The different forms of love we experience are crucial phenomena in human existence, helping to give shape to our purposes and meaning to our lives. Among them, romantic love that is hopefully consecrated in marriage, deep affection among family members, close bonds with a few dear friends, and wider relations of care for one's associates are central to our lives in contemporary culture, and something like these relations seems to be found in cultures around the world and through time. We do not think of these "special loves" as especially self-interested, as they usually include concern for the other's well-being for its own sake. But we recognize that they are distinct from a more controversial form of love that is held up in biblical traditions (and especially in Christian faiths) as the central virtue: namely, the agape which names God's pure love for creatures beyond anything they can merit, deserve, or reciprocate, and its human expression as "love of neighbor." Unlike the special loves in most contexts, love of neighbor is described by its adherents as a duty that should extend to all persons, like universal benevolence in Stoic and Buddhist traditions but with special appreciation for the uniqueness of each human person as a center of free will capable of responding to love and loving in turn.

Thus it should disturb us that philosophers and theologians starting with the famous Danish existential thinker Søren Kierkegaard have argued that this morally required form of agapic love is contrary in most respects to the motives that constitute human special loves, which appear selfish and possessive by contrast. Following Kierkegaard, the Swedish theologian Anders Nygren drove the wedge deeper in an influential work titled *Eros and Agape*. There he developed Plato's account of love in the *Symposium* as a sense of lack seeking completion, or need of some good that the loved one promises to add to our being. Broadening this model of eros, Plato had argued that all human motives have this "erosiac" form -- an idea taken up through modified in the eudaimonist tradition. Nygren took from Kierkegaard the idea that agapic love does not seek fulfillment of the lover through unification with the goods of the beloved or love object, but instead projects from the agapic lover towards the neighbor without regard to the neighbor's merits, qualities, or values. Contrast this with Aristotle's account of noble friendship (*philia*) as a love that indeed seeks the friend's good, but out of respect for his virtuous qualities. This contrast has deeply shaped 20th century philosophical work on love. While he denies that eros and agape are incompatible, C.S. Lewis famously portrayed them as "need-love" versus "gift-love," following Nygren. The American analytic philosopher Alan Soble makes Nygren's dichotomy the basis of his analyses, and a series of continental thinkers from Martin Buber to Emmanuel Levinas, Gabriel Marcel, and now Jean-Luc Marion have conceived agapic love as self-donating response to the other's "alterity," difference, or independent uniqueness without regard for self (though the contrast is less extreme in Buber than in Levinas).

Are we then stuck with the conclusion that the special loves are inferior, deeply marked by self-interest, either because of their erosiac form or their neediness or possessiveness? Or can these loves be transformed by connection with agapic love (which Christians regard as also enabled in us by grace)? In the last decade, there has been a lot of work on Kierkegaard seeking to show that there is no unbridgeable divide between neighbor-love and what he calls the "preferential loves" of human life. I will argue that Kierkegaard does not actually agree with Nygren's dichotomy, and though he is very critical of preferential loves in their natural form as unaltered by agape, he does offer one way to understand how agape can infuse the special loves. But significant problems remain with the way
Kierkegaard relates these types of love. The work of Dietrich von Hildebrand offers better steps towards a fully satisfactory set of solutions.

I. **Kierkegaard's Erosiac Conception of "Preferential Loves" (in their natural forms)**

I begin with three notes on Kierkegaard's famous and influential book *Works of Love*. First, it supports much of what is said about ethical life in his other texts, such as the pseudonymous *Either/Or* vol. II, *Fear and Trembling*, and the "Purity of Heart" discourse. Second, like Aquinas, Kierkegaard treats the agapic ideal of religious faith as a revealed command that "did not arise in any human being’s heart" (WL 24), and holds that loving in this way requires grace – although not necessarily special grace to particular individuals, as Kierkegaard says more than once that God’s love is the secret hidden wellspring of all human loves (WL 8, 146).\(^1\) Third, as if to emphasize this *source-thesis* (as I'll call it), Kierkegaard does not use the term "agapic" love but instead uses a word for spiritual love that is more neutral (*Kjærlighed*). This serves his apparent desire to indicate how spiritual love can inform the other forms of interhuman love, although some aspects of his analysis end up making this difficult.

