of the power of abstraction. (Žižek 2005, 162)

After one reads Žižek's chapter, "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence," in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, one can rewrite the selected quote above to say that love is the failure of the power of abstraction. This would be more in keeping with Žižek's actual position. We should understand this quote, in either of its forms, to be despairing of the loss of the power of the abstraction which leaves us with the politics of pity or love. What kind of abstraction? What are the politics of this abstraction? Why are the politics of love so much more untenable than a politics of abstraction? It is in this space, between love and abstraction, that we will see Žižek claim that "love and justice are incompatible" (Žižek 2005, 182). Such a political theory of love invites a careful reading and application of *Works of Love*.

Unfortunately, I believe Žižek's sentiment described above is representative of much of our contemporary politics, especially those discussed in the introduction. The state of Alabama is currently dealing with the consequences of a politics of abstraction, rather than love, in terms of immigration. We prefer the politics of abstraction over love every day. In this sense, Žižek, despite his apparent radicalness, is not out of step with his times in any radical way. Instead, he is fully representative of the abstracted approach to human relations, whether they include monsters or not. Strangely enough, Žižek emerges in the chapter, most likely despite any of his own personal political preferences, as looking simply liberal or at least social contractarian. This, undoubtedly, would assault his revolutionary Marxist sensibilities, but what else can we make of his preference for abstracted law over love?

Žižek is not critiquing Kierkegaard's notion of love so much in this chapter as he is that of Levinas and the "moment" of the "human face", that which calls out to us perpetually (Levinas 2001, 114-120). All neighbors, for Žižek, are potential monsters that demand a certain form of politics (Žižek 2005, 162-163). That, in essence, is what Žižek in his approach to the neighbor and any sort of politics of love claims. The worst things we can do, politically speaking, is to love or to pity (Žižek 2005, 183-184). Yet, Žižek is no Nietzschean here (Nietzsche 2005, 77-79; 1956, 258-261). His critique emanates from the Lacanian position that he operationalizes with primary emphasis being placed on the "big Other" rather than the face (Žižek 2005, 184).

Still, what we find in this chapter are particular concepts that make for a productive, political dialogue between Kierkegaard and Žižek. The primary concepts that I want to pay attention to are: the monstrous, inhumanness of neighbors; the politics that such monstrousness demands; the cruelty of love; the incompatibility of love and justice; the loss of abstraction; and

the presence of the big Other. All of these, as I will show, provide a fertile soil in which to cultivate and theorize Kierkegaard's own politics of love and the neighbor.

In the introduction to the text itself, an unnamed author, presumably one of the three contributors to the book, begins with extended quotes from Freud on neighbors and neighbor-love. I want to begin as well by quoting the same passages. According to Freud,

If I love someone, he must deserve it in some way...He deserves it if he is so like me in important ways that I can love myself in him; and he deserves it if he is so much more perfect than myself that I can love my ideal of my own self in him.

But if he is a stranger to me and if he cannot attract me by any worth of his own of any significance that he may already have acquired for my emotional life, it will be hard for me to love him. Indeed, I should be wrong to do so, for my love is valued by all my own people as a sign of my preferring them, and it is an injustice to them if I put a stranger on par with them. But if I am to love him (with this universal love) merely because he, too, is an inhabitant of this earth, like an insect, an earth-worm or a grass-snake, then I fear that only a small modicum of my love will fall to his share.

I must honestly confess that he has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred. He seems not to have the least trace of love for me and show me not the slightest consideration. If I will do him any good he has not hesitation in injuring me, nor does he ask himself whether the amount of advantage he gains bears any proportion to the extent of the harm he does to me. Indeed, he need not even obtain an advantage; if he can satisfy any sort of desire by it, he thinks nothing of jeering at me, insulting me, slandering me and showing his superior power; and the more secure he feels and the more helpless I am, the more certainly I can expect him to behave like this to me. (Žižek 2005, 1-2)

Love, for Freud, is something that is only extended to those who are known, familiar. It is, ultimately, a preferential thing, always. Not only that, but the known, familiar person must deserve my love before it is given. Absent here, of course, is Christ's injunction to love those that do not love you. For Christ, it is all-too-easy to love those that love you and hate those who hate you. Instead, one must animate a different, seemingly irrational love towards everyone, even those you cannot see yourself in or those who hate you. The fear and skepticism that underlie Freud's thoughts, however, are something different. Freud occupies no less than a Hobbesian position here (Hobbes 1994, 74-78), that all neighbors are fundamentally encountered

in a state of nature. They are continuously out to get me, to gain an advantage on me, to slander me and insult me. How can I love this person? Why must I be beholden to some “universal” that enjoins me to love such a person who is merely “an inhabitant of this earth” like an insect or other creature?

Žižek concurs with these feelings towards the neighbor in his contribution to the book. This is most evident in his critique of Levinasian ethics. Žižek feels that Levinasian ethics are, in a sense, too naïve, too gracious, too merciful. In short, the “human” face that calls out to us according to Levinas, is too “human” according to Žižek. What about the inhuman face? What sort of call does that face place upon us? Is it one that we should avoid hearing or looking at? Žižek writes,

Consequently, is the paradox of the Muselmann not that this figure is simultaneously a zero-level, a total reduction to life, *and* a name for the pure excess as such, excess deprived of its “normal” base? This is why the figure of the Muselmann signals the limitation of Levinas: when describing it, Primo Levi repeatedly used the predicate *faceless*, and this term should be given here its entire Levinasian weight. *When confronted with a Muselmann, one cannot discern in his face the trace of the abyss of the Other in his/her vulnerability, addressing us with the infinite call of our responsibility. What one gets instead is a kind of blind wall, a lack of depth.* Maybe the Muselmann is thus the zero-level neighbor, the neighbor with whom no empathetic relationship is possible...we again confront the key dilemma: what if it is precisely in the guise of the “faceless” face of a Muselmann that we encounter the Other’s call at its purest and most radical? What if, facing a Muselmann, one hits upon one’s responsibility toward the Other at its most traumatic?...What if, along these lines, we restore to the Levinasian “face” all its monstrosity: face is not a harmonious Whole of the dazzling epiphany of a “human face,” face is something the glimpse of which we get when we stumble upon a grotesquely distorted face, a face in the grip of a disgusting tic or grimace, a face which, precisely, confronts us when the neighbor “loses his face”? (Žižek 2005, 162) (emphasis added).

We can already see a tension developing here between Žižek and Kierkegaard, especially given Kierkegaard’s story of the two artists (Kierkegaard 1995, 158). Kierkegaard, in the deliberation, “Our Duty To Love The People That We See”, tells a story of two artists. The first one despairs, having traveled the world and found nothing or no person beautiful enough or worthy enough to

paint. The second artist, however, says, "...I have not found one single face to be so insignificant or so faulted that I still could not discern a more beautiful side and discover something transfigured in it," (Kierkegaard 1995, 158). Žižek, then, agrees in a way with the concept of a Freudian, monstrous neighbor. He feels that Levinas, though, does not pay sufficient attention to this fact. Levinas celebrates the neighbor who is the widow, the orphan, the starving, and hears their pitiful, perpetual calls. Yet, Žižek states, "...what Levinas (with all his celebration of Otherness) fails to take into account is not some underlying Sameness of all humans but the radical, "inhuman" Otherness itself: the Otherness of a human being reduced to inhumanity, the Otherness exemplified by the terrifying figure of the *Muselmann*, the "living dead" in the concentration camps." Hence, Žižek goes on to state that "Maybe the *Muselmann* is thus the zero-level neighbor, the neighbor with whom no empathetic relationship is possible," (Žižek 2005, 160).

What politics result then from the position? Žižek clearly feels he is correcting Levinas, that Levinas, for all of his ethical intentions, has grossly romanticized the face. Žižek concludes his chapter by writing,

We should therefore assume the risk of countering Levinas's position with a more radical one: others are primordially an (ethnically) indifferent multitude, and love is a violent gesture of cutting into this multitude and privileging a One as the neighbor, thus introducing a radical imbalance into the whole. In contrast to love, justice begins when I remember the faceless many left in shadow in this privileging of the One. Justice and love are thus structurally incompatible: justice, not love, has to be blind; it must disregard the privileged One whom I "really understand". What this means is that the Third is not secondary: it is always-already here, and the primordial ethical obligation is toward this Third who is *not* here in the face-to-face relationship, the one in shadow... (Žižek 2005, 182)

Žižek continues,

What this means with regard to love is that the universal proposition "I love you all" acquires the level of actual existence only if "there is at least one whom I hate" – a thesis abundantly confirmed by the fact that universal love for humanity always led to the brutal

hatred of the (actually existing) exception, of the enemies of humanity. This hatred of the exception is the “truth” of universal love... This brings us to the radical anti-Levinasian conclusion: the true ethical step is the one *beyond* the face of the other, the one of *suspending* the hold of the face, the one of choosing *against* the face, for the *third*. This coldness *is* justice at its most elementary. Every preempting of the Other in the guise of his or her face relegates the Third to the faceless background. And the elementary gesture of justice is not to show respect for the face in front of me, to be open to its depth, but to abstract from it and refocus onto the faceless Thirds in the background. It is only such a shift of focus onto the Third that effectively *uproots* justice, liberating it from the contingent umbilical link that renders it “embedded” in a particular situation. In other words, it is only such a shift onto the Third that grounds justice in the dimension of *universality* proper... Justice is emphatically *not* justice for – with regard to – the neighbor. (Žižek 2005, 183-184)

Žižek continued this line of thinking in his lecture for The Institute for Human Sciences at Boston University in 2007 entitled, “Fear Thy Neighbor As Thyself”. Here, he would express this position when he stated, “Love your neighbor as yourself is an impossible demand. Underlying this love is always fear,” (2007). In this lecture, Žižek was concerned with the ‘why’ of a politics of love. He understood love in this sense to be, merely, another liberal, multicultural attempt at ‘knowing’ the other, understanding him, thereby domesticating him, controlling him, taming him. As he claims, “The ideology of tolerance can be reduced to the notion of love your neighbor as yourself... the premise of liberal tolerance is that those we know from within cannot possibly be an enemy,” (2007). This “know[ing] from within”, then, according to Žižek, is a way of diffusing conflict and getting rid of animosity. As promising as such approaches appear, however, they still remain problematic and/or impossible tasks. They are impossible from the Lacanian and psychoanalytical viewpoint simply because what we tell ourselves about ourselves, and what we tell others about ourselves, are always, first and foremost, lies. We can never, then, know each other from within.

So, what do we have here with Žižek. First is his ostensible ethic or sense of justice. His preference for the always-already Third over the Levinasian face or the neighbor seems to

present a position, on the face of it, similar to Kierkegaard's, that he is also for the justice extended to *all*, a universal justice, not just the particular (Kierkegaard 1995, 159). Žižek clearly believes he has made an advancement here, ethically, on the Levinas position that states,

The other man in himself is my neighbor, the proximity of the other is my responsibility for him...*But we are never, me and the other, alone in the world. There is always a third; the men who surround me. And this third is also my neighbor.* Who is the nearest to me? Inevitable question of justice which arises from the depth of responsibility for the unique, in which ethics begins in the face of that which is incomparable. Here is the necessity of comparing what is incomparable – of knowing men. First violence, violence of judgment, transformation of faces into objective and plastic forms, into figures which are visible but de-faced; the appearing of men: of individuals, who are certainly unique, but restituted to their genera. *With intentions to scrutinize and acts to remember. And perhaps, at the basis of a necessary justice, the very ascending of knowledge, of objectifying and objective rationality, of the very idea of universality, the other is no longer the unique person offering himself to the compassion of my responsibility, but an individual within a logical order or a citizen of a state in which institutions, general laws, and judges are both possible and necessary...But would ethics disappear in the justice that it requires and in the politics that justice requires? A permanent danger which threatens goodness and the originary compassion of responsibility for the other man. A danger of being extinguished in the system of universal laws which these laws require and support. But also the eventual possibility for "goodness" to be understood in the guise of prophetic voices reverberating imperiously beneath the profundity of established laws. Voices that do not come, like a legislation beneath a legislation, to be formulated once again in the guise of logical rules...but mercy-for-the-other-man, going beyond the rigorous limit which designates justice, responds to these invitations...*(Levinas 2001, 115-116) (emphasis added).

Here, Levinas delineates responsibility for the other and other(s) under the institutions of justice. What must be preserved is mercy-for-the-other-man, emanating from the face, and it must not be substituted for the mechanisms of abstraction. Žižek, however, does not engage such passages of Levinas. Instead, he maintains that Levinas is too narrow, he must think larger, he must have the Other manifest in more than *a* face. It must be *faces*.

Now, according to Žižek, if we are to extend justice to *faces* of the Other, the multitude, love is precisely not the way to do it. Contra Hardt (2007) and even Nietzsche (2005, 54-55), Žižek claims that love or universal love, despite its claims to the contrary, simply cannot provide

justice to everyone. It does not cover enough ground. For Žižek, justice requires abstraction, not interest, not love. Love of all is an impossible demand. Love is always particular. Justice requires extension to all. Some of that “all” is monstrous and may not deserve love. As Žižek speculates,

...what if the ultimate function of the Law is not to enable us not to forget the neighbor, to retain our proximity to the neighbor, but, on the contrary, to keep the neighbor at a proper distance, to serve as a kind of protective wall against the monstrosity of the neighbor? In short, *the* temptation to be resisted here is the ethical “gentrification” of the neighbor, the reduction of the radically ambiguous monstrosity of the Neighbor-Thing into an Other as the abyssal point from which the call of ethical responsibility emanates.” (Žižek 2005, 162-163)

Žižek, here, has a methodological problem. He, too, wants universal justice, just not via love. Rather, he wants universal justice via abstract law.

Kierkegaard, on the contrary, sees no conflict between law and love, but he does see a conflict between love and justice. Regarding law and love, Kierkegaard writes,

Law, as if love were an idle feeling too distinguished to express itself in action, a pretentious incompetence that neither can nor will give satisfaction. Only foolishness speaks of love this way - as if there were a conflict between the Law and love, which there certainly is also, but "in" love there is no conflict between the Law and love, which is the fulfilling of the Law...Only foolishness sets the Law and love at loggerheads, thinks that it speaks wisely when it relays comments between them or even speaks ill of the one to the other. (Kierkegaard, 1995 106)

He continues,

It might seem strange to say that the Law is the indefinite, since it has its very strength in the provisions; indeed, it owns and controls all the provisions. Yet this is the case, and therein lies the weakness of the Law. Just as the shadow is weak in comparison with the strong actuality, so is the Law; but just as there is always something indefinite in the shadow, so also there is something indefinite in the silhouette of the Law, no matter how accurately this is carried out...Thus there is only one sketch that is completely definite, and this is the work itself...Thus the Law is a sketch and love the fulfilling and the entirely definite; in love the Law is the entirely definite...the Law requires, love gives. (Kierkegaard 1995, 104, 106)

Here, then, is no conflict between law and love for Kierkegaard. Love is the fulfilling of the law, love is the work of the law, it actualizes it in reality. But actualizes what for Kierkegaard? Justice? Žižek separated justice from love. What does Kierkegaard say about justice? He writes,

Justice is identified by its giving each his own, just as it also in turn claims its own. This means that justice pleads the cause of its own, divides and assigns, determines what each can lawfully call his own, judges and punishes if anyone refuses to make any distinction between mine and yours. The individual has the right to do as he pleases with this contentious and yet legally entitled mind; and if he seeks his own in no other way than that which justice allow, justice has nothing with which to reproach him and has no right to upbraid him for anything. Thus each one keeps his own. As soon as someone is defrauded of his own, or as soon as someone defrauds another of his own, justice intervenes, because it safeguards the common security in which everyone has his own, what he rightfully has. – But sometimes a change intrudes, a revolution, a war, an earthquake, or some such terrible misfortune, and everything is confused. Justice tries in vain to secure for each person his own; it cannot maintain the distinction between mine and yours; in the confusion, it cannot keep the balance and therefore throws away the scales – it despairs!

Terrible spectacle! Yet does not love in a certain sense, even if in the most blissful way, produce the same confusion? But love, it too is an event, the greatest of all, yet also the happiest. Love is a change, the most remarkable of all, but the most desirable – in fact we say in a very good sense that someone who is gripped by love is changed or becomes changed. Love is a revolution, the most profound revolution of all, but the most blessed! So, then, with love, there is no confusion; in this blissful confusion there is for lovers no distinction between mine and yours. Wonderful! There are a you and an I, and there is no mine and yours! For without a you and an I, there is no love, and with mine and yours, there is no love. (Kierkegaard 1995, 265-266)

While Žižek sees love as too narrow and particular, Kierkegaard critiques justice without love as too narrow and particular. For Kierkegaard, justice without love is merely the allocation of mine and yours. In love, there is no such distinction. So, where Žižek claims to be making a more radical advance than Levinas in the pursuit of justice, it only appears that, based on a Freudian-Hobbesian fear of neighbors, he has reconstructed the social contract and praised it for its legal abstraction and ability to cover more faces. Kierkegaard critiques the social contract by implying that when that breaks down, unless love is present, justice will break down as well.

Yet, in this he is no social contractarian, for even in the midst of the social contract, justice without love is still merely possessive and egotistical. I quote from Kierkegaard's journals at length here,

That the state in a Christian sense is supposed to be what Hegel taught – namely, that it has moral significance, that true virtue can appear only in the state (something I also childishly babbled after him in my dissertation), that the goal of the state is to improve men – is obviously nonsense... The state is human egotism on a large scale and in great dimensions – *so far off was Plato when he said that in order to become aware of the virtues we should study them in the state.*

The state is human egotism in great dimensions, very expediently and cunningly composed so that the egotism of individuals intersect each other correctively. To this extent the state is no doubt a safeguard against egotism by manifesting a higher egotism that copes with all the individual egotisms so that these must egotistically understand that egotistically it is the most prudent thing to live in the state. Just as we speak of a calculus of infinitesimals, so also the state is a calculus of egotisms, but always in such a way that it egotistically appears to be the most prudent thing to enter into and to be in this higher egotism. But this, after all, is anything but the moral abandoning of egotism.

The state cannot go beyond this; so to be improved by living in the state is just as doubtful as being improved in a prison. Perhaps an individual becomes much shrewder about his egotism, his enlightened egotism, that is, his egotism in relation to other egotisms, but less egotistic he does not become, and what is worse, he is spoiled by regarding this official, civic, authorized egotism as virtue – this, in fact, is how demoralizing civic life is, because it reassures one in being a shrewd egotist. Higher than this the state cannot go, and considered as moral upbringing and growth this must be regarded as very dubious.

Thus the state is continually subject to the same sophistry that engrossed the Greek Sophists – namely that injustice on a vast scale is justice, that in a very peculiar manner the concepts turn around or flop over, that what counts is to practice it on a vast scale... And then the state is supposed to be counted on to develop men morally, to be the proper medium for virtue, the place where one really can become virtuous! In fact, for such a purpose this place is just as strange as would be the claim that the best place for a watchmaker or an engraver to work is aboard a ship in a heavy sea. (Hong and Hong 1975, 199-201) (emphasis added).

Setting Kierkegaard into dialogue with Žižek has allowed us to assess the relation of law and love and their impact on justice. I argue that Kierkegaard has actually made an advance on Žižek. Žižek's says universal love always results in hatred of some excluded. But abstraction

often leads to identification of groups, such as “illegals”, who are kept as “shadows”, “faceless Other(s)”, who require law or immigration policy. This is just as dangerous as Alabama’s HB 56 legislation shows.

If we take seriously Kierkegaard’s reading of the Good Samaritan (Kierkegaard 1995, 317, 324), we can see a superb example of the love-justice relationship. Kierkegaard shows that the Good Samaritan is not a story about faith, Truth, doctrine, or even of God. In fact, none of those factors are present. The story is about love as “sheer action” and responding to the unique needs of the neighbor at hand. What would Žižek’s reading of this situation be? In his long discussion of the neighbor, he never discusses the Samaritan. How would it fit into his schema? Shouldn’t the Samaritan fear the assaulted man? Would this neighbor, assaulted, bruised, and dying and not represent the Muselmann or a version of such? Would the sight be too much to bear for Žižek’s Samaritan had he given a reading? Presumably, the assistance provided by the Samaritan would have been too narrow? Premised on hate? How, was the assistance not given to the already-existing, ready-at-hand enemy? If hate was foundational to the story, did the politics of love evidenced not efface it? We cannot know Žižek’s position on this. I think, though, that the story would be much different if abstraction over love and pity was practiced. If pity or love is the failure of abstraction, then the Good Samaritan would be quite a different story. It would still be political, just a politics of indifference.

Tillich’s Love of the Estranged

In the University of Alabama’s copy of Paul Tillich’s *Love, Power, and Justice*, there is an interesting text-within-the-text. Like any library book, this one has the slips of paper affixed to the first pages on which librarians stamp the date the book has been checked out. I cannot

speak for this text at other institutions, but the University of Alabama's copy has had an interesting history that, I believe, speaks to the historical, and present, political nature of the text.

The book was checked out fifteen times in the mid to late sixties; six times in the mid to late seventies; four times in the mid to late eighties; then there was a small uptick in interest as the book was checked out five times in the mid to late nineties; finally, it was checked out four times in the mid to late '00's. Between each of these "periods" of interest, there remained a consistent 5-6 year gap of non-interest. That is, if the book was last checked out in 1969, it would not be checked out again until 1974. This patterned gap continued. When one picks this book up, they are told a lot before they have even gotten to the title page. What they are told is that they are dealing with concept in decline, one that is unpopular, one that, could be implied, has been deemed ineffectual. This is Hardt's (2007) argument. Love-as-a-political-concept has been destroyed.

This might not seem very consequential, but I believe it is. Why are there such distinct periods of interest in love, power and justice? What explains the periods of no interest? Why such consistent patterns of interest? I think what this shows is that, politically, America is still dealing with entrenched issues of injustice, just as much so as it did fifty years ago. Yet, now, it is potentially dealing with these issues with a weakened dialogue on the practical and material force of politics that love represents.

In 1954, Tillich gave a series of lectures in Nottingham, England entitled, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications*. He began his lectures by dealing with what he called the intrinsic "problems, confusions, and method" in the approaches to the concepts of love, power and justice. Tillich described how the three central concepts "...appear in decisive places in the doctrine of man, in psychology and sociology, they are central in ethics

and jurisprudence, [and] *they determine political theory and educational method...*”(emphasis added) (Tillich 1954, 1). As the subtitle of his work shows, Tillich was conducting ontological analyses of love, power and justice and these ontological analyses resemble structuralism, or phenomenology, or something like a structural phenomenology. According to Tillich, “Therefore the search for *the basic meaning* of love, power and justice individually must be our first task, and it must be *carried out as a part of the search for the basic meaning of all those concepts* which are *universally present in man’s cognitive encounter with his world*. Traditionally they are called principles, structural elements, and categories of being,” (Tillich 1954, 2) (emphasis added)

There is, though, an “almost insuperable hurdle” ahead of Tillich and anyone else who desires to talk about the three concepts. Like Hardt (2007), Tillich believes the insuperable hurdle to be the inherited and confused “...state of...discussion of each of them [individually] and the even more confused state of the discussion of their mutual relations, (Tillich 1954, 2). This confused state results in a situation in which “the help of the semanticist is perhaps in no realm so much needed as in the jungle of ambiguities which has grown up through the lack of conceptual control and the abundance of emotional drive...which is circumscribed by love, power, and justice...” (Tillich 1954, 3). Tillich gives us three examples of how the concept of “love” exists in a confused state, preventing us from adequately conceiving of it in its root, structural meanings.

First, one of the reasons we today find love to be such an ambiguous term for inquiries into areas such as politics is that, as Tillich shows, love “...elicits a feeling of warmth, of passion, of happiness, of fulfillment... Its root meaning, therefore, seems to be an emotional state which like all emotions cannot be defined, but which must be described in its qualities and

expressions and is not a matter of intention or demand but of happening or gift,” (Tillich 1954, 3). The fact that love’s root meaning seems to be that of an emotional state which is destined to remain ambiguous makes talking about it in other ways, say socially or politically, strange, unusual, or problematic. It is not, despite the centrality to our lives and doctrines as Tillich referenced, an easy thing to talk about outside of its common emotional states.

Kierkegaard is in complete agreement here. One of his main targets in *Works of Love* is the poets (Kierkegaard 1995, 29-31). The poets, Kierkegaard felt, were responsible for the cultural tendency to see romantic love in its emotional aspects as the “highest” love possible. Odes to its forever-ness and unshakeableness are sung amidst so many failures of love. For Kierkegaard, romantic love, though extremely important to life, is fragile and susceptible to growing cold. In this critique, one in which Kierkegaard is famously mistaken for having a ‘disdain’ for romantic love, Kierkegaard also, similar to Hardt and Tillich, says that conceiving of love as a social force must escape the confines of the emotional and romantic. As he said, “Love of the neighbor is not sung about, it is accomplished,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 46).

