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A Love Knowing Nothing: Zen Meets Kierkegaard

Mary Jeanne Larrabee¹

Abstract

I present a case for a love that has a wisdom knowing nothing. How this nothing functions underlies what Kierkegaard urges in *Works of Love* and how Zen compassion moves us to action. In each there is an ethical call to love in action. I investigate how Kierkegaard's "religiousness B" is a "second immediacy" in relation to God, one springing from a nothing between human and God. This immediacy clarifies what Kierkegaard takes to be the Christian call to love. I draw a parallel between Kierkegaard's immediacy and the expression of immediacy within a Zen-influenced life, particularly the way in which it calls the Zen practitioner to act toward the specific needs of the person standing before one. In my understanding of both Kierkegaard and Zen life, there is also an ethics of response to the circumstances that put the person in need, such as entrenched poverty or other injustices.

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Introduction

Some might say that the wisdom of love is really the folly of love. In this case the best of lovers would be the fool, the one who claims to know nothing but to love nevertheless. Kierkegaard insists, for instance, that the best love is blind (WL 69).² In this paper I will make a case for a love that has a wisdom distinct from knowledge, a wisdom acting out of something that can be termed a “nothing.” It is from inhabiting such a nothing that the fool finds love, the best real love, and it is in recognizing what this nothing is that we can see what Kierkegaard calls each person to in *Works of Love* and how Zen compassion might move us to a response to another person. In each of these, then, there is a type of ethical call to love in action.

To argue my point about the wisdom of love, I will investigate what Kierkegaard calls “true faith” or religiousness B and show how it is understood as a second immediacy in relation to God and how, as such, it can clarify what Kierkegaard takes to be the Christian call to love one’s neighbor, especially as manifested in action, in “works of love.” In Kierkegaard’s book, *Works of Love*, the love of neighbor requires non-preferential love in contrast to how we as humans usually love-preferentially; that is, we usually love a special other person, whereas the love of neighbor is for a person in her/his “similarity” to every other, thus seemingly, to a “generic” human being. Yet then how do we do this and be loving toward “the individual” in Kierkegaard’s sense, rather than just to a “generic person,” what writers call the “generalized other” of modernist ethical theories (see, for example, Benhabib 163)? I will claim that one is called, in Christian love, to act in a way possible only within the “absolute absurd” of religiousness B, a point I explain with

² Kierkegaard’s works are cited according to the standard for Kierkegaardian scholarship; see Bibliography for abbreviations.

reference to the type of immediacy, termed a “second immediacy,” within which this religiousness places us. For this immediacy is such that we can see in a new way, without the mediation of knowledge, even about what a human being is or needs. Instead this “absurd” puts in place God as “the middle” within what is actually an immediacy and thus an unmediated relation. I then draw a parallel between Kierkegaard’s love within this second immediacy of true faith and another “immediacy” that is connected with the compassionate action expressed within a Zen-influenced life. I will show that, although the experiential basis and most of the conceptual articulation for action in these two views may seem to differ substantially, there are interesting parallels supporting each one’s call to a response in love or compassion to the other person.

Kierkegaard and the Immediacy of Real Love

We first need to look briefly at Kierkegaard’s descriptions of existence-spheres (or “stages of life”) and their relation, first, to the “individual” in Kierkegaard’s sense and, second, to immediacy and reflection, before discussing the sense of the second immediacy in religiousness B. According to Kierkegaard, there are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. The latter includes what Kierkegaard calls religiousness A and religiousness B, the second being the “true” or paradigmatic religiousness. These spheres, Merold Westphal states, can be described as “modes of being-in-the-world” rather than “in the first instance assertions about the world” (*Becoming* 22). Put differently, each is a complex interactional connection with one’s life and world, encompassing beliefs and attitudes, behavioral patterns and expectations, and most importantly a set of norms prioritized over other norms and values (rather than simply a negation of them).

