

# Denying and Becoming: A Defense of Kierkegaard's Works of Love

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*A perennial concern with Kierkegaard's Works of Love is that its condemnation of preferential love is incoherent, inhibits the proper formation of self and of special relationships (i.e. friendships, romantic relationships), or both. In this essay, I argue that (1) Kierkegaard coherently rejects selfishness while allowing for and encouraging special relationships to exist, and (2) understanding love as a double movement (like that of faith described in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling) is essential to understanding this basic claim. This essay thus draws upon and goes beyond previous analyses of Kierkegaard's work, demonstrating how the double movement can be used to understand neighbor love as all at once selfless, involving the kind of preference necessary for special relationships, and positively forming the one who loves her neighbor.*

SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S *Works of Love*<sup>1</sup> has long been accused of recommending a conception of love unlivable in some way—by ignoring crucial bodily realities, presenting an impossible ideal, failing to be coherent, or some combination of the three.<sup>2</sup> One perennial concern is that his account of love<sup>3</sup> demeans meaningful human relationships. For Kierkegaard, Christian love must be conceived of as a duty, rid of any preference for one person or another, and condemnatory of erotic love and friendship (*WL*, 55, 45). Thus, in his recommendation to “let love for the neighbor be the sanctifying element” in one’s romantic relationships and friendships, he appears to contradict himself (*WL*, 62).

The last half-century of scholarship has witnessed renewed interest in *WL* and these problems associated with it.<sup>4</sup> Much recent conversation engages with the landmark

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as *WL*.

<sup>2</sup> See, most notably, Theodor W. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love,” in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. 8, 1939, 413–29; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2*, ed. G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958); Knud Ejler Løgstrup, *The Ethical Demand*, eds. Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1997). More recently, see Peter George, “Something Anti-Social about *Works of Love*,” in *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (London: Macmillan, 1998), 70–81.

<sup>3</sup> That is, for Kierkegaard, real love, neighbor love, *Kjerlighed*. See *WL*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> For just a few examples consider: David J. Gouwens, “Chapter 6,” in *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Sylvia I. Walsh, “Forming the Heart: The Role of Love in Kierkegaard’s Thought,” in *The Grammar of the Heart*, ed. Richard H. Bell (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988), 234–56; Gene Fendt, *Works of Love? Reflections on Works of Love* (Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 1989); Bruce H. Kirmmse, “Chapter 19,” in *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Paul Müller, *Kierkegaard’s “Works of Love”: Christian Ethics and the Maieutic Ideal*, ed. and trans. C. Stephen Evans and Jan Evans (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1993); Sylvia Walsh Perkins, “Kierkegaard’s

work of M. Jamie Ferreira, whose commentary seeks to address whether Kierkegaard’s understanding of becoming a self in *WL* “only allows concern for others or whether it requires it” (2001, 7). In defense of the latter interpretation, Ferreira emphasizes Kierkegaard’s identification of the human need to love and of Christianity’s teaching about proper self-love as necessary for neighbor love.

With Kierkegaard, she identifies one form of selfish self-love as passionate preference, a “reactive” attitude which disposes of the beloved when one does not get what one wants (Ferreira 2001, 37). This preference is self-oriented, “secretly self-love” (*WL*, 19). Conversely, to love others properly is to “apprehend people as equals” and relate to them through self-denial (Ferreira 2001, 45). For Ferreira, this requires allowing the nature of one’s relationship to be determined by others’ needs rather than by one’s self-oriented desires. This “seek[ing] nothing at all for oneself” strips relationships of selfishness (Ferreira 2001, 153). While Kierkegaard’s ethic requires “at least a generalized benevolence” toward all, that benevolence will “in some cases... be enriched by warmth, emotion, and intimacy” (Ferreira 2001, 160). These phenomena are results of preference, which the command to love allows unless it “undermine[s] the impartiality that consists in not excluding anyone from our responsibility to [love]” (Ferreira 2001, 260). Thus “preferential love can be sharply contrasted *conceptually* with nonpreferential love,” but “they can coincide *materially*” (Ferreira 2001, 45). “The goal is,” at least in some Philosophy of Love,” in *The Nature and Pursuit of Love*, ed. David Goicoechea (New York, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), 167–79; Robert L. Perkins, ed., *International Kierkegaard Commentary 16: Works of Love* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999).

cases, “to preserve love for the neighbor in erotic love and friendship” (Ferreira 2001, 45).

