

3. M. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. A. Snoek (London, 1982), 167.
4. *Ibid.*, 164.
5. M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. D. Krell (London, 1978), 239.
6. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 31.
7. S. Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, trans. W. Lowrie (London, 1962), 144.
8. Kierkegaard, *Point of View*, 43.
9. "Aesthetic" in Kierkegaard can either refer to an existence lacking a "primitive impression" of existence and which is living, therefore, in illusion, or a concrete "life view," characteristic, for example, of paganism.
10. See, for example, JP, entries 1509, 2417, and 1823.
11. See, for example, JP, entries 1509 and 2420.
12. M. Weston, "Kierkegaard and the Origins of the Post-Modern 'Self,'" *European Journal of Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (2002): 398–412.
13. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford, 1967), 494.

8 What Kierkegaardian Faith Adds

to Alterity Ethics: How Levinas and Derrida Miss the Eschatological Dimension

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Introduction: Three Higher-Ethics Approaches to Fear and Trembling

In recent decades, a number of scholars have argued that a close relationship exists between the alterity ethics of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida on the one hand, and Kierkegaard's agapic ethics and portrayal of faith as a subjective process of individualization on the other. While I agree with M. Jamie Ferreira, Merold Westphal, John Caputo, and others that there are fruitful connections to be developed between Levinas's version of agapic duty and Kierkegaard's neighbor love ethic, I will argue (1) that Derrida's version of infinite responsibility offers little for the Kierkegaardian project of developing a sound agapic ethic and (2) that the distinguishing element of Kierkegaardian faith is eschatological hope, the significance of which is appreciated neither in Levinas's critique nor in Derrida's defense of *Fear and Trembling*. This argument is part of a larger critique of what I call "higher-ethics" interpretations of the "teleological suspension of the ethical" discussed by Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes de Silentio in the first *Problema* of *Fear and Trembling* (FT, 56).

In general, higher-ethics readings hold that when Silentio says Abraham's faith goes beyond the ethical, he means that Abraham obeys a higher duty, calling, or type of obligation that is contrasted with Hegelian social morality or (more broadly) with moral laws or universal precepts derived from any rational ground of understanding (Aristotelian, Kantian, utilitarian, moral sense, etc.). Thus the movement from Kierkegaard's ethical stage to the religious life-view consists primarily in a transition from ethics as the herd or the philosopher understands it to a singularizing ethical attitude that transcends all common moral codes sanctioned by tradition, government, culture, or even natural reason in general.¹ In particular, most higher-ethics readings of *Fear and Trembling* hold that the telos toward which ordinary moral laws are suspended is the

duty to obey a revealed commandment to love others for their own sake, that is, an agapic ideal.

In a recent essay, I distinguish three main genres of this approach.² The *strong divine command* interpretation (SDC) holds that Abraham's faith consists in absolute obedience to God's commands, which are arbitrary in the sense that they are not themselves governed by any independent standard. This view identifies Kierkegaardian faith—at least in *Fear and Trembling*—with the strongest form of theological voluntarism according to which all genuine moral obligation derives from general or singular divine imperatives, the right-making authority of which does not depend on them being constrained by any prior motives or principles: since God's authority rests purely on His power (or ownership of all He creates), He could command *any* X and thereby make X a duty for us. The passage that best supports this reading is: "He knew . . . that no sacrifice is too severe when God demands it—and he drew the knife" (FT, 22). Even though the singular imperative to Abraham seems to contradict all known duties, Abraham has a higher duty to obey it, no matter what. Patrick Gardiner suggests this reading, for example, when he says that for Kierkegaard, someone might be given an "exceptional" mission, to be fulfilled at *whatever* the cost.³

By contrast, agapic command ethics (ACE) readings say that in Kierkegaardian faith, our highest duties—if not all moral obligations—derive from the commands of a *loving* God.⁴ While this view is more plausibly attributed to Kierkegaard, especially in his late signed writings such as *Works of Love*, it does not so obviously apply to Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*, while sacrificing Isaac can easily be seen as obedience to an arbitrary singular divine command, how can it be seen as obedience to the commands of a God whose authority lies in His being Love? Perhaps God has a right to demand back any gift that He gave us if it is misused, or if its receiver loves it too possessively, or perhaps God has a secret good purpose that Abraham does not know; but Silentio does not consider any such explanations in *Fear and Trembling*.

Thus plausible ACE readings must hold both that the ethical which is suspended in faith is only Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* or Kantian *Moralität* rather than the agapic command ethics of Kierkegaard's religious works, and that belief in the love commandments would make it virtually impossible for us to be justified in believing that God issued a command to kill an innocent person.⁵ If this is right, then the Abraham example in *Fear and Trembling* turns out to be of limited value for understanding religious faith: it only gives us the schematic outline of faith as loyalty to a God whose loving will is a higher standard than *Sittlichkeit*, without reflecting much of its higher ethical content. Its main point, as C. Stephen Evans puts it, is to defend "the transcendence of the divine."⁶ Similarly, Westphal suggests that "the teleological suspension of the ethical is thus the movement of faith that recognizes the will of God and not the laws and customs of my people as the highest norm for my existence."⁷ Gardiner agrees: "The absolute sovereignty of the ethical" in the social or immanent sense is "transcended by a perspective" in which the individual may be

"subject to the demands of a unique calling."⁸ But on ACE readings, such a calling could not result from a singular command to despise others, fail to love them, or harm them just for the sake of harm.

As my description is intended to emphasize, the distinction between SDC and ACE views depends on the concept of agapic love having some content that is understandable by us, however imperfectly, prior to accepting the authority of God's will as the highest (or even sole) source of moral normativity. ACE collapses into SDC if "loving my neighbor" is simply defined as obeying *any* decree taken as divine will, whatever its content. There is now a lively debate about whether this is what *Works of Love* teaches. Against Evans, Westphal agrees with Jack Mulder⁹ that for Kierkegaard, love of God and love of human neighbors can never conflict just because what counts as loving anyone is determined by God's will (rather than the reverse): "This means that for the knight of faith who is commanded by God to sacrifice his son, that sacrifice becomes the right way to love the son."¹⁰ Presumably this means that an act whose final end is *simply and only* obedience to such a command could count as loving.¹¹ But if the content of agapic love is this fungible, then God's nature as Love could not ground His authority in the way Evans envisions: His commands would bind solely because of His absolute power and they would count as loving only by definitional tautology.

The third main genus of the higher-ethics approach I call *aretaic love ethics* (ALE); it rejects universal rules and regards only singular responses to unique situations as authentically loving. This third approach itself comes in several varieties, some of which are inspired primarily by neo-Aristotelian critiques of Kantian and utilitarian efforts to unify moral norms in a single ultimate principle, or to ground morality in rational autonomy or natural sympathy. Among these, the most subtle and insightful is Edward Mooney's carefully developed *aretaic* conception of ethical responsiveness as including awareness of dilemmas, sensitivity to the uniqueness of individuals, and holistic evaluation of concrete circumstances.¹² Mooney emphasizes that Silentio assumes "an objectivity of moral value. He never doubts that fathers should love their sons or that Abraham should love his God."¹³ But a conventionalist or rationalist ethics "eliminates anything like separate, individual persons, each of priceless worth" and is not flexible enough to account for the virtues of integrity and freedom in developing one's own unique identity. Thus

Faith is "higher" than social, civic, or rational morality. But not because it provides grounds for overriding ethics. . . . Faith is "higher" because for someone having wealth, it can be felt, retrospectively, to have transformed and completed a moral outlook all-too-familiar yet finally provisional. Faith enshrines space for a new ethics.¹⁴

In Mooney's view, then, it is only at the level of religious faith that the full value of individual persons as unique objects of essentially particularistic care is recognized; we become individuals in an absolute relation to the God who transforms lower ethics in this personalistic way, giving us back what was valuable

in "the universal" by a divine response tailored to our unique identity. This is similar in important respects to Evans's idea that "the selves we must become" are unique both in the sense that our universally human duties apply differently to our particular situation and in the additional sense that "there are genuinely individual tasks as well."¹⁵ This accurately reflects Kierkegaard's idea that each person has a distinct and divinely ordained calling.¹⁶

In this chapter, however, I will focus on the alterity ethics species of ALE, by which I mean readings that see Kierkegaard's conception of faith as anticipating the Levinasian idea that moral obligation arises from a fundamental relation or experience of another person (or the plurality of persons) as absolutely unique in value and/or status, beyond knowledge or constitution by the transcendental ego. Like Kantian accounts of moral necessity, alterity ethics emphasizes that the basic obligation to respond to others is *involuntary* in an important sense: it is binding without contract or optional undertaking on our part. Like Kant, Levinas requires a motive that is pure of self-interest, since it is not even formally aimed at one's own self-realization or *eudaimonia*. Kant and Levinas also agree that the moral *faktum* that obligates us, to which this pure motive responds, is prior to all theoretical knowledge and inseparable from the standpoint of responsible agency. This makes the revelation of duty in the face of the other somewhat like a revealed command beyond natural knowledge, despite Levinas's insistence that it is distinct from all "revealed opinions of positive religions" (TI, 23). Unlike Kant (and neo-Kantians such as Korsgaard and Habermas), alterity ethicists (alteritists?)¹⁷ do not allow this originary responsibility to be explained as an implicit commitment of free rational agency, or to be captured in any articulable norm applying symmetrically to myself and the other. Drawing on ideas that trace primarily to Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, alteritists hold that since what commands us to responsibility is the radical otherness of the person as unique neighbor, justice or goodness in its originary sense cannot be reduced to a principle or set of principles, but instead transcends any lawlike system of norms.¹⁸ The duty of absolute generosity or self-donation subverts anything like a list of basic human rights.

