

# THE ESSENTIAL KIERKEGAARD

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*Edited by*

Howard V. Hong and

Edna H. Hong

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prescription with respect to how a person is to act in carrying out this enormous task.

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58 What those ancient Greeks, who after all did know a little about philosophy, assumed to be a task for a whole lifetime, because proficiency in doubting is not acquired in days and weeks, what the old veteran disputant attained, he who had maintained the equilibrium of doubt throughout all the specious arguments, who had intrepidly denied the certainty of the senses and the certainty of thought, who, uncompromising, had defied the anxiety of self-love and the insinuations of fellow feeling—with that everyone begins in our age.

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59 In our age, everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further. It perhaps would be rash to ask where they are going, whereas it is a sign of urbanity and culture for me to assume that everyone has faith, since otherwise it certainly would be odd to speak of going further. It was different in those ancient days. Faith was then a task for a whole lifetime, because it was assumed that proficiency in believing is not acquired either in days or in weeks. When the tried and tested oldster approached his end, had fought the good fight and kept the faith, his heart was still young enough not to have forgotten the anxiety and trembling that disciplined the youth, that the adult learned to control, but that no man outgrows—except to the extent that he succeeds in going further as early as possible. The point attained by those venerable personages is in our age the point where everyone begins in order to go further.

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87 It is commonly supposed that what faith produces is no work of art, that it is a coarse and boorish piece of work, only for the more uncouth natures, but it is far from being that. The dialectic of faith is the finest and the most extraordinary of all; it has an elevation of which I can certainly form a conception, but no more than that. I can make the mighty trampoline leap whereby I cross over into infinity; my back is like a tightrope dancer's, twisted in my childhood, and therefore it is easy for me. One, two, three—I can walk upside down in existence, but I cannot make the next movement, for the marvelous I cannot do—I can only be amazed at it. Indeed, if Abraham,<sup>42</sup> the moment he swung his leg over the ass's back, had said to himself: Now Isaac is lost, I could just as well sacrifice him here at home as ride the long way to Moriah—then I do not need Abraham, whereas now I bow seven times to his name and seventy times to his deed. This he did not do, as I can prove by his really fervent joy on receiving Isaac and by his needing no preparation and no time to rally to finitude and its joy. If it had been otherwise with Abraham, he perhaps would have loved God but would not have had faith, for he who loves God without faith reflects upon himself; he who loves God in faith reflects upon God.

This is the peak on which Abraham stands. The last stage to pass from his

view is the stage of infinite resignation. He actually goes further and comes to faith. All those travesties of faith—the wretched, lukewarm lethargy that thinks: There's no urgency, there's no use in grieving beforehand; the despicable hope that says: One just can't know what will happen, it could just possibly be—those travesties are native to the paltriness of life, and infinite resignation has already infinitely disdained them.

Abraham I cannot understand; in a certain sense I can learn nothing from him except to be amazed. If someone deludes himself into thinking he may be moved to have faith by pondering the outcome of that story, he cheats himself and cheats God out of the first movement of faith—he wants to suck worldly wisdom out of the paradox. Someone might succeed, for our generation does not stop with faith, does not stop with the miracle of faith, turning water into wine<sup>43</sup>—it goes further and turns wine into water.

Would it not be best to stop with faith, and is it not shocking that everyone wants to go further? Where will it all end when in our age, as declared in so many ways, one does not want to stop with love? In worldly shrewdness, in petty calculation, in paltriness and meanness, in everything that can make man's divine origin doubtful. Would it not be best to remain standing at faith and for him who stands to see to it that he does not fall, for the movement of faith must continually be made by virtue of the absurd, but yet in such a way, please note, that one does not lose the finite but gains it whole and intact. For my part, I presumably can describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them. In learning to go through the motions of swimming, one can be suspended from the ceiling in a harness and then presumably describe the movements, but one is not swimming. In the same way I can describe the movements of faith. If I am thrown out into the water, I presumably do swim (for I do not belong to the waders), but I make different movements, the movements of infinity, whereas faith makes the opposite movements: after having made the movements of infinity, it makes the movements of finitude. Fortunate is the person who can make these movements! He does the marvelous, and I shall never weary of admiring him; it makes no difference to me whether it is Abraham or a slave in Abraham's house, whether it is a professor of philosophy or a poor servant girl—I pay attention only to the movements. But I do pay attention to them, and I do not let myself be fooled, either by myself or by anyone else. The knights of the infinite resignation are easily recognizable—their walk is light and bold. But they who carry the treasure of faith are likely to disappoint, for externally they have a striking resemblance to bourgeois philistinism, which infinite resignation, like faith, deeply disdains.