Secondly, things are complicated more when we begin to ponder love’s ethical dimension and not just its emotional dimension. In Christianity, the Great Commandment delivered by Jesus was that everyone shall love God with all their heart, soul and mind and they shall love their neighbor as themselves. Yet, as Tillich and countless others have pondered, “If love is an emotion, how can it be demanded?” (Tillich 1954, 4). What is the relationship of shall to the emotion of love? Prefiguring Žižek’s contemporary fears and suspicions of love and neighbor-love, especially its political uses, Tillich states, “Emotions cannot be demanded. We cannot demand them of ourselves. If we try, something artificial is produced *which shows the traits of what had to be suppressed* in its production. Repentance, intentionally produced, *hides self-*

complacency in perversion. Love, intentionally produced, shows indifference or hostility in perversion.” (emphasis added) (Tillich 1954, 4). Tillich sounds here like he is employing Žižek’s Lacanian psychoanalytic methods to ponder the problems of “commanding” or “demanding” love (Žižek 2005). Tillich attempts to resolve this contradiction, in an introductory way, by suggesting that there must be something “...at the basis of love as emotion which justifies both its ethical and its ontological [emotional] interpretation[s]. And it may well be that the ethical nature of love is dependent on its ontological nature, and that the ontological nature of love gets its qualifications by its ethical character, (Tillich 1954, 5).

I think Kierkegaard can be seen as agreeing here as well. First of all, I am not of the Stephen Evans (2004) and Philip Quinn (1996) camp which promotes the idea of divine command theory in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*. I agree more with Manis (2009) and Hanson and Baldwin (2008) which suggests that the natural *need* for love is more constitutive and defining of *neighbor love* than the command. The command, for Kierkegaard, does serve a purpose. It liberates love from the vicissitudes of romantic love. Because it is not preferential, it cannot be disappointed, cannot become envious. It is only sheer action. And yet, alongside discussions such as this, *Works of Love* also defines the need for love as being just as necessary to a socially transforming love. As Kierkegaard writes,

So deeply is this need rooted in human nature that since the creation of the first human being there has been no change, no new discovery has been made, but this selfsame first observation has only been confirmed in the most diverse ways, varied from generation to generation in the expression, in the presentation, in the turns of thought. So deeply is this need rooted in human nature, and so *essentially* does it belong to being human, that even he who was one with the Father and in the communion of love with the Father and the Spirit, he who loved the whole human race, our Lord Jesus Christ, even he humanly felt this need to love and be loved by an individual human being. (Kierkegaard 1995, 154-155).

Thirdly, Tillich shows another level of complication when he introduces the division between eros and agape, or as Tillich refers to them, “qualities” of love. These types appear contradictory as the first refers to earthly, imminent, romantic love while the latter refers to the universal and heavenly aspects of love. Tillich resolves this tension in an almost Hegelian way, as he did with the ontological and ethical tension, by stating that “...there are not types but qualifications of love, since the different qualities are present, by efficiency or deficiency, in every act of love,” (Tillich 1954, 5). Tillich goes on, “If, as I shall suggest, one has to distinguish the *libido*, the *philia*, the *eros*, the *agape* qualities of love one must ask: how are they openly related to each other?...Which quality of love is adequate to the Great Commandment?” (Tillich 1954, 5-6).

In this respect, Kierkegaard both agrees, in a qualified way, and differs with Tillich. I read Kierkegaard as agreeing in a qualified way with the notion of “qualifications” of love. Kierkegaard sees all loves as informing and permeating each other. We see this when he writes such as passages as,

Go, then, and do this, take away dissimilarity and its similarity so that you can love the neighbor. Take away the distinction of preferential love so that you can love the neighbor. But you are not to cease loving the beloved because of this – far from it. If in order to love the neighbor you would have to begin by giving up loving those for whom you have preference, the word “neighbor” would be the greatest deception ever contrived. Moreover, it would even be a contradiction, since inasmuch as the neighbor is all people surely no one can be excluded – should we now say, least of all the beloved? (Kierkegaard 1995, 61)

Yet, Kierkegaard does at the same time set neighbor love as a higher type of love. This love is not determined by emotion or drives, but it is purely responsive, merciful, and directed at everyone rather than someone in particular. It is, in this sense, something that is accomplished. So, when Tillich asks which love is most adequate to the Great Commandment, this is not a

question that Kierkegaard would ask. All loves should remain and function as they are, yet all loves should have a neighbor compartment to them. This essentially means a preservation of self-identity on both sides, whether in a romantic relationship, a friendship, or that between strangers or enemies.

Tillich's overarching goal in the introduction to his work is to show the fundamental and inherited ambiguities in the three concepts of love, power and justice. A companion to this overarching goal is the one that attempts to show the fundamental and inherited confusions involved in the concepts' relations to each other. Tillich is precise when he states,

Love and power are often contrasted in such a way that love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love. Powerless love and loveless power are contrasted. This, of course, is unavoidable if love is understood from its emotional side and power from its compulsory side. But such an understanding is error and confusion. It was this misinterpretation which induced the philosopher of the 'will-to-power' (i.e. Nietzsche) to reject radically the Christian idea of love. And it is the same misinterpretation which induces Christian theologians to reject Nietzsche's philosophy of the 'will-to-power' in the name of the Christian idea of love... *One could say that constructive social ethics are impossible as long as power is looked at with distrust and love is reduced to its emotional or ethical quality. Such a division leads to a rejection of or indifference to the political realm on the side of religion,* (Tillich 1954, 11-12).
(emphasis added)

A balanced, complete, and critical theory of the politics of love must look at how love both undermines power but is also a participant in power. Is it the 'power' of love that undermines loveless power? How is that power different from commonly-held notions of political power?

For Tillich, all the aforementioned confusions and problems inherent to the concepts of love, power, and justice "drive us to an ontological analysis", (Tillich 1954, 18). But what is ontology such that it would be the preferred method to investigate the individual and mutual meanings of love, power, and justice? According to Tillich, "It is the philosophy which asks the question: What does it mean that something *is*? What are the characteristics of everything that participates in being?...What does it mean *to be*? What are the structures, common to everything

that is, to everything that participates in being?” (Tillich 1954, 19). This Heideggerian starting point is the where Tillich chooses to begin in order to resolve the problems of the confused state of love, power, and justice. Ontology, then, does not describe things in the world as phenomenology might do, or as science might do, nor does it describe events the way history might, it describes the “hidden texture” which underlies and animates everything. It describes the essence of existence, the dark matter of existence so to speak.

The primacy of ontology then is that it is antecedent to every other form of investigation. Every other form of investigation contents itself with things that participate in being while ontology examines being itself. As Tillich says, though, this is a never-ending task, one that is protean and changes to a degree as being changes. One continual element, however, in the investigation of being, an element that connects our inquiries with the earliest Greek inquiries into being, is the starting points of love, power and justice. According to Tillich, the Greeks could not refer to the manifold texture of being without referring to love, power, and justice. This continues through time because “Our triad of terms points to a trinity of structures in being itself. Love, power, and justice are metaphysically speaking as old as being itself,” (Tillich 1954, 21).

How is ontology different from metaphysics? They are different primarily in the fact that ontology is never speculative, but descriptive. According to Tillich, “It analyses the encountered reality, trying to find the structural elements which enable a being to participate in being. It separates (sifts) those elements of the real which are generic or particular from those elements which are constitutive for everything that is and therefore are universal,” (Tillich 1954, 23). As Tillich begins, then, an ontology of love will look for those universal elements, those common structures, that enable love to participate in being itself. He begins by investigating what

manifold texture(s) give being to love itself. This is needed because “Most of the pitfalls in...political theory...are due to a misunderstanding of the ontological character of love,” (Tillich 1954, 24). It is in this context that Tillich will approach the problem of the strange.

Love, for Tillich, is fundamental, it is “the moving power of life... being is not actual without the love which drives everything that is towards everything else that is,” (Tillich 1954, 25). We see clearly here the ontological nature of the analysis. We are concerned with how love fits with, hangs together with, everything else “that is”. How is love’s existence part and parcel of everything else? Love participates in the structures of being because it serves to unite. Sounding very much like Aristophanes (Plato 2009, 189c-193e), Tillich states that “Love is the drive towards the unity of the separated. Reunion presupposes separation of that which belongs essentially together,” (Tillich 1954, 25).

The extent to which Tillich carries this Aristophanes-like assessment of love’s ontological purpose becomes very problematic for anyone with Kierkegaardian politics. It also complicates a notion such as Alphonso Lingis’ “community of those who have nothing in common” (1994). Indeed, Tillich appears to subscribe the psychoanalytic fears of Freud and Žižek. According to Tillich,

That which is absolutely strange to me cannot add to my self-fulfillment; it can only destroy me if it touches the sphere of my being. Therefore *love cannot be described as the union of the strange but as the reunion of the estranged. Estrangement presupposes original oneness.* Love manifests its greatest power there where it overcomes the greatest separation. And the greatest separation is the separation of self from self, (Tillich 1954, 25). (emphasis added)

In essence, everything that “is”, “is” because it is part of the manifold texture of being. But everything that “is” is presumably separated, apart. This structure of being gives the reason for the existence of love whose purpose is as described above. If love is the drive towards the unity of the separated, what does this mean politically? Are all people originally one, and now we are

different nations as in the Tower of Babel story? If we are all originally one, then we are not completely alien and foreign to one another, we have just forgotten our oneness. This would certainly allay the Freudian-Hobbesian fears mentioned above. Those fears can only be maintained as long as someone feels an “impenetrable abyss” exists between, not only beings, but others who seek to gain an advantage on each other.

Tillich does not believe in love of the absolutely strange or the inhuman. Doing so would complicate his purpose of Love. Instead, he prefers to talk about love of the estranged. But what does it do psychologically for us to conceive of everyone as having been originally one? Does it soothe us, make us more open and tolerant towards those we are simply estranged from? Do we need this psychological construct? To explain love ontologically, then, Tillich seems to need an absolute estrangement rather than an absolute strangement. We must ask ourselves if the story of the Good Samaritan is fundamentally about reunion or is it about a radical crossing-over? Is the love in the story planted in a hospitable soil that is welcoming of such familiar seeds of togetherness, or is it a strange ground that does not know of the seed of love being planted? Maybe, politically speaking, we need Žižek’s conception/description of separation, but rather than settling for his politics of retreat into Freudian fear and abstract law, as Tillich seems to be evidencing here as well, we need Kierkegaard’s politics that are similar to Tillich’s, but do not need the hospitable soil of original unity.

I quote Tillich and Kierkegaard here together. Recall, Tillich stated,

That which is absolutely strange to me cannot add to my self-fulfillment; it can only destroy me if it touches the sphere of my being. Therefore love cannot be described as the union of the strange but as the reunion of the estranged. Estrangement presupposes original oneness. Love manifests its greatest power there where it overcomes the greatest separation. (Tillich 1954, 25)

But is Kierkegaard not more sophisticated here because he allows for both the absolutely strange and the unifying force of love, love of the unlovable and the preservation of identity?

Kierkegaard writes,

Therefore love for the neighbor cannot make me one with the neighbor in a united self. Love for the neighbor is love between two beings eternally and independently determined as spirit; love for the neighbor is spirit's love, but two spirits are never able to become one self in a selfish sense. In erotic love and friendship, the two love each other by virtue of the dissimilarity or by virtue of the similarity that is based on dissimilarity (as when two friends love each other by virtue of similar customs, characters, occupations, education, etc., that is, on the basis of the similarity by which they are different from other people...) (Kierkegaard 1995, 56)

He continues,

When it is a duty to love the people we see, *one must first and foremost give up all imaginary and exaggerated ideas about a dreamworld where the object of love should be sought and found – that is, one must become sober, gain actuality and truth by finding and remaining in the world of actuality as the task assigned to one.* (Kierkegaard 1995, 161).

And finally,

It is sad but altogether too common inversion to go on talking continually about how the object of love must be so it can be lovable, instead of talking about how love must be so it can be love. (Kierkegaard 1995, 159)

For Kierkegaard, Tillich's fears of the strange are representative of an obsession with how the object of love should be, rather than how it is given in actuality. Kierkegaard seems not only more historicist here but more radical as well. Kierkegaard's notion of love extends beyond the strange, but not in the dominating way that Žižek fears, i.e., that love will tame, domesticate, or begin to "understand" the strange. No, Kierkegaard's love of the Good Samaritan and mercifulness is attuned and responsive to the others needs. Kierkegaard proceeds from the moment less than a principle.

Tillich then says that the greatest separation, alienation, is separation of the self from the self. According to Tillich, "Every self is self-related and *a complete self is completely self-*

related. It is an independent centre, indivisible and impenetrable, and therefore is rightly called an individual,” (Tillich 1954, 25-26) (emphasis added). Here, again, is where he contradicts Kierkegaard’s notion of love. For Kierkegaard, contrary to all received ideas, is less individualistic than Tillich. For Kierkegaard, “the cure is precisely to learn all over again the most important thing, to understand oneself in one’s longing for community,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 153). Kierkegaard’s “self” in *Works of Love* is one that is always-already grounded in a need for others, love, companionship and community (Kierkegaard 1995, 154-157). A complete self in *Works of Love* has taken on the strenuous task of understanding oneself in community (Kierkegaard 1995, 153).

By setting Kierkegaard and *Works of Love* in dialogue with both Žižek and Tillich, certain politics come to the surface. First, Kierkegaard shows that love and law should not be segregated as Žižek wishes. Love as the fulfillment of the law is the foundation of justice. Law, alone, does not provide justice. The “common power”, alone, does not provide justice. Love in the law does. Second, Kierkegaard shows that love of the strange, of the unlovable, is preferable to the love of the familiar or the estranged which is another form of the familiar. Love only, of the estranged, is premised on suspicion, fear and mistrust. These qualities do not work well in the context of forced migrations due to global economic policies.

I think Kierkegaard’s Good Samaritan goes beyond both Žižek and Tillich. It is not a story of faith, of God, of Truth/Doctrine, or any other such categories. It is a story of politics, of action, in the moment, responding the needs of a fellow human being. It did not rely on abstraction, nor did it rely on a soothing belief in the original estrangement of parties involved. Both parties were strange to each other, yet both had “faces”. In that context, law and estrangement would offer no politics. Kierkegaard’s does.

CHAPTER 4: MONGOVEN'S ETHICS OF CARE AND KIERKEGAARD'S MERCIFULNESS

This chapter will read provide a reading of *Works of Love* in relation to the political aspects of the feminist area of research known as the ethics of care. Virginia Held (2006) identifies five characteristics of the ethics of care. According to Held,

...[1]the central focus of the ethics of care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility...[2]the ethics of care values emotion rather than rejects it...emotions such as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness...[3]the ethics of care rejects the view of the dominant moral theories that the more abstract the reasoning about a moral problem the better because the more likely to avoid bias and arbitrariness...It calls into question the universalistic and abstract rules of the dominant theories...[4]the ethics of care...reconceptualizes traditional notions about the public and private...[5]the ethics of care usually works with a conception of persons as relational, rather than as the self-sufficient independent individuals of the dominant moral theories. (Held 2006, 10-13)

These characteristics open spaces for both Hardt and Kierkegaard. Recall that for Hardt, one of the reasons love has been corrupted as a political concept is that it has persisted in the use of a separation between the private and the public, or between eros and agape. Feminist care ethics, then, provides a resource for remedying this problem. The space for Kierkegaard is provided by the fact that each of the five characteristics that Held (2006) delineates, Kierkegaard addresses extensively and sympathetically. We will see how Kierkegaard speaks about attending to the needs of others (Kierkegaard 1995, 85-86); the value of sympathy, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness (Kierkegaard 1995, 317); the critique of abstraction, a classic Kierkegaardian theme, represents nearly whole of Kierkegaard's writings and his famous antipathy for speculative philosophy while provided a background context of *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1985); a reconceptualization of the private and the public (Kierkegaard 1995, 265-266); and the conception of persons as relational (Kierkegaard 1995, 5-7).

Yet, there is another space for Kierkegaard provided by Held (2006). She writes, "...the ethics of care bears some resemblance to a Christian ethic of love counseling us to love our neighbors and care for those in need. But when a morality depends on a given religion, it has little persuasiveness for those who do not share that faith," (Held 2006, 21). Strawser (2007), however, has shown that we can see a "teleological suspension of the theological" in the works of Kierkegaard, one that goes a long way in ameliorating the problem that Held (2006) fears, (Strawser 2007, 444). It will be shown, though, by putting Kierkegaard into dialogue with Mongoven (2009), who critiques Kierkegaard directly and extensively, that fears such as Held's (2006) prevent her and others such as Mongoven (2009) from seeing the full political utility contained in a work such as *Works of Love*.

One of the most woefully unattended-to aspects of Kierkegaard's love-as-a-political-concept is his reading of mercifulness, more specifically, his reading of a mercifulness that can "do nothing". Perhaps, it is the "do nothing" aspect of this deliberation that has frightened most interpreters, especially those who would like to advance a political and social reading of his work. This is not to say that the topic has never been interpreted; it has, perhaps most systematically by Ferreira (2001, 188-199), and most famously by Adorno (1939-1940, 413-429). In this chapter, I contribute an alternative reading of Kierkegaard's seventh deliberation in the second part of *Works of Love* entitled, "Mercifulness, a Work of Love Even If It Can Give Nothing and Is Able to Do Nothing". This deliberation contains his powerful readings of the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Poor Woman. I will provide this reading as a contrast to Ann Mongoven's recent work of political theory entitled, *Just Love: Transforming Civic Virtue* (2009).

Positioning Kierkegaard's politics of love relative to Mongoven's (2009) make sense when we begin to understand what Mongoven's position is and what critiques her position is founded upon. The relationship between the two has the potential to produce interesting political insights that are new to the literature on Kierkegaard. In her book, Mongoven employs a notion of love-as-a-political-concept, specifically, "the ethics of care", that is hostile to the Christian concepts of agape or self-sacrificial neighbor-love (2009, 39-43). In fact, the political theory of love that she wishes to defend draws a persistent line of separation between it and anything stylistically similar to that of neighbor-love. Why is this and is such a separation necessary? If such a separation is seen to be necessary, which Mongoven thinks it is, then it would suggest that Kierkegaard has nothing to say to the issue of civic virtue at all, of which Mongoven thinks he does not. On one level, given the work of Jegstrup (1992) and Zook (2008), such a position has been shown to be dubious. Jegstrup (1992) has drawn relationships from Kierkegaard to notions of citizenship and what she calls, "political consciousness", something similar to a civic and community-oriented mindset. Zook (2008) has drawn out the notions of civil society in Kierkegaard's politics as well. Mongoven (2009) does not address their claims. Yet, Jegstrup (1992) and Zook (2008) have not approached civic virtue from the perspective of care. Mongoven's work, in that sense, is insightful and potentially profound in its application, yet her reading of Kierkegaard on many points is simply wrong. Correcting these misreadings can allow Kierkegaard to inform her work in a way better than he has to this point.

The organization of the chapter proceeds in the following way. First, I will discuss Mongoven's notion of love-as-a-political-concept, as well how it fits into the larger feminist area of research known as "ethics of care" (Held 1993, 2006; Slote 2007). To do this, I will discuss three elements of Mongoven's argument that I feel are most relevant (2009). The first concerns

the invisibility of civic groups such as MADD in the work of those who deplore the current state of civic virtue such as Putnam (2001). The second element concerns what Mongoven calls the two-pronged assault of the ideology of gender and the ideology of religion, (Mongoven, 2009, 34-48). It is from the combination of these, the ideology of gender, manifested in the concept of domesticity, and the ideology of religion, manifested in the Christian concept of love of the neighbor, that has rendered political groups such as MADD invisible. (It is in this context that she discusses Kierkegaard so critically.) Finally, I will discuss the third element of her work in which offers up a call for a redefined or transformed concept of civic virtue based on care. Her ideal of care will provide the bridge to the next part of the chapter.

In the second part of the chapter, I will outline Kierkegaard's deliberation on mercifulness since I believe that it counters the problematic aspect of Mongoven's work the best. I will show, both, where Mongoven (2009) is right in her assessment of Kierkegaard, if a bit heavy-handed in her analysis, and I will show where I believe she is wrong. I will also show that incorporating Kierkegaard in a different way into Mongoven's position can provide for an alternative view of an "ethics of care" or a politics of love that can have impact on issues of social justice.

Mongoven's Ethics of Care

Mongoven begins her work by being, as she says, "mad about MADD" (2009, 3). Here, it is not Mothers Against Drunk Driving that she harbors antipathy towards, instead, she harbors antipathy toward those concepts and those people who would marginalize the politics of MADD to the point of invisibility. She is mad about the treatment and non-recognition groups such as MADD receive. According to Mongoven, "On the face of it, there is something heroic about the work of MADD, something heroic about the transformation of personal tragedy to public

service. MADD is but one of many grassroots movements in which personal experience is nobly turned outward for the benefit of the community at large,” (Mongoven 2009, 4). This “transformation of personal tragedy to public service” is crucial for Mongoven. Groups such as MADD that start from the personal are not only numerous, but effective, politically as well. Members of such groups are driven to exercise the politics inherent to the group, driven out of personal need and experiences. In the context of such passion, it is not hard to understand how MADD grew to “more than 400 chapters...work[ing] within all fifty states,” (Mongoven 2009, 3). And yet, “...the heroism of MADD and groups like it seems invisible in current discussions of civic virtue. Paradoxically, these discussions almost universally lament a perceived loss of civic virtue that is associated with losses of public civility and civic-mindedness,” (Mongoven 2009, 4).

What is going on here? When Mongoven mentions the lamenting of a “perceived loss of civic-mindedness”, the first name that comes to mind is Robert Putnam. Putnam’s bemoaning of the fact that we are increasingly “bowling alone” was meant to highlight, specifically, the disappearance not only of groups that can train us for civic-mindedness, but of civic-mindedness as well (Putnam, 2001). And yet, MADD was not mentioned in his book once. Is MADD not a civically-oriented group? Does their success not complicate Putnam’s jeremiad that social groups are dying out? Putnam is not alone in producing this paradoxical jeremiad (2001). Mongoven highlights Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), Robert Bellah et al. (1996), and Amitai Etzioni (1993) as well. According to Robert Bellah, one of the authors of *Habits of the Heart*,

Madison and the other founders [believed] our form of government was dependent on the existence of virtue among the people...The tension between private interest and public good is never freely resolved in any society. But in a free republic, it is the task of the citizen, whether ruler or ruled, to cultivate civic virtue in order to mitigate the tension and render it manageable...As the twentieth century has progressed, that understanding, so important throughout most of our history, has begun to slip from our grasp. (1996 270)

Together, these authors continue to deplore the loss of civically-virtuous groups and simultaneously fail to mention groups such as MADD. For Mongoven, this curious paradox represents a myth more than anything else (2009, 4). It is a commonly held myth of what she calls the “fall narrative” of civic virtue. We have, according to these authors, fallen away from our previously engaged selves who cultivated the virtue of civic-mindedness and had respect for the health of our republic. The conservativeness of this view is not lost on Mongoven.

Given the nature of our moral and ethical categories, Mongoven argues, this situation, the fall narrative and the concomitant invisibility of civic groups such as MADD, is completely predictable (2009). The focus on “invisibility” and its predictability is not surprising given the context from which Mongoven is writing. Mongoven is writing from within the feminist area of research known as “ethics of care”, a philosophy that was popularized to a large extent by Carol Gilligan (1993). Gilligan, of course, was famous for her work, *In a Different Voice*, where she criticized the moral and ethical categories of psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg for having missed completely the moral trajectory of females who rationalized their way through moral dilemmas “in a different voice” (1993). Mongoven builds on the notion of a “different voice” and speaks, also, of a notion of “different practices”; practices that remain unmasked due to the bias inherent to how we define civic virtue itself (2009). Mongoven writes,

I challenge readers to consider the puzzling disjuncture between the heroism of civic models like MADD and their invisibility in conversations on civic virtue. Healing this disjuncture requires changes in our understanding of civic virtue...My proposal is that civic virtue be redefined by considering ordinary moral heroes in our midst...clearly, [civic virtue] has not fallen off the planet of our political world. If we prevent the fall narrative from obscuring our vision, we discover that exemplary citizens are cultivating civic virtue right under our noses. (2009, 7)

Mongoven goes on to discuss Gilligan directly and the ramifications of her analyses for discussing civic virtue. Mongoven writes,

Gilligan contrasted a moral vocabulary she called “care” to a socially dominant moral vocabulary tagged “justice” and noted a gender pattern in which more women than men described ethical challenges in terms of care. According Gilligan...justice reasoners begin from a stance of moral independence, a stance in which rules protecting liberty seem a natural starting point for ethics...In contrast, care reasoners begin from a stance of moral relationality to others, a stance in which providing active care to others seems a natural starting point for ethics...Some explorers of care...have developed...a challenge to conventional boundaries, which ascribe justice as a regulatory ideal for public life and care for private life...Traditional gender biases have not only labeled caring a “private” activity, but they have contrasted women’s participation in such “private” activity to men’s participation in “public” activity. This bifurcation continues to disconnect the moral lessons of care from conceptions of civic virtue. (2009, 8-9)

Here, then, is the essential argument to Mongoven’s text. There is a bifurcation between justice/civic virtue on one hand, and love on the other. The bifurcation is defined by the familiar feminist focus on the public versus private dichotomy (Pateman 1998). Somewhere along the way, justice/civic virtue came to be defined as public concepts, masculinized concepts, that exist outside of the private home. Inside the private home, on the other hand, was located love, love of family, love of husband, love of children, etc. This was a feminized love, one that was domesticated within the walls of the home and provide what Christopher Lasch (1995) called a haven in a heartless world.