In the aesthetic existence-sphere, the individual exists as caught up primarily in the demands of desire directed in the moment and toward satisfaction, usually of various carnal pleasures, that is, desires of the flesh for food, drink, warmth, sex, but also desires often called “higher”; i.e., those related to friendship and other pleasures not strictly speaking carnal-intellectual. The values that are prioritized can be summarized as the acquisition of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. The immediacy here is a direct involvement in the moment and the moment’s desire—this is the “first” immediacy. It can be characterized as non-reflective in the sense that desire springs directly toward the desired person or thing without knowledge brought to bear in considering the broader values that might inform a choice.³ The desire creates the value of the object immediately (one might conceptualize after the fact to “explain” this desire). In this immediacy of the aesthetic life one often falls in love (or lust) with another person, desires an immediate relationship and the possession of the beloved (where possession can be understood as covering a range of modes of relatedness, only one of which might be sexual). In this immediacy, as well, one is not actually existing as a “real” individual, because expression of the self in regards to desires does not really distinguish one, even though one might think one is acting as *this* distinct person (which one is doing in some sense). Here one can be an individual only in a trivial sense, and often only exists as a member of the “herd” or “crowd,” desiring what is the moment’s thing to desire. For example, many heterosexual males in some cultures such

³ Westphal argues that the aesthetic sphere does not preclude reflection (*Becoming* 22–23). I would agree, but the point here is the way in which an intellectual reflective process intervenes; most commonly reflection occurs in the sense of conceptual activity that tempers the deciding moment by introducing values that point outside of that moment or to judgments about ethical standards that were decided upon and perhaps committed to prior to the moment; in the aesthetic sphere, for example, “reflection” would not do this, since it would happen after the fact of desire, if it happened then.

as the twentieth-century U.S. desired thin blonde women, while in the techno-culture of the early twenty-first century many instantly desire the newest iPhone as soon as its existence is announced.

In the ethical existence-sphere one can move beyond the moment in order to operate according to the demands of duty, of the universal, which often requires acting beyond the moment and against the moment's immediate demands for desire's satisfaction. This can require deferral of desire to a time beyond the moment, and a relationship to the other that carries over past one's own desire. This deferral is aided by reflection, such that the person draws on knowledge of what counts as the ethical. Reflection is a stepping back prior to decision, a more considered "desire" aimed at action, so that a gap opens up within immediacy to allow ethical decision-making. For Kierkegaard, ethics involves universal principles and their universal application to specific situations. Negative duties, such as "Do not kill," require the same action (or non-action) toward every human being, regardless of our loving or liking or disliking this one or that one. Ethical consideration of principles brings an abstraction from the individual as desired or not desired, so that our attention shifts to the generic human being of modernist thought—the human that every human being is. Within this existence-sphere there is some movement toward real individuality for the decision-maker, because the ethical (or unethical) action includes the acceptance of responsibility for this act. Nonetheless, the ethical is the universal and, when one follows the ethical, although that is valuable, one is given no distinctiveness, but only a distinction from those who are unethical.

Life in the existence-sphere of religious faith brings a different gap and hence requires a leap: this gap is brought about by an insertion into the individual's life—either of God or by God. The verticality of transcendence or eternity is inserted into the horizontality of human/worldly life, where, as Nishitani puts it in discussing Kierkegaard, "the

moment becomes an atom of eternity within time” (21). As stated above, this existence-sphere has two forms, A and B. In religiousness A, a type of “natural” religion, the individual makes this insertion of God (or the divine or the ultimate [my wording]) into one’s life, whereas in religiousness B God makes the insertion (CUP 561). Calvin Schrag reminds us that for Kierkegaard the prototypical insertion is the incarnation of God in Christ (7-8). Persons in religiousness A do have a faith, one that is usually expressible in concepts and statements, such that persons “know” what their faith is—what they believe. And religiousness A, it must be noted, is not aligned with the religiousness of all Christians—Kierkegaard states: “Religiousness A can be present in paganism, and in Christianity, it can be the religiousness of everyone who is not decisively Christian, whether baptized or not” (CUP 557). However, for Kierkegaard, only in religiousness B is “true faith” possible. A person of true faith, one who is decisively Christian, can be said to be in a direct, an immediate, that is, unmediated, relationship with God. This immediacy means that in the movement of faith, the leap, there is no definition or image of God at play intervening between the person and God.⁴ God, of course, can always see the person; however, in the leap of faith, the person of true faith “sees” God and not an idea of God. More importantly the person sees that God is seeing her/him—and *as the self s/he is*, not as a generic human, but as this specific creative expression of God. In this movement, one sees one’s own true uniqueness, distinctiveness, singularity, as *this* this-here, as really individual. Merold Westphal claims Kierkegaard’s individualism is that of Hegel, a “dialectical individualism” that rejects

⁴ Come describes the differences between religiousness A and B (*Kierkegaard* 305–308), describing the leap from ethics to religiousness A (*Kierkegaard* 298–304) and the faith of religiousness B as a relationship (*Kierkegaard* 307). Green, citing Gellman (297), discusses how *Fear and Trembling* is “a stinging critique of both the popular and cultural Christianity of his day and a reminder of the primitive challenge of Christian faith” (258), in which God calls the person of faith to “self-definition as an individual.”