I honestly confess that in my experience I have not found a single authentic instance, although I do not therefore deny that every second person may be such an instance. Meanwhile, I have been looking for it for many years, but in vain. Generally, people travel around the world to see rivers and

the envy of the elite and an inspiration to the common man, for his appetite is keener than Esau's. His wife does not have it—curiously enough, he is just the same. On the way he passes a building site and meets another man. They converse for a moment; in an instant he erects a building, and he himself has at his disposition everything required. The stranger leaves him thinking that he surely is a capitalist, while my admired knight thinks: Well, if it came right down to it, I could easily get it. He sits at an open window and surveys the neighborhood where he lives: everything that happens—a rat scurrying under a plank across the gutter, children playing—engages him with an equanimity akin to that of a sixteen-year-old girl. And yet he is no genius, for I have sought in vain to spy out the incommensurability of genius in him. In the evening, he smokes his pipe; seeing him, one would swear it was the butcher across the way vegetating in the gloaming. With the freedom from care of a reckless good-for-nothing, he lets things take care of themselves, and yet every moment of his life he buys the opportune time at the highest price, for he does not do even the slightest thing except by virtue of the absurd. And yet, yet—yes, I could be infuriated over it if for no other reason than envy—and yet this man has made and at every moment is making the movement of infinity. He drains the deep sadness of life in infinite resignation, he knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, and yet the finite tastes just as good to him as to one who never knew anything higher, because his remaining in finitude would have no trace of a timorous, anxious routine, and yet he has this security that makes him delight in it as if finitude were the surest thing of all. And yet, yet the whole earthly figure he presents is a new creation by virtue of the absurd. He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd. He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it, and no one ever suspects anything else. It is supposed to be the most difficult feat for a ballet dancer to leap into a specific posture in such a way that he never once strains for the posture but in the very leap assumes the posture. Perhaps there is no ballet dancer who can do it—but this knight does it. Most people live completely absorbed in worldly joys and sorrows; they are benchwarmers who do not take part in the dance. The knights of infinity are ballet dancers and have elevation. They make the upward movement and come down again, and this, too, is not an unhappy diversion and is not unlovely to see. But every time they come down, they are unable to assume the posture immediately, they waver for a moment, and this wavering shows that they are aliens in the world. It is more or less conspicuous according to their skill, but even the most skillful of these knights cannot hide this wavering. One does not need to see them in the air; one needs only to see them the instant they touch and have touched the earth—and then one recognizes them. But to be able to

mountains, new stars, colorful birds, freakish fish, preposterous races of mankind; they indulge in the brutish stupor that gawks at life and thinks it has seen something. That does not occupy me. But if I knew where a knight of faith lived, I would travel on foot to him, for this marvel occupies me absolutely. I would not leave him for a second, I would watch him every minute to see how he made the movements; I would consider myself taken care of for life and would divide my time between watching him and practicing myself, and thus spend all my time in admiring him. As I said before, I have not found anyone like that; meanwhile, I may very well imagine him. Here he is. The acquaintance is made, I am introduced to him. The instant I first lay eyes on him, I set him apart at once; I jump back, clap my hands, and say half aloud, "Good Lord, is this the man, is this really the one—he looks just like a tax collector!" But this is indeed the one. I move a little closer to him, watch his slightest movement to see if it reveals a bit of heterogeneous optical telegraphy from the infinite, a glance, a facial expression, a gesture, a sadness, a smile that would betray the infinite in its heterogeneity with the finite. No! I examine his figure from top to toe to see if there may not be a crack through which the infinite would peek. No! He is solid all the way through. His stance? It is vigorous, belongs entirely to finitude; no spruced-up burgher walking out to Fresberg on a Sunday afternoon treads the earth more solidly. He belongs entirely to the world; no bourgeois philistine could belong to it more. Nothing is detectable of that distant and aristocratic nature by which the knight of the infinite is recognized. He finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything, and every time one sees him participating in something particular, he does it with an assiduousness that marks the worldly man who is attached to such things. He attends to his job. To see him makes one think of him as a pen-pusher who has lost his soul to Italian bookkeeping, so punctilious is he. Sunday is for him a holiday. He goes to church. No heavenly gaze or any sign of the incommensurable betrays him; if one did not know him, it would be impossible to distinguish him from the rest of the crowd, for at most his hearty and powerful singing of the hymns proves that he has good lungs. In the afternoon, he takes a walk to the woods. He enjoys everything he sees, the swarms of people, the new omnibuses, the Sound. Encountering him on Strandveien, one would take him for a mercantile soul enjoying himself. He finds pleasure in this way, for he is not a poet, and I have tried in vain to lure the poetic incommensurability out of him. Toward evening, he goes home, and his gait is as steady as a postman's. On the way, he thinks that his wife surely will have a special hot meal for him when he comes home—for example, roast lamb's head with vegetables. If he meets a kindred soul, he would go on talking all the way to Østerport about this delicacy with a passion befitting a restaurant operator. It so happens that he does not have four shillings to his name, and yet he firmly believes that his wife has this delectable meal waiting for him. If she has, to see him eat would be