As I've noted, what von Hildebrand calls the "natural categories of love" for family members, friends, spouse, etc (NL 237), Kierkegaard terms "preferential loves" to emphasize that they single out particular people: "to love this one person above all others, to love him in contrast to all others" (WL 19). He seems to have 'best friends' and romantic partnerships especially in mind in choosing this term to contrast with agapic love's universal directness to all neighbors without distinction or exception. In hindsight, this way of characterizing the difference between agapic and natural/special loves may have been a rhetorical mistake. For it seems to equate focusing on particular individuals and loving people *for* their bodily, psychic, social, and historical properties (both intrinsic and relational), when these are not obviously equivalent.\(^2\) And it does not well capture Kierkegaard's main objection to familiar interhuman loves, which is really that these loves are self-interested: they prefer certain individuals because of their properties, which the lover desires to relate to (bodily, emotionally, or cognitively) given their apparent value for life. The lover is drawn to these distinguishing properties because relation to their goodness promises to enrich his being. So SK writes that "passionate preferential love is another form of self-love" (WL 53).

Call this the *preference-implies-selfishness* thesis. Though *Works of Love* does not offer a very clear explanation of it, we can find clues to Kierkegaard’s reasons for this thesis in several places. It is not just that in erotic love and friendship, we are self-loving by indulging our preferences (WL 21). The real problem is that such devotions (at least in their "preferential" forms) are not based on anything higher, any objective good to which they respond for its own sake (WL 29-30). Instead, "this [preferential] love actually gives itself the significance by which it swears" (WL 30; compare EO II...). What Kierkegaard probably means here is that I love the other person for their constellation of traits because appetites that I already have select these traits as good-for-me to be related to; I respond to no other values in the friend or erotic beloved except those that are conferred by my prior inclinations (or dispositions to such appetites). Thus these loves lack "enduring continuance;” their motivating power can disappear quickly if my appetites alter or the beloved loses those properties that my appetites light up as good (WL 31, 36). This is close to Nygren's characterization of eros.

Thus, underlying Kierkegaard's distinction between preferential and agapic loves is

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1 Still it is not clear that Kierkegaard would agree with Duns Scotus that a human analog of agapic love (perhaps something like MacIntyre's "just generosity") is possible for us through the power of our wills prior to grace.

2 To be more neutral or beg fewer questions, I will use the terms "natural" and "special" loves interchangeably in my own references to the familiar non-agapic forms of human affective bond that we typically call types of love.
the difference there is between the play of feelings, drives, inclinations, and passions, in short that play of the powers of immediacy...in desire or in want – what a difference between this and the earnestness of eternity, the earnestness of the commandment (WL 25).

The appetites of our "immediate" nature are those passively acquired or given by our animal form, whereas neighbor-love "is a matter of conscience and thus is not a matter of drives and inclinations" (WL 143). Such love has a different motivational structure between agent and end; it aims at the well-being of the neighbor for her own sake, rather than being drawn towards it as part of the agent's happiness or perfection. Thus we have "to will to love the neighbor" against the natural grain of human nature, instinctive inclination, social mores, and peer pressure (WL 81, my italics). Like Kantian "good will," agape is a volitional motive actively formed by the agent, rather than caused by the attractiveness of the goal given our natural desire for happiness or completion: it is free of "natural determinants" (WL56). This seems to explain several other related theses that Kierkegaard gives us soon after his basic distinction:

- Agapic love is more autonomous because it is grounded on freely accepted obligation (WL 37); it is not dependent on the other in the way that acquisitive desire is (WL 38); because it flows from the agent's will, it "does not depend on the object of love" remaining a certain way (WL 39).
- Unlike preferential loves, agapic love shows equal regard for all other persons without distinction because it is not based on their (contingent/distinct) features.
- (Unmodified) preferential loves are possessive; for example, jealousy lurks in friendships, and especially in the desire for exclusive or distinctive regard from the other (WL 54-55).
- By contrast, whereas agapic love does not demand reciprocation from the other (WL 16), and thus does not aim at an exclusive relationship with the human other or God (WL 27).

If this is the correct interpretation, then Kierkegaard's basic distinction between preferential and non-preferential love derives mainly from an underlying implicit distinction between two adverbial modes of motivation (rather than two types of goal) that are similar to Nygren's eros and agape. In particular, in some passages, Kierkegaard seems to anticipate Nygren's central premise that if love is property-based, or responds to contingent features of the beloved that vary between people, then this love is erosiac and so formally self-interested. Note that Kierkegaard says that God's love for us cannot be property-based for this reason (WL 65). So Kierkegaard risks being committed to what I call the first Nygren-Soble argument that agapic love cannot be property-based [see handout]. I will argue that despite appearances, Kierkegaard does not actually agree with Nygren that the only way for love to respond to features of the beloved is by way of erosiac attraction towards them.3 We will see that von Hildebrand also anticipated and avoided this fallacy.