Mongoven deplores this persistent bifurcation. She is unhappy not only that women’s work has traditionally been de-public-ized, but also that the work that they do enact does not count at all towards enhancing civic virtue. This is her purpose for starting with the example of MADD (2009). MADD is a collection of passionate mothers who turned their experiences of personal tragedy into public service. Their service is a part of an ethics of care. Care, this very personal attachment, attentiveness and responsiveness to the needs of those closest to us, has a

clear political use for Mongoven (2009). And yet, society does not seem to see it this way, hence the invisibility of “care” groups such as MADD on registers such as Putnam’s (2001).

Mongoven wants a re-appraisal of care, of the private, of the work that is done by “everyday heroes” who take their personal experiences, be they tragedy or not, and impact the social and public sphere with them (2009). But is Mongoven, not just replicating the same public/private distinction here by praising the care work done by women? On the surface, it may seem as if this is the case, but it is not so. Her focus and appreciation is aimed at an activity that has been socially domesticated in a particular way. It does not mean that men cannot engage in similar works of care or that they are not supposed to. It simply means that “...women are disproportionately engaged in kinds of labor that the fall narrative of civic virtue renders invisible.”(Mongoven 2009, 9) So, Mongoven can only go to where the work is, often done in private and often done by females, but that still does not change the fact that such work offers a conceptual alternative to dominant notions and categories of civic virtue, those masculinized models that privilege abstract reason and justice over emotion and care/love.

What has created and sustained this bifurcated state of affairs? How did we get to where we define justice/civic virtue as a public notion and care as a private notion, all with the attendant beliefs that men and women occupy one or the other? According to Mongoven, there was, historically speaking, a two-pronged attack on the concepts of care and justice, an attack that locked each away in their respective worlds (2009). This two-pronged attack was composed of two different ideologies that, when brought together, forever located care/love as only private affairs and justice/civic virtue as only public affairs. For Mongoven, the two ideologies were: an ideology of gender that Mongoven refers to as “domesticity”, and an ideology of religion that celebrates “...sacrifice for the stranger-neighbor that came to dominate interpretations of agape,

or Christian neighbor love...” (2009, 10) For Mongoven, however, it is not these two ideologies on their own that are problematic, it is how they became intertwined, how together they successfully located love in the home and virtue outside of the home. They had to cooperate, as it was, in order to banish civic virtue and neighbor love from the home, leaving only the feminized concepts of caring and maternal/nurturing love to define the home. She writes,

Two conceptual changes during this period, interweaving with economic changes that progressively moved production outside the home, synergized in ways that ultimately would defeat the coherence of civic virtue. These changes were the simultaneous evolutions of a gendered conception of public and private spheres, and a Christian emphasis on radically disinterested love of the neighbor. (Mongoven 2009, 34)

What is at stake in this situation is nothing less than the *coherence* of civic virtue. Dominated as it is by these two ideologies, it becomes a concept that is unstable within its own defining categories.

The title of one of Christopher Lasch’s books best exemplifies the notion of domesticity that Mongoven and others (Held 1993, 2006; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Slote 2007) are critical of. Lasch wrote a book entitled *Haven in a Heartless World* (1995) which discussed family and home in just the way that Mongoven views as problematic. The idea that the private home had to be contrasted with the harsh, public world in a particular way is foundational to the concept of domesticity that defines gender inequality. According to Mongoven,

While domesticity began to be discernible during the eighteenth century, it solidified in the nineteenth century. Evolving simultaneously with market capitalism, domesticity defined the realms of reproduction and production to be distinct... This novel distinction redefined the family as an emotional rather than an economic unit. Gendering became central to defining and maintaining the distinction. Women were accorded the nurturing work of caring for children and husbands at home. Within the context of developing market capitalism, men were expected to compete in the harsh world of production outside the home and then be humanized by the feminine touch at home. (2009, 34-35)

Along with this,

In eighteenth-century Europe and early nineteenth-century America, a striking rearrangement of gender identities and stereotypes occurred. To men were assigned all the character traits associated with competition: ambition, authority, power, vigor, calculation, instrumentalism, logic, and single-mindedness. To women were assigned all the traits associated with cooperation: gentleness, sensitivity, expressivism, altruism, empathy, personalism and tenderness. (2009, 35)

Entwined with this notion of domesticity was the problematic Christian notion of agapic and disinterested love. Christianity had not always been so dominated by this form of love, according to Mongoven. At one point in its history, Christianity saw it as part of its mission to delineate the “structural connections between different kinds of loves, from passionate personal loves of spouses and parents to the love of the stranger or enemy demanded by Jesus...” (2009, 39) It was only when, “In modern theology of the post-Enlightenment...[that] the challenge of Christian love came to be perceived as its antagonism to ‘natural’ loves: erotic love and friendship,” (2009, 39) Mongoven writes,

The modern interpretation of agape severed biblically linked conceptions of love and justice in paradoxical ways. On the one hand, love came to be viewed as a natural affection that governed home and hearth; justice, as a more strenuous ethical demand for political community. On the other hand, Christian neighbor love (agape) was conceived as the basis for justice to the stranger, while it was deemed *increasingly irrelevant*...to intimate settings where the colloquial word “love” was...employed...*agape and civic virtue came to be understood as completely divorced from ordinary practices of care and nurture among families, friends, or other particular communities.* (2009, 10-11) (emphasis added)

Once Christianity began to see love, specifically the highest form of love which was love of the neighbor, become antagonistic to the other forms of personal and private love, Christian love was on its way to becoming a non-private affair, a non-home-based affair.

Ultimately, her critique of neighbor love is that it is “idolatrous”, calling for a “...disinterested love that is all-encompassing, completely self-sacrificial, and lacking any desire

for reciprocation,” a love that disallows “Special loves...[from being]...’schools’ for broader loves.” (2009, 175) (Mongoven would do well here to read in depth Kierkegaard’s account of Christ’s need for human love, a reciprocation that she is denying here.) (Kierkegaard 1995, 154-157). In this perspective, then, neighbor love exited the home along with civic virtue. This bifurcation Mongoven terms as the difference between “comprehensive approaches” to love and “antagonistic approaches to love” (Mongoven 2009, 40-41). Practices of civic virtue, and justice-based love, then, were now public entities, masculinized, whereas love in the form of care rather than justice was feminized and privatized in the home. The gendering of civic virtue and love were complete. It is in this bifurcated context and mix of love that Mongoven locates Kierkegaard. She writes of his instrumentality in this process thusly,

Increasingly, theologians demanded that, to be like Jesus, Christians were called to radically self-sacrificing, disinterested love...disinterested lovers should be disinterested in the particular qualities of the beloved...and in receiving in any “return” on their love...Kierkegaard most clearly articulated the modern antagonistic conception of Christian neighbor love...No longer was the biblical command “Love your neighbor as yourself” interpreted to presume appropriate self-love as a proper ethical starting point. Increasingly, it was interpreted to presume a great divide between self and neighbor love...In such a framework, love for particular others becomes a problem...(Mongoven 2009, 41)

According to Mongoven, for Kierkegaard, it was not absurd to conceive of commanded neighbor love as

“disinterested”...For Kierkegaard, the classical Christian conception of the challenge of love, the challenge of integrating loves [comprehensive view], must be rejected as a remnant of paganism (Mongoven 2009, 42)

Mongoven continues,

...Kierkegaard’s conception of Christian love was defined over and against the home...instead of home affection balancing market rapaciousness, a view of totally disinterested love was contrasted to home affections...Kierkegaard gave love back its virility at the price of intimacy. (Mongoven 2009, 43)

Mongoven does address Ferreira briefly as one of the interpreters who would like to believe that Kierkegaard's "...polemic against erotic love and friendship was intended to pave the way for a retrieval of those loves in a transformed agapic context rather than a straightforward condemnation of those loves against the standard of agape." (Mongoven 2009, 43; Ferreira 2001) Yet, Mongoven's position is firm, that "...the rhetoric itself redefines the challenge of Christian love: now a challenge of *resistance to certain forms of love rather than an appropriate integration of all kinds of love.*" (Mongoven 2009, 43) (emphasis added) Presumably, she means the following rhetoric of Kierkegaard's:

Go, then, and do this, take away dissimilarity and its similarity so that you can love the neighbor. Take away the distinction of preferential love so that you can love the neighbor. But you are not to cease loving the beloved because of this – far from it. If in order to love the neighbor you would have to begin by giving up loving those for whom you have preference, the word "neighbor" would be the greatest deception ever contrived. Moreover, it would even be a contradiction, since inasmuch as the neighbor is all people surely no one can be excluded – should we now say, least of all the beloved? (Kierkegaard 1995, 61)

Through a similar misunderstanding of Christianity...people thought that it was Christian to...express in a worldly way Christianity's indifference to friendship, to the family relationships...which is indeed false, because Christianity is not indifferent in a worldly way to anything; on the contrary, it is concerned about everything simply and solely in a spiritual way. (Kierkegaard 1995, 144)

...it was thought that Christianity had something against erotic love because it was based upon a drive; it was thought that Christianity, which, as spirit, has posited a cleft between flesh and spirit, hated erotic love as the sensuous. But this was a misunderstanding, an exaggeration of spirituality. (Kierkegaard 1995, 52)

To repeat, Christianity has not changed anything in what people have previously learned about loving the beloveds, the friend, etc., has not added a little or subtracted something, but has changed everything, has changed love as a whole. Only insofar as a change of inwardness in erotic love and friendship results from this fundamental change, only to that extent has it changed these. This it has done by making *all love a matter of conscience*...(Kierkegaard 1995, 147) (emphasis added)

Just as this commandment will teach everyone how to love oneself, so it will also teach erotic love and friendship genuine love: in loving yourself, preserve love for the

neighbor; in erotic love and friendship, preserve love for the neighbor. (Kierkegaard 1995, 61-62)

Ferreira's extensive commentary on most every nuance of *Works of Love* shows there to be a much more complicated and integrated relationship between loves than Mongoven is prepared to give Kierkegaard credit for; the relationship between disinterested love and interested love is more integrative than she believes; but I will let Ferreira's text do the work in that context (2001; Mongoven 2009).

In light of Mongoven's position that the ideology of Christian neighbor love and the ideology of domesticity have both served to sever the relationship between civic virtue and the private realm, we are in need of a transformed or redefined conception of civic virtue. If we do not provide ourselves with this new definition, we will continue to miss all the civic virtue that continues to operate "right beneath our noses" in the lives of "everyday heroes" (2009). In this instance, care becomes central. Mongoven wants to impact the social, the public with the spirit of the private (2009). The direction of influence in her schema moves from the private to the public. The models of care enacted by everyday heroes need to become the models for civic virtue in particular, and democracy in general (2009).

I have shown where I believe that Mongoven has misinterpreted Kierkegaard with regards to the integration of love. In my greater critique though, I am most interested in what I would call Mongoven's second notion of disinterestedness. Mongoven's discussion of "disinterestedness" can be taken two ways, that is, she actually makes two divisions: one is common (though refuted by much of the secondary literature) and the other, problematic.

First, there is the obvious way, which we have discussed, that her discussion can be taken which is that Kierkegaard makes a separation between neighbor love and particular loves such as

family and romantic relationships. Neighbor love must be disinterested in temporal, external characteristics whereas romantic love is founded upon interest in those very external characteristics. Those interests are, after all, how we choose to be with one person over another. I would agree with her to an extent. Kierkegaard does work very hard to distinguish the nature of neighbor love from the nature of eros or friendship (Kierkegaard 1995, 17-43). Those types of love are particular and based on exclusivity, as well as sentimental feelings and bonds, mutuality and reciprocity. In that respect, they are subject to particular kinds of change that neighbor love is not. Neighbor love, in a sense is less constrained. Neighbor love cannot end like a marriage, for there is always another neighbor. It does not get jealous (Kierkegaard 1995, 35-36). For the love goes to everyone equally and expects nothing in return, so it is never disappointed. The neighbor cannot die, for there is always, again, another neighbor. Neighbor love, for Kierkegaard, is fundamentally different because it has been released from the vicissitudes of life that assault other forms of love. Despite the poet's odes to the forever-ness of romantic love, often times, Kierkegaard says, it comes to various kinds of ends (Kierkegaard 1995, 29-31).

This kind of disinterestedness I concede to a degree. Kierkegaard is very disinterested in externals, i.e. temporal characteristics that will cause a person to cease loving the neighbor because they found the neighbor to be, as a result of some temporal external, not worthy of love (Kierkegaard 1995, 162-164). Neighbor love is secured from the very vicissitudes of life that assault other forms of love as long as it can maintain its disinterestedness (Kierkegaard 1995, 39). In disinterest, it goes to everyone, in interest, it only goes to some. When Kierkegaard speaks of dethroning erotic love from its apparent place as the highest love, he has poets in his crosshairs more than anybody else. For the poets were, according to him, praising a form of love that could change or die at any moment (Kierkegaard 1995, 49-52). Yet, even though he makes

the distinction, romantic love is not something that should be abandoned in any sense, nor does it become “irrelevant” as Mongoven suggests (2009; Kierkegaard 1995, 61, 144).

Mongoven, however, becomes problematic when she contrasts neighbor-love and neighbor love’s disinterestedness to care. The central elements of Mongoven’s redefined or transformed civic virtue are care and the everyday heroes who enact it and connect it to forms of public action. She writes that she aims “...to foster renewed appreciation for the practical lessons offered by real civic heroes...[who are]...not merely ghosts from some past golden age. They are among us now in ordinary communal life.” (Mongoven 2009, 271) While we must appreciate the “...real political virtues of ordinary heroes...,” we must also increase our “...ethical scrutiny of politics advocated by appeal to an ‘impartial standpoint’ or to sacrificial ideals, and...question their relationship to civic virtue.” (Mongoven 2009, 271) We must be aware that “...genuinely ‘altruistic’ motivations may be unjust, harming because they ignore unique needs of unique others...” (Mongoven 2009, 271) Her disdain for sacrifice and altruism is clear. Mongoven begins to define her transformed conception of civic virtue thusly,

The starting point for a transformation of civic virtue is a revised conception of impartiality as a moral practice, a practice that politically values caring labor and offers a dialectical view of the relationship between love and justice. That reorientation de-genders civic virtue, resisting conceptions that define political virtue in association with socially constructed views of masculinity and in opposition to socially constructed views of femininity. *It underscores not only that passionate personal commitments can inform conceptions of public justice but also that **how** one fulfills passionate commitments may inform how one fulfills citizenship commitments.* (2009, 272) (emphasis and bolding added)

Mongoven’s transformation “...secularizes civic virtue...” and “...allows for [a] more sophisticated appreciation of constructive ways that religious practice can interrelate with civic virtue.” (2009, 273)

As Mongoven begins to lay out her “transformed conception of civic virtue”, she begins to sound more and more like Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1995, 219-220; 374).

For instance, her vision of impartiality-as-practice, based in virtues such as patience and humility,

...constitutes prudence, or practical reasoning, which sustains a mean between a moral focus on one’s most intimate and one’s broadest associations. It requires certain kinds of patience, humility, and moderation, which...become redefined as both virtues of democratic discourse and virtues that allow for the broadening of ‘discourse’ to include perceptive attention to ways of life, (Mongoven 2009, 275).

Other religious virtues she wishes to see inform her transformed civic virtue is “a view of appropriate human self-love,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 17-18), “ a view of human love as a responsive practice,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 98-99; 187-188), “self love...[less as a] given...[and more an] accomplishment,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 153), and a “friendship for particular others, which includes memory of deceased particular others...[which]...allows the love of even those whose names have been erased by history...to live on in communal memory,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 345-358) (Mongoven 2009, 189-190, 193).

Thus, we have Mongoven’s critique of Kierkegaard and neighbor love. We have it in both her actual critique aimed at neighbor love’s disinterestedness and sacrifice, but we also have it in her positive, constructive appraisals of a transformed civic virtue, for it is there that what she names as “good” is presumed to be antithetical to neighbor love. Let’s start with what Kierkegaard does do. He does reverse Mongoven’s position and has broader loves be a school for special loves, i.e., the concept of the neighbor should permeate all loves. He does praise the disinterestedness of neighbor love as a safeguard to “escaping” the need or duty to love.

He does not, however, do these things at the expense of care, emphasis on the how that care is given, attention to unique needs, passion, patience, humility (Kierkegaard 1995, 315-

330), appropriate self-love (Kierkegaard 1995, 17-43), love of the deceased (Kierkegaard 1995, 345-358), integration (Kierkegaard 1995, 135-154), or reciprocation (Kierkegaard 1995, 154-174). If, on the preceding nine points, Mongoven has misinterpreted Kierkegaard, then Mongoven's picture of him needs to be revised. If he utilizes all of these characteristics of love that Mongoven believes he does not, then this will impact her conception of civic virtue and its need to be separated from anything resembling a Kierkegaardian position. Kierkegaard, as it turns out, is more informative to her project than she has given him credit for.

At this point, I want to give representation to the care, quality of "how", attention to unique needs, passion, patience, and humility that informs Kierkegaard's conception of neighbor love. I can think of no better deliberation to turn to than his deliberation on mercifulness. Specifically, I want to turn to his reading of the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Poor Woman.

In this short deliberation, Kierkegaard gives example to what he repeatedly states over and over again throughout *Works of Love*, that "love is sheer action" (1995). Mongoven wanted a love that was a "responsive practice" attuned to "unique needs". So does Kierkegaard. In fact, for Kierkegaard, any love that is not falls far short of the "ideal" he discusses. First, let's look at how this responsiveness can be radical and meaningful, even if it can do nothing.

Kierkegaard's Conception of Care

Kierkegaard is concerned with the commodification of mercy (Marx 1998, 137-140; Tucker 1978, 319-329). Mercy, as the world understands it, has become another item that is simply bought (Kierkegaard 1995, 318-319). I read mercy, as described by Kierkegaard, as a deep form of care, similar to what Mongoven praises about the everyday heroes entrenched in their special relations. Kierkegaard begins with the story of the poor woman. He writes,

Take the story of about the woman who laid the two pennies in the temple box, but let us make a slight poetic change. For her the two pennies were a huge sum that she had not acquired all at once. She had saved for a long time in order to accumulate them; then she had set them aside, wrapped in a little cloth, in order to bring them when she herself went up to the temple. But a swindler had detected that she possessed this money, had tricked her out of it and put instead an identical cloth in which there was nothing – but the widow did not know this. So she went up to the temple, placed, as she thought, the two pennies, that is, nothing, into the temple box – would not Christ still have said what he said of her, that “she gave more than all of the rich people gave?” (Kierkegaard 1995, 317-318)

From Kierkegaard’s retelling of the parable above, he begins to speak of the economic nature of mercy. He writes,

But a mercifulness without money, what can it accomplish? Well, finally the worldly-minded brazenness of generosity and beneficence goes so far that it even laughs in scorn at a mercifulness that owns nothing! This is already unjust and revolting enough, the mercilessness of this earthly existence, that when a poor person gives her last penny and the rich one comes along and gives hundreds of dollars, that then all look at the hundreds of dollars, that is, then the rich one with his gifts completely overshadows the poor one’s – mercifulness. But what madness, if what Christ says is still true, that the poor person gave **the most**; what madness that the one who gives less...overshadows the one who gives more, indeed, even overshadows the one who gives the most! But of course the world does not say this; it says that the rich man gave the most, and why does the world say that? Because the world understands only about money – and Christ only about mercifulness. (Kierkegaard 1995, 317-318)

For Kierkegaard, the how of mercy is the most important element, echoing what Mongoven stressed above. Kierkegaard continues,

Mercifulness has nothing to give. It follows of itself that if the merciful person has something to give he gives it more than willingly. But it is not on this that we focus attention, but on this, that one can be merciful without having the least to give. This is of great importance, since *being able* to be merciful certainly is a far greater perfection than to have money and then *to be able* to give. (Kierkegaard 1995, 317)

What can we gather from this? First, mercifulness is a state of being, a commitment, a practice, and a responsiveness that pays no attention to the constraints of life. If one has nothing whatsoever to give, they are still not denied the ability to be merciful, to care. Care here is completely operative and mired in the experience of life, whatever that experience may be.

What is Kierkegaard describing here but care, quality of how, attention to unique needs, passion, and humility? These are all the qualities that Mongoven desired in her transformed civic virtue (2009). The poor woman was able to be all of these, which is what Kierkegaard is praising here, without having anything to give. The comportment of mercifulness, the quality of how something is given overrides the fact that something was given or how much.

This describes a personal comportment, yes, but does it not need to be interpersonal to meet the needs of Mongoven's requirements? Should it not be a care that exists within relationships? Yes, to meet Mongoven's requirements, it does. For Mongoven, though, pointing to an example of Christian neighbor love as relationships is inappropriate as it is too dispassionate, disinterested, and lacking in care and responsiveness to serve as an example. Though she does not say it directly, I think we can infer, based on the relationships that I have been drawing between Kierkegaard and Mongoven, that neighbor love, because of its socially-constructed and discursive distance from care is unmerciful. Zygmunt Bauman approaches this view when he refers to love and agape as something that "smothers its object" and is "one of the most insidious shapes of domination, as it blackmails its objects into obedience," (Bauman, 1992, 103)

Let's look at the most famous example of agape, the story of the Good Samaritan.

Kierkegaard has an interesting reading of it. He writes,

If that man well known for eighteen hundred years, the merciful Samaritan, had come not riding but walking along the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, where he saw the unfortunate man lying, if he had been carrying with him nothing with which he could bind up his wounds, if he had then lifted up the unfortunate man, laid him on his shoulders, and carried him to the nearest inn, where the innkeeper refused to receive either him or the unfortunate one because the Samaritan did not have a penny, could only beg and beseech this hard-hearted man to be merciful since a man's life was involved – would he not therefore...but, no, the story is not yet finished – if now the Samaritan, far from losing *patience* over this, had gone away carrying the unfortunate man, had sought a softer resting place for the wounded one, had sat by his side, had done everything to

stanch the flow of blood – but the unfortunate one died in his hands – would he not have equally as merciful, just as merciful as that merciful Samaritan, or is there some objection to calling this the story about the merciful Samaritan? (Kierkegaard 1995, 317) (emphasis added)

Kierkegaard goes on to re-describe the story again. He writes,

Suppose that it was not one man who traveled from Jericho to Jerusalem, but there were two, and both of them were assaulted by robbers and maimed, and no traveler passed by. Suppose, then, that one of them did nothing but moan, while the other forgot and surmounted his own suffering in order to speak comforting, friendly words or, what involved great pain, dragged himself to some water in order to fetch the other a refreshing drink. Or suppose that they were both bereft of speech, but one of them in his silent prayer sighed to God also for the other – was he then not merciful? – If someone has cut off my hands, then I cannot play the zither, and if someone has cut off my feet, then I cannot dance, and if I lie crippled on the shore, then I cannot throw myself into the sea in order to rescue another person’s life, and I myself am lying with a broken arm or leg, then I cannot plunge into the flames to save another’s life – but I can still be merciful...Mercifulness is *how*...everything and nothing are done. (Kierkegaard 1995, 324, 327-328)

What lack of care! Of patience! Of attention to *how* care/mercifulness is practiced! Of responsiveness! Of attention to unique needs! Of passion! Of humility! Notice, though, that these do not comprise an account of great faith, of religion, of any particular Truth, even of God. The only time God is mentioned is when a friend sighs a prayer for the other. This is in line with Strawser’s view of a “teleological suspension of the theological”, (Strawser 2007, 44). There, in his comparison of Kierkegaard and Spinoza, he writes, and I agree with him,

When one considers how difficult the ethics of love is to practice, how demanding it is of all one’s energy and focus, then ruminations on the nature of God seem misplaced at best. We are thus well advised to suspend the theological question for the higher purpose of the loving the other. (Strawser 2007, 44).

The passages Kierkegaard presents depict “love as sheer action” in Kierkegaard’s words, responsiveness to unique needs from within the ethics of care, to use Mongoven’s conception. I let Kierkegaard’s passages speak at length for themselves because I think they alone

problematize Mongoven's account of his supposed approach to a disinterested love that has been divorced from care, responsiveness and even special relations. In the second retelling of the Samaritan story, it is two, presumably acquaintances or friends who are assaulted together. This gives Kierkegaard the occasion to describe the intense, albeit, impotent care/mercifulness that was practiced between them.