“analytic or compositional individualism” that sees parts or individuals as self-sufficient, that is, as separate from others (*Kierkegaard’s* 30). A “dialectical” individualism is one that “emphasizes the *I* that is *We* and insists that the *We* remains dispersed in a plurality of *I’s*” (*Kierkegaard’s* 32). This integration of the social into self-identity *I* would see as important for the establishment of a social ethic, but it is only one part of Kierkegaard’s understanding of what an individual really is, one part of a totality of intricate “crossings” that make any individual unique from any other and unique in each moment of existing. God sees this “each moment” individual and in faith this one individual sees *that* God sees one as *this one* and *what* God sees one as (although one does not actually see all the “what” of God’s seeing in any one moment).⁵ While some of the experience may be conceptualized within or after the fact of these dual seeings, the insertion within religiousness B is not initiated with concepts—hence its immediacy.

One way of characterizing “real faith” is given in Kierkegaard’s contrast⁶ between the love of neighbor that is demanded of the person of true faith and the types of love within the aesthetic sphere, erotic love

⁵ Some religious writers and religious studies scholars emphasize the sense of individuality stemming from an individual’s recognition of that individual’s “unique” sinfulness before God, a sinfulness that calls one to repentance and a recognition of one’s need for God and Christ; such a reading might be needed from the religious or religious studies perspective, which might use a more philosophically inflected word such as finitude, but in my opinion it is unnecessary for a philosophical perspective. See Hall (24) and Quinn (364) for examples of tying individuality to conscience.

⁶ See Rumble (163–164), who investigates the ramifications of maintaining a clean dualism between the two types of love (preferential and non-preferential). I would agree with this inclination but would take a different direction than Rumble’s deconstructive reading of *Works of Love* (WL 162). Krishek tangles with Ferreira’s understanding of the two loves and is unmoved by Evans’s approach due to its narrow focus. My intentions in this essay differ from Krishek’s, so I do not take up her noteworthy argument.

and friendship. Kierkegaard designates both of the latter as preferential loves and love of neighbor as non-preferential.⁷ It would seem that another way to distinguish preferential from non-preferential love would include immediacy; we could then say that preferential love operates within immediacy, as a response to the beloved characterized by the desire within the aesthetic sphere. In contrast, then, perhaps non-preferential love must *not* operate within immediacy, at least that of self-centered desire. Instead, because non-preferential love is an outcome of a shift away from self-centered or self-serving, it might be included within the ethical sphere itself, because it is a form of “duty,” albeit a religious one.⁸

To respond to this latter possible interpretation, let’s turn to the question of how Kierkegaard thinks we *must* love the neighbor, so that we can understand how to evoke the immediacy at play here. Is love of neighbor a Christian “duty” and thus similar to the ethical sphere’s demands in regard to how we are to treat every human being or is it something entirely different? What are the implications for Kierkegaard’s understandings of the individual and immediacy? At first glance it would seem that preferential love truly *does* see the other as individual; for it is the beloved who is placed in the *unique* position to the lover as the only beloved—and uniqueness presumably bestows individuality. Yet Kierkegaard uncovers the full implications of preferential love: first and obviously, no *other* person can be loved but the beloved, the object of preference. So here is a limitation on the Christian perspective that claims we must love everyone—preferential love might get in the way. Second, the individual who is the beloved is not even actually *loved truly* in preferen-

⁷ See, in particular, Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (WL19 and 50–53, inter al.). See, among others, Quinn (354–359).