come down in such a way that instantaneously one seems to stand and to walk, to change the leap into life into walking, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian—only that knight can do it, and this is the one and only marvel.

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The act of resignation does not require faith, for what I gain in resignation is my eternal consciousness. This is a purely philosophical movement that I venture to make when it is demanded and can discipline myself to make, because every time some finitude will take power over me, I starve myself into submission until I make the movement, for my eternal consciousness is my love for God, and for me that is the highest of all. The act of resignation does not require faith, but to get the least little bit more than my eternal consciousness requires faith, for this is the paradox. The movements are often confused. It is said that faith is needed in order to renounce everything. Indeed, one hears what is even more curious: a person laments that he has lost his faith, and when a check is made to see where he is on the scale, curiously enough, he has only reached the point where he is to make the infinite movement of resignation. Through resignation I renounce everything. I make this movement all by myself, and if I do not make it, it is because I am too cowardly and soft and devoid of enthusiasm and do not feel the significance of the high dignity assigned to every human being, to be his own censor, which is far more exalted than to be the censor general of the whole Roman republic. This movement I make all by myself, and what I gain thereby is my eternal consciousness in blessed harmony with my love for the eternal being. By faith I do not renounce anything; on the contrary, by faith I receive everything exactly in the sense in which it is said that one who has faith like a mustard seed can move mountains. It takes a purely human courage to renounce the whole temporal realm in order to gain eternity, but this I do gain and in all eternity can never renounce—it is a self-contradiction. But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith. By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac. By virtue of resignation, that rich young man<sup>44</sup> should have given away everything, but if he had done so, then the knight of faith would have said to him: By virtue of the absurd, you will get every penny back again—believe it! And the formerly rich young man should by no means treat these words lightly, for if he were to give away his possessions because he is bored with them, then his resignation would not amount to much.

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Be it a duty or whatever, I cannot make the final movement, the paradoxical movement of faith, although there is nothing I wish more. Whether a person has the right to say this must be his own decision; whether he can come to an amicable agreement in this respect is a matter between himself and the eternal being, who is the object of faith. Every person can make the

movement of infinite resignation, and for my part I would not hesitate to call a coward anyone who imagines that he cannot do it. Faith is another matter, but no one has the right to lead others to believe that faith is something inferior or that it is an easy matter, since on the contrary it is the greatest and most difficult of all.

The story of Abraham is understood in another way. We praise God's mercy, that he gave him Isaac again and that the whole thing was only an ordeal [*Prøvelse*].

## PROBLEMA I

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104*Is There a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?*

The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times. It rests immanent in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its τέλος [end, purpose] but is itself the τέλος for everything outside itself, and when the ethical has assimilated this, it does not go any further. The single individual, sensately and psychically qualified in immediacy, is the individual who has his τέλος in the universal, and it is his ethical task continually to express himself in this, to annul his singularity in order to become the universal. As soon as the single individual asserts himself in his singularity before the universal, he sins; and only by acknowledging this can he be reconciled again with the universal. Every time the single individual, after having entered the universal, feels an impulse to assert himself as the single individual, he is in a spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*], from which he can work himself only by repentantly surrendering as the single individual in the universal. If this is the highest that can be said of man and his existence, then the ethical is of the same nature as a person's eternal salvation, which is his τέλος forevermore and at all times, since it would be a contradiction for this to be capable of being surrendered (that is, teleologically suspended), because as soon as this is suspended it is relinquished, whereas that which is suspended is not relinquished but is preserved in the higher, which is its τέλος.

Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal—yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal. If this is not faith, then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in the world precisely because it has always existed. For if the ethical—that is, social morality—is the highest and if there is in a person no residual incommensurability in some way such that this incommensurability is not evil (i.e., the single individual, who is to be expressed in the universal), then no categories are needed other than what Greek philosophy had or what can be deduced from them by consistent

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thought. Hegel should not have concealed this, for, after all, he had studied Greek philosophy.