Alterity ethics therefore tends to be *antitheoretical*, resisting any rational explanation of the origin of obligation in the requirements of shared *eudaimonia* or the inviolable value that autonomous agency must see in itself. Rather, the difference between persons from which responsibility arises subverts the adequacy of any universal moral laws: for the most basic moral motive made possible by our openness to (or constitution by) alterity is an *absolutely singular* response to the neighbor that transcends linguistic fixity. It is enacted in *how* we speak and respond (the "saying"), not in *what* we say or the determinate content of our acts (the "said"). Rules, rights, and laws may retain an important place in our practices, but since they can only govern the content of actions rather than the adverbial *how*, they are consigned to a derivative and always incomplete level of ethical understanding. They are mere *diakonia* next to the transcendent ethical *noesis* of alterity.

There are many interesting questions about the potential of such an alterity account as an explanation of the agapic ideal.¹⁹ While there are other versions of agapic ethics, alterity versions tend to suggest the challenging possibility that an existential virtue ethics focusing on agape as its *pros hen* may really be a fourth basic position in normative ethics, irreducible to utilitarianism, *eudaimonist* virtue ethics, or even deontological theories of obligation and the good life. This distinct position is hardly without content; in particular, it holds that the moral status of persons is based on what I call their *unappropriability*: the metaphysical difference between myself and another person lies not in contingent physical or psychological variances, but in an absolute independence from my will and thought that makes it impossible for me to *possess* him. I can never acquire a right to own another because I cannot create alterity; and even if I have another person in my power, my control can never be absolute. This is an important and novel way of reinterpreting Kant's central idea that persons deserve respect because of their freedom and capacity for moral motivation. The agapic approach deepens the idea of individual uniqueness and expands the kinds of moral motivation possible in response to this uniqueness beyond the conception of duties in classical deontology. Yet the antitheoretical bias of alterity ethics, combined with the tendency among Christian philosophers to see agapic duty as strictly limited to theological contexts (assuming that its obligatory status depends solely on revealed divine command), have conspired to keep the full potential of an agapic virtue ethics from being recognized and developed as a fourth basic type of moral theory.

Notably, Aquinas and Kierkegaard agree that to understand and respond well to agapic obligations requires faith, making agapic virtues part of a "second ethics" that lies beyond any natural law accessible to human reason and natural sentiments. This is why it has proven so tempting simply to *identify* Kierkegaardian faith with this second ethics: faith then consists precisely in loving obedience to God and loving service to human neighbors.²⁰ Yet this thesis, which is shared by all the higher-ethics readings of the pseudonymous works, is wrong: it misses the *eschatological* core of "faith" or religiousness in Kierkegaard's sense. In what follows, I will argue that this error explains how alterity accounts of *Fear and Trembling* became possible.

The Eschatological Element in Existential Faith Versus Levinasian Alterity Ethics

The Absolute as Source of Eschatological Possibilities

Here is a brief summary of the eschatological reading of *Fear and Trembling* to which I've alluded:²¹ the telos toward which Abraham suspends his ethical duties to Isaac is the absurd possibility of Isaac's survival *despite* God's requirement that he be sacrificed. The scenario involves all the following elements:

1. *An ethical ideal E* that is *not* rejected or transcended as a moral imperative: the agent must continue to recognize and to will this ideal. (In Abraham's case, he must love Isaac with his whole soul.)
2. *An obstacle O* to the ethical ideal: the human agent is prevented from achieving his or her moral ideal by some misfortune, problem, or set of circumstances that make it practically impossible for the agent to secure it by his or her own powers. (In Abraham's case, the obstacle itself is religious: it is God's mysterious and terrible command to give Isaac back to Him, as it were.)
3. *Infinite resignation* (∞R): having concentrated his or her entire identity in commitment to E, the agent accepts that E is humanly unattainable because of O: E is accessible to his or her agency only as an ideal in atemporal eternity.²² Thus the agent either stops actively pursuing E by his or her own endeavors, or pursues it out of pure principle without any hope of thereby realizing E. (Abraham is resigned in this sense; he accepts that he cannot save Isaac if God demands him.)
4. *An eschatological promise* (from God or His prophets) that E will be actualized by divine power within the created order of existence—either *within time*, or in *the hereafter* as a new temporal series (rather than as a Platonic *aeternitas*). (In Abraham's case, God has promised him that Isaac will become the father of a holy nation to bring the Word to all peoples.)
5. *The absurd*: the content of the eschatological promise, which is only eschatologically possible given O (and thus appears unintelligible outside of faith). (For Abraham, the absurd is Isaac surviving by God's power to fulfill his promised role, *despite* being sacrificed.)
6. *Faith*, in what we may call the "existential" sense, is defined in terms of elements 1–5 above: the agent infinitely resigns E, yet trusting entirely in the eschatological promise, stakes her/his identity on the belief that E will be actualized by God. ("Even in the moment when the knife gleamed," Abraham believed that he would get Isaac back "by virtue of the absurd" [FT, 36].)

Existential faith is thus a type of eschatological hope. Eschatology in its most general sense refers to the final realization of the Good by divine power in this temporal order or its successor.²³

A command to transgress familiar ethical norms is *not* essential to existential faith on this analysis: usually the obstacle to E is *not* a divine command to violate E, but something more familiar, like sin, finitude, or mortality, for example. Nor does Abraham really violate the universal moral requirement (already known at his time) that the father shall love the son: for, given his existential faith, he does not believe that he is murdering Isaac—permanently ending his life. The ethical is suspended toward the telos of eternal salvation (FT, 54) or the eschatological Good in just the sense that for Abraham, the moral law can be *fulfilled*—not rejected or abrogated—only with the aid of grace: his striving to uphold ethical ideals depends for its ultimate significance or meaningful-

ness on revealed eschatological possibilities. Thus in faith, we relate to the universal moral law *through* our personal trust in the covenantal God, the Person who promises eschatological resolutions not deducible from natural theology (FT, 70).

The basic idea developed in this eschatological interpretation of Silentio's Akedah is not new: it is found in Alastair Hannay's commentary²⁴ and plays a larger or smaller role in a number of ACE readings. Edward Mooney especially emphasizes Abraham's belief "that the very God who requires Isaac will also provide for his safe return." Thus "Kierkegaardian faith is not blind obedience."²⁵ Similarly, Evans points out that Abraham's faith is not demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, but rather by "Abraham's ability to receive Isaac back again with joy"²⁶ because he never lost trust that God would return Isaac (FT, 20–22). "He believes that even though God has asked him to sacrifice Isaac, somehow Isaac will not be sacrificed, or that if he is sacrificed, God will raise Isaac from the dead" (FT, 36).²⁷ Westphal concurs: both the knights of resignation and faith are willing to give up what is most precious. "The difference is that the latter, in the person of Abraham, hopes, by virtue of the absurd, to get Isaac back in this life."²⁸ Similarly, Gardiner says that Abraham "was prepared to resist the dictates of ordinary morality" and "he further believed—against every rational expectation—that he would in some fashion 'receive back' the son he had been commanded to sacrifice."²⁹

But none of these interpretations adequately connect this trust in a miraculous fulfillment of ethical duty on the strength of God's initial promise with the higher agapic ethical ideal. If an ethical standpoint that respects individual uniqueness above universal law is what's central to Kierkegaardian religiousness, why not develop this idea without the "baggage" from revealed religion? This is the logic behind the alterity approach to *Fear and Trembling* in a nutshell. For example, Mooney speaks of a "God so placed as to return Isaac or to provide a ground of value or to underwrite individuality."³⁰ But are these the same or inseparably connected aspects of the divine? Do we need the first disjunct, if the goal is to find a basis for the incomparable preciousness of each person *qua* individual? Levinas seems to do without Kierkegaard's hope for salvation, yet still to find himself "vulnerable both to the intrinsic value of persons . . . and to an ultimate source of their value."³¹ Thus if the point of Silentio's *Problema II* is simply that "God transcends the social order" and so "an absolute duty to God would . . . relativize one's ordinary ethical duties,"³² then why not replace God with my neighbor or the Levinasian other? This is exactly what Derrida does in his argument that God is "to be found everywhere there is something of the wholly other," namely, everywhere a human person exists: "What can be said about Abraham's relation to God can be said about my relation without relation to *every other (one)*," since the relation is "secret" and singularizing in both cases.³³

Thus it may seem that the agapic ideal can be reframed for a time in which the idea of God or the authority of divine commands has become virtually unthinkable for many people. If the main goal is to identify a transcendent

standpoint from which "radical challenge to existing values" is kept an open possibility,³⁴ then Levinasian transcendence seems to do the job as well as Kierkegaard's God, but in a way that is open to more people, many of whom have sincere reasons for atheism or agnosticism (such as the problem of evil, naturalistic explanations of religion, and other atheological arguments). A bit less radically, if the point of faith is "a clear sense of the difference between God and my culture,"³⁵ so that (among other things) I can recognize the infinite ethical tasks of confronting poverty and suffering rather than resting satisfied with "the American way of life,"³⁶ then do I really need the incarnate Christ or "absolute paradox" for this? Since imitating Christ is only one way to understand this transcendent ideal, can't we have what is vital in Westphal's Religiosity C without the distinctive element in Religiosity B (the absolute paradox), or more broadly without miracles of the kind to which Abraham trusted his whole self?