II. The Infusion Thesis: How Can Agapic Love Inform/Transform the Preferential Loves?

Even if we say that it only applies to the natural or spontaneous forms of preferential loves for Kierkegaard, his erosiac conception of these loves leads to several problems. The main problem concerns whether there can be any positive relation between neighbor-love and the preferential loves for romantic partners, friends, children, co-members of clubs and communities (and even for our "dear self" as object of various sorts of self-concern). His source-thesis implies that all human forms of love are at least inspired by Kjerlighed and ultimately God's creative love as final source; this is one of his reasons for holding that agapic love demands giving people the benefit of the doubt, awakening their capacity to love by giving them every chance, and even showing our enemies agapic

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3For Soble's version of Nygren's argument, see Alan Soble, The Structure of Love (...) ch.1. For my critique of Nygren's fallacy and argument that Levinas's conception of agapic love and duty depends on it, see Will as Commitment and Resolve, ch.9.
love that could inspire them to reconcile with us – themes developed in detail in the Second Series (see WL 209-299 on how love "builds up," "believes all things," "hopes all things," and "hides a multitude of sins," which is also the theme of some edifying discourses). Yet if preferential loves are erosiac and neighbor-love is non-erosiac in basic structure, they could only be co-present as distinct motives for the same act; they could not combine or synthesize.

Some Kierkegaard scholars thus conclude that agapic duty acts as a kind of "filter" for the preferential loves: conscience, through awareness of our obligations for neighbor-love, asks whether we are treating our friends, spouse, child, or coworker (and even ourselves) also as neighbor, and whether we are attending sufficiently to strangers in need while devoting our other kinds of love to these significant others on a preferential basis. As Kierkegaard says, the husband may love "his wife in particular, but he must never love her in particular in such a way that she is an exception to being the neighbor that every human being is" as well (WL 141-42); for example, he should respect her basic rights. Yet, while agapic duty must always operate this way as a check on excesses of natural-preferential loves, this is a purely negative relation: it says nothing about whether we can sometimes show too little of appropriate special-relationship love to certain persons, or whether agapic love may sometimes be expressed in and through a given form of natural-preferential love (or that agape might even need to be expressed specifically in this way towards some others). Surely sometimes what certain others need from us is to be distinguished from strangers, to be the object of special forms of attention as our child, friend, or romantic partner; perhaps that is part of what we ought to give them as neighbors too.

And Kierkegaard seems to agree, for he says that Christianity demands that conscience spread to all the other loves, and that the neighbor-love commanded by Christianity "now takes possession of every other form of love;" thus it has made even "erotic love a matter of conscience" (WL 140). In every special relationship, "in loving the beloved, we are first to love the neighbor;" so:

Your wife must first and foremost be to you the neighbor; that she is your wife is then a more precise specification of your particular relationship to each other. But what is the eternal foundation must be the foundation of every expression of the particular (WL 141).

This and similar passages imply what I call the Infusion Thesis: agapic love can infuse and transform all the natural forms of preferential love, so that erotic love, friendship, love of children, and even natural self-love are enhanced in their modes of special attention by awareness of the other person's transcendence and participation in divinity. As Kierkegaard puts it, agapic love willed by the human spirit and inspired by God's love "can lie at the base of and be present in every other expression of love" (WL 146). He even calls the natural loves a kind of "noble fire" that can be taught to "preserve love for the neighbor" within them (WL 62). If this neighbor-love contributes positively to all the other kinds of love, it must enhance love of an other precisely qua sibling, parent, child, friend, partner in a vocation or good works, or romantic beloved, enhancing what will to do for these others in light of what is special or distinctive about them in their concreteness and about our relation to them. This means loving them as they are rather than a false image of them (WL 164), and recognizing that their personhood, which makes them equal to all other persons in deserving agapic regard, involves their ineffable, property-transcending uniqueness as well (WL 68-69).

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4 For example, see John Lippitt on "The God Filter" in Kierkegaard the Problem of Self-Love (Cambridge University Press, 2013), ch.4: "The Problem of Special Relationships" pp.82-85.