⁸ See Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, the second discourse, first series, “You *Shall* Love,” on the question of treating the call to love as a duty.

tial love, at least not totally for who that individual is. Rather, the preferential love is guided in part, if not totally, by the lover's own needs, so that the beloved is often seen through the projections of the lover onto the beloved. The lover loves oneself in the other. Kierkegaard states that preferential love is "actually another form of self-love" (WL 53)—it has what M. Jaime Ferreira terms a "'selfish' self-referentiality" (Immediacy 108). Kierkegaard describes it rather bluntly: "the beloved and the friend are called, remarkably and profoundly, to be sure, the *other self*, the *other I*" (Immediacy 108). In preferential love I might think I love another person, an individual in some real sense, but I don't really in a full, total sense. The immediacy here, between lover and beloved, might seem to bring one directly before the other as an individual, but it also does *not* do so. The immediacy in the aesthetic sphere is that the lover is being drawn to have the beloved now, when and as the lover desires the beloved. The beloved is no more distinctive than the bedpost in a way; is not really unique as the individual s/he is—although some elements of that individuality are lures for the lover—and consequently immediacy here does not deliver individuality.

In the sphere of religiousness B, however, both the type of immediacy and thus the relation to the individual shift. As noted already, in this sphere we are called to love of neighbor. There must be a move out of the ethical sphere to gain a foothold from which to love the neighbor. The question for us now is put this way by Martin Andic: "Is the love of neighbour defended by Kierkegaard directed to human beings as *individuals*, or is there something abstract or unfocused, merely lukewarm and incomplete about it? Is it too impersonal really to be *love*?" (112). I would respond "Yes!" to the first part of the first question⁹ and "No!" to the

⁹ My answer differs from Andic's religiously based one (which might be more accurate to Kierkegaard as a religious writer), that locates individuality in part in conscience, or in "spirit," as related to God (119–120)—I say "in one's intricate totality," of which con-

rest; I will defend this claim by reference to the second immediacy of religiousness B and its link to real individuality. For Kierkegaard, a move from the position of the ethical reflection (for some, even the ethically inflected religiousness of religiousness B) is into a second immediacy (JP 1123), that of true faith or religiousness B.¹⁰ It is this immediacy that then allows one to stand as this one, *this* individual, before God. This second immediacy, possibly informed after the leap into it by some conceptualization (see Walsh n. 1), allows one to access the other as unique person on the basis of the altered relation to God. How? Because one's loving the other (the "neighbor"—who is any person) happens as a relating that reflects how God stands with one and sees one as the individual one is, thus allowing one to see that the other person one is to love here and now *is* this unique, and in some sense uniquely loved, individual. The reality of God's love seen/experienced in this second immediacy gives one the capacity to mirror God's manner of loving, although in finite form, in loving a neighbor.

Facing the other, then, calls to one to see that other as truly individual and love that other for the other's own self, not for one's own sake or as an image of one's own self in the way that one loves preferentially. And each such call to love the neighbor is distinct, because the call to love happens in the instant of facing another person, unlike the ethical demands that apply universally and thus call a person to act toward every person as "human being" and thus as the same as every other person, but not as individual. (We return to this distinction below, because Kierkegaard's discussion of love as duty aligns "similarity" with neighbor-love and "dissimilarity" with preferential love.) This distinct call for love

science might be one aspect and which includes far more than the individual awareness encompasses.

¹⁰ George claims "Kierkegaard's perspective in *Works of Love* is closer to the A than to the B perspective" (73); I would disagree.

comes in face of an *individual*, then, not an “other.” In fact it does not come from “an individual”—already an abstraction—but from *this* individual who stands before one in immediacy, the immediacy of true faith. Kierkegaard’s view of religiousness B can be understood to collapse the false dichotomy of modernist philosophy between the universalized or generalized other human being and the concrete or specific other who is an actually existing individual human being, a uniqueness or singularity. For “the neighbor” is both the bearer of rights—an instance of the universal—and the person with needs, a clearly distinguishable particular, such that the collapse disallows this tidy dualism. For, the uniqueness as human individuals that Christian love makes us capable of seeing includes needs as well as rights, because each individual in each moment has particular needs, including both “personal” needs and specific rights-related needs.