Is this not what Mongoven is talking about? The ethics of care evidenced by everyday heroes? My argument here is twofold. First, Mongoven's appropriation of Kierkegaard and neighbor love is incomplete and mistaken. She makes too strict a division of Kierkegaard's description of neighbor love or agape and, not only special relations, but most problematically, care itself. This dramatically undercuts her reading of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* (1995). It shows that she has not understood it as a complete work, but rather, like so many other Kierkegaard commentators, cherry-picked passages out of context and used them as representative of the whole. Second, I think the re-description of Kierkegaard here offers us interesting political possibilities.

What are the politics of mercifulness that Kierkegaard offers here? First, there is the political critique that is offered. Mercifulness, in this deliberation is set against, largely, an economic culture and mindset. Kierkegaard operationalizes a critique of capitalism and its particular forms of earnestness and, also, what could be termed, an alternative politics of mercifulness/earnestness. In effect, by making mercifulness "impotent", as Adorno was fond of calling it, Kierkegaard has actually unpacked the reified concept of mercifulness (Adorno 1939, 414-429). According to Kierkegaard's critique of society, mercifulness has become a commodity that is bought just like anything else (Marx 1988, 137-140; Tucker 1978, 319-329). Not only this, but it is external to a person, external to their constitution as an individual, and

something that one escapes having to actually do, or practice, or live, and instead simply buy, provided they have the money to do so. Society will applaud them the whole way as well, amazed at the amounts of money they are able to garner. We witness this when the media covers a donation by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, or when someone such as Ted Turner donates large sums of money to a cause. What goes unnoticed, however, are the same, everyday heroes and their acts of mercifulness that Mongoven is trying to rescue and bring back into view. Mercifulness exists and moves within a particular economic context, within a particular economic earnestness. This particular economic earnestness, as Kierkegaard calls it, views earnestness as something wholly different than that which comprises neighbor love. The context is described by Kierkegaard when he writes,

To make money is earnestness; to make much money; even if it were by selling human beings, this is earnestness. To make a lot of money by contemptible slander – this is earnestness. To proclaim some truth – provided one also makes much money (it does not depend on its being true but on one's making money) – this is earnestness. Money, Money – this is earnestness. This is how we are brought up; from earliest childhood we are disciplined in the ungodly worship of money. (Kierkegaard 1995, 320)

The effect of this particular context of economic earnestness, as Kierkegaard described, is that we are unable to make sense of the poor woman's mercifulness. In the same way that MADD was seen to be invisible by Mongoven, Kierkegaard sees the poor woman's actions as being invisible in a world that seeks to buy its mercy. This economic context says, the more you give, the more merciful you are. Kierkegaard's alternative and paradoxical politics of critique and de-reification say the exact opposite, if you give out of nothing with true mercifulness, you give more.

We have a political critique offered, and unsurprisingly it is the same as Mongoven's. It struggles against the socially-constructed invisibility of everyday heroes acting out their passionate politics of care both personally and socially. What actual praxis, beyond critique, is

offered here? I think this is where Kierkegaard can be wed so nicely to Mongoven's work. For Mongoven, care is a practice, first and foremost. It is an action that is done out of passion. When she describes organizations such as MADD, it is the passion of turning personal tragedy into public service, of impacting the social from the private. Care, in Mongoven's work, following the title of her book, is just love. It is love that is wedded to justice, to being responsive to unique needs, to being patient, and to being non-sectarian enough that it can go to everyone adequately. I think Kierkegaard describes the same thing. The primary difference is that Kierkegaard's schema moves in the other direction. Instead of the private determining the public, he has the public determining the private. That language, however, can obfuscate the meaning as it can appear hypermasculinized. The public, for Kierkegaard, i.e., neighbor love, is not defined by "ambition, authority, power, vigor, calculation, instrumentalism, logic, and single-mindedness," (Mongoven 2009, 35). Instead, it is defined, as we have seen, by all the characteristics that Mongoven praises in a transformed civic virtue, characteristics that have traditionally been seen as feminine. If Kierkegaard's public is defined by the more feminine characteristics, and he sees that there should be a full integration of all loves under the banner of these characteristics, i.e., erotic love and friendship should remain just as passionate and private as they have always been, yet be informed and safeguarded by neighbor love, then Kierkegaard is actually more radical in his political approach than Mongoven. Where she sees the utility in a strict separation between agape and private love, Kierkegaard sees a utility in their complete integration, with all loves being informed and safeguarded by the very characteristics that Mongoven holds to be the only political alternatives. Mongoven seeks to undermine, what she calls, the hypermasculinized public spaces of civic virtue by redefining it along alternative logics. Kierkegaard is starting from a point in which he has already redefined the public space. For

Mongoven, the public space is dictated, problematically, by justice while the private is dominated by love. Kierkegaard obliterates this distinction. For Kierkegaard, justice is too often calculating and rational. I quote Kierkegaard at length here,

Justice is identified by its giving each his own, just as it also in turn claims its own. This means that justice pleads the cause of its own, divides and assigns, determines what each can lawfully call his own, judges and punishes if anyone refuses to make any distinction between *mine* and *yours*. The individual has the right to do as he pleases with this contentious and yet legally entitled *mine*; and if he seeks his own in no other way than that which justice allow, justice has nothing with which to reproach him and has no right to upbraid him for anything. Thus each one keeps his own. As soon as someone is defrauded of his own, or as soon as someone defrauds another of his own, justice intervenes, because it safeguards the common security in which everyone has his own, what he rightfully has. – But sometimes a change intrudes, a revolution, a war, an earthquake, or some such terrible misfortune, and everything is confused. Justice tries in vain to secure for each person his own; it cannot maintain the distinction between *mine* and *yours*; in the confusion, it cannot keep the balance and therefore throws away the scales – it despairs!

Terrible spectacle! Yet does not love in a certain sense, even if in the most blissful way, produce the same confusion? But love, it too is an event, the greatest of all, yet also the happiest. Love is a change, the most remarkable of all, but the most desirable – in fact we say in a very good sense that someone who is gripped by love is changed or becomes changed. Love is a revolution, the most profound revolution of all, but the most blessed! So, then, with love, there is no confusion; in this blissful confusion there is for lovers no distinction between *mine* and *yours*. Wonderful! There are a *you* and an *I*, and there is no *mine* and *yours*! For without a *you* and an *I*, there is no love, and with *mine* and *yours*, there is no love. (Kierkegaard 1995, 265-266)

Kierkegaard, then, in this critique of liberalism, has critiqued the ability of the concept of *justice*, as a public concept, to maintain what it desires. I understand Kierkegaard to be saying something very similar to Mongoven here. Here, the direction moves from the private to the public. Justice in public must be defined by love, rather than contract, if it is to last. In this, though, we only more evidence of Kierkegaard's full integration of loves along the example of neighbor love. Public love and private love, distinct as they are, are still founded on neighbor love. Jegstrup provides a nice reading of this as well (Jegstrup, 1995).

There is much going on in *Works of Love* that Mongoven clearly fails to take notice of. Kierkegaard not only draws a similar distinction between love and justice, locating them both in the same domains that Mongoven (2009) does and critiques that of mere justice or justice-as-contract, but he also integrates all loves, dramatizes the need for reciprocation, and has his public love, i.e., neighbor love, defined by care, responsiveness, patience, and attention to unique needs. It is not disinterested to such a degree that it is divorced from care. To say that is to misunderstand how the idea of disinterest is defined in *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1995).

The contexts of this chapter, though, do raise some tensions that must be addressed, e.g., the criticism of otherworldliness, God as the middle term, the historical context in which Kierkegaard wrote *Works of Love*, and Kierkegaard's own relation to romantic love and women. We have a confluence of these elements in this chapter unlike the other chapters of the dissertation due to its discussion of romantic love, feminism, and economic justice. In Kierkegaard's discussion of mercifulness and economic earnestness, there are some difficult passages that seem to express an otherworldliness and indifference to temporal concerns. For example, Kierkegaard writes,

Is it mercifulness to give a hundred thousand to the poor? No. Is it mercifulness to give two pennies to the poor? No. Mercifulness is *how* it is given. But in that case the hundred thousand and the two pennies are unimportant – that is, I can perceive mercifulness just as well in one as in the other – that is, mercifulness can be and can be fully as apparent in the two pennies as in the hundred thousand that are given. But if I can perceive mercifulness in the two pennies just as well as in the hundred thousand, then I can actually see it best in the two pennies, because the hundred thousand have an accidental significance that easily draws senate attention to itself and thereby disturbs me in seeing the mercifulness (Kierkegaard 1995, 327).

This could easily be taken to be an indifference to actual change in the world and too-great-an-emphasis on the how the actions are done. That is, Kierkegaard's anti-consequentialism has

been interpreted as running the risk of being abstract and not worldly enough (Adorno [1933] 1989). I, however, agree with Ferreira's (2001) reading of this particular area of *Works of Love*.

According to Ferreira,

To put the efforts of the poor into perspective, he reminds them that the "well-intentioned" call to remedy temporal need "has a sensate conception of the size of the gift and of the ability to do something to remedy the need" (WL, p. 326). His provocative claim that "from the point of view of eternity, that someone dies is no misfortune, but that mercifulness is not practices certainly is" must be understood as a response to the cry that "the most important thing is that help be given," where help is understood in terms of the "the size of the gift." Given the particular audience he addresses, such reminders encourage each one to see what he or she can do as significant and thus encourage each to do what he or she can. Nothing in this need serve to excuse those with more from doing more. No one can legitimately draw the conclusion from this discussion that one has not duty to help people with fewer resources, which would be committing the fallacy of assuming that because some people (the poor) are told that they ought to love you (the rich), you are excused from the obligation to love them.

In sum, this deliberation does not mitigate the obligation of those with advantages to be loving, nor does it mitigate their responsibility for alleviating the lot of those less fortunate. Its advice is guided by a determination to be even-handed about the ability to perform works of love; this means that it will not focus on externals. One could, of course, argue that Kierkegaard's practical instruction (e.g., the Samaritan) is better than his theorizing or that his theorizing is dangerous precisely because it is able to be misunderstood. In the end, one could still have doubts about whether Kierkegaard makes the right choices when he decides, as the speaker, "to speak to the poor about practicing mercifulness" rather than "to speak to the rich about practicing generosity" (WL, pp. 321-22). But given that choice of audience, the advice is not inappropriate, nor is it able to provide an excuse for the rich not to practice generosity, (Ferreira, 2001, 193).

Coexistent with such fears of otherworldliness is the notion of God as the middle term between the one who loves and the neighbor. For critics such as Adorno (Adorno [1933] 1989) and Buber (Buber [1947] 1958), the notion of God as the middle term is exactly what leads to religious isolation and abstract love of the neighbor that is, materially, impotent in the world.

Critics such as these can point to passages such as the following where Kierkegaard writes,

Worldly wisdom is of the opinion that love is a relationship between persons; Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between a person – God – a person, that is, that God is middle term. However beautiful a relationship of love has been between two people or among many, however complete all their desire and all their bliss have been for

themselves in mutual sacrifice and devotion, even though everyone has praised this relationship – if God and the relationship with God have been omitted, then this, in the Christian sense, has not been love but a mutually enchanting defraudation of love. *To love God is to love oneself truly; to help another person to love God is to love another person; to be helped by another person to love God is to be loved.* In the divine sense, even the happiest love between two people still has danger that the merely human view of love does not think of, the danger that the earthly love could become too intense, so that the God-relationship is disturbed, the danger that the God-relationship can require even the happiest love as a sacrifice when, humanly speaking, there is nothing but peace and no danger is even in sight. A consequence of the possibility of this danger is that with concern you must always be on watch, even in the happiest love-relationship, although your concern, of course, is not that you might grow weary of your beloved or your beloved of you, but with concern that the two of you might forget God, or the beloved might, or you yourself. (Kierkegaard 1995, 106-107, 129-130) (emphases are Kierkegaard's).

Again, I believe Ferreira (2001) has the correct interpretation of this element of *Works of Love*.

She writes,

There is the “possibility” of a danger, then, but that danger does not by itself require indifference to the other; it is wrong to assume that a “danger” is an inevitability. Remembering God is not necessarily at odds with, or mutually exclusive of, remembering the lover or friend.

We should not end this discussion of the concept of God as the middle term without noting that another way to understand this idea is to see the “middle term” as an intermediary, a means to a goal; in that case we might say that seeing God as the middle term places the neighbor as the direct object of our love, for whom God is a medium. If, however, critics insist on seeing the expression “middle term” as one that marginalizes or diminishes the one who is on the other side of it, we should notice that in at least two instances Kierkegaard refers to the “neighbor” as the “middle term”. In the most striking instance, he uses the phrase “middle term” to refer to both God and neighbor as if interchangeably: “Love is qualified as a matter of conscience only when either God or the neighbor is the middle term, that is not in erotic love and friendship as such” (WL, p. 142). If “either God or the neighbor is the middle term,” love is a matter of conscience; that Kierkegaard could interchange them in this way suggests that we are not meant to read the idea of the middle term as one that prejudicially divides two people, (Ferreira 2001, 75).

This chapter invites discussion on two other points, the historical context in which Kierkegaard was writing and his view of women. The easiest criticism to level at *Works of Love* is the historical view of women that Kierkegaard employed. Like Nietzsche and so many others

of the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard was locked in an, ultimately, indefensible language of domesticity. This is clear when he writes, “Woman’s modesty is about earthly things; and in this modesty she feels superior...” (Kierkegaard 1995, 341). Feminist critics such as Leon (1997) and Agacinski (1997) have seized upon such discussions of women’s nature in Kierkegaard’s writings. Feminist supporters such as Walsh (1997) have spoken instead of Kierkegaard’s apparent “androgyny” when speaking of human relationships to God, or an “androgynist ideal of selfhood,” (Walsh 1997, 243). My own view is that, yes, *Works of Love* is plagued by a language of domesticity despite Kierkegaard’s repeated statements that women’s identity must be preserved and that they must interact with men as neighbors (Kierkegaard 1995, 141). Many interpreters might see this as concomitant with Kierkegaard’s broken engagement with Regine Olsen. They might see this event in his life as definitive of his view of women, and the presentation of romantic relationships as a stumbling block to truly loving God. I do not believe this is the case. If anything, it is in the very first page of the first chapter, “Love’s Hidden Life and Its Recognizability by Its Fruits”, that I read Kierkegaard as despairing of his loss of Regine and how it has impaired his ability to know love, rather than that loss being constitutive of the correct form of love. Kierkegaard writes,

To defraud oneself of love is the most terrible, is an eternal loss, for which there is no compensation either in time or in eternity. Ordinarily, when it is a matter of being deceived in love, however different the case may be, the one deceived is still related to love, and the deception is only that the love was not where it was thought to be, but the self-deceived person has locked and is locking himself out of love. There is also talk about being deceived by life or in life, but the one who in his self-deception deceived himself out of living – his loss is irreparable. Even for someone who all his life has been deceived by life, eternity can have rich compensation in store, but the self-deceived person has prevented himself from winning the eternal (Kierkegaard 1995, 6).

When we read this passage, in light of all the passages quoted earlier in this chapter pertaining to the need for integrating loves, it seems as if Kierkegaard is referencing his own loss and despair

here and what must be avoided rather than what must be emulated. Kierkegaard, for all of his preservation of female identity, both temporally and eternally, remains locked, like so many of his contemporaries, into a language domesticity. Yet, this does not negate his praising of temporal love nor its integration with eternal love.

CHAPTER 5: CORNEL WEST'S "OTHER" KIERKEGAARDIAN INFLUENCES: FROM RADICAL HISTORICISM TO THE "RADICALNESS" OF CHRISTIAN HISTORICISM

When I talk about love, I'm talking about the most difficult, the most dangerous, the most subversive force in the world. Because when you're talking about love it means you have a steadfast commitment to the well-being of others and you're willing to do what it takes to ensure that their humanity is always affirmed. – Cornel West, speaking at Occupy Seattle, November 16, 2011.

Justice is what love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what love looks like in private. – Cornel West, sermon given at Howard University, April 23, 2006.

Cornel West is one of the most provocative political theorists of love today. When we approach Cornel West's work, love-as-a-political-concept is accented differently at various moments. At times, it seems ostensibly absent in written works such as *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982), a work in which West outlines a revolutionary and historicist (Marx 1988; Tucker 1978; Jameson 1979; Green and Troup 1999; West 1991) Christianity, more pronounced in popular works such as *Race Matters* (2001), and explicitly foundational to his spoken work of public lectures, interviews and sermons. Yet, the relationship between West's writing and speaking is an intimate one, with neither being more definitive of him than the other, and, thus, love-as-a-political-concept being no more present in one over the other. We see this when West writes,

...my writing and teaching have been markedly anti-academic not out of explicit opposition to academic professionalism but from my allegiance to humanist intellectual work I ironically nurtured in the academy...I give much weight to teaching in the academy and in the larger society. In fact, the priority I give to reading and speaking is closely related to the centrality of teaching in my intellectual vocation. In this sense, I am more a public teacher than public intellectual (a phrase I have never used to describe myself, though I have also never rejected it!), more interested in Socratic probing of the public than pronouncing blueprints for the public (West 2001, 361)

Thus, West's teaching informs his writing and vice versa. They coexist and nurture each other in their common "anti-academic" nature, a nature that is at heart, Socratic and Gramscian-organic (Gramsci 1971), and is used in order to "probe the public". So, when West states repeatedly and passionately in the form of improvisational speaking he is so well-known for, quotes such as the two that begin this chapter, these sentiments inform and are present in his writing as well.

West's invocation of love has been both celebrated and critiqued. Rosemary Cowan, who has written brilliantly on and quite sympathetically towards West's love ethic, still states critically that West operates with "...broad and vague theoretical notions of love and justice". (Cowan 2003, 169) Her argument is understandable given her own approach to the subject. In her two chapters, "The Politics of 'Conversion': West's 'Love Ethic'" and "Achieving Democracy: Applying the Love Ethic", of her book, *Cornel West: The Politics of Conversion*, Cowan writes extensively on the "sources and precedents" of West's love ethic (Cowan 2003, 127-169). Adeptly connecting the ethic to notions of community, civil religion, and democracy and providing deep, critical analyses of his works, *Jews and Blacks* (Lerner and West 1996), *The War Against Parents* (Hewlett and West 1999), and *The Future of American Progressivism* (West and Mangabeira 1999), Cowan ultimately remains puzzled concerning West's "...failure to explicitly acknowledge the influence of Rauschenbusch..." despite the fact that he appears to "...stand as an explicit precursor to West's love ethic in his assertion of the moral values of Christianity in the public sphere.." (Cowan, 2003, 72, 74) Her bewilderment at this omission could have been abated had she given more weight to West's critique of the Social Gospel in *Prophesy Deliverance!* in which he wrote, "Bernsteinianism is to Marxism what the social gospel is to Christianity: powerful critiques tied to abortive praxis." (West 1982, 137)

If we are too look for the sources and precedents of West's love ethic without bewilderment, we should look to Kierkegaard's most political text, *Works of Love* (1995), where powerful critiques are indeed wedded to a non-abortive praxis. This will allow us, not only, to flesh out theoretically West's own love ethic, but also to read the Kierkegaard-Cornel West relationship along alternative lines and categories.

The ways in which both love and Kierkegaard have been approached in Cornel West's work by Westian scholars opens up a dramatic space that necessitates a political reading of *Works of Love* (1995). Love, for West, is an eminently political concept, and it is one that has been heavily critiqued (In addition to the critiques of Williams (1993), Hayes (2001), Mills (2001) and Cowan (2003) discussed here, see also Goldberg (1997), Giroux (1996), Dyson (1989), Steinberg (1995), Asante (1998), and Hadjor (1995), for similar critiques of the love ethic.)

Delores Williams, in her *Theology Today* review of *Race Matters* in 1994, critiques the love ethic employed by West in his chapter "Nihilism in Black America". In that chapter, West writes,

What is to be done about this nihilistic threat? Is there really any hope, given our shattered civil society, market-driven corporate enterprises, and white supremacy? If one begins with the threat of concrete nihilism, then one must talk about some kind of *politics of conversion*. New models of collective black leadership must promote a version of this politics. Like alcoholism and drug addiction, nihilism is a disease of the soul. It can never be completely cured, and there is always the possibility of relapse. But there is always a chance for conversion—a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle. This chance rests neither on an agreement about what justice consists of nor on an analysis of how racism, sexism, or class...subordination operate. Such arguments and analyses are indispensable. But a politics of conversion requires more. Nihilism is not overcome by arguments or analyses; it is tamed by love and care. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done through one's own affirmation of one's worth—an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. A love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion. A love ethic has nothing to do with sentimental feelings or tribal connections. Rather it is a last attempt at generating a sense of agency among a downtrodden people...Self-love and

love of others are both modes toward increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one's community. These modes of valuation and resistance are rooted in a subversive memory—the best of one's past without romantic nostalgia—and guided by a universal love ethic. (2001, 18-19)

This represents one of the most critiqued and controversial passages that West has written, for it seems to lie dangerously close to a conservative blaming-of-the-victim approach which takes no notice of structural causes of nihilism and despair. Williams critiques this love ethic from two vantage points, an inquiry into who the intended audience is and the efficacy of a love ethic for black women. According to Williams,

West claims his basic aim in life is “. . . to speak the truth to power with love so that the quality of everyday life for ordinary people is enhanced and white supremacy is stripped of its authority and legitimacy.” One wonders: Who is the power to whom West will speak the truth with love? Does he think that his speech and love, by themselves, are efficacious enough to improve the quality of life of ordinary people and inspire power to give up power? Though West's expressed aim is reminiscent of Martin Luther King's words, life, and work, West, unlike King, does not have the masses of live bodies supporting his words and pressuring power to make concessions that challenge the authority of white supremacy. Given his aim, who is the audience targeted by West's book? Is it also non-elite, non-college trained ordinary people? Or is the intended audience an educated, elite-and perhaps more white than of color-group who would be thoroughly familiar with the Latin words and phrases contained in West's text? (Williams 162, 1993)

This is an important critique, not only of West's love ethic and politics of conversion, but any politics of love. Williams, here, is calling into question the very utility of a political language oriented towards love. A language of love that was so important to Martin Luther King, was buttressed and animated by actual masses of economically and politically-protesting “live bodies”. In the absence of this mass of people, West's language of love begins to seem abstract, philosophical, and empty. Without the force of “live bodies” to meet the forces of racism, exclusion, and violence, what is the language of love and who is it meant for? The oppressors? How?

If West's language of love *is* intended for the masses, how is this any better? All this situation would likely breed is suspicion according to Williams. Building on elements of the previous critique, Williams writes,

Though West wisely chose Toni Morrison's words from *Beloved* to exemplify the self-love constitutive of his love ethic, his understanding of love of others (also constitutive of his love ethic) would have been more appealing had he been informed by another piece of literature from black women's literary history. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston warns black women against this unqualified love of others. One of her characters, Nannie, claims that love of others has black women working from "can't see in the morning 'till can't see at night." "Ain't nothing wrong with love," she says, "it just makes you sweat." The social history of black women is full of the negative consequences black women have realized in their unqualified and unrestrained love of others (especially in their love of some black men).

Many of us who came of age in the segregated, lynching South are very cautious about using "love language" in relation to the people who have power to oppress and gain privilege on the basis of race, class station, or gender affiliation. Thus, West may want to re-think his solutions that support the primacy of a love ethic. He might want to ask whether this love emphasis makes his solutions to the problems "weak-kneed" and abstract, especially since the years beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.'s voice and movement have shown black Americans that power is impervious to love as an incentive for eradicating its own oppressive force. We've learned that force is moved by force. So, vital parts of West's love ethic may have very little meaning for the masses of black women who are everyday battered, brutalized, beguiled, and betrayed in the name of love. (Williams 1993, 164)

Williams' critiques of love-as-a-political-concept are not only difficult, they are crucial. They are the perennial critiques of love from a political standpoint, representing the idea that, politically, force can only be met with force and that anything less is simply abstract, naïve and "weak-kneed". I will show, however, that West and Kierkegaard, like King who called love "the greatest force in all the world," (Carson 1992), directly oppose love to hate as a force. Such sentiments are supported by bell hooks as well when she writes,

In the segregated South those black and white folks who struggled together for racial justice (many of whom grounded their actions not in radical politics but in religious conviction) were bound by a shared belief in the transformative power of love. Understanding that love was the antithesis of the will to dominate and subjugate, we allowed that longing to know love, to love one another, to radicalize us politically. That

love was not sentimental. It did not blind us to the reality that racism was deeply systemic and that only by realizing love in concrete political actions that might involve sacrifice, even the surrender of one's life, would white supremacy be fundamentally challenged. We knew the sweetness of *beloved community*. (hooks 1995, 265)

Floyd W. Hayes III, in his interrogation of West's appropriation of the concept of nihilism itself, asks questions similar to Williams'. Hayes writes,

What is troubling about West's essay [Nihilism in Black America] is that he completely lets the dominant culture off the hook. Much like the Black neoconservatives, who try to deny the central importance of white supremacy and capitalist exploitation, West requires nothing from the ruling-class whites. Is the *politics of conversion* supposed to change their vicious and brutish hearts, minds, and conduct? Will the *politics of conversion* terminate or promote the terminations of white supremacy and overthrow capitalism? Will it liberate Black Americans? Will it endow them with the power to struggle against the evils of white supremacy, economic exploitation, and cultural domination? Why does West assert the love ethic when, indeed, the dominant culture has devalued this and other higher values? (2001, 248)

Hayes position here is reminiscent of Machiavelli's invocation of "paper kingdoms", "men who make professions of good in all instances", and the proper, princely politics in a culture that only values force (Machiavelli 1998). This is not to say that Hayes and others like him are "Machiavellian", in any of the number of ways that concept has been interpreted, but it does suggest that Hayes subscribes to a particular form of realist politics that usually eschews the utility of love. Although, I do think West would say that the last sentence in Hayes critique is the most important and explanatory. It is *because* the dominant society has given up on the love ethic that speaking its truth to power is so timely and needed. It is in this context that talking about love becomes one of the most dangerous, subversive and radical things that one can do. The sentiment expressed here is similar to West's thoughts on the timeliness and need for Marxist thought when he wrote,

One of the major ironies of our time is that Marxist thought becomes even more relevant after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe than it was before. The explosion of capitalist market forces on a global scale – concomitant with open class conflict, aggressive consumerism, rapacious individualism, xenophobic

tribalism, and chauvinistic nationalism – makes Marxist thought an inescapable part of the intellectual weaponry for present-day freedom fighters. (1991, xiv)

Charles W. Mills is of the same mind here when he writes,

For King...it [the love ethic] was part of a program of nonviolent protest. In West's appropriation...the political program seems to have vanished and it is just a matter of individualized redemption. Thus the effect – in a popular book that has sold 400,000 copies – is to cede theoretical ground to the right, (Mills 2001, 208).