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The difference between the tragic hero and Abraham is very obvious. The tragic hero is still within the ethical. He allows an expression of the ethical to have its τέλος in a higher expression of the ethical; he scales down the ethical relation between father and son or daughter and father to a feeling that has its dialectic in its relation to the idea of moral conduct. Here there can be no question of a teleological suspension of the ethical itself.

Abraham's situation is different. By his act he transgressed the ethical altogether and had a higher τέλος outside it, in relation to which he suspended it. For I certainly would like to know how Abraham's act can be related to the universal, whether any point of contact between what Abraham did and the universal can be found other than that Abraham transgressed it. It is not to save a nation, not to uphold the idea of the state that Abraham does it; it is not to appease the angry gods. If it were a matter of the deity's being angry, then he was, after all, angry only with Abraham, and Abraham's act is totally unrelated to the universal, is a purely private endeavor. Therefore, while the tragic hero is great because of his moral virtue, Abraham is great because of a purely personal virtue. There is no higher expression for the ethical in Abraham's life than that the father shall love the son. The ethical in the sense of the moral is entirely beside the point. Insofar as the universal was present, it was cryptically in Isaac, hidden, so to speak, in Isaac's loins, and must cry out with Isaac's mouth: Do not do this, you are destroying everything.

Why, then, does Abraham do it? For God's sake and—the two are wholly identical—for his own sake. He does it for God's sake because God demands this proof of his faith; he does it for his own sake so that he can prove it. The unity of the two is altogether correctly expressed in the word already used to describe this relationship. It is an ordeal, a temptation. A temptation—but what does that mean? As a rule, what tempts a person is something that will hold him back from doing his duty, but here the temptation is the ethical itself, which would hold him back from doing God's will. But what is duty? Duty is simply the expression for God's will.

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Here the necessity of a new category for the understanding of Abraham becomes apparent. Paganism does not know such a relationship to the divine. The tragic hero does not enter into any private relationship to the divine, but the ethical is the divine, and thus the paradox therein can be mediated in the universal.

Abraham cannot be mediated; in other words, he cannot speak. As soon as I speak, I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me. As soon as Abraham wants to express himself in the universal, he must declare that his situation is a spiritual trial [*Anfægtelse*], for he has no higher expression of the universal that ranks above the universal he violates.

It is great when the poet in presenting his tragic hero for public admiration dares to say: Weep for him, for he deserves it. It is great to deserve the tears of those who deserve to shed tears. It is great that the poet dares to keep the crowd under restraint, dares to discipline men to examine themselves individually to see if they are worthy to weep for the hero, for the slop water of the snivellers is a debasement of the sacred.—But even greater than all this is the knight of faith's daring to say to the noble one who wants to weep for him: Do not weep for me, but weep for yourself.

We are touched, we look back to those beautiful times. Sweet sentimental longing leads us to the goal of our desire, to see Christ walking about in the promised land. We forget the anxiety, the distress, the paradox. Was it such a simple matter not to make a mistake? Was it not terrifying that this man walking around among the others was God? Was it not terrifying to sit down to eat with him? Was it such an easy matter to become an apostle? But the result, the eighteen centuries—that helps, that contributes to this mean deception whereby we deceive ourselves and others. I do not feel brave enough to wish to be contemporary with events like that, but I do not for that reason severely condemn those who made a mistake, nor do I depreciate those who saw what was right.

But I come back to Abraham. During the time before the result, either Abraham was a murderer every minute or we stand before a paradox that is higher than all mediations.

The story of Abraham contains, then, a teleological suspension of the ethical. As the single individual he became higher than the universal. This is the paradox, which cannot be mediated. How he entered into it is just as inexplicable as how he remains in it. If this is not Abraham's situation, then Abraham is not even a tragic hero but a murderer. It is thoughtless to want to go on calling him the father of faith, to speak of it to men who have an interest only in words. A person can become a tragic hero through his own strength—but not the knight of faith. When a person walks what is in one sense the hard road of the tragic hero, there are many who can give him advice, but he who walks the narrow road of faith has no one to advise him—no one understands him. Faith is a marvel, and yet no human being is excluded from it; for that which unites all human life is passion, and faith is a passion.

WORKS OF LOVE (SEPTEMBER 29, 1847)

BY S. KIERKEGAARD

"Despite everything people ought to have learned about my maieutic carefulness, by 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 [*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*] they will probably bawl out that I do not know what comes next, that I know nothing about sociality. . . .