Possible Problems with Immediacy in Kierkegaard

This point is complicated by Kierkegaard’s statement that “one sees the neighbor only with closed eyes, or by looking *away from* the dissimilarities” (WL 68). Here it sounds as though the love within true faith requires that we love only persons as similar and thus as generic, not as real individuals, contrary to my point made above.¹¹ One way of saving my position, however, is to demarcate clearly the context within which

¹¹ Quinn calls this “seeing with closed eyes” an “apparently paradoxical metaphor”; he resolves the paradox by having God provide the vision (364). Andic connects this seeing to the other’s “inexhaustible particularity” that includes “her conscience with God” (119). Other writers use this issue of “closed eyes” to justify Kierkegaard’s purported acosmism that implies the lack of a social ethic, a point that Barrett rejects: “If not actually contradicting himself, Kierkegaard is at least engaging in a very paradoxical literary strategy. . . . [Nevertheless, neighbor love] leads to the attention to neighbor’s material and social situation” (164).

the citation of the statement by Kierkegaard is functioning. Some commentators take this statement to be a connotative definition of what counts as neighbor; in other words, the “neighbor” is any individual with all dissimilarities from any other individual stripped away. Such a process (possible only in imagination or deductive logic) would yield something like the underlying unchanging aspects of human existence shared by all of us; i.e., the need for nourishment and social connection, the limitations of a life begun with birth and ending with death, and the like. In other words, it would end in a generic human being, whether or not you label such unchanging aspects an essence. Establishing this sense of neighbor is an important endeavor (even though no such generic person exists), because it would underlie discussions of the *equality* of all persons before God and as loved by God, the exemplar for us as humans loving a neighbor.¹² Yet I think the citation from Kierkegaard concerning “closed eyes” is more about *how* we discover the “neighbor” in contrast to how we discover the beloved or the friend. In the case of the latter two we find that specific aspects draw us toward this specific person and not toward others (whether these aspects exist in our imagination or in the person in fact), so that we see this specific person as dissimilar from all others. To be able to love *all others*, as the Christian commandment to love the neighbor requires, one needs to discover the neighbor differently from how one discovers those one preferentially loves. Hence, Kierkegaard tells us to close our eyes, to look away. But this suggestion is about the process whereby one can identify the neighbor, telling us that, when we do not look for the kinds of “uniquenesses” that we feel draw us preferentially to a beloved or a friend, we find—lo and behold—each and every person, not just the few “special” ones. This processual and thus de-

¹² In her discussion of the gender differences found in Kierkegaard’s understanding of how males and females relate to God, How raises a serious question concerning the implications for this equality (239–240).

notative definition of neighbor, however, does not yet to my mind describe how we are to act toward the neighbor—nor, I argue, to Kierkegaard's mind. That is, one does not act in love as though the neighbor were *generic*. And Kierkegaard makes clear that love within true faith cannot be the flighty or “flightable” feelings of preferential love, that easily dissipate when the object of one's affection changes in respect to what draws us toward a beloved or a friend; for this reason the love of faith is called a duty of a special sort.¹³ As well, this love is required to show itself in the works of love. We will return to this point in a minute.

A further objection might also be made that could undermine my understanding of what Kierkegaard understands as a real individual (in relation to love within true faith), given my use of the second immediacy in my argument. Kierkegaard's claim that the second immediacy is an immediacy comes into question when he uses the phrase, “God is the middle term”?¹⁴ But this problem can be dissolved by understanding the uniqueness of immediacy within true faith. Usually where there is a “middle term” there is mediation and thus no immediacy, since for Kierkegaard mediation implies an intellectual endeavor, the positing of a middle term. The middle terms is understood in logic as a concept or claim that provides a logical connection between two other concepts or claims—in this example the middle sentence of an argument: “Socrates is a poet; poets are writers; thus Socrates is a writer. Thus, a claim concerning God as middle term, as the mediator between the Christian lover and the neighbor, seemingly denies the immediacy within love of neighbor. The claimed immediacy of religiousness B in general might also be in question, if one were to claim that *any* immediacy had to be like the immediacy of the aesthetic existence-sphere in which no middle term, no

¹³ See Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, Discourse II A, in Series One, “You Shall Love,” which indicates the need to secure love eternally in making it a duty.

¹⁴ See, for example, Kierkegaard, WL 58, 77, 106.

concept, no moment of waiting, introduced a gap between the aesthete's desire and its object.