In other words, despite West's espoused leftist politics, his focus on individual redemption and conversion does nothing but help the other side.

Rosemary Cowan, as mentioned earlier, is ambiguous in her acceptance of West's love ethic. At times, she seems very interested in rescuing it as a source of Christian social thought that informs productive ideas of civil religion, democracy, and community. She also, here, is implicitly working against those critics of West's notion of a love ethic as an antidote to nihilism. Via what she sees as the stages of development or implementation of the love ethic, Cowan attempts to wed personal conversion to structural critique. This is seen most clearly when she writes,

The love ethic is an outworking of West's liberatory vision, and so he links the idea of conversion with an articulation of leftist politics and with spiritual wrestling against the "darkness". There are three facets to his notion of social liberation. First, people must individually reform their attitudes. They must question their personal addiction to market values of stimulation and titillation and the way in which this addiction has displaced human interaction with others. From that premise people can advance to the second stage, where non-market values of equality and community can be articulated through interpersonal toleration and the creation of bonds of trust that will enable one to treat others with respect despite the presence of strong ideological differences. Third, West discerns a need for something more than respect: an attempt to understand the arguments of others. This requires a reconstitution of the public sphere... (Cowan 2003, 140)

In this analysis, Cowan situates West amongst those such as Connolly (2000), Habermas (1985) or Mouffe (2005), as if his working from a politics of conversion aimed solely at resulting in something reminiscent of a dialogical, agonistic, deliberative democracy. It is this, as well as her

attempt to associate West so strongly with “civil religion”, that seems too narrow an interpretation of West’s political ambition. Proceeding from the first quote that began this chapter, one would have to ask themselves if, when West says love is the most powerful and subversive force available, he really only sees it as a way towards a reconstituted public sphere, or, does he intend something more radical? If so, what would that be? It is not clear that West intends a civil religion revival or solely a more open dialogical space. He clearly desires stronger bonds and dialogue across groups, but I think the love he makes foundational can be seen as less procedural and more substantive and existential. This is seen when West states,

Love helps break down barriers, so even when black rage and righteous indignation have to look white supremacy in the face – in all of its dimensions that still persist – the language of love still allows black brother and sisters to recognize that it’s not all white people and it’s not genetic... White brothers and sisters can make choices. John Brown was part of the movement. Tom Hayden is part of the movement because it’s all about choices, decisions, and commitments. No one is pushed into a pigeonhole or locked into a convenient category. That is why the ability to love and be loved in the highest sense is so crucial, (West 2008, 161).

Having now looked at how scholars have discussed love in West’s work, how do they approach Kierkegaard? It is rare to pick up any Cornel West book, whether it is written by him or by someone closely associated with his work, that has an introduction in which you will not find a very familiar refrain repeated. Anytime West begins to speak about his influences, Kierkegaard is one of the first names that is mentioned. Paradigmatic of this influence discussion is the interview with George Yancy that is contained in the book, *The Cornel West Reader* (2001). Yancy asks West what drew him to Kierkegaard and notions of the absurd when he was a teenager. West answered by saying,

I think early on I was just in some sense seized by a certain kind of terror that struck me as being at the heart of things human and a profound sadness and sorrow that struck me as being at the core of the human condition. And so in reading Kierkegaard from the Bookmobile, and here was someone who was seriously and substantively wrestling with a certain level of melancholia, I was struck by his very honest and candid – I want to

stress honest and candid – encounter with what he understood to be this terror, this suffering and this sadness and sorrow. It resonated deeply with me. (2001, 20)

When then asked what influence this encounter with Kierkegaard had on his later philosophical development, West answered, “I think that it was decisive. It gave me a profoundly Kierkegaardian sensibility that required then that philosophizing be linked to existentially concrete situations, wrestling with decision, commitment, actualized possibility and realized potential,” (2001, 20). West, thus, has dictated most subsequent interpretations of his work, specifically the role of Kierkegaard, by speaking so often about Kierkegaard and the absurd. Subsequent commentators seem unable to get beyond, not only West’s brief, direct statements about Kierkegaard, but they seem unable to get beyond the typical reading of Kierkegaard as well.

Perhaps no one has looked at the relationship between Cornel West and Kierkegaard more than Marcia Robinson. In a recent compilation of work, edited by the eminent Kierkegaard scholar Jon Stewart, entitled *Kierkegaard’s Influence on Social-Political Thought* (2011), Robinson contributed a chapter entitled, “Kierkegaard and the Construction of a “Blues Philosophy”. In this chapter, Robinson looks extensively at the role of Kierkegaard’s philosophy in West’s philosophy.

Robinson proceeds from typical Kierkegaardian themes. She writes, “This essay examines...[the]...rich, complicated, and heretofore unexplored topic by focusing on several fundamental features of Kierkegaard’s influence on West: his views on the absurd, anxiety, despair, and faith—the launching point for any understanding of the role of the Dane in West’s thought and activism,” (2011, 234). Such fundamental features of Kierkegaard are conveyed in the following passages. With regard to the absurd, Johannes Climacus writes in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*,

My intention is to make it difficult to become a Christian, yet not more difficult than it is, and not difficult for the obtuse and easy for the brainy, but qualitatively and essentially difficult for every human being, because, viewed essentially, it is equally difficult for every human being to relinquish his understanding and his thinking and to concentrate his soul on the absurd; and it is comparatively most difficult for the person who has much understanding, if one recalls that not everyone who has not lost his understanding over Christianity thereby demonstrates that he has it. (Kierkegaard 1992, 557)

Climacus also states,

What, then, is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, etc., has come into existence exactly as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being... In relation to the absurd, the objective approximation resembles the comedy... which ordinarily is played by assistant professors and speculative thinkers... It is by way of the objective repulsion that the absurd is the dynamometer of faith in inwardness. So, then, there is a man who wants to have faith; well, let the comedy begin. He wants to have faith, but he wants to assure himself with the aid of objective deliberation and approximation. What happens? With the aid of approximation, the absurd becomes something else; it becomes probably, it becomes more probable, it may become to a high degree and exceedingly probable. Now he is all set to believe it, and he dares to say of himself that does not believe as shoemakers and tailors and simple do, but only after long deliberation. Now he is all set to believe it, but, lo and behold, now it has indeed become impossible to believe it. The almost probable, the probable, the to-a-high-degree and exceedingly probable – that he can almost *know* – but *believe* it, that cannot be done, for the absurd is precisely the object of faith and only that can be believed. (Kierkegaard 1992, 210-211).

These notions of the absurd, its representation of Jesus' actual existence, as well our own difficult appropriation of the fact, are conveyed when West states,

Behold, that first century Palestinian Jew was born in a funky manger. He had some funky working-class parents sometimes dealing with unemployment and underemployment. He walked on some funky and dusty roads didn't he? He brought together 12 funky folk. He didn't go out 100 miles to the vanilla suburbs, did he? He picked them right from around where he came from. It's so easy to forget the funk in Jesus's life because our churches can become so easily deodorized... The funky gospel of funky Jesus can become so Americanized that it is reduced to marketplace spirituality, prosperity gospel, and Chamber of Commerce religion. No! We want to keep focused on the funk of Jesus, especially that funky blood at the funky cross... If you don't find joy in serving others, if you don't understand what it means to be at that funky tomb that was empty when that prostitute Mary Magdalene showed up and had a message for the world... You can't be committed to that kind of funky gospel if you're not willing to pay a price. You need to be willing to bear a burden. You need to cut against the grain. (West 2008, 70).

Regarding anxiety, Kierkegaard writes,

However, in order that an individual may thus be educated absolutely and infinitely by the possibility, he must be honest toward possibility and have faith. By faith I understand here what Hegel somewhere in his way correctly calls the inner certainty that anticipates infinity. When the discoveries of possibility are honestly administered, possibility will discover all the finitudes, but it will idealize them in the form of infinity and in anxiety overwhelm the individual until he again overcomes them in the anticipation of faith... What I am saying here probably strikes many as obscure and foolish talk, because they pride themselves on never having been in anxiety. To this I would reply that one certainly should not be in anxiety about men and about finitudes, but only he who passes through the anxiety of the possible is educated to have no anxiety, not because he can escape the terrible things of life but because these always become weak by comparison with those of possibility. If, on the other hand, the speaker maintains that the great thing about him is that he has never been in anxiety, I will gladly provide him with my explanation: that it is because his is very spiritless. (Kierkegaard 1980, 157) (For a contemporary appropriation of this theme see Dumm 2008).

It is passages such as this one in which we can see where West gained an appreciation for Kierkegaard's honest approach to melancholia.

Perhaps one of Kierkegaard's most well-known subjects is that of despair. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard writes,

As soon as a man ceases to be regarded as defined by spirit...but only as psychical-physical synthesis, health is an immediate qualification, and mental and physical sickness is the only dialectical qualification. But to be unaware of being defined as spirit is precisely what despair is. Even that which, humanly speaking, is utterly beautiful and lovable...is nevertheless despair. To be sure, it is happiness, but happiness is not a qualification of spirit, and deep, deep within the most secret hiding place of happiness there dwells also anxiety, which is despair; it very much wishes to be allowed to remain there, because for despair the most cherished and desirable place to live is in the heart of happiness. Despite its illusory security and tranquility, all immediacy is anxiety and thus, quite consistently, is most anxious about nothing....Therefore, the common view that despair is a rarity is entirely wrong; on the contrary, it is universal. The common view, which assumes that everyone who does not think or feel his is in despair is not or that only he who says he is in despair is, is totally false. On the contrary, the person who without affectation says that he is in despair is still a little closer, is dialectically closer, to being cured than all those who are not regarded as such and who do not regard themselves as being in despair. (Kierkegaard 1980, 25)

This despair, borne out of comfort, complacency, and indifference to self is others is corroborated by West when he states,

American culture seems to lack two elements that are basic to racial justice: a deep sense of the tragic and a genuine grasp of the unadulterated rage directed at American society. The chronic refusal of most Americans to acknowledge the sheer absurdity that a person of African descent confronts in this country – the incessant assaults on black intelligence, beauty, character, and possibility – is not simply a matter of defending white-skin privilege. It also bespeaks a reluctance to look squarely at the brutality and tragedy of the American past and present...Such a long and hard look would puncture the life-sustaining bubble of many Americans, namely that this nation of freedom-loving people and undeniable opportunity has committed unspeakable crimes against other human beings, especially black people. (West 2008, 168).

And finally, regarding faith, Johannes de Silentio writes,

Love indeed has its priests in the poets, and occasionally we hear a voice that knows how to honor it, but not a word is heard about faith. Who speaks to the honor of this passion? Philosophy goes further. Theology sits all rouged and powdered in the window and courts its favor, offers its charms to philosophy. It is supposed to be difficult to understand Hegel, but to understand Abraham is a small matter. To go beyond Hegel is a miraculous achievement, but to go beyond Abraham is the easiest of all. I for my part have applied considerable time to understanding Hegelian philosophy and believe that I have understood it fairly well; I am sufficiently brash to think that when I cannot understand particular passages despite my pains, he himself may not have been entirely clear. All this I do easily, naturally, without any mental strain. Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however; then I am shattered. I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham's life, I am constantly repelled, and, despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get ahead by a hairsbreadth...I by no means conclude that faith is something inferior but rather that it is the highest, also that it is dishonest of philosophy to give something else in its place and to disparage faith. (Kierkegaard 1983, 33).

By working from these categories, Robinson is not wrong by any means. Based on West's public statements of the influence of Kierkegaard on his thought, starting from these fundamental features of Kierkegaard's authorship is important. One major problem, however, is that love is not mentioned as one of the fundamental features of Kierkegaard's influence. Is it because West was not influenced by Kierkegaard's notions of love? Robinson does discuss love, primarily from the vantage point of the love ethic West described in *Race Matters*, the love ethic

that can combat nihilism and self-hatred. Towards the end of the chapter, she provides a commentary on West's, "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization" (West 1999, 87-118) which compares Richard Wright's *Native Son* to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. In a footnote to this commentary, she references *Race Matters* and writes, "According to West, Baby Suggs exemplifies a love ethic that addresses nihilism head on as a "disease of the soul"...Such a love ethic, on his view, must be part of a 'politics of conversion'," (2011 250). Robinson provides a very nice analysis of West here, but does not get much deeper on the topic of love than this.

The greater part of Robinson's chapter revolves around reconciling West's thought with those fundamental features of Kierkegaard's thought, the absurd, anxiety, despair and faith.

When she writes,

Black experience, says West, offers pragmatism a "profound sense of the tragic and the comic rooted in heroic efforts to preserve human dignity on the night side, the underside of modernity." That is, the spirituals, the blues, jazz, black literature, and black oratory—premier expressions of African-American life and faith, from the slave past to the present—present American pragmatism with astounding examples of absurdity and tragedy, wrenching cases of "radical contingency" and "radical conditionedness," and harrowing instances of misery, of the "guttural cry" of suffering individuals, while also demonstrating the power that oppressed people have to act—and to hope—against the odds (Robinson 2011, 232-233; see also Jones 1963; Cone 1972; Moten 2003)

The explanation for this, this apparent avoidance of the political or love's role there comes in a footnote where Robinson states,

Kierkegaard does not share West's particular situation, or champion a particular political theory or cause. Therefore, West has to integrate Kierkegaard's ideas into black religion, literature, music, and so forth. Since West must also address social and political issues in the United States, he must also necessarily go to others, particularly those whose philosophical, cultural, political, and economic critiques (i.e., pragmatists, neo-pragmatists, and progressive Marxists) can in some way be aligned with Kierkegaard's ideas. (West has in mind a shared anti-foundationalist and radical historicist stance.) (Robinson 2011, 234)

For Robinson, then, West can only integrate Kierkegaard's ideas into "black religion, literature, [and] music", since they "do not share...a political theory". She is on the right track when she

says Kierkegaard operates with an anti-foundationalist and historicist stance, but she is unable to proceed from the historicism to actual politics. This is likely due to her neglect of *Works of Love* which accents more a historicist, activist Christianity than Kierkegaard's more familiar emphases on the absurd, despair and faith. Her stronger and more focused attack on the possibility of a politics in Kierkegaard comes in a recent article where she writes,

Kierkegaard's work raises—or seems to raise—at least four issues for black people: 1) His notion of despair as sin does not seem to provide a way to deal with collective or social sin; 2) His idea of faith and his Christian ethics seem to preclude a universal or normative ethics focused on social justice; 3) His idea of contemporaneity with Christ seems to make it difficult for the “blackness” of Jesus to come forth; and 4) His kenotic faith, with its emphasis on self-emptying and receptivity, seems to idealize suffering and servitude in a way that is particularly offensive to black women as “servants of servants.” (Robinson 2011, 232).

Here, Robinson feels that Kierkegaard's notion of sin is too individualistic to be able to account for social sins and injustices and his ethics make impossible a focus on social justice. Her third point is curious one since West shares so much of Kierkegaard's picture of Christ. According to West,

Jesus's love talk took deep root and produced unbelievable flowers. His love fed the love talk of Martin Luther King Jr., the love talk of John Coltrane's *Love Supreme*, and the love talk of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. That is serious. (West 2008, 154-155)

Finally, echoing Williams' and Mongoven's critiques, Kierkegaard's emphasis on sacrifice is seen as too problematic for “servants of servants”. These are powerful critiques. At the same time, the notion that Kierkegaard's work precludes a focus on social justice has been shown by most interpreters to be a narrow position. The political critique in *Works of Love*, in particular that of capitalism, accounts, I feel, for the idea of social corruption. The last point Robinson makes is the most problematic. The notion of sacrifice or a politics built around it are not appealing to all. Not just that, some see it as completely ineffective. To counter this claim, we need to work through *Prophesy Deliverance!* and *Works of Love* in greater detail together. In

doing this, we will have an alternative, what Robinson called, jumping off point in understanding Kierkegaard's influence upon West.

For West, radical historicism is central to his dissertation, *Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (1991). In that work, West refers to Kierkegaard as a radical historicist. That same conception of historicism would go on to define the politics of *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982). There is something unexplored by the critiques of Robinson and others. Robinson sees the historicism in Kierkegaard's philosophy, but not his politics. To explore the relationship between the politics of West and Kierkegaard, we must explicate the resonances between the radical historicism and pursuit of economic justice in *Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (1991), *Prophesy Deliverance!*(1982) and *Works of Love* (1995). Doing this will not only bring to light the political influence of Kierkegaard's radical love and historicism on West, the same radical love that he talks about in public so often, but it will also bring to light the politics of historicism and economic justice in *Works of Love*, a heretofore unexamined topic. Not everyone agrees with proceeding in this way or seeking to explore this relationship. According to John Pittman, Kierkegaard "...could be characterized...[as a] 'radical fideist,' with more justice perhaps, than West's characterization...[of him] as radical historicist..." (2001, 237). Nonetheless, West chooses to refer to Kierkegaard as a radical historicist. The similarities I will draw between *Prophesy Deliverance!* and *Works of Love* will suggest that Kierkegaard's influence on West was more than just in regards to the ideas of the absurd, despair and faith. At the very least, working through West and Kierkegaard in this way will reveal political elements of *Works of Love* that need greater explication.

Two of Cornel West's works, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (1991) and *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982), deal with Kierkegaard in a manner different than any of his other

works. In these, he goes beyond discussing Kierkegaard as a childhood influence or as someone who introduced him to the deep thoughts on the absurd and despair. In these two books, Kierkegaard becomes a political ally for West. In his dissertation, West refers to Kierkegaard as a “radical historicist” (West 1991, 69). Understanding what West means by radical historicism (Bloch 1953; Solomon 1983; Pippin 2011; Conway 2011; Jameson 2010) will reveal to us another side of Kierkegaard other than that of the philosopher of the absurd and despair. In the preface to the 2002 edition of *Prophesy Deliverance!*, West writes, “...my aim was to Afro-Americanize the profound insights of Kierkegaard’s critique of bourgeois Christendom and Marx’s critique of bourgeois capitalism in order to enhance the human quest for wisdom and freedom,” (West 2002, 7). Afro-Americanization here means roughly to show that Kierkegaardian and Marxist insights were reached by key prophetic Christian and progressive leftist figures in black history.” The characteristics West disliked about the Social Gospel were absent in Kierkegaard. West continually operationalizes, similar to Kierkegaard, a language of radical political love coexistent with an economic critique of capitalism.

If we want to understand fully the impact that Kierkegaard had on West, we should look to *Works of Love* where we can see the same love ethic tied to an economic critique. In *Works of Love*, critique is not tied to abortive praxis, but becomes a steadfast commitment to the well-being of others through the revolution of love.

This chapter will now outline the concept of radical historicism as it is found in West’s dissertation. This is important since the political historicism found in that early work informs much of West’s current political positions. It is a good representation of how West began to appropriate the Marxist critique (Marx 1988; Tucker 1978; Althusser 2009; Jameson 1979; Green and Troup 1999) and politics into his own as well as being his best statement on what he

conceives historicism to be. Following that, I will then provide a comparative reading of *Works of Love* and *Prophesy Deliverance!* I find *Prophesy Deliverance!* to be the best representation of West's melding of radical historicism and Christianity into a political stance. What resonances we find between it and *Works of Love* will allow the political aspects of historicism and economic critique found in *Works of Love* to become more apparent. We will also see at this point a heretofore unexamined relationship between Cornel West and Kierkegaard, one that has been greatly underappreciated in the preference for foci on the absurd, despair, and faith.

Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought with Comparisons to Works of Love

West opens this book with a lament for the pervasive forms of social, moral, and civic decay. All around, we are surrounded by nihilism and cynicism. Nihilism for West is the "lived experience of meaninglessness, hopelessness, and lovelessness." (1992 xii) In light of this, one of the essential tasks is the "remaking of the left" (1992 xiii). This remaking of the left requires three tasks. The first is the attempt to "understand and support all egalitarian and democratic concerns, efforts and movements," born out of "a wholesale critical inventory of ourselves and our communities of struggle." (1992, xiii). The second is to confront the "intellectual crisis on the left" and provide a defense of Marxist thought despite its "blindnesses and inadequacies". (1992 xiv) Finally, the third task is to explicate "credible strategies and tactics for progressive politics in the United States," which entails "a fresh examination of the crisis of leadership, mobilization and organization". (1992 xiv)

As West talks about the sources of his own politics and what led him on his own life pilgrimage, the most important sources were neither academia, nor political organizations, but his "closely knit family and overlapping communities of church and friends" where he was

inundated with a “Christian ethic of love informed service to others, ego-deflating humility (Mongoven 2009) about oneself owing to the precious yet fallible humanity of others, and politically engaged struggle for social betterment.” (1992, xv)

“This book...was my attempt to understand Marxist thought as one grand stream, among others, of the larger modern articulation of historical consciousness, an articulation fanned by Romantic quests for harmony and wholeness and fueled by concrete revolutionary and reformist movements for freedom, equality, and democracy.” (1992, xx) “...I take the reader...through Marx’s own intellectual development in order to show how in incorporated modern historical consciousness...in relation to his ethical values of individuality and democracy.” (1992, xxi) The ultimate purpose of showing these ethical foundations of Marxist thought, the foundations of individuality and democracy, was to contrast Marxist thought with “subsequent Marxists, like Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky, and Georg Lukács” and show that “their diverse conceptions of modern historical consciousness in relation to ethical issues differ greatly from that of Marx.” (1992, xxi) Essentially, this amounts to a defense of Marx and his ethical dimensions over and against subsequent Marxists who have corrupted the theoretical paradigm and possibilities of Marxist thought.

West encapsulates nicely what I also desire to achieve with regard to Kierkegaard in this dissertation. West states,

...despite the deep tensions in Marx’s thought, there are other and better versions of Marxism put forward by Marx himself in his best moments. My point here is not that Marx’s social theory fully accounts for all social and historical phenomena; rather, it is that social theory wedded in a nuanced manner to concrete historical analyses must be defended in our present moment of epistemic skepticism, explanatory agnosticism, political impotence (among progressives), and historical cynicism. (1992, xxii)

West highlights the highpoints of Marxist thought as “Marx’s own historical and economic analyses, Georg Lukács’ (1980) theory of reification, and Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) conceptions of hegemony.” However, “...certain crucial phenomena of the modern world – nationalism, racism, gender oppression, homophobia, ecological devastation – have not been adequately understood by Marxist theorists.” West’s basic claim is that “...these complex phenomena cannot be grasped, or changed, without the insights of Marxist theory.” (1992, xxiii) So, for all of its deficiencies, Marxist thought is indispensable.