Now I have the theme of the next book. It will be called:

*Works of Love.*"<sup>136</sup>

The subtitle calls the work "deliberations" because a deliberation "does not presuppose the definitions as given and understood." "An upbuilding discourse about love presupposes that people know essentially what love is and seeks to win them to it, to move them. But this certainly is not the case. Therefore a 'deliberation' must first fetch them up out of the cellar, call to them, turn their comfortable way of thinking topsy-turvy with the dialectic of truth."<sup>137</sup>

Danish has two words for two kinds of love: *Elskov*, love in the ordinary sense, erotic love, and *Kjerlighed*, self-giving love, unconditional love, *agape* love. Much of the work concentrates on a clarification of the distinction. Other key terms are *opelske*, to love forth love by acting on the presupposition that the other acted in love, and *opbygge*, to build up ("edify" with its Latin root loses in English the literal basis of the metaphor).

Love (*Kjerlighed*) is a work, an act, not a mood, a feeling, a spontaneous inclination, but a task, and ultimately a gift in a triangle of love, whereby the "you shall" of the task is transformed into an expression of gratitude for the gift, and the imperative ethics is transformed into an indicative ethics of response, into a responsive striving born of gratitude.

The concluding chapters are on "Mercifulness, a Work of Love Even If It Can Give Nothing and Is Able to Do Nothing," "The Victory of the Conciliatory Spirit in Love," "The Work of Love in Recollecting One Who Is Dead," and "The Work of Love in Praising Love."

PREFACE

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These Christian deliberations, which are the fruit of much deliberation, will be understood slowly but then also easily, whereas they will surely become very difficult if someone by hasty and curious reading makes them very difficult for himself. *That single individual* who first deliberates with himself whether or not he will read, if he then chooses to read, will lovingly deliberate whether the difficulty and the ease, when placed thoughtfully together on the scale, relate properly to each other so that what is essentially Christian is not presented with a false weight by making the difficulty or by making the ease too great.

They are *Christian deliberations*, therefore not about *love* but about *works of love*.

They are about *works of love*, not as if hereby all its works were now added

up and described, oh, far from it; not as if even the particular work described were described once and for all, far from it, God be praised! Something that in its total richness is *essentially* inexhaustible is also in its smallest work *essentially* indescribable just because essentially it is totally present everywhere and *essentially* cannot be described.

Autumn 1847

S. K.

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Prayer

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! How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you who revealed what love is, you our Savior and Redeemer, who gave yourself in order to save all. How could one speak properly of love if you were forgotten, you Spirit of love, who take nothing of your own but remind us of that love-sacrifice, remind the believer to love as he is loved and his neighbor as himself! O Eternal Love, you who are everywhere present and never without witness where you are called upon, be not without witness in what will be said here about love or about works of love. There are indeed only some works that human language specifically and narrowly calls works of love, but in heaven no work can be pleasing unless it is a work of love: sincere in self-renunciation, a need in love itself, and for that very reason without any claim of meritoriousness!

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YOU SHALL LOVE

Matthew 22:39. But the second commandment is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Every discourse, particularly a section of a discourse, usually presupposes something that is the starting point. Someone who wishes to deliberate on the discourse or statement therefore does well to find this presupposition first in order then to begin with it. Our quoted text also contains a presupposition that, although it comes last, is nevertheless the beginning. When it is said, "You shall love your neighbor [*Næste*] as yourself," this contains what is presupposed, that every person loves himself. Thus, Christianity, which by no means begins, as do those high-flying thinkers, without presuppositions, nor with a flattering presupposition, presupposes this. Dare we then deny that it is as Christianity presupposes? But on the other hand, is it possible for anyone to misunderstand Christianity, as if it were its intention to teach what

worldly sagacity unanimously—alas, and yet contentiously—teaches, “that everyone is closest [*närmest*] to himself.” Is it possible for anyone to misunderstand this, as if it were Christianity’s intention to proclaim self-love as a prescriptive right? Indeed, on the contrary, it is Christianity’s intention to wrest self-love away from us human beings.