In short, if the ACE readings of *Fear and Trembling* were right, then Derrida would have a strong point. Or, equivalently, Levinas's attempt to show the validity of agapic obligations without reference to biblical commands or to the authority of any historical religion is a serious challenge not only to Kierkegaard's own explanation of agapic duty, but to the indispensability of God for religiousness or faith as interpreted in any ACE account. This point is independent of acknowledged problems in Levinas's own critique of Kierkegaard; in fact, it is only *strengthened* by the response that Kierkegaard's agapic ethics is similar to Levinas's in several respects—except that Kierkegaard's also requires us to believe that God is not dead! Within the ACE project, Levinas and Derrida seem to have Ockham's razor on their side. This is a good reason to consider carefully if there is anything in Kierkegaardian faith that ACE readings leave out.

Answering Levinas's Critique of Fear and Trembling

Since Levinas's critique is addressed by other chapters in this volume, I will assume that readers are familiar with it and comment only on how it sets the stage for the chief error in later alterity readings of *Fear and Trembling*. Notably, Levinas himself does not read Kierkegaardian faith as anticipating alterity ethics; instead, he *rightly* focuses on the soteriological content of "religiousness" in *Fear and Trembling* and the Climacus works. He criticizes Kierkegaard's emphasis on the possibility of salvation as simply a more refined form of egoistic "thirst" or erosiac desire for self-completion.³⁷ In Levinas's view, despite Kierkegaard's defense of a subjectivity prior to totality, or individuality against "impersonal logos," he has not made a deep break from Hegel's "egocentric" conception of the subject.³⁸

I will contest this objection later. Yet in my view, the fundamental problem with Levinas's critique lies not in raising this worry about religious egoism but rather in failing to see the answer already present in *Fear and Trembling*. Though Levinas recognizes that Kierkegaardian faith is primarily about salva-

tion rather than ethical obligation (of any kind), he entirely misses the point that in *Fear and Trembling* the soteriological element is *Isaac's* being spared or passed over. He overlooks Silentio's evident emphasis on Abraham's absurd-by-rational-standards belief that obeying God's mysterious command will *not* result in murdering Isaac (i.e., causing his permanent death)—that the command is really a perilous test of faith in God's original promise to Abraham rather than a betrayal of that promise.

This oversight is clearest when Levinas suggests that Kierkegaard did not identify the best interpretation of the Akedah: "The high point of the whole drama could be the moment when Abraham lent an ear to the voice calling him back to the ethical order."³⁹ He fails to see that Kierkegaard agrees! In Silentio's version of the Akedah, this moment not only is the high point but is even expected as such: Abraham trusts absolutely in a prior divine promise which implies that *the ethical order will be restored*—whether by his being called back from the sacrifice, or in some other unpredictable and marvelous way. In Levinas's version, the point is that Abraham lends an ear to the command to stop the sacrifice when the surprise comes; in Kierkegaard's version, Abraham trusts from the outset that such a surprise will come. Faith does not consist in Abraham's being violently forced by the command "to abandon the ethical stage (or rather, what it took to be the ethical stage) in order to embark on the religious stage, the domain of belief."⁴⁰ The point of Silentio's story is not to laud sheer obedience to the command to sacrifice—which in my analysis would mean taking *the obstacle* as the ultimate authority or final word (which is despair). Rather, existential faith consists in trust that all obstacles to the complete realization of the ethical will be overcome "in the end," as God has promised, even though this outcome infinitely transcends the finite powers of our agency, strivings, and predictions. This is certainly not an assurance one can get from the alterity of human others; it requires eschatological divinity.⁴¹

The right understanding of the soteriological element in Silentio's narrative also lays to rest Levinas's worry about religious egoism. In *Fear and Trembling*, Abraham's existential faith concerns Isaac's life, Isaac's survival; his own good is affected only because he is *already selflessly devoted* to Isaac. Thus the content of his eschatological hope is what we may call an "agent-transcending" good.⁴² The eschatological good to come is, in itself, the miraculous realization of an agapic ideal in time. Abraham's devotion to this ideal and his trust in its fulfillment are both independent of any erosiac attraction to his own beatitude: Isaac's reprieve gives Abraham infinite joy only because of his prior devotion to Isaac, which is pure to the point of infinite resignation. To see this, imagine that instead of telling Abraham to stop and sacrifice the ram instead, the angel called out, "Abraham, now release Isaac and plunge the knife into your own breast, and Isaac will be saved." This would have been just as good as the ram to Silentio's Abraham; he would have died knowing that God's promise had come true: his belief was simply that Isaac would be saved, though he knew not how.

Thus eschatological hope and the ethical willing/caring it presupposes are arguably like what Levinas (rather misleadingly) calls "metaphysical desire,"

namely, a motive state not driven by lack or need in the motivated subjected but rather generated by the agent looking beyond her own good.⁴³ While ethical willing is generated by the agent projecting ends not needed for his completion, that to which the agent is committed in faith is not a goal of intentional action at all (since he knows that he cannot bring it about by his efforts), but rather a state that confers ultimate meaning on moral motives that are purely willed for the sake of their rightness. As Silentio says, the knight of infinite resignation values his ethical ideal apart from any result in finite temporal world: he knows that in loving others, one should remain "sufficient unto oneself" (FT, 44) or free of need in Levinas's sense. In short, eschatological hope that our moral efforts are not ultimately fruitless or without eternal significance supports the purity of agapic love as its consolation. Hope for such consolation or final meaning does not make our love egoistic.⁴⁴

Mooney is thus correct both that "mere obedience cannot distinguish faith" and that faith as Kierkegaard understands it might even be compatible with "Abraham refusing God's command."⁴⁵ But this is not because Abraham's situation is a moral dilemma with conflicting duties in which universal norms cannot guide us. It may be true that no sincere agapic ethics can provide an algorithmic procedure to decide what is best in Abraham's situation. Yet the perilous divine command functions as an *obstacle* to his prophesied future—as if a dangerous power in a fairy tale had acquired a terrible right to his life in bargain.⁴⁶ Given this, Abraham might reject the command, knowing that this move is just as powerless to save Isaac as obeying the command would be: either way, Isaac's fate is in God's hands. However, as Mooney sees, obeying is more clearly free of possessive attachment and recognizes that Isaac was an unmerited gift.

Contrast with Westphal's Response

It is helpful to contrast this reply to Levinas with the response given by Merold Westphal in this volume, which I take to represent the ACE view. Westphal argues that Levinas (1) does not distinguish the different senses of the ethical in Kierkegaard, and so misses the religious agapic ethics that is not teleologically suspended in faith; (2) that, while misconceived love of God can crowd out love of neighbor, Christian hope for heaven properly understood cannot be egoistic; and (3) that demanding that God's word meet pre-established ethical criteria sounds a lot like Kant's and Lessing's universal rational religion, which is open to the charge of onto-theological violence against the divine.⁴⁷ Do these replies adequately answer Levinas's concern that by suspending the ethical as *Sittlichkeit* in a relationship with God rather than in the alterity of the human other, Kierkegaard is justifying possible historical faith in immoral commands?⁴⁸

I agree that Levinas seems to be unfamiliar with the religious ethics of *Works of Love*, which is similar in some respects to his own agapic ethics. But as I suggested, Levinasians should respond that the love-commands only make the al-

leged problem with *Fear and Trembling* more difficult. For Levinas holds that if our responsibility to love our neighbor has any deontic force *at all*, it must at the very least prohibit ever intentionally taking innocent life (TL, 194, 198): in fact, the command not to murder is almost *equivalent* to the Face whose vulnerability calls us to care for this other person in his uniqueness (TL, 199).⁴⁹ But Isaac lying on Mount Moriah is even more vulnerable and innocent than Abel was before Cain (the example Levinas frequently cites). So any command to murder Isaac arguably conflicts not only with ancient Hebrew *Sittlichkeit*, but also with core of Kierkegaard's agapic ethics.⁵⁰ As we have seen, the eschatological reading is able to answer Levinas quite directly on this point, while the ACE approach is not.

Nor can we save Kierkegaard from the charge of religious egoism by interpreting the desire for salvation in an afterlife as a desire "to make permanent and perfect the welcoming of the Other, both divine and human."⁵¹ Described this way, faith becomes a desire for righteousness that Levinas would argue should be treated as a moral ideal resting on the phenomenology of otherness rather than any historical revelation. But this ideal is incomplete: while the eschatological goods in which Christianity, prophetic Judaism, and Islam have faith surely include this perfecting of our love, they must also include the *realization* of goods we legitimately willed (however imperfectly) for others and ourselves—and thus some final meaning to all good human efforts and striving. In other words, the perfection of the promised hereafter in which I trust must be *more* than the purification of my will; it must include the fulfillment of a pure heart's wish to see the kingdom of heaven realized for all who can participate in it. To give one concrete and poignant example, if my will was perfected and united with God, but Anne Frank was still dead and her father's soul still in despair, I do not think I could be in heaven. But this kind of restoration or renewal goes beyond our ethical intentions and works, even in their highest agapic form: it requires the cosmogenic power that created the world to recreate it anew, with every distortion straightened, every evil answered, every good effort or striving given final positive significance, and more beyond all imagination.⁵² The absolute reconciliation of enemies that Westphal cites from Kierkegaard's discourse on eternal salvation (EUD, 265)⁵³ is another good example. As much as I might long for such a reconciliation and work for some part of it with my whole mind and body, honesty requires infinite resignation to my inability to bring it about, since it requires free choices on the part of others who I cannot control.