My claim, similarly, is that for all of its deficiencies, Kierkegaard’s theory of the love of the neighbor, at its best in *Works of Love*, is indispensable to solving the same political problems. Without a functional analysis, definition, and practical strategy of love, political problems remain intransigent. For West, Marxist thought is “an indispensable – though by itself inadequate – intellectual weapon in the struggle for individuality and democracy” (1992, xxiv). This, exactly, is my position on Kierkegaardian politics of love. They are indispensable and their best moments are put forth in *Works of Love*, his most political text. Kierkegaard’s economic critique and praxis are indispensable to any progressive politics able to operationalize love as a guiding concept. West describes himself and his vocation as such:

...my vocation uses Christian resources, among others, to speak to the multilayered crises of contemporary society and culture. So I am more a cultural critic with philosophic training who works out of the Christian tradition than a theologian who focuses on the systematic coherency or epistemic validity of Christian claims. (1992, xxix)

In West’s first chapter on radical historicism, the descriptions he offers sounds very much, at times, like descriptions of Kierkegaard’s own approach to knowledge, truth, objectivity and subjectivity. Kierkegaard is seen as one who, through Johannes Climacus, was suspicious of universal, objective knowledge and the ability to rationally demonstrate the truths of Christianity. Johannes Climacus writes,

If Christianity is viewed as a historical document, the important thing is to obtain a completely reliable report of what the Christian doctrine really is. If the inquiring subject were infinitely interested in his relation to this truth, he would here despair at once, because nothing is easier to perceive than this, that with regard to the historical the greatest certainty is only an *approximation*, and an approximation is too little to build his happiness on and is so unlike an eternal happiness that no result can ensue... When the truth of Christianity is asked about historically or what is and what is not Christian truth, Holy Scripture immediately presents itself as a crucial document. Therefore, the historical point of view focuses first on the Bible... Here the important thing for the research scholar is to secure for himself the greatest possible reliability; for me, however, it is not a matter of exhibiting any knowledge or of showing that I have none. For my deliberation, it is more important that it be understood and borne in mind that even with the most stupendous learning and perseverance, and even if the heads of all the critics were mounted on a single neck, one would never arrive at anything more than an approximation... (Kierkegaard 1992, 23-24).

According to West,

...for the radical historicist, the only plausible candidates for the criteria, grounds, or foundations in questions would be the *contingent, community-specific* agreements people make in relation to particular norms, aims, goals and objectives... the moral philosopher [in light of radical historicism] attempts to put forward “moral” guidelines or insights as to how to solve particular pressing problems, overcome urgent dilemmas, and alleviate specific hardships. (1992, 3)

When West contrasts radical historicism and the three forms of moral relativism, the basic claim being made seems to be that radical historicism is genealogical rather than strictly philosophic (Nietzsche 1956). That is, moral relativism is concerned with philosophy and validity, whereas radical historicism is concerned with understanding the emergence of morals and principles and what makes them sources of progressive change (West 1991, 4-13). Radical historicism asks, what works and what does not? (West 1991, 2-3) One of the first, most important claims that West makes about radical historicism is that it accepts that there are moral principles and ethical claims, but that it does no good to search for “*philosophic* criteria, grounds, or foundations” since “dynamic historical processes...[subject]...all criteria, grounds, and foundations to revision and modification.” (West 1991, 1) This would inform, then, West’s call for a critical self-examination and community-inventory regarding ethics and principles. This

capacity for revision and modification preserves an action-oriented praxis and engagement with the world, one of development, rather than one that rests in philosophic certainty. The historicist sees philosophy and ethics as part of history, not things that exist outside of history, immune from flux, change, revision or modification (Nietzsche 1956; Foucault and Gordon 1980). Accepting such a position supports what West suggests is a Socratic self-examination and willingness to change.

As West discusses Marx's dissertation, he shows how Marx struggled between reality and ideality, between is and ought, between presence and absence. Marx's solution in his dissertation relied on an adoption of Hegel's anti-transcendental approach of immanent, historical process and dialectic. According to West,

At this point, Marx's conception of ethics seems to be that ideals and norms can be known and discerned only insofar as they are manifest in the real world. Just as Plato claims that we know the beautiful solely by its making itself visible in beautiful things, Marx holds that we know ideality by its activity in reality, actualizing particular potentialities and specifically the motion, repulsion, or contradiction in the atom. (1992, 22)

This passage not only shows what West is trying to highlight, i.e., Marx's radical historicism, but it alludes as well to Kierkegaard's notions of love. According to the first deliberation in *Works of Love*, "Love's Hidden Life and Its Recognizability By Its Fruits", love can only be known by its fruits, in this world (Kierkegaard 1995, 5-16). Kierkegaard's notions of loving the unseen/seen are applicable here as well (Kierkegaard 1995, 160-161). It is in this area that we can argue for Kierkegaard as a radical historicist, i.e., how love is manifested within individual and collective practices in reality.

There is, as for Marx, a tension in Kierkegaard between the universal and the temporal. Actuality of the ideal is gained here, not in some other ether. What philosophy is for Marx, love is for Kierkegaard. According to West,

Philosophy must be conceived as an activity, a critical activity which opposes the actual world as an act of moral judgment upon it...At this fork in the road, philosophy can travel one of two paths. It can either turn toward the real world and promote the 'turn about of philosophy, its transubstantiation into flesh and blood,' or it can further distance itself from the world, harking back to a transcendental, even religious position....Marx's extolment of philosophy, and its role as a critical activity that impinges upon the world in the form of a moral judgment, puts ethics at its core. (emphasis added) (West 1991, 23-24)

Not only are ethics at its core, but this become its politics as well. The politics of critique are imminent, with a view towards changing what is. We can see this in statements by both Marx and Kierkegaard. Marx writes, "What was inner light has become consuming flame turning outwards. The result is that as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly..." (West 1991, 23). Similarly, Kierkegaard writes,

...Christian love...is sheer action; consequently it is as far from inaction as it is from busyness. It never accepts anything in advance or gives a promise in place of action; it never rests satisfied in the delusion of being finished; it never dwells indulgently on itself; it never sits idle marveling at itself. It is not that hidden, private, mysterious feeling behind the lattice of the inexplicable that the poet wants to lure to the window; it is not a mood in the pampered soul that knows and wants to know no law, or wants to have its own law and listens only to songs – Christian love is sheer action...(Kierkegaard 1995, 98-99).

Love, as described by Kierkegaard here, is like Marx's inner light that becomes a consuming flame turned outwards. It escapes the confines of the pampered soul and is actualized in the world.

As West develops Marx's notions of the role of philosophy and ethics, he argues that Marx soon operationalizes a "fecund criticism". According to West,

Marx's rational moral criticism, at this point, can be characterized in the following way. First, his criticism still is tied to philosophic conceptions of objectivity, impartiality, universality, and rationality. So his objectivism remains. Second, his criticism sides with "the poor, politically and socially propertyless many." And his interest in their conditions and circumstances increases. Third, his criticism is becoming more and more engaged in the mundane world of politics. Hence, he becomes more cognizant of consideration about power in society.

West continues,

In his political essays, these three characteristics come together to create what I call Marx's *fecund criticism*, a criticism whose first and foremost aim is to *give birth to societal alternatives based on discerning potentialities and possibilities in the existing order*. This "fecund criticism" makes two requirements for itself. First, this criticism must neither merely condemn the present state of affairs nor endorse an ideal state of affairs. *Rather, it must try to describe, explain, and analyze present state of affairs in order to see what possible and desirable state of affairs can be realized*. Second, this criticism must not only put forward moral judgments about the present or descriptions and explanations of the present. It also must become an integral part of the actual political movements in the present which can usher in a new future or activate a possible alternative to the present. (1992, 36-37) (emphasis added)

In this, we can hear echoes of West's own "preservative" approach to changing society and Hardt's (2007) notion of reanimating social/cultural resources such as love that can help change society. In all of this, for both of these authors, the creation of new values is happening, imminently, in the social circumstances in which one finds oneself. This is radical historicism. West quotes Marx as saying, "The critic, therefore, can start with any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and develop the true actuality out of the forms *inherent* in existing actuality as its ought-to-be and goal." (1992, 36) This is similar to Kierkegaard developing his "ought-to-be" out of the "deep need" for love in man. Out of what is already present in the world, the resource inherent in individuals' need for love, Kierkegaard draws out social possibilities. The duty to love is born out of the need to love. Kierkegaard writes,

The commandment is that you *shall* love, but ah, 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. Moreover, to love people is the only blessed comfort both here and in the next world; and to love people is the only true sign that you are a Christian – truly, a profession of faith is not enough either. (Kierkegaard 1995, 375).

This interpretation of love's duty emerging out of its already, existent need, is shared by Hanson and Balwin (2008, 7-20). I think we get similar resonance of this in the quote above where West said one of the requirements of Marx's "fecund criticism" was to "describe, explain and

analyze present state of affairs in order to see what possible and desirable state of affairs can be realized”. Such a historicism looks for the latent, inherent possibilities contained in the order already existing. Gramsci talks at length about this when he writes about the problem of preserving “ideological unity” similar to that of the Church (Gramsci 1971, 328-330), but he also evinces this sentiment when he writes,

The history of philosophy as it is generally understood, that is as the history of philosopher’s philosophies, is the history of attempts made and ideological initiatives undertaken by a specific class of people to change, correct or perfect the conceptions of the world that exist in any particular age and thus to change the norms of conduct that go with them, (Gramsci 1971, 344).

This radical historicism also represents what West calls Marx’s developing “aggressive” philosophy. According to West’s reading of Marx,

The philosopher is no longer a moralist, but now a social critic with a moral outlook and political concern. The task of philosophy is to bring to light *the treasures which exist buried in the past and present*, treasures that have been centuries in the making. These treasures consist of *societal possibilities*, results of human struggle down through the corridors of history. (1992, 36)

This description of Marx’s philosophy could just as easily describe West’s own view of the role of blues and service-oriented love, both of which were uniquely defined in the African-American experience in slavery and Jim Crow. The blues and love, the love and struggle exemplified in the blues, is a centuries-long treasure in the making (West 2008, 114; 1988, 177-187; Jones 1963; Cone 1972).

As West describes Marx’s role for the philosopher-critic, it really seems as if he is describing certain elements of himself. The passages of Marx’s that he chose to examine resonate deeply with his notions of Christian love. For instance, West quotes Marx as saying,

Our slogan, therefore, must be: Reform of consciousness, not through dogmas, but through analysis of the mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself, whether in religion or politics. It will be evident, then, that the world has long dreamed of something of which it only has to become conscious in order to possess it in actuality. It

will be evident that there is not a big blank between the past and the future, but rather that it is a matter of *realizing* the thoughts of the past. It will be evident, finally, that mankind does not begin any *new* work but performs its old work consciously. (1992, 37)

The resonances that I see here with West hang on the words, “possibility” and the “performing of old work”, that is, enacting those forms of love on a larger scale that we have been doing and imagining all along. As West says, “To be a critic is to muster available resources to respond to the crisis of one’s own time in light of one’s view of the past,” (West 2008, 36). Despite such resonances, though, West is clear in pointing out that Marx still has not arrived at a radically historicist position. The Marx he is describing, for all of his newfound emphases on the poor and immanence, is still an objectivist. He is still beholden to a Left Hegelianism. According to West,

In his political essays, we see two basic theoretical movements at work. On the one hand, Marx is concerned with setting his fecund criticism apart from other kinds of criticism (including earlier forms of his own). Therefore, he relentlessly engages in criticizing other critics. On the other hand, he is in search of a theoretical viewpoint regarding the status of philosophy and ethics that will “ease his philosophic conscience”; that is, he recognizes the tension between replacing philosophic language and aims with theoretic ones and remaining captive to an old vision of philosophy. Yet he remains unclear as to what this viewpoint can be. He does not arrive at this viewpoint – the radical historicist viewpoint – until his famous *Theses on Feuerbach*... (1992, 38)

West highlights the deficiencies of Hegelianism for Marx by stating,

This discovery of what modern society is doing to people, i.e., reinforcing egoism, even forces Marx to see that the left-Hegelian idea (i.e., formerly his own) of changing ideas without changing conditions or of merely attempting to “raise the consciousness” of people must be rethought and ultimately modified. Therefore philosophy and ethics must become self-consciously part of the powers and political forces in society. (1992, 38)

West goes on,

Marx’s grand claim about the actualization of philosophy and the transformation of the world or making philosophy worldly and the world philosophical has significant consequences for his conception of the status of ethics. First, philosophy’s “critical activity of reason” no longer is merely embodied in the actual world as a political force, e.g., as a free press. This critical activity now galvanizes and energizes social forces and political powers that possess the capacity to fundamentally transform existing reality (proletariat here). Second, this transformed reality or world made “philosophical”

signifies the end of philosophic notions such as criteria, grounds or foundations to judge states of affairs in the world. Philosophy is actualized only when its “critical activity of reason” is rendered obsolete, outmoded, superfluous, and only when its norms become realities. (1992, 39)

This description of philosophy is similar to Kierkegaard’s, and by that token, West’s, notions of love. As we saw earlier, for Kierkegaard, love is only actualized when it begins to act in and transform the world. Cone (2012) echoes this when he writes, “All the hatred we have expressed toward one another cannot destroy the profound mutual love and solidarity that flow deeply between us – a love that empowered blacks to open their arms to receive the many whites who were also empowered by the same love to risk their lives in the black struggle for freedom,” (Cone 2012, 165-166). Critchley (2012), in his discussion of Kierkegaard, agrees that what is required is an “...activist conception of faith that...abides in the infinite demand of love,” (Critchley 2012, 251). For philosophy to become actualized when its critical activity of reason is rendered obsolete, or when this activity withers away, is similar to Kierkegaard talking about the disappearance of Christianity if all people could love their neighbor.

As West’s dissertation progresses, we see that the primary difference between Marx and the Marxist thinkers that followed, is that they are more philosophical and less theoretical than Marx was himself. According to West,

The major Marxist approaches to ethics bear the historicist stamp. They deny the existence of an Archimedian point from which to adjudicate rival ethical judgments, they accent the fleeting character of moral views, and they thereby preclude traditional foundationalist justifications of moral positions...Yet despite this historicist orientation, the major Marxist thinkers who have been concerned with ethical matters have engaged in the philosophic quest for objectivity, the search for foundations...The failure of the Marxist philosophers is that they ultimately remain philosophers, whereas Marx’s radically historicist, metaphilosophical vision enables him to stop doing philosophy and to begin to describe, explain, and ultimately to change the world.” (West 1991, 102,170)

The importance of West's dissertation, then, lies in its development of the view of radical historicism in Marx, how that view informs his own view and politics, and most importantly, the implication of Kierkegaard as a radical historicist. The relationships that West draws in his dissertation explicate what he takes to be the function of the historicist philosophy of Marx. We can extrapolate from this discussion what the function of love is in Kierkegaard. Yet, we must ask, how is *Works of Love* (1995) better at communicating a radical historicism than, say, *The Present Age* (1962), *Concluding Postscript* (1992), or *The Attack Upon Christendom* (1968), texts to which so many others have turned to find a Kierkegaardian politics? In the latter, we have critiques of objectivity, philosophy, and society, but these critiques are tied to what West critiqued of the Social Gospel, an abortive praxis (West 1982, 137). This is why Dooley (2001), who begins his book stating that *The Present Age* (1962) is Kierkegaard's "most political text", has to end his book by beginning to look at *Works of Love*. The philosophic critique of *The Present Age* had to give way to something, had to actualize in some kind of politics, hence Dooley's Derridian-Kierkegaardian "community of neighbors" (Dooley 2001; Derrida and Dufourmantele 2000). This shows that Dooley anticipated the "politics" of *Works of Love*, but he ultimately fell short of describing them other than as an antidote to individualism. He never mentions Kierkegaard's odes to revolution in *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1995, 265-267).

How, then, is love, for Kierkegaard, a part of radical historicism? I believe it is the very focus on love in *Works of Love* that sets it apart from his other, more philosophical texts that critique objectivity for its own sake (Kierkegaard 1992; 1985; 1983). Yet, is Kierkegaard grounding anything? Is he looking for foundations in *Works of Love*? What about the essence of the need for love? Does this not make him a moderate historicist more along the lines of Engels, Kautsky and Lukács? Similarly, how does love make West's politics radically historicist and

how does love make Kierkegaard's politics radically historicist? West states that he cannot go as far as Marx in his historicism (West 1991, xvii). According to West,

I am a non-Marxist socialist in that as Christian, I recognize certain irreconcilable differences between Marxists of whatever sort and Christians of whatever sort. Since my conception of Christian faith is deeply, though not absolutely, historical, this disagreement is not primarily a metaphysical issue; rather, it is a basic existential difference in the weight I put on certain biblical narratives, symbols, and rituals that generate sanity and meaning for me. (West 1991, xvii).

Yet, he calls Kierkegaard a radical historicist. My argument thus far has been that West's historicism comes not only from Marx, but from Kierkegaard as well. Instead of focusing on radical historicism in both thinkers as one concept, we should begin to focus on the radicalness of the Christian historicism in West and Kierkegaard. Because of their statements on the nature of love in the nature of humanity, the need for love as something more than how Marx described it above, they can never go as far as Marx in regards to historicism, but they go further in regards to love. Marx addressed love in the following way,

Let us assume man to be man, and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. If you wish to enjoy art you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you wish to influence other people you must be a person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect on others. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life. If you love without evoking love in return, i.e., if you are not able, by the manifestation of yourself, as a loving person, to make yourself a beloved person, then your love is impotent and a misfortune. (West 1991, 60)

Here is a critique of relationships under a bourgeois system. Marx was unable to see love outside of the relationships of exchange and reciprocity. Impotent love, or non-reciprocal love, which is often what neighbor love can be, is primarily the problem here for Marx. Yet, the question must be asked, and it is by Kierkegaard, what is the role or efficacy, precisely, of this impotent love within such economic structures? What can it do? How can it cause change or be subversive? For Kierkegaard, such love, if it is real love, will of course be seen as impotent in

such a money-worshipping society (Kierkegaard 1995, 318). It is only impotent according to those who value exchange and reciprocity though. This love, which is given birth by particular social circumstances, is a core element of the “profound revolution”, a revolution that is not solely concerned with souls, heaven or salvation. West’s and Kierkegaard’s Christian historicism is radical, then, in light of its economic critiques and political stances. Its radicalness does not come from an abandoning of all foundations and grounds though, for as we have shown, Kierkegaard still sees an essential need for love grounded in humanity. The practice of neighbor love, however, according the distinction that West has drawn in his dissertation between that of theoretic and philosophic practice, is a theoretic practice whose purpose is to change the world and its structures.

We are dealing, then, with three new categories between the two thinkers. Instead of Robinson’s accenting of absurdity, despair, faith, and coping, we accent love, historicism, and economic justice. By looking at these three categories, I believe we can get a better picture of the political nature of Kierkegaard’s notion of love as well as the “other” influences on West.

Prophesy Deliverance!

It makes sense that Kierkegaard and Cornel West would be critiqued in much the same ways. Their mutual emphasis on the importance of the core of Christianity is unsettling to many for the simple fact that it may not be able to achieve what it aspires to. Importantly, West’s and Kierkegaard’s mutual emphases on the individual, the spiritual, and a love ethic, all appear to coalesce into a conservative-type view of the world and politics.

One way to abate this suspicion is to read *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982) in conjunction with the historicist model that West laid out in *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (1991). The two works should be seen as companion volumes and they are essentially linked in

the very first paragraph of *Prophesy Deliverance!* where West begins by discussing the “sources and tasks of Afro-American critical thought”. Here, West states,

African-American critical thought...is not concerned with “foundations” or transcendental “grounds” but with how to build its language in such a way that the configuration of sentences and the constellation of paragraphs themselves create a textuality and distinctive discourse which are a material force for Afro-American freedom. (1982, 15)

I see *Prophesy Deliverance!* as volume II to *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, as it represents West’s application of the Marxism he laid out in the first text to the Christianity he espouses. The above not only hearkens back to Kierkegaard’s critique of a Christianity that orients itself solely around the organization of paragraphs and sentences in the service of building some Christian façade or regime of objective “Truth” at the expense of putting those paragraphs and sentences to the service of understanding what it means to live (see Kierkegaard, 1992), but it clearly hearkens back to *The Ethical Dimension of Marxist Thought* (1991) and its division between the philosophic and the theoretic in Marx. On my reading of *The Ethical Dimension of Marxist Thought*’s (1992), as Marx leaves behind the philosophic for the theoretic, West argues that Marx becomes eminently more political, more engaged in the actual structures of power in the real world and is oriented towards changing those. This division highlights the “function” of philosophy, one that is alternative to the traditional, Western model that is concerned with “mastery”, “Truth”, “grounds” and “foundations,”. Philosophy that becomes a force for change, i.e., the theoretical, is politics in West, Marx and Kierkegaard. This is what Kierkegaard is talking about when he says that “love is sheer action” (Kierkegaard 1995, 98-99).

What we must do, then, is parse out the categories of historicism, love, and economic justice in *Prophesy Deliverance!*(1992) as well as *Works of Love* (1995). This will be the new reading. It seems that the traditional reading of West in relation not only to Kierkegaard but the

Christian love ethic in general, is that of love as a coping mechanism in an absurd and tragic world (West 1999; Cowan 2003; Pittman 2001; Johnson 2003; Robinson 2011). Kierkegaard becomes, solely, a psychological influence for West, an exemplar who wrestled with despair, angst, anxiety, the absurd, the paradoxical, and offered up the categories of faith and the individual as antidotes. This not only short-changes Kierkegaard, but that of West's notion of love as well. As he states often in his lectures, "Love is not a sentimental view of the world, but a steadfast commitment to the well-being of others," (West 2008, 156). Here, love is not solely an existential coping mechanism, meant to ground the individual in community and make sense of the absurd. Rather, it is a "force" meant to combat the features of the market-mentality and empire (Hardt 2001; Weber 2010) which lead to economic injustices. Love, for West and Hardt (2007, 2011), is also a means to identify with the underclass and poor. Love becomes a dynamic answer to structural injustices. This vision is echoed again when West writes, "...a truncated understanding of the core of the Christian gospel accents its otherworldly dimension at the expense of its this-worldly possibilities," (West 1982, 16). For Kierkegaard, it was a matter of avoiding escape. Kierkegaard wrote that "With regard to loving, the most dangerous of all escapes is wanting to love only the unseen or that which one has not seen," (Kierkegaard 1995, 161). The this-worldly possibilities do not, I believe, reside solely in coping. West, nor Kierkegaard, is speaking of Christianity's paragraphs and sentences, or any philosophical move to ground Christianity in reasons and principles, but of this-worldly possibilities that are oriented towards emancipation and freedom.

Similarly, I don't think that Kierkegaard's radical historicism, as mentioned in *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (1991), only refers to his investigations of humanity's finitude and limit situations as discussed in works such as *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

(1992, 483-484), *Fear and Trembling* (1983, 40-41), and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1980, 29-35). Although he does discuss such concepts and is most famous for doing so in those works, I believe the claim to radical historicism by West also refers to love. Kierkegaard broaches this when he claims that Christianity cannot only be a system of truth, but must always be telling us how to live daily in the world (Kierkegaard 1992, 133). Yet, this still does not make him a radical historicist. To do this, his use of Christianity must be put to the task of changing the world, radically. Once he has approached such formulations, he becomes more like the later Marx that West identifies (West 1991, 61-69). It is not only a matter of destabilizing foundations and grounds that make one a radical historicist on either West's or Marx's accounts, but what was once philosophy must gain a new force, described most famously in Marx's eleventh thesis on Feurbach (Tucker 1978, 145). This is summed up best when West writes, "The Christian gospel accents decision, commitment, engagement, and action which transform what is in the light of that which is to be," (West 1982, 17).

The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought (1991) gives us a picture of West's social commitments in light of philosophy and social changes. *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982) gives us a picture of West's particular form of prophetic Christianity and African-American thought. Taken together, the two texts give us a picture of West's categories of historicism, love and economics. Most important in these three categories is how love functions in a radically historicist way with regards to economics. Once we lay this out, we can compare Kierkegaard's own categories with West's to see where there are resonances.

Prophesy Deliverance! begins with a genealogy of sorts. West seeks to identify the "sources and tasks of Afro-American thought." (1982, 15) The two sources he identifies are prophetic Christian thought and the philosophy of American Pragmatism. When West outlines

the primary contributions of prophetic Christian thought to Afro-American critical thought, he begins to expand beyond the notion that Christianity is primarily a coping mechanism in an absurd world. West writes,

The contribution of prophetic Christian thought as a source for Afro-American critical thought is twofold. *First, it confronts candidly the tragic character of human history (and the hope for ultimate transhistorical triumph) without permitting the immensity of what is and must be lost to call into question the significance of what may be gained.* In this way, it allows us to sidestep what Baudelaire called “the metaphysical horror of modern thought” and take more seriously the existential anxiety, *political oppression, economic exploitation, and social degradation of actual human beings.* Second, prophetic Afro-American Christian thought elevates the notion of struggle (against the odds!) – personal and collective struggle regulated by the norms of individuality and democracy – the highest priority. To be a prophetic Afro-American Christian is to negate what is and transform prevailing realities against the backdrop of the present historical limits. (1982, 19) (emphases added)

In the first italicized part, West does concede the coping mechanisms that Christianity affords in the “tragic character of human history”. It is important, however, how he moves beyond a concern for existential anxiety and names political oppression, economic exploitation and social degradation as the important issues. These are, undoubtedly, sources of anxiety, but they are not anxiety itself. If being a “prophetic Afro-American Christian” is oriented around “negat[ing] what is and transform[ing] prevailing realities” (West 1982, 19, 99), then West surely sees the Christian love ethic as being a vital force in that negation. Political oppression, economic exploitation, and social degradation are material and this-worldly. The this-worldly possibilities of love are to move beyond coping and towards the forces of negation.