In a pair of articles in 2008 and 2010, Sharon Krishek challenges the adequacy of Ferreira’s response to the problem of preferentiality in WL. Though Krishek believes Ferreira interprets Kierkegaard correctly, she also thinks the idea of selfless preferential love is incoherent. To her, Kierkegaard’s condemnation of selfishness includes condemnation of self-focused concerns essential to any kind of preference and to any kind of special relationship (i.e. friendship, romantic relationship); preferential love and neighbor love cannot “coincide materially” as Ferreira suggests (Ferreira 2001, 45). If neighbor love excludes these important self-focused concerns wrapped up in preference, neighbor love cannot be recommended as the only proper and valuable form of love. For Krishek, then, neighbor love must be understood as only one work of love, that of self-denial, alongside preferential love, which is self-affirmation. Neighbor love is not love itself, as Kierkegaard and Ferreira see it, and self-focused concerns should be given up only to be followed by a purified return to them. Krishek here proposes reading *Fear and Trembling*<sup>5</sup> to find a Kierkegaardian way around the insufficiencies of WL, appropriating the double movement of faith to describe how a resignation and return to self could be possible.<sup>6</sup>

Going beyond both analyses, in this essay I argue that Kierkegaard coherently rejects selfishness while allowing for and encouraging special relationships to exist. Further, understanding love as a double movement is essential to understanding this basic claim. I begin by presenting Krishek’s position more fully. I validate her concerns with Ferreira’s treatment before highlighting where I believe Krishek’s thinking goes wrong, considering also instances

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter referred to as *FT*.

<sup>6</sup> For a consideration of Krishek’s proposal, see John Lippitt, “Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special Relationships: Ferreira, Krishek and the ‘God Filter,’” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 72, no. 3 (December 2012): 177–97. Lippitt there attempts to demonstrate that Krishek’s concerns are invalid. In his view, it is possible for preferential love to be purified, to become neighbor love, by passing through what he calls the ‘God filter,’ a theoretical strainer ridding preferential love of any self-serving aspects. Lippitt’s solution fails to address Krishek’s identification of neighbor love and preferential love as utterly different and incompatible. Since I seek to engage this problem of apparent incompatibility head-on, and Lippitt avoids addressing the problem, seeing it as a non-issue, I do not to consider Lippitt’s work in the body of this essay. For Krishek’s response to Lippitt, in which she maintains that the problems she identifies in *WL* are present and that her solution incorporating ideas from *FT* sufficiently addresses them, see Sharon Krishek, “In Defence of a Faith-like Model of Love: A Reply to John Lippitt’s ‘Kierkegaard and the Problem of Special Relationships: Ferreira, Krishek, and the ‘God Filter,’” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 75, no. 2 (April 2014): 155–66.

in which Ferreira’s insights lend resources for correcting Krishek’s mistakes. I conclude by demonstrating how the double movement of faith in *FT* can be used to understand neighbor love as all at once selfless, involving preference, and positively forming the one who loves her neighbor.

### 1: KRISHEK’S KIERKEGAARDIAN AMENDMENT TO WORKS OF LOVE

In her 2008, 2010, and 2014 articles, Krishek indicates that she agrees with Ferreira’s interpretation of Kierkegaard’s account of neighbor love but, unlike Ferreira, does not champion that account without amendment. She takes this position because she understands the demands of neighbor love and preferential love as contradictory and preferential love as essential to having meaningful relationships, such as friendships or romantic relationships.

Krishek reminds her reader that Kierkegaard establishes Christian love as “the duty to love the neighbor, *any neighbor*, as one loves oneself” and preferential love as “the love directed at *one special neighbor* who, by virtue of preference, has a different status than all the other neighbors” (2008, 596, emphasis Krishek’s). Implicit in these definitions, Krishek perceives, is that neighbor love is essentially equalizing, demanding equal and identical responses to all people. Preferential love, on the other hand, is essentially exclusive. Defined in this way, neighbor love and preferential love are necessarily at odds with one another. This tension is only amplified when one notices Kierkegaard’s insistence that neighbor love “is self-denial’s love, ... [which] drives out all preferential love just as it drives out all self-love” (*WL*, 55). Ferreira is wrong in her estimation that Kierkegaard’s warnings against preferential love are merely “warnings against exclusion” (2008, 603)—preferential love and neighbor love are incompatible.