This is the infinite comfort provided by the expectancy of salvation: the belief that striving for ethical ideals need not all be *for naught* in the final scheme of things. The boundless joy of this eschatological state is beyond description, but it not egoistic; for this joy is a by-product of willing the good of others *for its own sake* and seeing them flourish infinitely, beyond all finite earthly hopes, in the end. This answers Levinas's worry without reducing eschatological happiness to the self-respect or dignity that a person of goodwill can find

purely in the rightness of her own ends, which is possible even without any hope of achieving her righteous goals.⁵⁴ The eschatological fulfillment of all ethical hopes is much more than an infinitely good conscience.

Derrida: Faith as Dilemmic Obligation Without Eschatological Hope

Derrida on Abraham's Silence

I explained above why Derrida's approach to *Fear and Trembling* makes some sense as a response to familiar SDC and ACE readings. However, Derrida's account in *The Gift of Death* not only follows Levinas's basic error and eliminates the distinctive element in Kierkegaardian faith, but also makes nonsense of the agapic ethical ideal that is supposed to replace the duty to God in this particular alterity interpretation (though not in all ALE readings). This is ironic for several reasons, including that Derrida accuses several other twentieth-century authors of offering us "a nondogmatic doublet of dogma" in place of the *mysterium* of revealed religion,⁵⁵ when this *mysterium* actually centers in the eschatological.

Derrida starts off well, associating religious fear and trembling with being seen in secret by the hidden, silent, God who judges.⁵⁶ He then emphasizes the Knight of Faith's silence, by which he "transgresses the ethical order" or "betrays ethics."⁵⁷ Silentio's Abraham is silent not to save Isaac. Derrida writes, but rather because speaking would imply that the duty involved is one for which he can answer in public, not one that singles him out. This is bizarre for two reasons. First, the idea that "no one can perform in my place"⁵⁸ the duty assigned uniquely to me hardly seems to require secrecy; in fact, people say things like this all time, and are often understood: this task is given to me; no one can perform it but me, and so on. For example, Frodo says such things several times in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and Sam understands him, though not completely until he too has borne the Ring.

Second, in Problema III, Silentio's statements concerning why Abraham cannot explain himself have little to do with the idea that authentic responsibility is an aporia of unique, singular, nonsubstitutable demands in contrast to "the generality of ethics" (as understood by lower minds—lawyers, philosophers, the rabble);⁵⁹ it is rather because Abraham's trust that he will get Isaac back cannot be rationally comprehended. Silentio is very clear that he is talking about "speech" as *rational explanation*. "If I cannot make myself understood when I speak, then I am not speaking" in the relevant sense (FT, 113). Abraham can certainly say that "he is going to sacrifice [Isaac] because it is only an ordeal" (FT, 113).⁶⁰ Yet "only an ordeal" means that Isaac will still live despite being sacrificed. "But it will not happen, or if it does, the Lord will give me a new Isaac, by virtue of the absurd" (FT, 115). By all "human reckoning" (FT, 115), this makes no sense; it sounds utterly crazy.⁶¹ We can view this as an aporia

of human reason or "human language" (FT, 114), but it is not the aporia of higher-ethical election that Derrida has in mind.

Kierkegaard's God, then, is "jealous" of other false gods, but not of the ethical ideal He promises to fulfill. The religious life view contains the ethical ideal within it; its content mentions the actualization of the ethical ideal, and thus is defined in relation to it. The ethical *per se* is not "renounced."⁶² This religious life view only denies the *existential sufficiency* or stability of a life devoted to the good but forlorn of all eschatological hope. The idea of a religiousness beyond, or without, or "against" ethics⁶³ is thus in total contradiction to Kierkegaard's account of cumulative existential "stages." Such a description instead suggests a Nietzschean religiousness, if that is conceivable. It does not help to respond that "Kierkegaard still follows the Kantian tradition of a pure ethics or practical reason that is exceeded by absolute duty as it extends into the realm of sacrifice,"⁶⁴ as if the ethics that is superseded is only deontological obligation. For, like some other higher ethics interpretations, this one creates a total *opposition* between (a) the level of ordinary responsibilities that it substitutes for "the ethical" and (b) the higher level that it substitutes for "the religious" stages in the pseudonymous works,⁶⁵ although Kierkegaard clearly regards the relation between (a) and (b) as more like nested concentric circles. Moreover, since the higher calling of "respect for absolute singularity" still amounts to another ethical standpoint, this reading also makes it impossible to distinguish clearly "between the ethical and the religious."⁶⁶ This is not a correction to Kierkegaard but a result of misreading his Akeidah as primarily a *metaphor* for "the paradox constituting the concept of duty and absolute responsibility."⁶⁷

Of course, Derrida could not adopt the eschatological reading of *Fear and Trembling* proposed above because he thinks that even *hope* for a response from the other, or for success in one's self-sacrificing efforts, implies egoistic interest in a "return," or what he calls "economy." Only the gift that forgets itself in the giving, and even forgets the very idea that the receiver might respond with gratitude or some other kind of reciprocation, is truly generous rather than "economic." If we start with this contentious premise—more extreme than anything in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*—then eschatological trust as I've defined would have to be selfish.

Derrida is certainly correct that in *Fear and Trembling* Abraham's obedience is not an investment or clever wager to maneuver Isaac's reprieve: "Abraham is in a position of nonexchange with God" and expects no "reward" from him.⁶⁸ But that is because he does not conceive obedience to the perilous command as *the condition* for God's reversing the order or giving Isaac back so he conceives the fateful decision to sacrifice Isaac neither as causing nor as earning Isaac's emancipation.⁶⁹ Hence Derrida badly errs, on Kierkegaard's view, in describing God's "decision" to "give back the beloved son" as a result of Abraham's obedience, let alone a result of Abraham giving to God "a gift outside any economy, the gift of death."⁷⁰ For one certainly cannot give (let alone give disinterestedly) what one does not own, and Derrida sees as clearly as Mooney that Abraham is

renouncing any claims to possess Isaac in Silentio's narrative. Hence Abraham's obedience to the command is not intended as a gift to God.⁷¹ Abraham hopes to receive Isaac back in spite of his sacrifice, not because of it (as if he could earn Isaac's return).

By contrast, Derrida thinks that in Silentio's story, Abraham's sacrificing Isaac is a gift to God, made because God demands this gift; the gift is pure because Abraham does not even hope for Isaac's return, yet he gets Isaac back as a result of the purity of his gift to God.⁷²

... having renounced winning, expecting neither response nor recompense, expecting nothing that can be given back to him, nothing that will come back to him... he sees that God gives back to him, in the instant of absolute renunciation, the very thing that he had already, in the same instant, decided to sacrifice. It is given back to him because he renounced calculation.⁷³

Here we see the central error in Derrida's analysis: he reduces Abraham's faith to infinite resignation without eschatological hope. This is why he has to conclude erroneously that Silentio or Kierkegaard sees Isaac's return as caused by the purity of Abraham's gift. Certainly Abraham does not "expect" Isaac back in the sense of any rational calculation about how it might happen, or how he (with or without help from others) might bring it about. But he certainly does expect Isaac to live by virtue of the absurd, because he trusts in God's original promise. This promise becomes eschatological in significance when its fulfillment is apparently blocked by a horrifying obstacle, namely, a command that almost seems to come from a different God. In this case, the inexorability of the obstacle involves God's power and absolute ownership rights, but this only clarifies that accepting the obstacle in resignation does not amount to giving a gift.

In short, Abraham "expects" Isaac back in a sense of "expectancy" that is not investment or manipulation. Thus we can modify Derrida's formula that "God asks that one give without knowing, without calculating, reckoning, or hoping, for one must give without counting, and that is what takes it outside of sense."⁷⁴ On the contrary, while the absurdity of Isaac's return despite being sacrificed cannot rationally be counted on or strategically engineered, Abraham can still hope for it, and even trust in it, without becoming "economic." This holds just as much for hope to see "the kingdom of heaven," or trust in the eschatological promises made by Christ.⁷⁵

Agapic Duty as Pure Dilemma

Suppose, however, we want to know if agapic ethics is possible without eschatological faith. Perhaps, but if so, agapic duty still cannot be plausibly be conceived as Derrida interprets it. While there is much to recommend his discussion of the biblical neighbor love commands and the secrecy of an invisible God,⁷⁶ in trying to make agapic duty paradoxical, unsayable, and contrary to the universal to match Silentio's description of "faith" (as he understands it),

Derrida distorts the requirements of neighbor love to make them impossible even in principle to fulfill. Let me distinguish four aspects of this complex distortion.