Like the source of prophetic Christian thought, American pragmatism also is unconcerned with foundations or grounds, especially of the subjectivist kind in terms of “intuition or unmediated insight” (West 1982, 20). For the American pragmatist, knowledge gains its being through practice, not a defense of its boundaries and definitions, etc. West writes,

Knowledge should not be a rummaging for foundations but a matter of public testing and open evaluation of consequences. Knowledge claims are secured by the social practices of a community of inquirers, rather than the purely mental activity of an individual subject...The social or communal is thus the central philosophical category of this pragmatist conception of knowledge. It recognizes that in knowledge the crucial component is not intuition but social practice and communal norm.” (1982, 21)

This claim about knowledge, as I will show, is the same as Kierkegaard’s claims about love. Love gains its actuality through practice rather than mental reflection, description, or even song. For Kierkegaard, “Love of the neighbor is not something to be sung about, but rather, something to be accomplished,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 46, 51, 180). It is accomplished in community, in practice, in praxis, and in action. West goes on to state, “...pragmatism’s primary aim is to discern, delineate, and defend particular norms through highlighting desirable possibilities present in the practices of a specific community or society...Pragmatism also dethroned epistemology as the highest priority of modern thought in favor of ethics: not the professional discipline of ethics but the search for desirable and realizable historical possibilities in the present,”(West 1982, 21). West also shows the centrality of economic justice to Afro-American Christian thought by stating, “Afro-American Christian thought must, for its part, emphasize the uniqueness of human personality, the centrality of the class struggle, and the political dimensions of knowledge.” (1982, 21)

In combining these two, West goes on to define the tasks of Afro-American critical thought. These include the reshaping of “the contours of Afro-American history” as well as providing a “new self-understanding of the Afro-American experience which suggest guidelines for action in the present,” (1982 22). This action in the present is the historicism from *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (1991) linked clearly to Afro-American critical thought and Christianity. This sentiment however, is expressed most clearly in the last two tasks he sets

for Afro-American thought. These are, first, to “present a dialogical encounter between prophetic Afro-American thought Christian thought and progressive Marxist social analysis,” and, second, “to provide a political prescription for the specific praxis in the present historical moment of the struggle for liberation.” (1982, 23) If we recall that West wanted to “Afro-Americanize the profound insights of Kierkegaard’s critique of bourgeois Christendom,” (West 2002, 7), then we can begin to see the relevant connections being made. Kierkegaard’s critique of bourgeois Christendom is not confined to the last years of his life as Perez-Alvarez (2009) believes. Instead, the critique of bourgeois Christendom in *Works of Love*, along with its view of love as action, resonate with West’s politics.

The most important chapter in *Prophesy Deliverance!* for comparison to *Works of Love* is chapter four, “Prophetic Afro-American Christian Thought and Progressive Marxism.” In this chapter, West outlines the Christian critique of Marxism and Marxism’s response to said critique, as well as Marxism’s critique of Christianity and Christianity’s response back. In doing this, he shows how the two can begin to move beyond their differences and see that, together, they are the “last human hope for humankind”. (1982, 95)

West starts with the Marxist critique of Christianity which moves along three points, that the ability of Christianity to negate injustice in the world and provide true social change is “impotent, incorrect, and ill-informed”. (1982, 95) The critique of impotence, if you will recall, was one of Adorno’s (1939-1940) major critiques of Kierkegaard’s “mercifulness that can do nothing”. Taken in full, the Marxist critique is that Christianity is impotent because “[it] locate[s] ultimate power in a transcendent God who seems to work most effectively beyond history rather than in history...incorrect in that the very positing of such...an almighty Being is intellectually unjustifiable...ill-informed because they possess highly limited analytical...and

scientific understanding.” (1982, 95-96). West’s response, especially regarding the critique of impotence, is worth quoting in full. He writes,

The Christian project – even the Marxist-informed Christian project – is impotent in the sense that *within the historical process ultimate triumph eludes it and imperfect products plague it. Yet, more important, there are varying degrees of imperfection and much historical pace for human betterment.* For Christians, the dimension of impotency of all historical projects is not an excuse which justifies the existing status quo, but rather a check on utopian aspirations which often debilitate and demoralize those persons involved in negating and transforming the status quo. Ultimate triumph indeed depends on the almighty power of a transcendent God who proleptically acts in history but who also withholds the final, promised negation and transformation of history until an unknown future. In the interim, imperfect human negations and transformations must persist. (1982, 96)

To draw comparisons here brings us to some very difficult passages in *Works of Love*. Maintained in West’s quote above is that a commitment to social change, even if imperfect, must remain in the face of the belief that ultimate triumph in the world cannot be had. If one does not have the constant inertia towards human betterment, then one simply becomes, in apathy, complacent, indifferent, conservative and violent. There are passages in *Works of Love* that apply here. Regarding the first sentiment, that of ultimate temporal impotence, Kierkegaard writes,

Worldly similarity, if it were possible, is not Christian equality. Moreover, to bring about worldly similarity perfectly is an impossibility. Well-intentioned worldliness actually admits this itself. It rejoices when it succeeds in making temporal conditions the same for more and more people, but it acknowledges itself that its struggle is a pious wish, that it has taken on a prodigious task, that its prospects are remote – if it rightly understood itself, it would perceive that this will never be achieved in temporality, that even if this struggle is continued for centuries, it will never attain the goal. (1995, 72)

This, taken together with Kierkegaard’s thoughts on mercy’s impotence, would lead anyone to ask, then what can this offer (Kierkegaard 1995, 321)? Does Kierkegaard still maintain that hopeful approach to human betterment, imperfect as it may be but still practiced? The primary element in all of this will come down precisely on the indifference to money that Kierkegaard

has and how that fits into love of the neighbor as praxis. I would say that Kierkegaard does have a conception of social change, even structural change. One thing that one needs to be clear about when discussing *Works of Love* is that Kierkegaard is talking about Christianity's aims, not those of governments or social movements. That being said, I also do not think Kierkegaard has committed himself to a philosophy that can do nothing for the world. Christianity is his politics, not governments or churches. The imitation of the Christ is his politics. As difficult as that is, he does not believe that the discussion of the neighbor has attached a "false weight" to the possibility of it being done (Kierkegaard 1995, 3). As he said in *The Point of View*, "If everyone in truth loved the neighbor as himself, then perfect human equality would be achieved unconditionally," (Kierkegaard 1998, 111). Evidence of Kierkegaard's commitment to change, I think, comes early in *Works of Love*.

The first deliberation in the text is entitled, "Love's Hidden Life and Its Recognizability by Its Fruits". The theme of this deliberation is that love can only be known and recognized by its outward manifestations, by its actions. Absent this proof, love remains an internalized sentiment and emotion. Yet, this proof can be elusive. In one passage, Kierkegaard writes,

There is no work, not one single one, not even the best, about which we unconditionally dare to say: The one who does this unconditionally demonstrates love by it. It depends on *how* the work is done. There are, of course, works that in a particular sense are called works of love. But even giving to charity, visiting the widow, and clothing the naked do not truly demonstrate or make known a person's love, inasmuch as one can do works of love in an unloving, yes, even in a self-serving way, and if this is so the work of love is no work of love at all...In the same way the honest person surely admits that however often and however any times he willingly and gladly gave to charity, he has never done it except in weakness, perhaps disturbed by an incidental impression, perhaps with capricious partiality, perhaps to make amends for himself, perhaps with averted face...perhaps without the left hand's knowing about it, *but thoughtlessly, perhaps thinking about his own cares instead of thinking about the cares of the poor, perhaps seeking alleviation by giving to charity instead of wanting to alleviate poverty...* (1995, 13-14)(emphasis added)

So, Kierkegaard has talked about the inability to ever fully achieve temporal equality, but he has also talked about being truly attuned to the “cares of the poor”. And, he suggests that it would be much better to seek to “alleviate poverty” itself that to seek alleviation of one’s own conscience by giving. To draw a similar argument here, Žižek (2009) says precisely the same thing about “social capitalism” and solving the world’s problems by “buying” our way, consumerist-style, to justice. Hardt (2007) as well spoke of the dangers of love being reduced to charity rather than linked to actual structural change as it is in liberation theology. I clearly think Kierkegaard is on par with both West and Žižek here. He has the tragic belief in impotence that West talked about, but he is also attuned to economic exploitation, just as West said Afro-American Christian thought should do. Now, how does Kierkegaard go about fixing this problem? His praxis, as I’ve suggested, is neighbor love.

For neighbor love to happen, people must recognize their already-existent equality. On one hand, this is ripe for the Marxist critique of placing equality in the hereafter and not in this world, yet, Kierkegaard says that even amongst so much “dissimilarity”, people are still equal. The belief that they are not, that caste systems or slavery are natural and good in some way is precisely the “inhuman” “ungodliness” that must be overcome (Kierkegaard 1995, 345). How is it overcome? Answering this gets us into the heart of neighbor politics. Kierkegaard would answer that it is overcome with a revolution. That of the communists? Decidedly not. In a passage that sounds much like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard writes, and I quote at length,

Let us now consider the dissimilarity of lowliness. The times are past when those called the more lowly had no conception of themselves or only the conception of being slaves, of not merely being lowly human beings but of not being human beings at all. The fierce rebellions, the horror that followed upon that horror, are perhaps over also, but I wonder if the corruption may not still dwell hidden in a person? In that case the corrupted lowliness will lead the lowly person to believe that he must see his enemy in the powerful and the prominent, in everyone who is favored by some advantage. But be cautious, as the saying goes, because these enemies still have so much power that it could be

dangerous to break with them. Therefore the corruption will not teach the lowly one to rise in rebellion or to repress entirely every expression of deference or to allow the secret to be disclosed, but it will teach that something should be done and yet not done... Thus even in homage there will be a crafty defiance that, hidden, can exasperate, a reluctance that, hidden, says no to what the mouth professes, a tonelessness, as it were, of suppressed envy in the acclaim that honor the powerful. No force is to be used – that could become dangerous; it must not come to a break – that could become dangerous; but a secret of hidden exasperation, a remotely intimated painful dejection will transform the power and honor and eminence into an affliction for the powerful... here lie the art and the secret. (1995, 80-81)

He continues,

If, then, there was a lowly person into whose heart this secret of envy did not come and who also refused to allow the corruption from the outside to gain this power over him, a lowly person who without craven submission, without fear of people, modestly, but above all with joy, gave every advantage of earthly life its due, happier and more joyful in giving than perhaps someone who receives often is and can be – he, too, would discover the double danger. His peers would perhaps push him away as a traitor, scorn him as slave-minded, and, alas, the privileged would perhaps misunderstand him and deride him as a climber.

This is how dangerous it is to will to love the neighbor. There is plenty dissimilarity in the world there is dissimilarity everywhere in temporality- which, after all, is precisely the different, the multifarious. Moreover, by virtue of his dissimilarity a person may be able to get along with all dissimilarities in a compliant and accommodating compromise that scales down a little in one place and in turn demands a little in another place – but *eternity's equality*, to will to love the neighbor, *seems both too little and too much, and therefore it seems that this love for the neighbor does not fit properly into the relationships of earthly life.* (1995, 80-81)

Kierkegaard's more "profound" revolution (1995, 265) is an inward revolution of the individual first, that is then turned outwards in "sheer action" (1995, 98). It does not confuse its responsibility of love towards the neighbor, depicted as radical mercifulness, with earthly intentions of achieving *only* equality through machination. Injustice *will be* overturned, truly, the results will follow, if the how of neighbor love is truly practiced (1995, 317). Without this, the world changes, ostensibly for the better, but the "corruption changes also" (1995, 75-76). What had been practiced openly before now requires "public relations" in order to continue being

ungodly. It must be remembered though, that “It follows of itself that if the merciful person has something to give he gives it more than willingly,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 317).

Kierkegaard has a dual critique being offered here. He critiques the economic structures and discourses of society. This was discussed above with regard to earnestness in chapter three. He also critiques efforts and “mere” superficial change. Based on his quote regarding poverty, and his quotes regarding the institution of slavery, it would be false to say that Kierkegaard does not want change. Yet, this type of change is not for everyone. His politics, if practiced, could earn individuals pariah status in their own class and the other classes as well. Neighbor love is the politics that does not fit. As West states, “I actually believe that loving your neighbor as yourself is a desirable way of being in the world, even though it may seem absurd given the kind of world we live in,” (West 2008, 152). It is a comportment, an indifference to money altogether, both in giving and in possessing. Our dissimilarity should “hang loosely...like [a] cape” (1995, 87), one that can be taken off at any time. Kierkegaard writes that “However ludicrous, however frustrating, however inexpedient loving the neighbor may seem in the world, it is still the highest a person is capable of doing. But the highest has never quite fitted into the relationships of earthly life – it is both too little and too much,” (1995, 86). Similarly, West writes,

...postmodern times require an exaggeration of human possibility in order to keep alive the very notions of negation and activity of transformation...in one-dimensional societies which render revolutionary praxis a utopian dream and oppositional activity a nostalgic memory, naïve overstatements of human possibilities resemble divine revelations.” (1982, 99)

Finally, West writes that “...black theological reflection and action must simultaneously become more familiar with and rooted in the progressive Marxist tradition...and more anchored in its own proto-Kierkegaardian viewpoint...” (1982, 106)

My argument in this chapter has been that there is an alternative path to seeing Kierkegaard's influence upon Cornel West. The typical path of influence begins at the very familiar Kierkegaardian themes of the absurd, despair and faith. When West refers to Kierkegaard in (1991) as a "radical historicist", and when he says in the preface to *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982) that he wanted to Afro-Americanize Kierkegaard's critique of bourgeois Christendom, I believe he opens the door for us to see a different Kierkegaardian influence. Given West's many public pronouncements on the politics of love, I proposed that we read *Works of Love* for elements of historicism, which we see in Kierkegaard's repeated claims that love is meant to be an action in the world, not something sentimentalized or sung about. We can also see this in relation to the trenchant economic critique in *Works of Love*. The praxis is one that I think West described well, a "naïve" optimism that is needed in a time in which revolutionary praxis is rendered a utopian dream (1982, 99). The whole of *Works of Love* is about what we must do if we want a better world. The politics of love offered there, admittedly, are not of the democratic socialist vein of West's. Kierkegaard is not drawing directly on institutions here. But I would not say that he denies institutions the ability to practice neighbor love too. Neighbor love is a comportment of responsibility, of care, compassion, mercy and indifference to the economic systems that surround us. As Kierkegaard said, "It follows of itself that if the merciful person has something to give he gives it more than willingly...But...one can be merciful without having the least thing to give," (1995, 317). This is a politics for everyone.

Both Kierkegaard and West refer to love as being dangerous. It is in the sense that it is completely out of step with the world. Yet, radical, subversive, merciful love, no matter how apparently naïve, has the power to topple unjust societies. I think this is the purpose of Kierkegaard's discussions of the Good Samaritan (1995, 317), the Poor Woman (1995, 317), the

banquet for the lowly (1995, 81-81), and the actors (1995, 87-88). All of these represent people who have chosen to be out of step with capitalism, ignore the importance of money, give it when they can, and give it when they cannot. In this, we would have a new social contract, a contract that inequality and the tools that create it are illusions. Kierkegaard also states that "...hope relates to the future, to possibility, which in turn, unlike actuality, is always a duality, the possibility of advance or of retrogression, of rising or falling, of good or of evil," (1995, 249). This hope in possibility is not a hope for heaven, it is a hope in the very revolutionary politics of love, the neighbor and mercy. The politics of how, of quality, of inwardness that is turned outward, in sheer action and fruits.

The tonal resonances of love in Kierkegaard in Cornel West's work are, I think, clear. West's pragmatism leads him to rely on solutions that are a bit more institutional and material than Kierkegaard's, but they share the same prophetic Christian thought, that which sees love not only as a critique of unjust economic practices and structures, but as something that can potentially overturn it as well, provided people are willing to be so out of step with the times, appear naïve, operate with hope, and have a "steadfast commitment to the well-being of others", which I think Kierkegaard's Good Samaritan evidences quite well.

CHAPTER 6: THE ACTUAL SHAPE OF KIERKEGAARD'S POLITICS OF NEIGHBOR LOVE

Kierkegaard was, perhaps, at his most prescient when he wrote that within the state as it formally exists, "...injustice on a vast scale is justice, that in a very peculiar manner the concepts turn around or flop over..." (Kierkegaard, JP, 4238). Here is where we can most decisively distance Kierkegaard's politics from any defined by states of exception or emergency or those defined by a friend/enemy distinction (Schmitt 1996; 2006; 2012; Agamben 2005). Agamben writes of the exception and emergency,

...the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones. Faced with the unstoppable progression of what has been called a "global civil war," the state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics. This transformation of a provisional and exceptional measure into a technique of government threatens radically to alter – in fact has already palpably altered – the structure and meaning of the traditional distinction between constitutional forms. Indeed, from this perspective, the state of exception appears as a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism, (Agamben 2005, 2-3).

Agamben's critiques of Schmitt's states of exception and emergency (2006; 2012), political theology (2006) and the friend-enemy distinction (1996) are supported by Kierkegaard. We have seen how Kierkegaard deplored the divining of the state in any capacity (Kierkegaard, 1991, 87-88, 111) as well as any sort operative distinction between friend and enemy, especially when he writes,

Therefore the one who truly loves the neighbor loves also his enemy. The distinction friend or enemy is a difference in the object of love, but love for the neighbor has the object that is without difference. The neighbor is the utterly unrecognizable dissimilarity

between persons or is the eternal equality before God – the enemy, too, has this quality, (Kierkegaard 1995, 67-68).

While the friend/enemy distinction may define other types of love, for Kierkegaard, it has no place in love of the neighbor, a love which is sheer action (Kierkegaard 1995, 98) and a revolution (Kierkegaard 1995, 265). More important than these two distinctions, however, is the distinction of when the political happens. For Schmitt, the political of the exception happens in a time of emergency or crisis (Agamben 2005, 2-3). For Kierkegaard, the exact opposite is the case. The political happens, instead, when everything is ostensibly stable and calm, precisely when the state, complacently masquerades “injustice on a vast scale” as “justice,” (Hong and Hong 1975, 199-201). This is corroborated by Kierkegaard’s critique of distinguished corruption which is similar to Nietzsche’s critique of “the good and just” (Nietzsche 2005, 18).

Kierkegaard writes,

Yes the world has changed - and the corruption has changed also. Yet it would indeed be rash if one believed that the world had become good because it had changed. Just imagine one of those proud, defiant characters who previously delighted in this ungodly game of openly letting "those people" feel their paltriness - how surprised he would be if he found out that so much circumspection has now become necessary in order to keep this secret! Alas, but the world has changed, and as the world changes the forms of corruption also gradually become more cunning, more difficult to point out - but they certainly do not become better (Kierkegaard 1995, 75-76).

It is in this situation, when the state participates, cunningly, in the “ungodly game” of perpetuating “injustice on a vast scale” that love of the neighbor is needed. It is when the system’s individuals are comfortable, complacent, indifferent and unquestioning that the need for the political becomes urgent, not in the time of an emergency. I agree with Bartholomew Ryan here when he writes,

Kierkegaard’s exception is most needed when stability seems most assured. Also, unlike Schmitt’s exception being the decision of the sovereign, and thus the exception becoming the ruler governing a country, Kierkegaard’s exception acts as the critic in the face of the

universal or norm – and in extremis – in the face of political totality, thus giving the exception to the individual being governed rather than to the powers that govern. Kierkegaard's exception emerges in normality, or when society assures itself that it is stable and secure, in the case of the political realm, in times of peace, in times of stability; the exception ought to provide the exception to the rule, as the Socratic gadfly that confronts the ruling powers, the one that speaks out, responsible for themselves as individuals rather than as members of a faceless public (Ryan 2011, 201). Kierkegaard's love of the neighbor, as he calls it, is a revolution (Kierkegaard 1995, 265).

This revolution is meant to disrupt the “egoism” and “vast injustice” authored by the egoism (Kierkegaard JP, 4238). By operating with the categories of care and mercy (Kierkegaard 1995, 317), the love of the neighbor is meant to, subversively, undermine structures and transform individuals. From here, we must begin to ask ourselves, what are we comfortable with today?

I have argued in this dissertation that Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* is a vital text for political theory and that it affords us political sensibilities that can be responsive to contemporary political problems. Proceeding from a notion of the political informed by Levinas' responsibility to the face of the other (Levinas 1981; 2000; 1961; 1998; 1991), I have argued that the praxis of the love of the neighbor, as it is presented in *Works of Love*, represents a source of radical, political possibility that can impact a range of political injustices at both the individual and structural levels.

I began with Michael Hardt's recent attempts to think through love as a political concept, one that could dismantle the structures and effects of Empire. I began with Hardt for two reasons. The first was his positioning of love as an antidote to the structural and individual-level effects of Empire. The second was his preliminary five-part schema with which he approached the possibility of love as a political concept. According to Hardt, in order to conceive of love as a political concept, we must see love as an expansive social concept not limited to the same; eros and agape must be united rather than separated; love must be the love of differences; there must be primacy of the love by and for the poor; and love must be a productive force (2007). I have

shown that where Hardt was incomplete due to the nature of his own professed approach to such work as well as his own theoretical limitations, Kierkegaard's understanding of the command to love the neighbor served to provide the needed, theoretical, substantiation. I showed this over the course of chapters three through five. In each of those chapters, I accented a political element of *Works of Love* by putting it in dialogue with other approaches to love as a political concept. As chapters three through five progressed, we saw, theoretically, how Kierkegaard's understanding of the love of the neighbor provided an expansive social concept of love that was not limited to the same, a love in which eros and agape were not set apart but were structural to each other, a love in which difference or strangeness was nurtured, a love in which the poor were not objectified, and a love that was productive in its emphasis on action.

In chapter three, I argued that Kierkegaard's love of the neighbor was not premised on an originary estrangement as Tillich argued. Rather, Kierkegaard's love of the neighbor made an advancement on Tillich by allowing for love of the strange, a love that could still act even amidst radical alterity, a love that was responsive to the needs of the other no matter if the other was completely other to me in every respect. I argued that Tillich's concept of love was too constrained by Freudian-Hobbesian fears when it professed,

That which is absolutely strange to me cannot add to my self-fulfillment; it can only destroy me if it touches the sphere of my being. Therefore love cannot be described as the union of the strange but as the reunion of the estranged. Estrangement presupposes original oneness. Love manifests its greatest power there where it overcomes the greatest separation. And the greatest separation is the separation of self from self, (Tillich 1954, 25).

Kierkegaard, by offering a concept of love more expansive than this, one that did not need the psychological soothing of estrangement, is more in line with Hardt's notion of an expansive notion of love that is not limited to the same. Further, Kierkegaard's notion of love is not a

destructor of difference or one that merges identities into unity, but is premised rather on the perseverance of identities. Kierkegaard states this when he writes,

Therefore love for the neighbor cannot make me one with the neighbor in a united self. Love for the neighbor is love between two beings eternally and independently determined as spirit; love for the neighbor is spirit's love, but two spirits are never able to become one self in a selfish sense. In erotic love and friendship, the two love each other by virtue of the dissimilarity or by virtue of the similarity that is based on dissimilarity (as when two friends love each other by virtue of similar customs, characters, occupations, education, etc., that is, on the basis of the similarity by which they are different from other people...) (Kierkegaard 1995, 56)

I also argued in chapter three that Kierkegaard's understanding of the love of the neighbor was more sophisticated than Žižek's understanding of the relationship between love, law and justice. In Žižek's critique of Levinas' responsibility to the call from the face of the other, Žižek promoted abstraction as the path to justice rather than love. For Žižek, love is too particular to take adequate notion of the third or all of the faceless others that are excluded when one is focused on the face immediately present before them. For Žižek,

We should therefore assume the risk of countering Levinas' position with a more radical one: others are primordially an (ethnically) indifferent multitude, and love is a violent gesture of cutting into this multitude and privileging a One as the neighbor, thus introducing a radical imbalance into the whole. In contrast to love, justice begins when I remember the faceless many left in shadow in this privileging of the One. Justice and love are thus structurally incompatible: justice, not love, has to be blind; it must disregard the privileged One whom I "really understand". What this means is that the Third is not secondary: it is always-already here, and the primordial ethical obligation is toward this Third who is not here in the face-to-face relationship, the one in shadow... (Žižek 2005, 182)

Kierkegaard, however, similar to Levinas and contra Žižek, allows for a cooperative relationship between law and love and for a love that takes into account both those near and those far. I showed that Kierkegaard's understanding of the love of the neighbor is premised on the avoidance of law without love which only results in abstraction that is based on indifference. For Kierkegaard, love is the fulfilling of the law and in the absence of love, law simply becomes

a social contract mechanism that is not substantive enough to chart a course towards justice. For Žižek, pity, or love, is the failure of abstraction, while for Kierkegaard, abstraction is the failure of love, both for those near and far. Though Hardt did not address the relationship between law and love specifically, I addressed it here because it provides more substance to the nature of Kierkegaard's expansive concept of love.