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In other words, this is implied in loving oneself; but if one is to love the neighbor *as oneself*, then the commandment, as with a pick, wrenches [*vriste*] open the lock of self-love and wrests [*fiavriste*] it away from a person. If the commandment about loving the neighbor were expressed in any other way than with this little phrase, *as yourself*, which simultaneously is so easy to handle and yet has the elasticity of eternity, the commandment would be unable to cope with self-love in this way. This *as yourself* does not vacillate in its aim, and therefore, judging with the unshakableness of eternity, it penetrates into the innermost hiding place where a person loves himself; it does not leave self-love the slightest little excuse, the least little way of escape. How amazing! Long and discerning addresses could be delivered on how a person ought to love his neighbor, and when the addresses had been heard, self-love would still be able to hit upon excuses and find a way of escape, because the subject had not been entirely exhausted, all circumstances had not been taken into account, because something had continually been forgotten or something had not been accurately and bindingly enough expressed and described. But this *as yourself*—indeed, no wrestler [*Bryder*] can wrap himself around the one he wrestles as this commandment wraps itself around self-love, which cannot move from the spot. Truly, when self-love has struggled with this phrase, which is, however, so easy to understand that no one needs to rack [*bryde*] his brain over it, then it will perceive that it has struggled with one that is stronger. Just as Jacob limped after having struggled with God, so will self-love be broken if it has struggled with this phrase that does not want to teach a person that he is not to love himself but rather wants to teach him proper self-love. How amazing! What struggle is as protracted and terrible and involved as self-love’s battle to defend itself, and yet Christianity decides it all with one single blow. The whole thing is as quick as a turn of the hand; everything is decided, like the eternal decision of resurrection, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (I Corinthians 15:52). Christianity presupposes that a person loves himself and then adds to this only the phrase about the neighbor *as yourself*. And yet there is the change of eternity between the former and the latter.

But would this really be the highest; would it not be possible to love a person *more than oneself*? Indeed, this kind of poetic effusion is heard in the world. Would it perhaps then be so that it is Christianity that is unable to soar that high and therefore (probably also because it addresses itself to simple, everyday people) is left miserably holding to the requirement to love the neighbor *as oneself*, just as it sets the apparently very unpoetic *neighbor* as the

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object of love instead of the celebrated objects of soaring love, a *beloved*, a *friend* (love for the neighbor has certainly not been celebrated by any poet, no more than this loving *as oneself*)—would this perhaps be so? Or would we, since we do make a concession to *celebrated* love in comparison with *commanded* love, meagerly praise Christianity's levelheadedness and understanding of life because it more soberly and more firmly holds itself down to earth, perhaps in the same sense as the saying "Love me little, love me long"? Far from it. Christianity certainly knows far better than any poet what love is and what it means to love. For this very reason it also knows what perhaps escapes the poets, that the love they celebrate is secretly self-love, and that precisely by this its intoxicated expression—to love another person more than oneself—can be explained. Erotic love [*Elskov*] is still not the eternal; it is the beautiful dizziness of infinity; its highest expression is the foolhardiness of riddles. This explains its attempting an even dizzier expression, "to love a person more than God." This foolhardiness pleases the poet beyond measure; it is sweet music to his ears; it inspires him to song. Ah, but Christianity teaches that this is blasphemy.

The same holds true of friendship as of erotic love, inasmuch as this, too, is based on preference: to love this one person above all others, to love him in contrast to all others. Therefore the object of both erotic love and of friendship has preference's name, "the beloved," "the friend," who is loved in contrast to the whole world. The Christian doctrine, on the contrary, is to love the neighbor, to love the whole human race, all people, even the enemy, and not to make exceptions, neither of preference nor of aversion.

There is only one whom a person can with the truth of eternity love more than himself—that is God. Therefore it does not say, "You shall love God as yourself" but says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind."<sup>138</sup> A person should love God unconditionally *in obedience* and love him *in adoration*. It is ungodliness if any human being dares to love himself in this way, or dares to love another person in this way, or dares to allow another person to love him in this way. If your beloved or friend asks something of you that you, precisely because you honestly loved, had in concern considered would be harmful to him, then you must bear a responsibility if you love by obeying instead of loving by refusing a fulfillment of the desire. But you shall love God in unconditional obedience, even if what he requires of you might seem to you to be to your own harm, indeed, harmful to his cause; for God's wisdom is beyond all comparison with yours, and God's governance has no obligation of responsibility in relation to your sagacity. All you have to do is to obey in love. A human being, however, you shall only—but, no, this is indeed the highest—a human being you shall love as yourself. If you can perceive what is best for him better than he can, you will not be excused because the harmful thing was his own desire, was what he himself asked for. If this were not the case, it would be quite

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proper to speak of loving another person more than oneself, because this would mean, despite one's insight that this would be harmful to him, doing it *in obedience* because he demanded it, or *in adoration* because he desired it. But you expressly have no right to do this; you have the responsibility if you do it, just as the other has the responsibility if he wants to misuse his relation to you in such a way.