Krishek understands Kierkegaard’s delineation between preferential love and neighbor love as coming from his wish to leave no room for selfishness in his conception of Christian love. She infers “that Kierkegaard considers [‘feelings, drives, inclinations, and passions ... the powers of immediacy’ (*WL*, 25)] to constitute the selfishness that distinguishes between preferential love and neighborly love because they are concerned exclusively with the self and its gratification” (Krishek 2008, 597). Krishek identifies preference as “the *essential element* ... in special loves” (2008, 604, emphasis Krishek’s). If Kierkegaard took his own claims seriously, preferential love could under no circumstances be commended. And yet, Krishek observes, “it is clear that Kierkegaard wishes to affirm the special relationships we all have in our lives”

(2008, 600). Ferreira and Kierkegaard have both, then, failed to see the irreconcilable tension in simultaneously affirming a commitment to neighbor love as the only love and to special relationships as commendable in certain circumstances.

Not only is Kierkegaard's view of neighbor love incoherent, its radical call for self-denial is detrimental to the person practicing it. Ferreira and Krishek read Kierkegaard as identifying two possible kinds of self-love: proper self-love and selfish self-love. But Krishek suggests that there are three kinds of self-love. First, there is self-love (a), which is "indeed 'at odds with the good of the other': using the other as a means for one's selfish satisfaction or acting toward achieving one's own good regardless of the effect it has on the other" (Krishek 2008, 598). Second, there is self-love (b), which she terms "proper unqualified self-love" and describes as a limited kind of self-love "understood in terms of respect and wishing one's well-being" in a disembodied sense of the word (Krishek 2008, 599). Third, there is self-love (c), "proper unqualified self-love," which entails "fulfilling one's own 'self-focused' concerns as long as they are *not* 'at odds with the good of the other'" (Krishek 2008, 599).

Krishek claims self-love (b), which she takes to be the love referred to by the commandment and recommended by Kierkegaard, does not permit preference and therefore "allows only for a partial self" (2008, 601). Consequently, Kierkegaard's praise of self-love (b) is an unfortunate result of his "conflat[ion] [of] preferentiality with selfishness" (Krishek 2010, 17). Krishek advocates for going beyond self-love (b) to self-love (c) since the latter involves the unqualified self-affirmation intrinsic to special relationships while still avoiding selfishness as she understands it.<sup>7</sup>

For Krishek, special relationships are inherently preferential, by their very definition attentive to those wants overlooked by self-love (b). "The demand to love in the *same* [neighborly] way ... leave[s] no real room for the (existing) differences between preferential and non-preferential loves" (Krishek 2008, 606, emphasis Krishek's). This does not "do justice to our experience," Krishek thinks, that special relationships involve a qualitatively different love than do non-preferential relationships (2014, 160).

Krishek maintains that special relationships obviously differ from non-preferential relationships in the way in which we treat people in those respective relationships. Ferreira maintains that this difference does not imply

<sup>7</sup> Krishek makes it clear that her definition of selfishness differs from that of Kierkegaard, but she never explicitly defines the term for herself. One can certainly infer, however, that her definition would leave room for concerns that are both self-focused and truly loving in regard to one's neighbor.

preference, but Krishek contends preference cannot be separated from action in the way Ferreira suggests (Krishek 2008, 607). "*Choice is essentially connected with preference;*" to choose is to prefer (Krishek 2008, 609). Additionally, special relationships are not, as Ferreira insists, formed "in accordance with the needs of the neighbour who is loved" as a mere outpouring of one's recognition that the other person is one's neighbor (Krishek 2010, 15). Special relationships are instead a reflection of one's own needs as well as one's own "desires, inclinations, and preferences" (Krishek 2010, 16).

For these reasons, Krishek argues that neighbor love cannot "be the ground for special loves" (2008, 612). That Ferreira neglects special loves in her unreserved affirmation of Kierkegaard's account of love leads to her failure to "address adequately the problem of preferential love" (Krishek 2010, 16). In response to this failure, Krishek proposes an amendment to Kierkegaard's account of love inspired by Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*.