(1) If we define this absolute duty as totally incomprehensible or as beyond any explanation, as "a gift or sacrifice that functions beyond both debt and duty,"⁷⁷ it follows that *too many things* can count as a "gift," that agapic love is an infinitely plastic—or empty—concept. I might absentmindedly toss a cigarette out of my car window and thus perform an act of pristine generosity to a bum on the sidewalk. I might doodle on a piece of paper with no thought of any appreciation by others and thus donate a pure gift to the next person who finds the paper on my bus seat. An act of random harm to someone not done for any pleasure or as a means to any other good, which we usually call cruelty for its own sake, is also not inscribed in any economy of exchange (that is precisely what's perverse about it). When malice transcends vengeance based on a (corrupted) sense of justice, it too would stand beyond all universal law as a pure gift—indeed perhaps as the gift of death to the other.⁷⁸ For the ideal of agapic love to give any real guidance in practical deliberation, it presupposes at least some background conception of harms and goods, both in human welfare and other types of intrinsic value and disvalue in the world (such as beauty in nature or the diversity of species). These have the characteristic of being evaluative universals, although they may always be manifested in unique concrete gestalts.⁷⁹ Without such background concepts, we cannot even meaningfully say that agapic love generally intends to help rather than to harm people or the world. If agapic love simply requires "the betrayal of everything that manifests itself within the order of the universal generality" then (even ignoring Derrida's usual failure to grasp the distinction between the *universal* and the *general*),⁸⁰ we can achieve agapic generosity just by thumbing our nose at conventions or even by being "demonic" in Kierkegaard's sense. For example, the Grinch in Dr. Seuss's classic tale⁸¹ transcends the *Stirlichkeit* of Whoville, and Dostoevsky's underground man transgresses Kantian universals in a most avant-garde fashion; both are also responding, in their way, to the alterity of the Other.⁸²

(2) Derrida makes agapic duty into a simple contradiction rather than a paradox in Kierkegaard's quite different sense of that polyvalent term. In his view, the higher-ethical demand of alterity deconstructs the mundane ethics of everyday life and of "moralizing moralists" (the kind Nietzsche despised) because it denies the very possibility of "good conscience."⁸³ The sacrifice of Isaac in *Fear and Trembling* "illustrates" or stands for the point that, in my singular response to a specific other person (or God?) to whom I owe an absolute duty, I *must always* sacrifice others, betraying my equal responsibility to third parties:

I cannot respond to the call, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others. ... As a result, the concepts of responsibility, of decision, or of duty, are condemned *a priori* to paradox, scandal, and aporia. ... As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, with the look, request,

love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can only respond by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to respond, in the same instant, to all the others.⁸⁴

Here at least we have a clear thesis: beneath all the rhetoric, Derrida's whole analysis depends on this one claim. Such a claim, given its extraordinary nature, requires a frank response. Note that "ethics" in the last sentence of this passage refers not to lower Kantian or Hegelian ethics, but rather to agapic obligation itself—here read as requiring us to be everywhere on Earth at once, responding in heartfelt proximity to every person, or entering a singularizing I-Thou encounter with everyone, one by one (or even better) simultaneously.⁸⁵ This duty to become God (for that is what it implies) is certainly "absurd," but not at all in Kierkegaard's sense. Agapic duty on this alterity interpretation is immediately "paradoxical" in the cheapest sense imaginable, namely, what it demands of us is not only physically and psychologically impossible under our laws of nature, but probably also impossible for any nondivine being in any universe with natural laws and a form of life *anything* like ours. Yet we would see no profound "paradox" in telling insects to write poetry, or telling a single individual to feed all the starving with one loaf.

Derrida's conception thus introduces the thesis, novel to moral theory, that we are always in a moral dilemma, whatever we do, at all times, with respect to everyone. Other philosophers have thought it difficult to establish that moral dilemmas can *sometimes* occur a person's life without tracing to previous acts of wrongdoing by that person.⁸⁶ But Derrida leaps over such old-fashioned debates in metaethics, and goes much further: with a few words, he poetically transforms *every* decision into an underivative moral dilemma of the strongest kind: "By preferring my work, simply by giving it my time and attention," I may be fulfilling one duty but "I am sacrificing and betraying at every moment all my other obligations: my obligations to the other others whom I don't know, to billions of my fellows . . . who are dying of starvation or sickness."⁸⁷ Since I could always help someone by doing something other than what I'm doing now—even by sending a dollar to some random person on a far continent rather than writing this sentence, for example—I'm always doing something wrong. Never mind that human beings are so constituted that we need to have meaningful endeavors and relationships other than merely providing for people's basic needs;⁸⁸ I am personally responsible to ensure that no one is suffering anywhere from deprivation of any kind, but especially (it seems) basic material deprivation.

It has been considered a very powerful objection against act-utilitarian moral theories that they demand too much, or cannot leave room for loyalty to one's own family, social roles, and identity-defining commitments. But that widely recognized problem would appear vanishingly small in comparison to the conceptual problems created by Derrida's theory. Even if I religiously followed what sometimes seems to be Peter Singer's prescription and turned myself into a mere utility maximizing machine, reducing my consumption to the lowest pos-

sible amount consistent with maintaining the most lucrative career available to me while avoiding total psychological breakdown so that I can contribute as much as possible to poverty relief, I would have barely scratched the surface of what Derrida thinks the alterity of my neighbors demands of me. And to think I felt good just for coaching little league this spring!

What is most *comical* about these statements is that Derrida simply assumes that this is the right understanding of agapic duty, thus begging the question against all saner interpretations of the neighbor love commands, and against (as far as I know) all moral theory in world history before him. Not everyone agrees with the Kantian principle that ought entails can, but no one else has ever asserted that ought, properly understood, always implies *can't*!

What is *arrogant* in Derrida's stance is that he puts himself, with perhaps a few others sufficiently gifted with deconstructive insight to see the aporetic nature of our agapic duties, in the position of Abraham as a kind of martyr to the ethical, tortured by his own defiant claim that he is in the same position as Abraham. Contrast the humility of Sileño, who would never dream of comparing himself to Abraham. It is arrogant to romanticize this kind of fetishism for aporia as a higher, more authentic life view that distinguishes one from ordinary moral thinkers.

What is *frightening* about Derrida's ethic is that it is a recipe for despair. It means that because of the existence of others, I'm never entitled to anything—a quiet moment by the fire, a bit of fun playing a game with my children, the pleasure of a chocolate chip cookie—for every instant of time or bit of material could instead have been devoted to alleviating the poverty of someone somewhere. But since I'm *equally and infinitely* in the wrong whatever I do, I may as well eat, drink, and be merry and forget about it (or worse)—for it is all the same, as regards my moral worth, whether I live the life of Donald Trump or Mother Theresa (all "moral ledgers" having been rendered *passé* by the infinite demands of all others upon us).⁸⁹

Of course, we are all familiar with the common experience of being pulled in different and contingently conflicting directions by what Ross sanely called *prima facie* moral claims,⁹⁰ and this holds for agapic ethics just as much as for Ross's intuitionist theory of the right. There is nothing ethically profound, let alone religious, in this. But by a simple non sequitur, Derrida turns this prosaic truth of our existence into an absolute dilemma and associates it with transcendence by rhetoric like "responding to the call of each other as absolutely other" and so on.

Many intelligent philosophers have been misled by such rhetoric into thinking that there must be some great insight here. Caputo, for example, says that Derrida is more authentically ethical than all the "moralizing and self-approving critics of Derrida, who are given to praying in public."⁹¹ Yes, Derrida is much more profound; he ventures "beyond duty," beyond all public ethical ideals into the singularizing paralysis of totalized moral dilemma; he accepts the martyrdom of impossible ethical demands, which sanctimonious analytic philosophers won't admit. He is daring, who else could have gone beyond even Levi-

nas, who still saw the origin of responsibility in the singular face as compatible with universal duties.⁹² One should recall here the assistant professors mocked by Kierkegaard for thinking themselves profound because they had gone "beyond faith." Derrida's rhetoric is pure idolatry of aporia, worship of contradiction, sanctification of dilemma—an aestheticization of movement beyond ethics.

It would significantly mitigate these problems if we thought that institutional relationships mediated by the "force of law" can count as primary ways of fulfilling our agapic obligations to distant strangers and future generations, and that the main requirement for such institutional relationships is that they be just in some non-maximizing sense definable by various universal norms. But Derrida simply assumes that global markets are unjust without giving any diagnosis of the specific injustices. If anyone is "allowed to die" anywhere without our personal and direct intervention as private citizens who transcend global politics, then we are murderers in his reckoning.⁹³ Thus we are all murderers, like Abraham. Yet this highly offensive claim is not followed by any explanation of what institutional arrangement would suffice for us to avoid ending up on a moral par with Manson (there can be none, since we are necessarily murderers). Derrida condemns civilized societies for "the monotonous complacency of their discourses on morality, politics, and the law, and the exercises of rights (whether public, private, national, or international)" because they allow third world debt and poverty.⁹⁴ But does he tell us how global markets should be structured and limited by law so as to be just? Of course not; to enter into such details would be to descend from his heights into the casuistry of general/universal normative discourses, the paltry calculations of common mores, or the pale abstractions of ethical theory.