Therefore—*as yourself*. If the most cunning deceiver who has ever lived (or we could make him even more cunning than he ever was), in order if possible to get the Law to be verbose and to become prolix (for then the deceiver would quickly conquer), would *temptingly* continue to question the *royal Law* and ask, "How shall I love my neighbor?" then the commandment will invariably go on repeating the brief phrase "as yourself." And if any deceiver has deceived himself throughout his whole life by all sorts of prolixities on this subject, eternity will simply confront him with the Law's brief phrase, "as yourself." Veritably no one is going to be able to escape the commandment; if its "as yourself" presses as hard as possible upon self-love, then in its impertinence *the neighbor* is in turn a stipulation that is as perilous to self-love as possible. Self-love itself perceives the impossibility of wriggling out of it. The only escape is the one the Pharisee in his day tried in order to justify himself:<sup>139</sup> to cast doubt on who one's neighbor is—in order to get him out of one's life.

*Who, then, is one's neighbor* [*Næste*]?<sup>140</sup> The word is obviously derived from "nearest [*Nærmeste*]"; thus the neighbor is the person who is nearer to you than anyone else, yet not in the sense of preferential love, since to love someone who in the sense of preferential love is nearer than anyone else is self-love—"do not the pagans also do the same?"<sup>141</sup> The neighbor, then, is nearer to you than anyone else. But is he also nearer to you than you are to yourself? No, that he is not, but he is just as near, or he ought to be just as near to you. The concept "neighbor" is actually the redoubling of your own self; "the neighbor" is what thinkers call "the other," that by which the selfishness in self-love is to be tested. As far as thought is concerned, the neighbor does not even need to exist. If someone living on a desert island mentally conformed to this commandment, by renouncing self-love he could be said to love the neighbor. To be sure, "neighbor" in itself is a multiplicity, since "the neighbor" means "all people," and yet in another sense one person is enough in order for you to be able to practice the Law. In the selfish sense, in being a self it is impossible consciously to be two; self-love must be by itself. Nor does it take three, because if there are two, that is, if there is one other person whom you in the Christian sense love *as yourself* or in whom you love *the neighbor*, then you love all people. But what self-love unconditionally cannot endure is redoubling, and the commandment's *as yourself* is a redoubling. The person aflame with erotic love, by reason or by virtue of this ardor, can by no means bear redoubling, which here would mean to give up

the erotic love if the beloved required it. The lover therefore does not love the beloved *as himself*, because he is imposing requirements, but this *as yourself* expressly contains a requirement on him—alas, and yet the lover thinks that he loves the other person even more than himself.

In this way *the neighbor* comes as close to self-love as possible. If there are only two people, the other person is the neighbor; if there are millions, every one of these is the neighbor, who in turn is closer than *the friend* and *the beloved*, inasmuch as they, as the objects of preference, more or less hold together with the self-love in one. Usually a person is aware of the existence of the neighbor and of his being so close when he thinks he has privileges in relation to him or is able to claim something from him. If someone with this view asks, “Who is my neighbor?” then that reply of Christ to the Pharisee will contain an answer only in a singular way, because in the answer the question is actually first turned around, whereby the meaning is: how is a person to ask the question. That is, after having told the parable of the merciful Samaritan, Christ says to the Pharisee (Luke 10:36), “Which of these three seems to you to have been the neighbor to the man who had fallen among robbers?” and the Pharisee answers *correctly*, “The one who showed mercy on him”—that is, by acknowledging your duty you easily discover who your neighbor is. The Pharisee’s answer is contained in Christ’s question, which by its form compelled the Pharisee to answer in that way. The one to whom I have a duty is my neighbor, and when I fulfill my duty I show that I am a neighbor. Christ does not speak about knowing the neighbor but about becoming a neighbor oneself, about showing oneself to be a neighbor just as the Samaritan showed it by his mercy. By this he did not show that the assaulted man was his neighbor but that he was a neighbor of the one assaulted. The Levite and the priest were in a stricter sense the victim’s neighbor, but they wished to ignore it. The Samaritan, on the other hand, who because of prejudice was predisposed to misunderstanding, nevertheless correctly understood that he was a neighbor of the assaulted man. To choose a beloved, to find a friend, yes, this is a complicated business, but one’s neighbor is easy to recognize, easy to find if only one will personally—acknowledge one’s duty.