To do this, Krishek reminds her reader of Kierkegaard's premise that something is a work of love when it is done in an attitude of self-denial. Krishek, in contrast, proposes that something is a work of love when it is done in the same double movement in which faith is done (2010, 7). In conjunction with this idea, Krishek recommends understanding that love is not itself neighborly or based on self-denial. Rather, love (*Kjerlighed*) can be understood in terms of caring, and caring, so long as it takes the form of the double movement of faith, can be manifest through the work of neighbor love, the work of preferential love, or some other kind of work of love.<sup>8</sup> She appeals to experience: Can your marriage or best friendship really be explained solely by your recognition of your spouse or best friend as neighbor? Is it not that something other than the affirmation of the other's intrinsic worth is at play in these circumstances?

For these reasons, Krishek seeks to amend Kierkegaard's account of love by turning to his earlier work *Fear and Trembling*. Quoting Robert M. Adams, she notes that "[t]he portrait of the knight of faith ... can be seen as one of a number of attempts Kierkegaard made to understand, or imagine, how devotion to God could coexist with

<sup>8</sup> Krishek here reminds the reader that Kierkegaard's stated purpose in *WL* is to consider works of love rather than love itself: "They are Christian deliberations, therefore not about love but about works of love" (*WL*, 3). She argues that if the focus of the book is neighbor love, the reader should consider that neighbor love is a work of love rather than love itself. She leaves open the possibility for works of love beside those of neighbor love and preferential love but stops short of suggesting what any of these additional kinds of works might be.

pursuit and enjoyment of finite goods” (Krishek 2010, 13-14). *FT* is the perfect text to which to turn because it includes a model for how two apparently contradictory attitudes, namely resignation and faith, can coexist.

Krishek points out the similarities between self-denial and the first movement of faith, namely, an attitude of resignation. In her view, the knight of resignation “submits himself, and his worldly desire, to the will of God” (Krishek 2010, 9). The knight “*keeps desiring* the object of his renunciation,” all the while “wholeheartedly accepting the impossibility of fulfilling [his desire]” (Krishek 2010, 9, emphasis Krishek’s). In both self-denial and resignation, a person surrenders something of great import. In the case of Abraham, this is his son; in the case of someone attempting to love her neighbor, this might be allowing the other’s needs to trump one’s own desires in the way one acts. Krishek likens an affirmation of oneself to the second movement of faith. Just as Abraham’s son is returned to him, so the person who loves another person is able to return to herself in a purified manner. The person who performs the second movement “receives back the same thing he is renouncing, without in any way cancelling his renunciation” (Krishek 2010, 12, emphasis Krishek’s). Thus “unqualified, proper self-love (self-love [c]) as well as the preferential loves based on it are the clearest manifestation of the second movement, of an unrestricted affirmation of finitude” (Krishek 2008, 614).

Because, in Krishek’s model, neighbor love and preferential love are two different kinds or works of love, and the double movement is the manner in which love must be performed in order to perform true love, a work of neighbor love must be performed in the double movement, as must a work of preferential love. By Krishek’s lights, a work of neighbor love involves movements of both self-denial and self-affirmation. So, too, with a work of preferential love. The second movement in a work of neighbor love would be “expressed precisely in the tender compassion implied by this attitude, in *my emotional involvement* in this situation (of encountering the neighbor)” (Krishek 2008, 615, emphasis Krishek’s). The second movement in a work of preferential love would be “expressed in a feeling that in addition to the neighbor-love element in it includes sensitivity to the special preferences and inclinations of the self who loves” (Krishek 2008, 616). In this understanding, neighbor love must be “directed at everybody equally,” so that one recognizes every other person as her neighbor, and yet there is room for the work of preferential love to be done in addition to the work of neighbor love in relationships in which one has preferences (Krishek 2008, 616). In

fact, neighbor love “is like the ground floor of any love .... However, when it comes to preferential relationships, other layers of emotional and practical dispositions—unique to such relationships—are added to the basic layer of neighbourly love, giving it its distinct flavor” (Krishek 2014, 164).