Likewise, the current global political order is criticized as if there were clear moral criteria for critiquing it when there can be none in Derrida's totality of moral dilemmas. Derrida rightly condemns the fact that millions are left to die or suffer from systematic injustice at the hands of tyrants, or abused by those who fight wars to stop tyrants—though again, he outrageously puts these opponents on a moral par.⁹⁵ But does he call for a new federation of the world's democracies to create a global order in which the atrocities of Iraq, Sudan, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Congo, East Timor, Zimbabwe, and so on, are not possible, and each nation (even France) does its fair share to stop tyranny and terrorism? Of course not. Derrida is not Habermas; he proposes no institutional solution. Yet his defenders often call Habermas arrogant.⁹⁶ In reply, it might fairly be asked how their deconstruction of ethical theory has helped created a more just global order.

(3) All this said, however, I think Derrida's ethic is *nominally* close to the truth, or at least to Kierkegaard's view that ethical responsibility is "infinite." That it so badly misconstrues this central idea in perfectionist accounts is part of its tragedy. In the *Postscript*, Climacus explains the perfectionist ethical demand in the section on the totality of guilt.⁹⁷ We are "essentially guilty" because

we are subject to perfectionist moral judgments: being morally responsible makes it possible to be guilty or not guilty in particular cases.⁹⁸ The obligations that make us responsible are ultimately owed to God, who is infinite and thus incommensurable with even the slightest fault on our part.⁹⁹ But it is crucial that contingent guilt (as opposed to the essential condition of being morally responsible before God) is not inevitable in principle on Climacus's account: it is metaphysically and psychologically possible for us to fulfill our perfect duties.¹⁰⁰ Our responsibility is *qualitatively* infinite, since it is governed by a perfectionist ideal.¹⁰¹ It always extends beyond what we have actually done, but not beyond what we could in principle have done. Thus it does not violate one relevant version of the ought-implies-can principle.¹⁰² By contrast, Derrida interprets the totality of guilt as an actual failure to live up to our duty that necessarily results from our finitude.¹⁰³

In Kierkegaard's view, our agapic duties do not aim to *maximize* any numerical quantity (CUP, 536); they require that perfectly earnest love be operative toward everyone, leaving room for universal norms (involving comparative judgments and finite criteria) to fill out *how* this motive is best expressed in different spheres of life. What matters qualitatively is "constancy in the relation" or ongoing commitment of the will to the perfect good and thus to the recollection of guilt, since we always *in fact* fall short of that to which we are committed (CUP, 535). Derrida externalizes this perfectionist conception of duty, making it into the task of attending personally to each one of roughly 6 billion unique individuals. This confusion has been aptly diagnosed by Knud Løgstrup, who argues that we need to distinguish the radical character of a demand for selfless motives from a quantitatively unlimited "responsibility for everything under the sun," and from a maximizing concern for "what best serves the welfare of everyone."¹⁰⁴

Climacus's qualitative conception of infinite duty also explains why resignation to our inability to fulfill our duties on our own, which stands at the outer limit of the ethical, is called "infinite" resignation: it is the same as the totality of guilt before a perfectionist ideal. The totality of guilt transcends anything found in the "comparative, conventional, external, bourgeois conception of the ethical" with its discrete list of dos and don'ts (CUP, 546).¹⁰⁵ But note that this category is *before* faith as its necessary precondition in both Climacus's and Silentio's writings: infinite responsibility to each person according to the love commands is not faith itself. Thus it is also prior to recognizing sin as contingent rebellion against divine authority in each person's life.

(4) Finally, despite his emphasis on the singular, Derrida cannot avoid a type of *universality* in the duty to love all neighbors, given his claim that we are responsible "at every moment for every man and every woman"¹⁰⁶ as unique individuals rather than simply as numbers in some calculus. Rightly understood, this means that our agapic duties are universal in *scope*, reaching to all persons and requiring us to show agapic regard to them all as precious, free, creative, beings capable of autonomy but needing relation, whose status as per-

sions gives them inviolable basic dignity. This type of universal scope is quite compatible with my duties to particular others being historically unique or unrepeatable because of their singular place in the web of human life stories, which makes my role in these contexts "irreplaceable"; no one else could take my place, because to be in this place is part of what it is to be *me*. Thus Derrida is wrong to think that singularization of duties to specific individuals in this time/place contradicts the universal scope of agapic obligations: turning toward a single individual in love does not require putting their interests or demands above those of all other unique individuals (including even oneself).¹⁰⁷ Derrida simply mistakes this universality in *scope* for a duty that is identical in *material content* to each other at the same time, and so is impossible to fulfill.

In sum, agapic love for others is not "exclusive" in the same sense as existential faith. It is a universal duty to all persons, which means that what is owed to every individual is formally identical; but this does not entail the same material relationship of direct caring interaction with each. The faith-relation is exclusive because only one being can make eschatological goods possible; so that being is different from all other persons. God's Alterity is not the otherness of persons in general, the alterity that grounds agapic obligation to them: it *exceeds* this interhuman alterity, just as one order of infinity exceeds another.

Conclusion

We have seen that trying to assimilate the singularity of faith to agapic duty leads Derrida to misconstrue not only what Kierkegaard means by religious faith, but also the content of agapic duty itself. Kierkegaard's portrayal of eschatological trust in the story of the Akedah is turned, by rhetorical art, into a quick excuse for rejecting all ethical theory, a fast way of rejecting universal ethical norms. God is replaced with the human other, and the absolute relation of trust in the eschatological promise is replaced with absolute moral dilemma. Poor Kierkegaard, to have a disciple like that.

Thus more is at stake in the right understanding of *Fear and Trembling* than simply the question of how best to read a single famous text by an old Danish author. For higher-ethics interpretations that fail to distinguish faith from individual vocations or singular moral callings not only miss the eschatological center of Kierkegaard's conception of God, but also threaten to give us versions of agapic duty that overstress exclusive care relationships that are possible only with a few others in this life. When universalized, such agapic duty becomes sheer impossibility, rather than infinite resignation looking toward eschatological hope. The singularity of the absolute relation is indeed crucial to faith, but this absolute relation is something added to ethical obligation and our volitional response to such obligation, rather than a replacement for them. Only the eschatological reading preserves the right relation between universal agapic duties to all human persons and the higher duty to have faith in God's promise that the ultimate aims of agapic love will be realized, here or hereafter.

Notes

1. Note that it is not only the materialist philosopher who is transcended here; nor only the herd who deny any non-physical reality: all rationalist ethics is overcome. My description intentionally highlights the danger of elitism or even gnosticism that is built into the higher-ethics approach. We "faithful" have a sacred calling that is higher than these petty bourgeois with their legalistic rights, these casuists with their traditional moral precepts, these eudaimonists with their virtues, or these Kantian calculators with their hidebound categorical imperatives. However, defenders of this approach to Kierkegaardian faith usually hold that the higher-ethical attitude or insight is available in principle to all. But claims that true faith requires a teleological suspension of concern for human welfare in mystical detachment, or a suspension of all rules of just war for the sake of forcing revealed truth on all nations, or a suspension of all scientific knowledge in order to adhere to the creed of some illuminati, would all count as other species of the higher-ethics family. This is uncomfortable company to keep.

2. Davenport, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*," forthcoming in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: Philosophical Engagements*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), chap. 15.

3. Patrick Gardiner, *Kierkegaard: A Very Short Introduction* (1988; Oxford University Press, 2002), 67 (my italics). Gardiner is sensitive to Slenitio's point that the ethical is not rejected or "dispensed with" in being made relative to the absolute or denied "ultimate or supreme" status (66). However, the SDC reading cannot make sense of this point, which is only explained on the eschatological reading.

4. C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Evans follows Robert Adams in connecting divine commands to "God's broader teleological vision of the good" (9). God's commands are not arbitrary, since they are "successfully directed toward human flourishing" (300). Thus if God did issue a command to murder an innocent child, it would have to serve some purpose independently recognizable as good, such as teaching that human sacrifice is forbidden (306–307). God cannot command anything that is evil, and this is not a tautology in Evans's view (315). Our duty to obey God depends on our knowledge of "God himself as a good and loving person," which in turn depends on some prior (even if imperfect) understanding of "what is good and loving" (316). On this view, the authority of divine commands clearly rests on the idea that God embodies perfect love.

5. *Ibid.*, 62–84, 305–10. It is hard, however, to square this with Evans's idea that one goal of *Fear and Trembling* is to show, in a fictionalized Abraham, "what true religious faith would be like in a person who is perfectly ethical" (82). For by Evans's own analysis, in the counterfactual case that such a human person existed, she or he would know and follow the love commands, and could not then believe that God commands her or him to sacrifice an innocent child.

6. *Ibid.*, 76.

7. Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Religiousness C: A Defense," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (December 2004): 535–48, 538.

8. Gardiner, *Kierkegaard*, 67.

9. Jack Mulder, "Re-Radicalizing Kierkegaard: An Alternative to Religiousness C in Light of an Investigation into the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical," *Continental Philosophy Review* 35, no. 3 (2002): 303–24.

10. Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Religiousness C," 539.

11. As we will see, the eschatological interpretation has a quite different explanation of how Abraham's act can be loving, which depends on his having a purpose *other* than mere obedience to God as creator or infinite power. The dispute is not over the thesis that, rightly understood, loving God and loving the neighbor cannot conflict; it is over the reason *why* they cannot conflict in the second ethics, and whether this reason is implicit in *Fear and Trembling*.