The commandment said, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” but if the commandment is properly understood it also says the opposite: *You shall love yourself in the right way*. Therefore, if anyone is unwilling to learn from Christianity to love himself in the right way, he cannot love the neighbor either. He can perhaps hold together with another or a few other persons, “through thick and thin,” as it is called, but this is by no means loving the neighbor. To love yourself in the right way and to love the neighbor correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing. When the Law’s *as yourself* has wrested from you the self-love that Christianity sadly enough must presuppose to be in every human being, then you have actually learned to love yourself. The Law is therefore: You shall

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love yourself in the same way as you love your neighbor when you love him as yourself. Whoever has any knowledge of people will certainly admit that just as he has often wished to be able to move them to relinquish self-love, he has also had to wish that it were possible to teach them to love themselves. When the bustling wastes his time and powers in the service of futile, inconsequential pursuits, is this not because he has not learned rightly to love himself? When the light-minded person throws himself almost like a nonentity into the folly of the moment and makes nothing of it, is this not because he does not know how to love himself rightly? When the depressed person desires to be rid of life, indeed, of himself, is this not because he is unwilling to learn earnestly and rigorously to love himself? When someone surrenders to despair because the world or another person has faithlessly left him betrayed, what then is his fault (his innocent suffering is not referred to here) except not loving himself in the right way? When someone self-tormentingly thinks to do God a service by torturing himself, what is his sin except not willing to love himself in the right way? And if, alas, a person presumptuously lays violent hands upon himself, is not his sin precisely this, that he does not rightly love himself in the sense in which a person *ought* to love himself?

Oh, there is a lot of talk in the world about treachery and faithlessness, and, God help us, it is unfortunately all too true, but still let us never because of this forget that the most dangerous traitor of all is the one every person has within himself. This treachery, whether it consists in selfishly loving oneself or consists in selfishly not willing to love oneself in the right way—this treachery is admittedly a secret. No cry is raised as it usually is in the case of treachery and faithfulness. But is it not therefore all the more important that Christianity's doctrine should be brought to mind again and again, that a person shall love his neighbor as himself, that is, as he ought to love himself?

The commandment about love for the neighbor therefore speaks in one and the same phrase, *as yourself*, about this love and about love of oneself. And now the introduction to the discourse ends with what it wishes to make the object of consideration: that is, the commandment about love for the neighbor and about love of oneself becomes synonymous not only through this phrase "as yourself" but even more through the phrase *you shall*. We will now speak about:

*You shall love.*

because this is the very mark of Christian love and is its distinctive characteristic—that it contains this apparent contradiction: to love is a duty.

"You shall love." **Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eter-**

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nally secured against every change, eternally made free in blessed independence, eternally and happily secured against despair.

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However joyous, however happy, however indescribably confident instinctive and inclinational love, spontaneous love, can be itself, precisely in its most beautiful moment it still feels a need to bind itself, if possible, even more securely. Therefore the two swear an oath, swear fidelity or friendship to each other. When we speak most solemnly, we do not say of the two, "They love each other"; we say, "They swore fidelity to each other" or "They swore friendship to each other." But by what does this love swear? We do not wish now to divert attention and distract by calling to mind the great variety of things the spokesmen of this love, *the poets*, know through initiation—for when it comes to this love it is the poet who receives the promise of the two, the poet who unites the two, the poet who dictates the oath to the two and has them swear—in short, it is the poet who is the priest.

Does this love then swear by something that is higher than itself? No, that it does not do. This is the beautiful, the touching, the enigmatic, the poetic misunderstanding—that the two do not themselves discover this; and the poet is their one and only, their beloved confidant precisely because he does not discover it either. When this love swears, it actually gives itself the significance by which it swears; it is the love itself that gives the luster to that by which it swears. Therefore it not only does not swear by something higher but actually swears by something that is lower than itself. This love is indescribably rich in its lovable misunderstanding; just because it is itself an infinite richness, an unlimited trustworthiness, when it wants to swear it will swear by something lower—but does not discover this itself. The result, in turn, is that this swearing, which indeed should be and also honestly thinks itself to be the highest earnestness, is actually the most enchanting jest. Moreover, the enigmatic friend, the poet, whose perfect confidence is this love's highest understanding—he does not understand it either. Yet it is surely easy to understand that if one is truly to swear, one must swear by something higher; then God in heaven is the only one who is truly in the position of being able to swear by himself alone. But the poet cannot understand this; that is, the single individual who is a poet may be able to understand it, but he cannot understand it insofar as he is a poet, since the *poet* cannot understand it. The poet can understand everything, in riddles, and wonderfully explain everything, in riddles, but he cannot understand himself or understand that he himself is a riddle. If he were compelled to understand this, he would, if he did not become indignant and embittered, sadly say: Would that this understanding had not been forced upon me—it disturbs what is most beautiful to me, disturbs my life, and in the meantime I have no use for it. In a way the poet is right about that, because the true understanding is the decisive settlement of questions vital to his existence. There are, then, two rid-

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