5 The need for an adequate account of neighbor-love to include this kind of infusion of the special loves has recently been stressed by Sharon Krishek in her Kierkegaard on Faith and Love (Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch.4: "Neighborly Love versus Romantic Love." She argues that the model of faith as eschatological hope in Fear and Trembling provides a better basis for understanding an agapically transformed romantic love.
Unfortunately though, this crucial potential for infusion by agape seems to be ruled out if the preferential loves are all essentially erosiac in Kierkegaard's view: for then, the lover will always be aiming at his own perfection through the union with the beloved, rather than aiming at her good or encounter with her uniqueness for its own sake (or expression of these aims in attentions particular to the relevant kind of special love).

One way to avoid this outcome is to reinterpret Kierkegaard's contrast between the natural and agapic loves as based on the tendency towards possessiveness in the former [see handout], e.g. jealous desire to exclude third parties from friendship with our friend (WL 54), and perhaps insistence that no other man can even see our wife's face. This kind of possessiveness is a clear indication that our love for the other consists at partly in our interest in (some of) their features as contributing to our own material or psychic well-being, e.g. by enhancing our pleasures, status, sense of special privileges, prospects of healthy children, flattering self-image, or even envy of others. This interpretation has the advantage of locating the conflict with agapic regard in a contingent aspect of the special loves, rather than in their essential form. Then, even if they naturally begin with a possessive cast, the special loves can be rid of this aspect by being infused with agapic love, which makes the lover appreciate the freedom, mystery, and in general alterity of the other -- a term from Levinas that I use to stand for all that which makes it wrong and ultimately impossible to possess another person. There are definitely many hints in this direction in Works of Love, but this interpretation is partly a charitable reconstruction.

Kierkegaard offers one other possible solution in his argument that the love-command is a duty to "love the people we see" in their concrete particularity, despite all their flaws. In this section, he suggests that within special love-relationships, we can will devotion to our "beloved" or "friend" as that individual person who underlies all their features and traits, and remains the same even when these change (WL 164-65). That kind of love expresses faith in the beloved individual beyond all his or her imperfections, and thus recognizes her or his ultimate potential. For example, consider the nephew in Dickens' famous story who remains loyal to his uncle Scrooge in the conviction that within him a better man is struggling to get out. Or even more poignantly, in Shakespeare's greatest work, Cordelia's unending love for her errant father King Lear. This love operates within the bond of close kinship, but infuses it with the saving generosity of heaven; it clearly transcends any natural or non-willed kind of human affection. Kierkegaard envisions this kind of unconditional commitment being given within a special relation to particular people, so that the "lovers" or "friends" view their imperfections not as reasons to withdraw loves, but as tests to overcome together (WL 166-67). Such an infinite solidarity is possible within special loves in our experience, and seems to offer a positive relation between agapic and natural-preferential loves. The question whether natural attractions or bonds of exclusive regard in special loves are then seen as a mere occasion for focusing the volitional energy of one's agapic love on this or that particular person as one's special charge or task. In other words, the agapic love does not seem to be communicated through the natural form of love for parent, friend, or erotic beloved in Kierkegaard's account.

III. Von Hildebrand's Solutions on Different Levels

The more systematic work of Dietrich von Hildebrand on love offers us possible ways to solve the problems that Kierkegaard faces in relating agapic love and the special loves, or explaining how transformed versions of the latter can embody neighbor-love within them. Relying primarily on

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6 As Martha Nussbaum has argued in helpful essays on this topic. Kierkegaard frequently suggests that God's love is not envious, that God does not want us to love him rather than other human beings, but on the contrary, insists that we love Him through loving human persons (WL 160) -- an idea taken to its extreme in Levinas.
chs 6-7 and 9-10 of von Hildebrand's *The Nature of Love*, I will simply list four key points that I find especially useful in his account of the different kinds of love and relations between them, and note how each of these points improves on Kierkegaard's picture. Note, until the last point, I ignore the subtle distinction he draws between *caritas* and love of neighbor, which is not found in Kierkegaard.