12. See Edward Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*, chaps. 4–8; Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Rescue* (Routledge, 1996), chaps. 4–6. Another version of ALE is found in Jerome Gellman's reading of the teleological suspension as defending a kind of proto-Sartrean individualistic ethic: Gellman, "Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*," *Man and World* 23, no. 3 (1990): 295–304. I briefly mention these approaches along with John Caputo's version of ALE in "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*," but my focus there is on SDC and ACE readings.

13. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*, 92.

14. *Ibid.*, 94.

15. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 25.

16. *Ibid.*, 26–27. Evans emphasizes that for Kierkegaard, human agents must exercise "creative freedom" in discovering this divine vocation and fashioning an authentic practical identity on its basis. But I suggest that the radical uniqueness of individuals required for Kierkegaard's agapic ethics involves something more than this, namely that the identity I'm "called" to develop is *intrinsically* ambiguous in certain key respects—like a quantum state in superposition—waiting for my freedom to interact with it. If that is right, then persons cannot be individualized by "individual essences" that pick them out metaphysically prior to their existing and choosing (*ibid.*, 15 n. 15). This does not mean the "call" must be as abstract as in Heidegger's account; it only means that neither Molinist haecceities nor singular divine commands can fully define the agent's cares and the unique way that she pursues her devotions.

17. We cannot call them "alterity theorists" because, although they *are* defending a moral theory that includes specific metaethical propositions (so my summary claims), they often want to believe that their theory is only a praxis without any pure theoretical elements, or that it is only an engagement with others to improve the world rather than an address to philosophers looking for any rational explanation of morality or way to understand ethics. In this regard, however, Derrida seems to be more honest than most; he knows he is providing a kind of moral theory.

18. On this idea, see in particular Derrida's famous essay, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992).

19. I have raised some questions about Levinas's version of agape in "Levinas's Agapic Metaphysics of Morals: Absolute Passivity and the Other as Eschatological Hiccup," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Fall 1998, 331–66. The irony is that rather than divinizing each other, as Derrida would have it, Levinas unwittingly collapses the uniqueness of individuals into a single transcendent divinity: "plurality" can only be stipulated because the theory lacks an adequate metaphysical conception of personal individuality (admittedly this is a hard problem for any agapic metaphysics of morals to solve).

20. That said, I do not concede that Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* presents a strong divine command ethics or defends the ontological thesis that divine command is what makes a norm obligatory for us. See Zachary Manis's careful critique of this position in

chapter 3 of "Virtues, Divine Commands, and the Debt of Creation: Towards a Kierkegaardian Christian Ethic" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2006).

21. For the full story, see John Davenport, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*," a summary that focuses more on the two main conditions of existential faith is given in "Kierkegaard's Postscript in Light of *Fear and Trembling: Eschatological Faith*," forthcoming in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* (2008).

22. Note that this is distinct from the non-corporal afterlife anticipated in various forms of Religiousness A, such as Socrates' faith: it is a pure ethical ideal accessible only in contemplation, expecting no hereafter.

23. See John Davenport, "The Essence of Eschatology: A Modal Interpretation," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, September 1996, 206–39.

24. Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 80–81.

25. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*, 4.

26. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 71; he follows Mooney's essay, "Getting Isaac Back: Ordeals and Reconciliations in *Fear and Trembling*," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, ed. George Cornell and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1992), 71–95. Also see Kierkegaard's remark that "Abraham was great not because he sacrificed Isaac, but because he had faith, because he was cheerful and willing" (JP, IV B 73 n.d., FT Suppl. 249).

27. *Ibid.*, 73. The parallel between Isaac's return and Christ's return helps clarify the sense in which Isaac's liberation is an eschatological good or miraculous restoration of the right ethical relationship.

28. Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Religiousness C," 540. However, he immediately adds that "nothing in this account concerns the question of Abraham's duty" nor the idea that God is "the highest authority," which is "doubtless why Silentio calls this discussion 'preliminary'" (*Ibid.*). This remark assumes both that Abraham's "duty" is something other than to trust in God's original promise, and that the teleological suspension concerns this other duty to God *rather* than the absurd hope to get Isaac back (which is reduced to a merely "preliminary" matter). I would draw the opposite conclusion and infer that, since the task of the "Preliminary Expectoration" section is to set out the essential structure of "faith" that is only elaborated in all the subsequent Problemata, the teleological suspension and absolute duty to God are aspects of "faith" and so must also be explained by the way that trust in the eschatological outcome transcends the ethical principles respected in infinite resignation: the duty to God is precisely to make the second movement that takes the agent beyond infinite resignation and into second immediacy (as described in the "preliminary" section).

29. Gardiner, *Kierkegaard*, 68. Unlike Hannay, Gardiner does not explain any integral connection between this absurd belief and Abraham's willingness to obey God.

30. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*, 96.

31. *Ibid.*, 100. Note that Levinas still seems to recognize a divine trace ("illegible") behind the human Face in his philosophical works, and a transcendent God as revealed in scripture in his religious commentaries, though in neither case does God function exactly as a "ground" of responsibility.

32. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 77.

33. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 78.

34. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, 79.

35. Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Religiousness C," 541.

36. Ibid., 545.

37. Levinas, "Existence and Ethics," reprinted in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Reé and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 26–38, 27. My citations are all to this later reprint version, in which the essay is translated by Reé.

38. Ibid., 28. It is not entirely clear that Levinas is right about Hegel; nor do I agree with Levinas's insistence that Heidegger's description of *Dasein* as existing "in such a way that its existence is always an issue for it" makes *Dasein* essentially egoistic (30).

39. Ibid., 33. Levinas repeats this point in more detail in the first of "Two Comments on Kierkegaard" immediately following "Existence and Ethics" in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, 34.

40. Ibid., 31.

41. This is why Derrida completely ignores the prior divine promise to Abraham (which was so absurd to Sarah) when he is describing Abraham's free decision to obey the command to sacrifice. Derrida recognizes that Abraham does not know what is going to happen, but he simply stops with this negative aspect, which he compares to "heading off towards the absolute request of the other, beyond knowledge" in Levinas's sense (*Gift of Death*, 77). By contrast, the positive element of trust in a good to come (beyond all prediction or manipulation) cannot be so easily conflated with anything coming from the human other on Levinas's account, so Derrida conveniently leaves it out. Turning his own rhetoric on him, we might even say that this is the lacuna on which his entire text depends: the suppression of the eschatological turns out to be the "truth" of deconstruction. While eschatological hope is explicitly rejected as spite in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, its rejection is concealed in Derrida.

42. See the discussion in *Will as Commitment and Resolve* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), chap. 5. It is also a good that is non-tangible in the sense explained in chapter 5 §2.4.

43. See the discussion of Levinas in *Will as Commitment and Resolve*, chapter 9 §4.

44. I use Hans Küng's theology to defend this point in response to Levinas in "Eschatological Ultimacy and the Best Possible Hereafter," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 25 (2002): 36–67, 39–42.

45. Mooney, *Knights of Faith and Resignation*, 85.

46. For example, compare Isaac's situation to Gawain's in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain, of course, is a knight of resignation rather than faith, since he does not hope by virtue of the absurd to live when he comes to the Green Knight's chapel. We might also compare Isaac's situation to Edmund's in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, in which the evil witch queen Jadis acquires a claim on Edmund's life through his own sins. His return through Aslan's sacrifice is an example of what Tolkien calls a "eucatastrophe" (a theme discussed in my essay, "Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*"). While the Green Knight is associated with the sacred, and the witch with the profane (like the Snow Queen in Andersen's famous story, on which Lewis's witch is based), God in the Akeidah shows both sacred and profane sides, as do divine figures throughout world mythology.

47. Westphal, "The Many Faces of Kierkegaard as a Reader of Levinas," in this volume. My remarks here are drawn from my response to an early version of this chapter presented to the Kierkegaard Society session at the Eastern Division meeting of the APA (December 2002).

48. This is also pretty much how John Llewelyn summarizes Levinas's critique of Kierkegaard in his book, *Emmanuel Levinas* (Routledge, 1995), 3.

49. In this respect, Levinas follows not only Kant—whose absolute moral *factum* of

the free rational agent as an end-in-himself, the secularized *imago dei*, surely underlies much of what Levinas says about the call of the Other—but a long line of rabbinic and Christian theologians.

50. Indeed, Timothy Jackson defends this thesis at length in his essay, "Is Isaac Kierkegaard's Neighbor?" *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 17 (1997): 97–119.

51. Westphal, "The Many Faces of Kierkegaard as a Reader of Levinas," p. 9.

52. Thus the Apostle Paul's faith does not consist primarily in his ethical obedience to God's call to ministry, but rather in his trust that somehow, beyond anything he can achieve by his own power, the churches that God has founded through him will succeed and have a place in the glory of the final kingdom to come. Without this hope, his faith would be pure obedience without any consolation—something closer to the Levinasian ethical ideal.

53. Westphal, "The Many Faces of Levinas as a Reader of Kierkegaard," p. 12.

54. I agree with Westphal's point that on his ACh reading, "Abraham does not appear as an egoism tensed on itself, but as a deeply decentred self" (ibid., p. 14). Our disagreement concerns the direction of the decentring. If it is toward God as arbitrary omnipotent commander, of what value is it? If it is toward God as Love, how is that compatible with the command to kill an innocent child? If it is toward God as the source of eschatological possibility, then it makes sense and we agree.

55. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 49.

56. Ibid., 56–57.

57. Ibid., 59.

58. Ibid., 60.

59. Ibid., 61. Again, my rhetoric is intentionally polemical here, but this is necessary in response to John Caputo's polemics, such as his insistence that obligation has to be incomprehensible to the agent to be authentic obligation: see *Against Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 8–10. It is unclear why he thinks this, because the *involuntariness* of obligation hardly entails its unintelligibility to reason or its heterogeneity to language.

60. Derrida quotes this passage because it ends with the ethical as a "temptation." But Silentio does not mean that the ethical makes us "irresponsible" (ibid.); rather, the temptation refers to stopping with infinite resignation inside the ethical, rather than adding to infinite resignation the second movement of faith in the "absurd."

61. For further evidence in favor of this reading of Problema III, see my essay, "Kierkegaard's *Postscript* in Light of *Fear and Trembling*" §11.

62. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 62.

63. See Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 18: "In short, Johannes de Silentio writes a eulogy to obligation without ethics" (in the sense of ethical theory or normative principles).

64. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 92–93.

65. Ibid., 63: "The absolute duty that binds me to God himself, in faith, must function beyond and against any duty I have" in the ordinary sense of "duty" as respect for the moral law.

66. Ibid., 84. Derrida adds here that Levinas's ethics is also already "religious" because it cannot distinguish between "the infinite alterity of God and that of every human." This seems to be incorrect, because Levinas does distinguish between ipseity and alterity. But even if it were correct, that would not make Levinas's ethics "religious" in the eschatological sense—the sense that actually distinguishes religious categories from all natural knowledge and naturally accessible categories, including the phenomenology of the Face.

67. Ibid., 66.

68. Ibid., 96. Indeed, nothing given *because* demanded could ever count as a gift in Derrida's sense of gratuitous or pure generosity; demands for gifts are violent and even self-defeating, since they prevent free giving by ordering it.

69. Derrida is correct that Abraham does make this decision and it is only within this "instant" between decision and completed action that God stays his hand. He is also correct that "it is as if he [God] did not know what Abraham was going to do, decide, or decide to do" (ibid., 95). This is one of many points in the pseudonymous works that suggest what would now be called an "open" conception of God that preserves human leeway-libertarian freedom (though in signed religious works Kierkegaard does affirm complete divine foreknowledge).

70. Ibid., 96.

71. Derrida implies more than once that God demands that we give him gifts, as if God *needed* us to set aside our debts and duties to other human beings to turn to Him (ibid., 72). By contrast, the eschatological interpretation says that the love God demands consists primarily in following His moral laws in interacting with human persons and the world, and *having faith* in His promise that the ideal behind these laws will be fulfilled within time or at its end.

72. Caputo emphasizes these points in "Instants, Secrets, and Singularities," 219: "Abraham is willing to make a gift of the life of Isaac." Kierkegaard would regard this as pure nonsense, not paradoxical sublimity: for my sacrifice of X to count as a gift of X, I must think that I am the rightful owner of X. Though parents may at one time have seen their children as property, Silentio certainly does not describe Abraham this way.

73. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 96–97 (last set of italics mine). Note that if this were right, then a clever calculator could anticipate it and have himself hypnotized or trained not to barter with God but rather to give freely, in order to get the reward. This would be a theological version of Derek Parfit's self-effacing egoistic strategy in *Reasons and Persons*. Thus Caputo is right that on Derrida's reading, God turns Abraham's act "into an economy of sacrifice" in which the agent gets a return ("Instants, Secrets, and Singularities," 229). But Caputo does not see how dramatically this counts against Derrida's interpretation!

74. Ibid., 97 (my italics).

75. To which Derrida refers on 99.

76. Ibid., 100–101, but I am focusing on the negative in this chapter. In doing so, I fear I will offend many persons of goodwill whom I do not wish to offend, perhaps even some friends. But someone had to say it in the analysis of Kierkegaard, Emperor Derrida has no ethical clothes, despite the fine terms in which these clothes are often praised.

77. Ibid., 63.

78. For a discussion of non-erotic forms of evil motivation, see Davenport, *Will as Commitment and Resolve*, chap. 10.

79. See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Prometheus, 1988), \$59, p. 99.

80. Compare Caputo, "Instants, Secrets, and Singularities," 223.

81. Dr. Seuss, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (New York: Random House, 1957). This applies even more clearly to the expanded storyline in the new movie adaptation, *The Grinch*, directed by Ron Howard, with Jim Carey as the Grinch (Universal Studios, 2000). The Grinch steals the gifts and thus unwittingly gives a greater gift. His return of the Christmas gifts in this story is another eucatastrophe, in which it turns out that Christmas means "a little bit more" than economy.

82. If the underground man example seems odd, consider that Derrida seems to cele-

brate Bartleby's refusal to speak as a "sacrificial passion" (75), rather than recognizing it as aesthetic spiritlessness.

83. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 67.

84. Ibid., 68 (my italics).

85. Actually, I don't think this goes far enough. On the banal logic behind this interpretation of agapic obligation, we might as well extend it to require that I be present for each other at every point in history as well, and indeed on every other planet in the universe on which personal beings exist, and call the physical impossibility of doing so part of the "paradox" and angst of the higher-ethical attitude that makes it so fraught with torment. On the other hand, when everyone can become a knight of faith simply by accepting the ubiquity of moral dilemma in every circumstances, hasn't the price of faith come down a bit? Why feel so lonely and singularized by the impossible call?

86. See, for example, Christopher Gowans, *Moral Dilemmas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

87. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 69.

88. Several conceptions of agapic love leave too little place for forms of love or devotion that are "partial" or particularistic; arguably, Kierkegaard himself fails to recognize that parental, filial, and romantic love can sometimes be appropriate expressions of agapic regard or ways of fulfilling agapic duties. But the problem with Derrida's account should be distinguished from this well-known problem of reconciling agape with other forms of love: for on Derrida's account, it is not possible to show agapic regard to a single other person without failing in one's agapic duty to all the rest; acts of parental devotion, *philia*, or *eros* are betrayals in the same sense, not in a distinct sense.

89. Perhaps I just don't understand Derrida. For after forty years, I have got no further than the ethical, while Derrida has passed right beyond the everyday ethical concerns that worry me into a higher kind of religiousness above my meager powers of comprehension.

90. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 20.

91. Caputo, "Instants, Secrets, and Singularities," 217.

92. Ibid., 225.

93. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 86.

94. Ibid., 86. I fear that we are meant to infer that no market system whatsoever, however limited, could ever be just to individuals qua individuals. For this issue, we'd have to look at *Specters of Marx*.

95. Ibid., 86–87.

96. Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 37. I'm happy to be corrected, but I do not recall Derrida calling for ground troops from France to stop the slaughter in Rwanda, Bosnia, or Kosovo; but then why would he, if standing idly by and allowing ethnic cleansing and genocide is no better than using force to try to stop it, because either way we are sacrificing all the other absolute others, and so on?

97. See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), "The Decisive Expression of the Existential Pathos," 525–55.

98. Ibid., 528–29.

99. Ibid., 530.

100. Ibid., 532. This is one of the differences between "guilt" and "sin," which is also not determined but in fact always already present in each of us. Thus strictly speaking, we should say "possible in the initial development of our agency." On this theme, see Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*.

Part Four.

Ethico-Political Possibilities

101. Ibid., 548. The "silent relation to the ideal" in inwardness that blames only itself rather than others for its faults concerns the purity of our motives and the strength of our will, rather than (only) our outward acts.

102. On this point, see John J. Davenport, "My Schindler's List: A Personal Kierkegaardian Reflection," *Religious Humanism* 34, no. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 2001): 13-23. In the terms of this chapter, Derrida's idea of infinity in duty seems to be a quantitative infinity or aggregation of tasks summing to infinity. However, specifying the right version of the ought-implies-can principle remains a tricky business because of the complexity of the relevant sense of "can."

103. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 51. Note that this implication seems to be a *de dicto meta-physical* necessity.

104. Knud Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, intro. Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 46-47. I do not comment here on Løgstrup's own critique of Kierkegaard's conception of agapic duties in his "polemical epilogue," since that deserves detailed treatment. However, Løgstrup's own version seems to require intermediate principles (or secondary precepts, as Mill would have called them) to guide judgment concerning what love for the other whose life or well-being rests in our hands requires for us in different types of circumstance. I think this is the right way to go: otherwise an agapic version of moral perfectionism turns into an empty situation-ethics that can provide little practical guidance.

105. Though Climacus does not discuss the love commands explicitly in the way that *Works of Love* does, it is still clear that he thinks the totality of guilt does not occur in *Sittlichkeit*, since legal or conventional systems are restricted to particular lists of acts to be done or avoided and lack any qualitatively infinite background demand on our motives (e.g., 537). This aligns the totality of guilt with the second ethics of the religious stage, and indeed Climacus characterizes it as part of Religiousness A: it requires absolute divine authority (544).

106. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 78. He stresses that God is just a name for the fact that "every other (one) is every (bit) other" (77).

107. Here is the origin of Caputo's error in replacing Levinas's "excess" of the other with "infinite partiality" to a single other person (*Against Ethics*, 19).

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To a continued conversation between neighbors

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