In chapter four, I showed how Kierkegaard's understanding of the love of the neighbor overcomes the separation between eros and agape by putting *Works of Love* in dialogue with feminist care ethics. I argued that the care ethics Held (2006) and Mongoven (2009) are premised on partial and mistaken readings of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, such as when Mongoven states,

...Kierkegaard's conception of Christian love was defined over and against the home...instead of home affection balancing market rapaciousness, a view of totally disinterested love was contrasted to home affections...Kierkegaard gave love back its virility at the price of intimacy. (Mongoven 2009, 43)

Care ethics, for Held (2006) and Mongoven (2009), represent a source of democratic possibility and practice. By redefining citizenship along the lines of care, hospitality, sympathy and responsiveness, care ethics holds the promise of overcoming problematic, liberal emphases on the individual and promoting a more social understanding of the ethics of democracy (Held 2006). I argued that Kierkegaard offers a profound resource for care ethics qua his understanding of the love of the neighbor. Kierkegaard's social love of the neighbor operates in a public sphere that is defined along the lines of care, sympathy, love and responsiveness, and neighbor love for Kierkegaard requires a full integration of erotic love and social love, or agape in the process. Care ethics then, in its current manifestation, can be enhanced by a greater appreciation of Kierkegaard's love of the neighbor and its emphasis on responsiveness to the needs of others out sympathy, mercy, care and love.

In chapter five, I argued that *Works of Love* has a historicist element to it that is premised on action oriented towards securing economic justice for the poor. By situating Kierkegaard's understanding of the love of the neighbor in conjunction with Cornel West's work in *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (1991) and *Prophesy Deliverance!* (1982), I argued that, not only is *Works of Love* a primary influence on the politics of love employed by Cornel West, but, in line with Hardt, it also offers a love of the poor that is manifested in an activist form of love, one that is productive even in its powerlessness. We see this when Kierkegaard writes,

...Christian love...is sheer action; consequently it is as far from inaction as it is from busyness. It never accepts anything in advance or gives a promise in place of action; it never rests satisfied in the delusion of being finished; it never dwells indulgently on itself; it never sits idle marveling at itself. It is not that hidden, private, mysterious feeling behind the lattice of the inexplicable that the poet wants to lure to the window; it is not a mood in the pampered soul that knows and wants to know no law, or wants to have its own law and listens only to songs – Christian love is sheer action...(Kierkegaard 1995, 98-99).

When we contextualize this with Kierkegaard's critiques of ungodly dissimilarity (Kierkegaard 1995, 75-76), slavery (Kierkegaard 1995, 320), and the need to alleviate poverty rather than practicing mere charity (Kierkegaard 1995, 13-14), we see that Kierkegaard gives theoretical voice to what Hardt spoke about in a preliminary way.

Across these chapters, then, I have argued that elements of *Works of Love* substantiates, theoretically, all five areas of Hardt's five-part schema with which he approaches love as a political concept. What emerged in chapters three through five is the extent and the manner to which Kierkegaard speaks to difference, strangeness, the relationships between love/law/justice, the relationship of eros to agape, love and its relationship to structural economic injustice, and love as a praxis. What remains to be seen is how we can locate these political elements in concrete political practices in ways that can unsettle that which we are comfortable with, the vast injustices that we can often be indifferent to. In what follows, I will suggest how we can begin

to locate these elements in politics that impact all levels, from the most individual to the most structural. It is in the act of doing this that sets this dissertation apart from other works on Kierkegaardian politics. In the absence of doing this, a description of Kierkegaard's politics merely resides at the argument that Kierkegaard *has* a politics. Yet, I have not seen a discussion of what Kierkegaardian neighbor love looks like in terms of the problems such as race, immigration, economic injustice, and the environment. What we must be most concerned with now is what we can *gain* from his politics? This is how we can advance studies into the nature of Kierkegaardian politics. What does the praxis of *Works of Love* (1995) actually look like? In concerning ourselves with these questions, we can begin to explore how love can be responsive to contemporary political problems.

Starting at the most individual of concrete practices, we can see Kierkegaard's politics of neighbor love when someone gives money to another who asks for it, even if the person asked does not have the money to give. This political moment, being asked for money, is a political moment that nearly everyone has experienced, at least anyone who has walked through a city at some point. It is in this moment that we experience the call from the face of the other reminding us of our responsibility to them. It is in this moment that the duty to love, a love that has been freed from the vicissitudes of change, can become sheer action and responsive to the immediate needs of the other. It is in this moment that mercifulness can be accomplished.

Yet, many of us become exceptionally rational in such moment. Upon being asked for an amount of money, many of us will begin to calculate whether the person asking is worthy of the money. We ask ourselves, is this person worthy of my change, dollar, five dollars, or twenty dollars? What are they going to do with the money? Will they buy alcohol, drugs, etc.? Kierkegaard would say that we become very earnest at this point, economically earnest that is

(Kierkegaard 1995, 318). It is at this moment that Kierkegaard's understanding of the Christian like for like becomes important (Kierkegaard 1995, 380-386). The mercifulness and forgiveness we extend to others becomes the mercifulness and forgiveness that is extended to us. Similarly, in our repetition and imitation of the God-man, we love as we are loved. This is Kierkegaard's purpose in retelling the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Poor Woman (Kierkegaard 1995, 317).

In such a practice, we can see all the elements of Hardt's schema. Love, in this moment, is not deterred by strangeness or difference; it does not seek to change the other by forming a unity with them; it is a love of the poor rather than charity which typically occurs within a particular economy, i.e., a calculation of how much can be given out of what one already has; it is active and productive; and it models, socially, the examples of care and sympathy that exist privately. It is expansive as well, extending not only to those closest, but to those far away as well. In this instance, then, at the most individual level, the concrete practice of loving the neighbor is one that nearly all have wrestled with at some point. We choose to help or we choose not to help. If we choose not to help in that moment based on the principle that doing so will not really make a difference in the greater structural problems of poverty, then are we really responsive to the others' needs in the immediate moment? If, as Kierkegaard says, perfect human equality would be accomplished if we all truly loved the neighbor, then would this not be one of the first steps in such a revolution (Kierkegaard 1998, 111)? Would this not be one of the first steps in dismantling Empire? This appears to be a paradigmatic example of what Kierkegaard calls mercifulness that can do nothing (Kierkegaard 1995, 317). A mercifulness that can do nothing, but is still done, appears as nothing more than responsive action in the moment to the immediate needs of another.

Another place that we should look is to the current political efforts and democratic socialism of Cornel West, especially given that one of the dissertation chapters sought to parallel his early work in historicist Christianity with *Works of Love*. What does his current, later work look like such that it accents a Kierkegaardian politics of neighbor love? Currently, West's political and ethical work in the forms of public speaking and governmental lobbying is often done in cooperation with broadcaster Tavis Smiley. Together, they make numerous television and radio appearances and have recently written a book together entitled, *The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto* (2012). In 2011, they began, "The Poverty Tour: A Call to America's Conscience". Their primary aim was not only to "place poverty on the national agenda", but also to "put a human face on poverty so that the persistent poor, near poor, and new poor will not be ignored or rendered invisible during this unprecedented wave of economic downturn," (Smiley and West 2012). It is in the putting of a "human face" on the issue that West participates in deconstructing, as he so often calls it, the sanitized and deodorized public discourse of political problems. By putting a human face on poverty, West is also constructing a situation of Levinasian responsibility. West believes that avoidance of such faces leads to the absence of politics, or at least, the presence of indifferent politics. West believes that we avoid any and all language that is uncomfortable and which forces each of us, as individuals, to take a hard look at ourselves and the problems that surround us. In this effort, West is merely critiquing the economic earnestness and escape characteristic of the Christendom he currently lives under, just as Kierkegaard did in *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1995, 320). No longer, though, is this merely a problem of language or subjective orientation to it use, it is now a problem of democracy. According to Smiley and West,

True democracy focuses on the public interest; it defends the common good and protects its citizens – especially the weak and vulnerable. We maintain that no democracy can

survive without the powerful notions of *compassion* and *public service*. The level of wealth inequality in this country has gotten so far out of hand, the quantity of compassion so thoroughly diminished, that the very future of American democracy is at stake... We try to demonstrate how the elimination of poverty is possible if and when we *break from traditional paradigms and map a new course based on shared humanity and shared accountability*. (Smiley and West 2012, 10) (emphases added)

In their latest book, Smiley and West utilize economic statistics from the Pew Research Center to argue that nearly half of America is either poor or near poor. With such a startling statistic in mind, they argue that any avoidance of such an issue for any longer merely serves to undermine our own political ideals, as well as our ability to fulfill those ideals.

Their quote above concerning true democracy is an important one. We can see there how West's current work is still historicist and based in love, just as it was in an early work such as *Prophesy Deliverance!* West realizes that the cure, to borrow one of Kierkegaard's words, is to "break free from traditional paradigms" and develop a "new course based on shared humanity and accountability" (Smiley and West 2012, 10). I read this call for a new course to be paralleled in West's insistent public appraisals of a politics of radical love, that love which, as he says, is dangerous and subversive to talk about. West operates amongst silences, those that dominate public consciousness and make daily life comfortable. Just as Kierkegaard was a gadfly, so is West. His current politics which operate in this light are undeniably motivated by the notion of neighbor love as described by Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*. The emphases on compassion and public service speak to the notions of a de-sentimentalized love, one that, instead, has a "steadfast commitment to the well-being of others" (Kierkegaard 2008, 156). Love, here, is sheer action; it is not sung about; it is accomplished (Kierkegaard 1995, 46), and such a notion of shared humanity speaks to the Kierkegaardian notion that, "...all human beings are blood relatives, that is, of one blood, this kinship of life is so often disavowed in life; but that they are of one clay, this kinship of death, this cannot be disavowed." (Kierkegaard 1995, 345).

I believe West's politics to be a politics of love as well in their unmasking of subtle methods of corruption and greed, similar to Kierkegaard's unmasking of corruption in *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1995, 75-77). Here, West's attention to the unique needs of the poor and his relentless advocacy on their part (Smiley and West 2012) shows that he is much more interested in the alleviation of poverty than in simply, private Christian charity (Kierkegaard 1995, 13-14). His persistent claim to be operating the midst of a tragic-comic hope (West 1982, 96) also parallels Kierkegaard's notions of mercifulness, a mercifulness that may or may not be able to do anything, but is still clung to and practice in the imperfect effort to continually try to reform the system (Kierkegaard 1995, 318). And, finally, his persistent emphasis on hope (West 2008, 69) parallels perfectly with how Kierkegaard defines hope as the perpetual expectation of possibility, development and progress (Kierkegaard 1995, 254).

It is in such instances that I see West accenting a Kierkegaardian politics of love in material ways. His politics of democratic socialism and his continued efforts to expand social spending and governmental attention to the plight of the poor represent his efforts to connect the politics of love to institutional politics. West's politics of love, similar to Kierkegaard's, are the foundational element to a cure for "understanding oneself in one's longing for community" (Kierkegaard 1995, 153). That community includes the poor. For both Kierkegaard and West, attention to the needs of others and a practiced mercifulness are required for a truly progressive politics.

Peter Nyers, in his book *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency* (2005), begins his introduction with a quote from Gilles Deleuze which says, "There is nothing more unsettling than the continual movement of something that seems fixed." (2005, ix) Such a feeling of unsettledness, today, leads to harsh, abstract immigration legislation that results in the

fracturing of families and trampling of rights. This dissertation began by describing the immigration legislation in Alabama that has currently eclipsed, in harshness, every other state in the country. The fears that underlie the making of that legislation, I believe, can be tied back to the unsettled feeling that many have concerning things that not only seem fixed, but, as they see it, should be fixed. (Nyers 2003; Wright 2006) This applies not only to geographical locations of people, but to conceptions of national identity as well. The immigration debate in this country is no different than it has ever been, (Jacobson 1999; Honig 2001), it is a debate that is fueled by the unsettling fear by some that something is being corrupted, lost, and changed. In the midst of that unsettling fear, we are faced with “ethical and political questions that arise whenever the complicated problem of refugees, their movements, and their political practices arise,” (Nyers 2005, ix-x). Such ethical and political questions are generated through the “ontological activity” of movement in which “...bodies encounter and confront one another, thereby developing relationships that constitute the myriad ways of being and living in the world. How these encounters are structured and performed is of immense political significance. Will they be hospitable or hostile? engaging or effacing? equitable or hierarchical?” (Nyers 2005 x) The spaces, or, moments rather, in which bodies meet, spaces in which some of the bodies are on the move, while some feel fixed, is the space where the ethical and political questions of love and neighbor can arise.

The praxis contained in *Works of Love* has one of its best representations in the American Sanctuary Movement. The politics of the Sanctuary Movement are such that they are premised on accenting the unique needs of others, are compassionate, are merciful, and they operate in the face of the possibility of un-success, but with the continual hope in the possibility of true success. The movement also operates with a very Kierkegaardian understanding of the law. It

operates with a critique of the law that law alone, abstracted from love, can become unjust. The law itself must be animated by love. In this sense, the movement was famous for flouting U.S. immigration policies by bringing undocumented refugees across the border. Yet, they also attempted to work with the law by actively trying to change it so that it could more effectively secure the rights of those who needed them most. These politics may proceed from an ostensible impotence, i.e., they may seem to all observers, and sometimes even to those involved, as hopeless, and yet, like the Good Samaritan, participants choose to do it anyway. They choose an inwardness that results in outwardness, and this outwardness becomes the politics that has affected the public consciousness. From the individual level to the institutional level, the politics of love and the neighbor can be a profound revolution as Kierkegaard called it.

The American Sanctuary movement (Golden and McConnell 1986; Tomsho 1987; Lorentzen 1991; Coutin 1993) began in the early 1980's, in large part with the experiences of one man, Jim Corbett. Corbett, an Ivy League educated Quaker, whose philosophical influences included Gandhi and Martin Luther King, was a goat herder in Arizona. After a friend of Corbett's had given a hitchhiker a ride, the hitchhiker was a Salvadoran national attempting to escape his country, they were both captured by the INS, questioned, and the Salvadoran hitchhiker was deported. When Corbett found out what the man was going home to, he became incensed that such practices were being allowed to happen. As a result, according to Eugene Carroll,

In two years, from 1980 to 1982, he and a small group of like-minded individuals made hundreds of trips across the border to bring refugees back to the Tucson area for shelter. He had enlisted the efforts and support of the Tucson Ecumenical Council, along with Pastor John Fife of the Southside Presbyterian Church, to open that building as a refuge. On March 24, 1982, South-side became the first of several hundred churches in the United States to declare itself a sanctuary. The force of that declaration was not only felt in the United States in the ensuing months, but through the next several years it had rippling implications for the international church and government communities. The

admonition of Jesus, in Mark 12:17, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," was now stark reality to Corbett and his followers. They knew that their course was the only Christian answer to injustice, murder, and terror. (Carroll 1989, 577-579)

The result of more churches becoming involved across the country as a means to providing sanctuary to Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees created the sanctuary movement. Not only did they help the refugees once they got here, but in many cases, in complete violation of American immigration law, went and helped the refugees flee their countries to America. Their services to the refugees were numerous. According to Coutin, in addition to providing sanctuary, the movement members,

Brought Salvadorans and Guatemalans into the United States, traveled to Central America to accompany displaced communities, organized caravans to transport Salvadorans and Guatemalans to other parts of the United States, held ecumenical prayer services and vigils focusing on Central American issues, enable undocumented refugees to testify publicly about their experiences, sent telegrams protesting human rights abuses in Central America, lobbied Congress, provided social services to Central American refugee communities, sold and distributed Central American crafts and literature, organized press conferences, arranged visits and public presentations by visiting Central American activist and religious leaders, raised bail bond money for detained Central Americans, helped detainees file for political asylum, and more. As they performed these activities, sanctuary workers invoked and reinterpreted legal, cultural and religious practices in unique ways. (1993, 100-101)

Many of the sanctuary movement participants were indicted for their actions.

The sanctuary movement of the 1980's has gained traction again in the wake of various pieces of immigration legislation passed in the U.S., starting with the Arizona immigration legislation SB1070 and culminating in the recent HB56 legislation in Alabama. The new manifestation of the movement operates with the name, The New Sanctuary Movement. Yet, according to Schwartz, "Despite differences, the two movements share common features. Both were inspired by the liberation theology of Latin America and its doctrine of helping the oppressed. Likewise, both movements have operated under the belief that transnational problems

can be addressed locally,” (2010, 17). What was previously a sanctuary movement for political refugees is now becoming a sanctuary movement for economic refugees. The actions of ministers in Alabama in response to Alabama’s HB 56 legislation is a particularly nice example of such loving sanctuary.

The example of this movement shows Kierkegaardian politics at work nicely. Here, we have love going to the strange-d rather than the estranged; we have the law being undermined and flouted in the effort to show that it always exists as, and should be seen solely as, a skeletal structure; that law without love is cruel and abstract; yet it also works within the law in its efforts to help people become legal; it is historicist in that it is theoretic rather than philosophical or doctrinaire, it sees its mission as putting theory to practice and responding, today, to economic crises that force migration of peoples; and it operates with care, mercifulness and is attuned to the unique needs of other. Those who enact such politics are different kinds of citizens. They embody what Jegstrup called the Kierkegaardian “political consciousness” (1992), Dooley’s “community of neighbors” (2001), and an expanded view of Mongoven’s “transformed civic virtue” (2009). What is in flux here is precisely the concept of the nation, of national identity. We have here a politics that operates amongst what so many others prefer to see as fixed. Yet, in true historicist fashion, their political critiques of injustice and exclusion lead them to take on the role of neighbor and operate with a responsive commitment to the well-being of others. As Kierkegaard said, “Love is sheer action,” (Kierkegaard 1995, 46) and in the context of the problems the Sanctuary Movement addresses, their love-as-sheer-action is political.

Steve Lerner, in his book, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (2010), seeks to chronicle,

...environmental justice struggles in...fenceline communities and [to] celebrate the courage and perseverance of grassroots leaders who protest the contamination that

permeates their neighborhoods. Most of these residents are school teachers, veterans, health care professionals, or retired people. They do not have prior experience as activists and do not see themselves, at least initially, as environmentalists. For the most part, when the local pollution problem first comes to their attention, they have been living private lives and raising families. But when the fumes become too intense, when they find their family and friends falling ill from pollution-induced disease, they shed their quiet ways and organize a protest. (Lerner 2010, 1-2)

Such fence-line communities are the same as those discussed in the introduction. Uniontown, AL and Emelle, AL are predominantly poor areas populated with minority residents. It has been a traditional practice, as exposed by the environmental justice movement, to locate toxic dumps, factories or industries in these communities and effectively poison the residents over time. The environmental justice movement, of which Lerner is a part, has shown that there is no equity in exposure to harmful environments in America. The richer you are, the longer you live, is the general finding amongst environmental justice advocates (Camancho 1998; Mohai and Bryant 1992; Pace 2005; Faber and Kreig 2002).

The people that Lerner chronicles are the same “everyday moral heroes” that Mongoven (2009) found to be so crucial to the politics of the ethics of care. Here, just as Mongoven emphasized, are people who acted from the most passionate elements of the private in order to impact, politically, the public sphere. The politics of care/love practiced here are different in no way than the politics of MADD that Mongoven (2009) praised for being an example of transformed civic virtue. The civic virtue on display here is rooted in a politics of love, one that is premised on compassion, care, community, attention to unique needs of others and the idea that love is best expressed in political action rather than political rhetoric. Yet, just like Kierkegaard’s politics of love, those of the environmental justice movement must be enacted over and against distinguished forms of corruption. Lerner writes,

On one side of the fence is a group of residents who meet around a kitchen table or in a small church, talk about the odors coming from the plant, and complain to each other that they and their children are sick from the fumes... On the other side of the fence stand companies with vastly greater resources at their disposal to fight the antipollution campaigns mounted by their residential neighbors. These companies have deep pockets, legions of lawyers, and public relations specialists to get out their message. They hire lobbyists in the state capital and in Washington to see that their interests are protected, and they have the money to fund charitable works in the community as well as the power to hire and fire local residents who work in their plants. (Lerner 2010, 11-12)

Similarly, Kierkegaard writes,

To make money is earnestness; to make much money; even if it were by selling human beings, this is earnestness. To make a lot of money by contemptible slander – this is earnestness. To proclaim some truth – provided one also makes much money (it does not depend on its being true but on one's making money) – this is earnestness. Money, Money – this is earnestness. This is how we are brought up; from earliest childhood we are disciplined in the ungodly worship of money. (Kierkegaard 1995, 320)

Coexistent with this “earnestness” are the new, “distinguished” forms that corruption takes as society changes or passes progressive laws to ameliorate social injustices. Kierkegaard writes,

Yes, the world has changed – and the corruption has changed also. Yet it would indeed be rash of if one believed that the world had become good because it had changed. Just imagine one of those proud, defiant characters who delighted in this ungodly game of openly letting “those people” feel their paltriness – how surprised he would be if he found out that so much circumspection has now become necessary in order to keep this secret! Alas, but the world has changed, and as the world changes the forms of corruption also gradually become more cunning, more difficult to point out – but they certainly do not become better... So it is with distinguished corruption. (Kierkegaard 1995, 75-76)

The descriptions Kierkegaard offers here of one of the central critiques of a politics of love are paralleled perfectly in the efforts of those who seek to unmask the false earnestness, the slander, the untruths, and the cunning circumspection that is involved in destroying communities via environmental injustices. Those grassroots organizers and protesters in the realm of environmental justice who have “come to understand themselves in their longing for community” (Kierkegaard 1995, 153) have enacted a politics of love aimed at undermining and

stopping the manipulative and oppressive corporate and governmental practices that seek to destroy their communities.

The force on one side of the fence is the antithesis of a politics of love. We see how their charitable works are only meant to perpetuate the inequality rather than alleviate poverty or the injustice involved as Kierkegaard discussed. Kierkegaard's emphasis on how things are done could not be more relevant here. Care, compassion and mercifulness exist on one side of the fence, in the hearts and suffering lives of those who are fighting the oppressive powers. People that Lerner highlights such as Margaret Williams of Pensacola, Florida, Hilton Kelley of Port Arthur, Texas, and Suzie Canales of Corpus Christi, Texas, all chose to enact a seemingly impossible politics by fighting corporations and governments head on, giving action to the naïve optimism that Cornel West praised as a motivating factor for progressive politics, and showing that potentially impotent mercifulness, love for one's community neighbors, and attention to their imminent material needs, represents an alternative paradigm premised on shared humanity and shared accountability. Cornel West calls this a politics of radical love and so would Kierkegaard. It has all the characteristics of being a structurally-transforming form of mercifulness.

Lerner's further questions here are central. He writes,

So why do we not pass legislation to better protect fenceline residents? Why are we as a nation all but deaf to the environmental justice argument? Why are the general public and the press not calling for reform? Why do we allow a form of discrimination to persist in which toxic exposure burdens are clearly apportioned by race and class? And why do we sit idly by as the most toxic industries are sited in low-income and heavily minority communities? (Lerner 2010, 299)

These questions only set the stage for political action. They show, as Kierkegaard surmised, that law without love provides no justice whatsoever. It is merely a skeletal structure that induces

creativity, circumspection and public relations in the methods of those who wish to oppress others. Lerner concludes by writing,

...we must all be willing to look beyond the rationalizations and excuses for inaction and squarely face the fact that environmental injustices affect millions of citizens. We need to publicly acknowledge that the disparities in exposure to toxic chemicals follow race and class lines despite our cherished ethic that promises equal protection under the law...Only when these inequities in chemical exposure are acknowledged by millions of Americans will we begin to build the political will necessary to abolish these shameful...injustices. (2010, 314)

This only hearkens back to Kierkegaard's quote at the beginning of this dissertation: "the cure is precisely to learn all over again the most important thing, to understand oneself in one's longing for community," (Kierkegaard 1995, 153).

In these examples, we see that the problems of economic injustice, institutionalized fear and hatred of the immigrant, and environmental injustices, are susceptible to radical transformation via the politics of neighbor love, just as Hardt positioned love as the antidote to Empire. The love of the neighbor that Kierkegaard discussed is not a sentimental feeling, thought, or doctrine, it is action. It is defined by mercifulness, hope, abiding-ness, compassion, responsiveness, and responsibility. The politics of love that Kierkegaard described can, and do presently, inform progressive politics aimed at social change. Love gives concretion to politics and shape to the law. It animates private passions and connects them to public injustices. It builds community with the estranged and the strange-d based on mutual care and compassion. And it critiques and seeks to alleviate structures of inequality. Without love, we merely have politics and mere politics generally suffers from blindness to the neighbor. The cure is to learn again how to love ourselves and our neighbors.

My work discussed here has only begun to scratch the surface, not only of love's place in politics, but even of a text such as *Works of Love*. Future theoretical appropriations of the work

require a greater presence from those such as Derrida, Foucault, Nietzsche, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, and Paul. The limitations of this work necessitated that I put Kierkegaard in dialogue with those discussed here.

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