First, his account of the natural loves is superior because it insists that their relation to my "subjectivity" including concern for my own happiness through these loves (NL 209) does not make them simply egoistic – either in the Hobbesian sense of looking for relations with material benefit to me, or in the sense of Platonic eros as "an appetitus" for the lover's own perfection (NL 123). Against this, von Hildebrand argues that in natural loves, the push toward union with the beloved has the character of Martin Buber's I-Thou with another person in all her alterity (NL 125), which he says is achieved by an "interpenetration of looks" (NL 126 – clearly a Buberian idea). So the union with my beloved, which I fully hope will contribute to my own happiness when completed in the beloved's reciprocation, is still *secondary* to my concern for the "objective good" of the beloved (NL 147) and my response to the other's unique value that arises "in the realm" of other values associated with her (NL 129). Later, in agreeing with Kierkegaard that "eigenleben" (or proper self-concern for one's subjective personality) is crucial for a good human life, he argues that this right self-love a necessary basis for the other special loves (NL 215) and that in such loves, "the happiness and salvation of the beloved person rank higher than the happiness of my union with him" (NL 212); so my happiness through relation with the beloved is also an intended but only secondarily. Here an insight is recovered from Aristotle, namely that we can care about another person's good for its own sake while also hoping for happiness through union with them. And beyond this, for von Hildebrand the happiness I derive from completion of a loving relation is at least partly a *byproduct* of the devotion to the values manifested by my beloved, and to the beloved's good for her own sake (NL 132). Relative to my primary goal in loving actions towards my beloved, my happiness from the union is an unintended side-effect; but at a secondary level, it is also thematic for me and intended, though only equally to my hope that the union will also contribute to my beloved's happiness in turn (NL 132). All this is consistent with the idea that in natural loves, I am concerned for the beloved for her own sake, but also concerned about achieving and sustaining my particular relation to her.

Now probably a strict Kierkegaardian would respond that this is a very optimistic picture of the special loves that describes their ideal state when they avoid the many types of possessiveness, erosic interest in our own perfection, and plain selfish interest in material benefits that the beloved brings, along with the side-benefit that I get to ignore needy others – the features Kierkegaard stresses in his critiques of real-life "preferential" loves. In fact, von Hildebrand still distinguishes

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7And in my will-book I have put it much this way by saying that friendship involves two ends, the primary one being the good of the friend, and the secondary one being the good of cultivating my relationship with him. In the practices, it could be similar; my main goal is to produce excellent instances of the good that defines the practice (for which the practice exists) while my secondary goal is to deepen my relationship to other practitioners from whom I learn and with whom I cooperate. But in the practice, we do not have the I-Thou kind of union.

8Such goods are in no way a means for my happiness; it is rather the case that I am made happy in a superabundant way by giving myself to them and letting their intrinsic value stand at the center of my attention" or become "thematic" for me (NL 132). I take "superabundant" here to mean 'beyond my intentional aim' and thus as a side-effect or byproduct; and the "self-donation" involved in pure concern for intrinsic values corresponds to what I have called "projective motivation" in my book on the will.

9If this is right, then DvH sees the special loves as quite complex in their best form: they involve a pure devotion to certain values as intrinsically worth expressing and promoting, as well as care for the beloved's well-being both in itself as a final end, and as part of a relationship with the lover (the lover intending that the beloved become happy in part through desiring and achieving union in reciprocal love with the lover in turn).

10At one point DvH suggests that the "opposite of this self-donation" or seeking I-thou union in the special
authentic natural loves from their baptized state infused with caritas (NL 252) –more on this later. But he gives a convincing description of special loves which shows that in their authentic form, they are not simply possessive or selfish. And the most important element he adds – namely the Buberian I-thou union with the other treasured as unique, irreplaceable, and unpossessable – suggests how a special love-relation could share something with agapic love. Thus it is no surprise when he adds that "[t]he penetration of all other categories of love with this stream of caritas" that comes from awareness of God's universal love actually "brings to perfection" the natural loves (NL 259).

In particular, the Buberian interpretation of the intentio unionis in non-distorted natural loves suggests a kind of attention to the other that, while valuing her traits and her way of embodying them or synthesizing them in the process of living, also pushes beyond these features to the very personhood that transcends them, the individual freedom of the other that can turn to me in the I-Thou relation. Whatever the problems of his own account may be, Emmanuel Levinas has probably taught us that attendance to alterity in this sense is central to agapic love; and this can be found in Kierkegaard's account, though it is not as stressed. But Buber provides the suggestion which von Hildebrand has developed, i.e. that love of the other's alterity at the core of her being can transfigure the various special loves as well. Thus I would say that von Hildebrand's description of the authentic loves already includes some connection with agape; at least, we could call this an alterity-focused version of the special loves, which can no longer properly be called "preferential" in Kierkegaard's sense. As this form of the special loves is not mainly erosiac in Plato's sense, the basic contrast that we found underlying Kierkegaard's opposition between preferential loves and neighbor-loves does not apply to von Hildebrand's authentic special loves.