In this way, Krishek believes self-denial’s love is dethroned from its inappropriate place as the highest form of love while still maintaining, with Ferreira and Kierkegaard, that self-denial is “crucial to the way one should love” whether that way of loving be neighborly or preferential (Krishek 2014, 161). Where Kierkegaard in *WL* “gives priority to the movement of resignation, and allows for only a partial, hesitant return to finitude” (2008, 614), Krishek provides for the possibility of the affirmation of self and of preferences even as self-denial is continually performed: “One renounces oneself (one’s will, one’s desires, one’s worldly attachments and preferences) and at the same time affirms oneself: namely, gains a new—humble and trusting—hold on oneself” (2010, 18). And while in Kierkegaard’s account one must worry “how the same love can be both equal (when it is directed at every neighbour) and preferential (when it is directed at an intimate, closer neighbour),” in Krishek’s account, “we do not have to face such a problem: after all, we are not talking about the *same* love” but “two *different* expressions of (the primordial power of) love; two *works* of love” (2010, 20, emphasis Krishek’s). Neighbor love understood as a work of love to be performed in a double movement of self-denial and affirmation does not pose the same “threat to the distinctiveness and value of preferential love” that *WL*’s picture of neighbor love does (Krishek 2014, 156).

## 2: A DEFENSE OF WORKS OF LOVE

Both Ferreira’s and Krishek’s accounts of *WL* have strengths, but so too do they each miss pieces of the puzzle crucial for understanding the full virtue of Kierkegaard’s account. They are, as I see it, in desperate need of additional insights, both from one another and Kierkegaard’s text. In this last section of my essay, I briefly evaluate each of their accounts and conclude by offering my own suggestion for how to understand Kierkegaard’s account of the relationship between neighbor and preferential love. To begin, I raise two issues with Krishek’s account.

First, Krishek continually affirms that preference is tied to choice: “*choice is essentially connected with preference*” (2014, 156). But how exactly does choice connect to preference? The answer depends on what preference is, something she addresses in a footnote in her 2010 article:



What does making preferences mean? To prefer person *x* over another person *y* has at least three meanings: 1. To consider *x* as better and more valuable than *y*; 2. To choose *x* over *y* in contexts where choosing is a natural part of our life (I choose one person to become my close friend and not the other; I commit myself to only one man whom I choose as my romantic beloved and not to that man or to the other); 3. To choose *x* over *y* in situations where the need to make a hierarchy is forced upon us. Namely, since we are limited in time, money, and other material and spiritual assets, we cannot provide everything to everybody and we need to choose whom we prefer to help (or even simply be with) at every given moment of our life. Now, of these three meanings of preference only the first is negative and needs to be unequivocally rooted out from any expression of love. However, Kierkegaard does not seem to distinguish between a ‘bad’ preference and a ‘good’ (or morally neutral) one, and he denounces preferentiality altogether (Krishek 2010, 15).

Krishek rejects this first meaning of preference but says the second and third accounts needn’t be excluded (as Kierkegaard seems to) from a definition of proper love. In reality, however, Kierkegaard does not reject these second and third meanings. Krishek herself acknowledges Kierkegaard’s affirmation of special relationships and of human limitation as playing a role in what it means to perform a work of neighbor love. But where Krishek understands this affirmation as contradicting his denouncement of preference, Kierkegaard’s unequivocal rejection of preference is a rejection of the first sense alone. It is clear from his treatment of special relationships that he does indeed expect and exhort his reader to enter into special relationships with particular people, which of course requires preference in the third and second senses. He might disagree with Krishek about *why* a person would make the choice described in the second meaning of preference (Ferreira, at least, would insist that these choices ought to be made by taking into account the needs of the other rather than one’s own desires) but he would affirm that choosing *x* over *y* must indeed take place in human relationships. This choice needn’t conflict with genuine neighbor love as long as it is not motivated by preference, i.e., performing works of love for my friend *because* she is especially likable.

Second, I think Krishek is wrong to conceive of neighbor and preferential love as separate works of love. Krishek claims they need to be understood as separate works of love because their natures are contradictory; one love cannot be both equalizing and exclusive. If they are separate works of

love, the tension between them is no longer a problem; they are performed distinctly. The problem with this conception is that it seems Krishek has only eliminated the tension between neighbor love and preferential love on one level. She still contends that one should perform works of neighbor love and of preferential love simultaneously toward those with whom one is in special relationship. Krishek has not eliminated the problem of how a person could treat her beloved in both equalizing and exclusive ways. And if a work of neighbor love involves both self-denial and self-affirmation, as Krishek describes, it is not clear that we need the category of a work of preferential love. Much of Krishek’s insistence that we hold onto preferential love has to do with ensuring that selves are not swallowed up by acts of pure self-denial.