The second point I would highlight is that von Hildebrand shares with Kierkegaard an emphatic distinction between the natural loves and agapic love (NL 238-39), but he draws this distinction more carefully. He argues that "in loving my neighbor I step out of my subjectivity" or familiar perspective in a way that I do not in love of friend, spouse, child etc. because these loves (even in their best form) must concern my well-being secondarily and in combination with my beloved's happiness. By contrast, loving the other as neighbor does not concern my happiness at all because "my neighbor as neighbor is not a source of happiness for me"11 (NL 209). Love of neighbor "does not establish any lasting personal union..." (NL 250). At most, there is a weak intentio unionis through hope for fellowship with the neighbor in the hereafter. Like Kierkegaard, von Hildebrand also stresses that willing the good of the neighbor is not the same as total self-abnegation, detachment, denial of one's own value, or loss of any interest in one's own good (NL 213-17). Similarly, Kierkegaard preserves a role for agapic self-love as authentic concern for the loving quality of one's own character. So there is close agreement between them on the structure of neighbor-love, though von Hildebrand does a better job of clarifying how it attends to the uniqueness of each neighbor as an individual.

One danger in von Hildebrand's formulation is that it might make it sound like the neighbor must be a stranger to us, someone whose good is not already bound up with our own happiness by some shared community or special love-relation. If that were right, it would make it hard to see how the light of agapic care could shine through or be expressed within the concrete aspects of other human relations including the special loves – the same basic problem we found in Kierkegaard's

loves is the "egocentricity that expresses itself in a person never being so happy as when he is independent of others and able to live out his desires without being bothered by them" (NL 212). This makes egocentricity a state without special loves even in their deficient forms, whereas SK recognizes these deficient forms. Elsewhere DvH does recognize them too, however, e.g. when he diagnoses an inauthentic simulacrum of love that is only concerned about its agent's own happiness as a "will to possess" the other (NL 135).

11Except, I assume, when happiness happens to come to my as a byproduct of serving my neighbor, as in the first/highest intention in the special loves according to DvH.
account. But I think what von Hildebrand means is only that the form of care for the other that constitutes neighbor-love is not concerned with my contingent relation to her. Moreover he holds that special loves involve "an intimate personal self-donation that is not found in love of neighbor" (NL 212) when it is not combined with any of the special-love relations. This intimacy found in the erotic and philial aspects of spousal love, in the tenderness of parents towards a child, in the adoration of a young child towards an older sibling, and in the spontaneous empathy of close friends who know what each other are thinking, is an affection involved in the I-thou encounter in these relations. Although arguably there must be a volitional element of commitment to the other in these loves if they are not passively arising erosiac attraction towards one's perfection through the other, in these relations, the volitional element of love is bound up with complex and often intense affective responses that are not under direct volitional control. Emotional responses to the other inform us of values involving him or her to which we respond with pure devotion, and our care for the other produces other emotional processes that call forth and respond to the other's responding emotions in turn; part of what I must do to love the other rightly in these cases is to open my own heart to him or her, making "a gift of my subjectivity" (NL 220). Yet this kind of complex affective interchange need not be involved in love of the neighbor, who after all can be a complete stranger in the ordinary sense.¹² In cases where I know the person to whom I must show agapic love, at least qua neighbor they are not in the same intimate union with me. This is interesting because it says that the willed donation of self-to-other in neighbor-love does not involve the same intimacy as in special loves.

Third, while von Hildebrand agrees with Kierkegaard that agapic love is distinguished by being commanded and by being a direct expression of a will to moral rightness (NL 236), he explains agapic caring in a way that more clearly brings out its universality and non-preferentiality and the way these link up with valuing each neighbor as unique and irreplaceable. This is found primarily in his point – which Kierkegaard would certainly endorse, but which he did not develop – that hating person A detracts from showing agapic love to person B in a way that we do not find in the natural loves (NL 238). This flows from the point that agapic love must express one's whole being and express the "goodness dwelling in the soul of the one who loves" (NL 239). Kierkegaard would phrase this point this way; one can only love the neighbor with one's whole heart; to be divided in one's will through hatred detracts from agape I may try to show to anyone else. The idea seems to be that the person showing caritas to other human persons reveals a grace-given motive that, as given by God, should infuse one's whole character.