Ferreira’s account, while not attempting to provide a model for the coexistence of neighbor love and preferential love as Krishek’s does, offers resources for thinking through some of what the latter is missing. Key to her explanation of *WL* is the idea that human beings have an intrinsic and deep “craving” or need to love others (Ferreira 2001, 26).<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Ferreira asserts that self-denial is to realize the truth about who we are in light of who God is. She writes that this discovery is twofold: “you can do nothing (without God) and you can do everything (with God)” (Ferreira 2001, 233). Only with God’s help, while one understands that one is capable of nothing on one’s own, can a person “do everything” or really *anything* “for the other” (Ferreira 2001, 234, emphasis Ferreira’s). These ideas harmonize with Krishek’s suggestion that neighbor love should be understood as involving both self-denial and self-affirmation. Though Krishek thinks she diverges from Kierkegaard in holding this view, in reality she is in full agreement with him. As Kierkegaard puts it, “the truly loving person ... makes himself by self-denial” (*WL*, 269). Ferreira thus helps us understand how it could be that neighbor love necessarily involves self-affirmation.

Ferreira also draws attention to the importance of Kierkegaard’s claim that passionate preference is to be condemned because of its reactive nature. Kierkegaard is concerned about the tendency of preference to make comparisons, but he seems equally, if not more, concerned about the tendency of preference-based love to cease as soon as their partner offends, hurts, or disowns them. In

<sup>9</sup> I find it important that Ferreira and Kierkegaard refer to this need of love to express itself as a “craving” because while need does not necessarily imply desire, craving does—and not just an intellectual or emotional desire, but a *bodily* desire. This wording helps my case that neighbor love is not so exclusive of one’s human, fleshy, and material desires after all.

fact, he sees the reactive nature of passionate preference as impinging on a person's ability to be free and independent.<sup>10</sup> Krishek overlooks this essential difference between the love that Kierkegaard condemns and the love that Kierkegaard extols. Any preferential love that could be commended would have to overcome not only the problem of exclusivity but also the problem of fallibility. With Kierkegaard's affirmation of special relationships in mind, I suspect his condemnation of preference is more about the fallibility of preference untouched by Christianity; his condemnation of preference cannot be about an appreciation of the particularities of our neighbors.

Lastly, Ferreira helpfully argues that combatting selfishness *does* require allowing the nature of one's relationships to be determined by the needs of other people rather than by one's self-oriented desires. This is especially clear when one considers Kierkegaard's assertion that "to help another person to love God is to love another person" (*WL*, 107). In approaching every person, the Christian should consider not "How can I fulfill my desires involving this person?" but "How can I help this person to love God?" Hopefully, of course, one's genuine desire for the other person is that he grows in love for God. Ferreira also highlights this quote to remind us that human desires are not in and of themselves detrimental to love: "Christianity is no more scandalized by a drive human beings have indeed not given to themselves than it has wanted to forbid people to eat and drink" (*WL*, 52). She remarks, Christianity wants "to guarantee that our drives and preferences will not be the force that dictates our responsibility to others" (Ferreira 2001, 238). The Christian ought to act according to what it means to love others, regardless of whether or not she has desires conflicting with that course of action. The desires, hopefully, will follow.

For these reasons, I believe Ferreira is right to suppose that special relationships, involving preferential love, can be the vehicles by which neighbor love is preserved—but concede that Ferreira does not sufficiently show how this happens. I now defend why Ferreira and Kierkegaard are correct and consistent in their simultaneous affirmation of preferential love and neighbor love, of self-denial and self-affirmation, as well as why they need Krishek's suggestion to incorporate *FT* in order to understand *WL*.