However, a potential problem arises when von Hildebrand adds that

...with Christian love of neighbor the intention benevolentiae is not the result of affirming my neighbor in a value-responding way; it is rather an actualization of the goodness dwelling in the soul of the one who loves. Although this goodness can only be actualized in a value-response to my neighbor, it does not arise from taking delight in him or her. The one who loves another with love of neighbor is good to the other on the basis of the goodness and fundamental attitude of love that reigns in him; he brings this to the encounter with the other (NL 239).

¹²Indeed arguably this aspect of von Hildebrand's account might make it easier to connect the obligations of agapic love with justice to human persons more generally, e.g. if it possible to express agapic love to unknown distant persons or future generations through acts of justice to them that are motivated by a sense of their bearing the image of God even though I can never come into direct I-thou encounter with their unique irreplaceability (as opposed to similar intentions towards just acts that are only motivated by universal lawlike norms that abstract from individuality). If so, this would help correct another problem not only in Kierkegaard's account, but also in Buber's and in Levinas's. There are familiar problems with conceptions of agapic love that suggest a close emotional bond with the neighbor, because they make it immediately impossible to see how we could love more than a few neighbors at a time. Of course this is compatible with affective response to witnessing suffering or injustice of particular people I love as neighbors.
This might sound like an endorsement of Nygren's view that in agape, there is no response to antecedent perception of values in the person-as-neighbor (because that would be attraction to what delights us), but instead all the value the loving person discerns in the neighbor results from his devotion to her – what Soble calls the "bestowal" theory. As I noted, Kierkegaard also sounds like this when he appears to say that agapic love cannot be property-based: whereas erotic love and friendship are "defined by [their] object," only "love for the neighbor is defined by love" (WL 66), and its need to express its overflowing love is so great that "it seems as if it might almost be able to produce its object" (WL 67 -- a reference to the idea of divine agape as creative). If we go too far down this road, it can make the gap between natural loves and agape unbridgeable.

Yet von Hildebrand also writes that "There is a beauty and worth that inheres in every human person for as long as he lives, even if he is stained by the worst qualitative disvalues" (including moral wrongs); this is the "image of God" in each (NL 237) which Kierkegaard refers to as the divine "watermark." To me, this implies that agapic love does respond to something essential about the neighbor; there is a distinct kind of value found in the capacity for free will, independent life, and love that are standard for human persons. The willed effort of agapic love is justified by this basis, which will also be found in the person who is the object of our special attention in any natural love. So it still responds to a transcendent value, although this value do not attract according to familiar inclinations. The value of personhood itself do not appeal to my subjectivity in ways that draws on my personal affinities for certain values rather than others in the world, those to which my emotions and affects respond more readily for example.\(^{13}\) Thus "It is my neighbor who stands at the center of my attention and not my personal union with him or her," and this implies "a certain independence of the neighbor from me" (NL 240). In fact we might say that this alterity involved in the other's freedom is more fully thematized in agapic regard. So in neighbor-love, the "primacy that the beloved person possesses" in all authentic cases of the natural loves (in von Hildebrand's view) is radicalized; I can show agapic love to another person without calling him or her into any continuing relation with me as a result.

That seems right to me, though I agree with Gene Outka that we may at least hope that the other reciprocates in agapic love both for us and for others in turn -- and thus Buber's I-Thou relation might become an I-Thou in the case of agape yet still remain as a unique kind of encounter (especially in those cases where helping the neighbor requires that this neighbor learn that someone else is capable of loving him just for being a person). There is a strange way in which in the midst of an act of sacrifice for the other, the loving agent may find in an answering glance of the other or moment of recognition from a bystander a mysterious sense that she too has been loved by being given this chance. There is a fleeting anticipation here of a kind of encounter, though without the affectionate intimacy of the natural loves.

Finally, let me acknowledge von Hildebrand's distinction between caritas as a qualitative aspect of loves and the category of neighbor-love. He defends this distinction on the grounds that caritas is found in authentic human love for God, which involves the ultimate desire for union born of infinite value-response (NL 241-42). Likewise, Christ's love for human persons has the quality of caritas but involves a will to union with the individual that interhuman neighbor-love lacks (NL 249-51). This makes sense to me, but leaves it a little unclear what exactly defines the quality of caritas that also appears in neighbor-love. Von Hildebrand seems to equate it with a "holy substantial goodness and kindness" that expresses pure care for the unique other apart from any self-concern

\(^{13}\)Still, von Hildebrand may be correct that such a volitional response to the neighbor and concern for his good without relation to myself presupposes a "substantial goodness" infused into the loving agent by God (NL 242). Without this, perhaps we cannot love the neighbor in what he calls the "anticipatory" way that does not respond to the beloved's merits. Yet as Kierkegaard stresses, what we anticipate in neighbor-love is the neighbor's capacity to become loving in turn. And that is a response to a kind of potential that is found in the other's living free individuality.
Thus the crucial line, "Caritas is constituted in love for God, and neighbor-love is the fruit of caritas" (NL 243). But apart from its inspiration from God and dependence on grace, this quality looks like the privileging of the other's good that we find in all the authentic loves.