With Krishek, we can maintain that neighbor love begins with self-denial. Kierkegaard's picture of neighbor

<sup>10</sup> Only Christian love is "eternally secured against every change, eternally made free in blessed independence, eternally and happily secured against despair" (*WL*, 29). In this way, Christian love appears to be loss, appears to trap or negate a person's self, but is in truth an affirmation of oneself.

love as a love that celebrates differences implies that self-denial and celebration of difference are related. The connection is made especially clear in the deliberation "Love Does Not Seek Its Own," where he recommends loving what is the other's own, that is, the other's distinctiveness. He ties this appreciation and promotion of another's particularities to the denial of what is one's own, and it is precisely at this point that he provides us with the biblical reminder: "the person who loses his soul will gain it" (*WL*, 268). The one who forgets himself in love of others is remembered by God and for this reason "acquires what he gives" (*WL*, 281). This makes perfect sense; because I am a person who has natural preferences for certain people and qualities in people, in the sense of valuing certain people and qualities over other people and qualities, and because I naturally dislike certain people and qualities, denying myself and celebrating differences go hand in hand. To appreciate the diversity of the people around me, I need to suspend my preferences—to transcend or give up myself, in a sense—and do some striving toward gratitude for the diverse people I encounter. In this way I could be said to be cultivating preferences for all my neighbors as I endeavor to love them in self-denial. And this, I think, coincides with human experience. If I am determined to appreciate another person's particularity, appreciation comes—not without effort, certainly, but it comes all the same, granted and sustained by the eternal, which, according to Kierkegaard, grounds all love. Because the very character of neighbor love is to celebrate difference, there is no need, contra Krishek, to talk about Christian preferential love as incompatible with neighbor love in any way. Neighbor love necessarily cultivates and involves preference—not comparative preference, and not selective preference, but preference all the same.

If this work of cultivating preference in self-denial is done, self-affirmation follows. As I come to see more and more of my neighbors as worthy of my celebration and devotion, I increase in the amount of positive preference I have. Since, as Krishek explains, preferences are an expression of self, and my preferences have expanded, there is in fact more of myself to affirm. Additionally, because my love is grounded in the eternal, my love is infallible, independent of the wiles of others, and I am free in a way I could not be if were I to participate in the sort of passionate preference untouched by Christianity. Neighbor love, which Kierkegaard himself identifies as being a kind of faith,<sup>11</sup> is

<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard writes, "Just as one by faith believes the unseen into what is seen, so the one who loves by forgiveness believes away what is seen. Both are faith" (*WL*, 295, emphasis Kierkegaard's). He does not here explicitly tie love to the double movement he describes in *FT*, but I feel justified in involving this quote because of how strongly the case

an affirmation of finitude because to deny myself in the way Kierkegaard counsels is precisely to become more myself. The person of faith trusts, with *Fear and Trembling's* Abraham, that God will bless her in this life<sup>12</sup> in proportion to her willingness to give up this life; that she is a person who can be made happy in humble service to her neighbor. This kind of self-denial need not be dethroned; it poses no threat to the self and is, upon closer examination, the purest and most complete sort of self-love. And because affirmation of oneself “is an expression of one’s relationship to God,” who “originally intended” one’s selfhood (Krishek 2014, 162), practicing self-denial as Kierkegaard prescribes is not only proper and full love of self and neighbor, but also love of God. Ultimately, then, practicing self-denial as Kierkegaard prescribes is the only way to love self, God, and neighbor.

### CONCLUSION

As Krishek suggests, it is indeed unclear from a cursory read of Ferreira and Kierkegaard how it could be that preference in any way coexists with—let alone preserves—the love commanded by Christ in the gospels. Upon closer examination we see that Kierkegaard condemns relationships motivated by preference; such relationships always involve, to their detriment, qualitative comparisons and a reactive selfishness inevitably leading to a break in relationship. Preference in this role must be seen in stark contrast to, and as incompatible with, Christian love. At the same time, Ferreira helps us understand that the kind of preference allowing us to form and function in friendships and romantic relationships must be affirmed if we are to act in obedience to the commandment, and Krishek reminds us of a Kierkegaardian model that helps us make such an affirmation in tandem with an affirmation of self-denial. It is, thus, only with the combined insights of Krishek and Ferreira, as well as renewed attention to the thought of Kierkegaard himself, that the relationship between denying and becoming in *Works of Love* can be properly apprehended. Understood in this way, Kierkegaard’s account is coherent, instructive, and edifying for all those interested in the relationship between Christian love and the development of a full and vibrant self.

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has been made for a strong tie between the texts.

<sup>12</sup> Something *Fear and Trembling's* pseudonym, Johannes de silentio, associates with “happiness.”

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