**Conclusion.** This distinction is crucial because it may open a way to solve Kierkegaard's problem. Strictly speaking, **neighbor-love** cannot be expressed within the natural loves even in their authentic forms for von Hildebrand (as these loves always aim in part at special union with the beloved -- a union with intimacy that to some extent takes our beloved's attention away from third parties, as Kierkegaard stresses). But the quality of caritas can and should infuse all the natural loves (NL 252). It does this by removing the danger of "egoism for the beloved person" or preference for them beyond the bounds of justice to others (NL 252-53). It also brings us back to the other person from excessive focus on our own agendas that can result from any serious commitment (NL 255).

When love for God is present in our natural interhuman loves, it inspires us to remember others whom our preferences could wrong if they extend beyond legitimate bounds.

I think this is on the right track: what we need is to isolate an agapic quality that can be present within special love-relations, including even their preferential focus and (in some types) need to exclusivity. But the way von Hildebrand explains this penetration of caritas into the other loves looks a bit like the corrective or filtering-relation we found in Kierkegaard's first account, according to which neighbor-love **checks** the natural loves with moral demands. Von Hildebrand says that caritas provides more than "the protective wall erected by the fundamental moral attitude against the dangers of natural love," and his idea seems to be that caritas avoids all forms of egoism more spontaneously, without the pain of conscientiousness; it is a virtue beyond dutifulness (NL 262). But a fully positive relationship between the loves in my sense requires one step further. We need to specify how the special attentions given to certain others in the different natural loves can themselves become expressions of the spirit of caritas at the same time.

Von Hildebrand might doubt Kierkegaard's volitional thesis as a way of explaining this, for caritas seems to be partly a special emotional attitude, rather than a pure will to care about the other. And this raises the question of how the closeness with another that we offer in natural loves can be strengthened by a volitional effort of commitment never to abandon the other. I think this makes sense if our special attentions within natural loves can eventually communicate to the other not only that we prize his happiness above our own, or appreciate her good qualities beyond our own delight in them, but also that we do this partly because it can express our absolute gratitude for the very existence of this other as a person. For example, beyond communicating to our spouse that we adore her beauty and value all the good qualities of her character, we also express -- 'between the lines', as it were, of our special-love statements -- that we prize above all these her very being and potential because of her basic independence and sanctity as a person. This is not to lace romance with Kantian duty but rather to indicate that we fully appreciate the deeper mystery behind the physical and psychical traits, or underlying the shared experiences and historical relationship we have developed. Although we might sometimes express this by being unwilling to do injustices for the good of our spouse or friend or child, verifying that our love for them ultimately endorses the same reality that is the basis of our duties to third parties, we also express more directly in intimate attentions shown to them (rather than to strangers) that we love them not only for the values to which our form special-love naturally responds, **but also** for the inner glory of their being as a center of mystery that we could never possess, that is due directly to God. So von Hildebrand is right that caritas here involves a love for God, a thanks to God for giving me the chance to know this person, for a brief or long time as may be, which indicates to them my gratitude to God for loving them better than I can.

This is not to divorce caritas infusing special loves from the moral quality of neighbor-love. Rather, in the fully positive relation, I hold that the legitimately bounded expressions of the natural love are part of what those who stand in certain special relations with me need from me, and thus part
of what I ought to give to them (to the extent that I legitimately can). To reach this conclusion requires the additional premise that what concretely is due to each as neighbor is mediated to an extent (though not entirely) by other layers of relations that vary between persons, and so are not universal -- relations of community, law, shared history, and bonds of natural love-relations as well. That might be a controversial thought from the perspective of both our thinkers for today, but it is one we could defend by looking back to Aquinas among others.  

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\text{For this I'm indebted to Eleanore Stump's Presidential Address to the APA some years back on Aquinas's interpretation of the duties of charity as a theological virtue.}\]