So, the one suspicion about a "second immediacy" stems from the fact that it sounds like it will mimic the immediacy of the aesthetic although it follows upon the intellectual processing that occurs within the ethical sphere which provides an anti-immediacy gap allowing the leap from the ethical (or quasi-religious sphere of religiousness A) to religiousness B. In this latter leap any conscious processing, I would claim, needs to be seen, not as an abstractive move—a move away from the ethical, but a dynamically concrete movement out of an accepted "reality" within one existence-sphere (hence the quandary over Abraham). The second immediacy marks a distinction between religiousness A and B (CUP 555). Religiousness A does not (at least fully) reach this second immediacy because in it individuals initiate the movement toward God or the ultimate, whereas in religiousness B God initiates the movement. Yet religiousness B is a "paradoxical religiousness" (CUP 556), in part due to the way God functions as "middle."

So, let's look at how the second immediacy allows the inclusion of God as a "middle term," a characteristic that would seem to obviate its very immediacy. But the "middle" God provides cannot be understood linearly. God is not a "between," between the lover and the neighbor. To understand this is to recognize the radicality of Kierkegaard's vision of true Christianity, the religiousness B noted above, where God initiates the relationship. In religiousness B God is a "between" in a peculiar sense, for the "paradox" of religiousness B is that God comes as an insertion of eternity into time (CUP 570), of the infinity of the divine into the finitude of human space, of human flesh. When this happens, God's very being is in relation to just *this* specific individual called by God to relationship. The call yields no mediation between God and human, just as in an incarnated God (for Christians, Jesus) there is no mediation between

the human and the divine (although there is an ontological difference). This is another aspect of the paradox: Heiko Schulz puts it in another way: “the self rests transparently in the power that established it,” that is, in God (72). God’s being in this way toward the individual so-called fills up the “between.”

It is then out of this relationship between God and this one individual that this one individual can see the other individual as the specific individual whom God sees. This is seeing “in a unique way” (WL 69), distinct from the more usual self-occupied or self-centered way of seeing. Kierkegaard’s call to this type of seeing in nonpreferential love can seem odd in light of his call to use closed eyes in seeing the neighbor, but at this point in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard has moved into the actual *how* of loving, rather than just a discussion of the process for identifying the neighbor. This unique seeing would mean that I as lover would see the other outside of my own projections upon the other that happen in preferential love. It could be what the fourth century desert dweller, Abba Bessarion, meant in exhorting us to become “all eye” (Ward 42), so that we become unable to see anything except what *is* and *who* is in front of me. In this seeing there is no mediation in any sense, that is, initially through concepts (although concepts may flow out of the experience), for God stands singularly *in* each individual, the lover and the neighbor, and in this “middle” that intersects the being of each there is opened the “space” in which nothing stands between one’s seeing/loving and the other seen as lovable and thus loved. As Kierkegaard puts it, one can thus stand toward the other as Christ does/did: “For Christ, as for God’s providence, . . . the countless are counted, are all individuals” (WL 69). Not even a promise can be allowed to get between, because a promise introduces the human’s time into a moment that is the eternity-in-time of an incarnate God.

God as middle initiates the seeing from one person to another seen as “neighbor,” because conceptualization is not the initiator here—concept or image are ruled out in this moment of seeing. It makes sense that the second immediacy drops out concepts, to a certain degree. For the more the lover *knows*, the more s/he might introduce a gap between self and other, by acting on an assumption that all previous ideas about this other were also true in this moment. Instead, in contrast to the preferential lover who at least pretends to great knowledge of the beloved, the person of faith must stand as a fool before the neighbor in the sense of having available no *fore-knowledge* of this neighbor’s needs. One might again be introducing one’s “self”—one’s own image of this neighbor—onto the neighbor, and thus not seeing this neighbor right here/now. Instead this new way of seeing involves what Arne Grøn calls a redirection that is a self-forgetting (Mediated 95), a loss of self or a becoming nothing. Between this lover and the neighbor stands only God—God is the middle term because “the love is God” (WL 121). This notion of God as middle term seems to impose a gap, but it is not; rather, it is either the everything or nothing of this type of love. Everything standing between the lover and the beloved is love or God—the “everything” is God, whereas the “nothing” is the person of true faith, of religiousness B, in face of the everything of God. The love is God, the seeing is God, the response is God—but here, all God *in* the person of true faith or *as* that person.

The immediate response to neighbor, then, is marked by immediacy or exists within immediacy; it occurs within the second immediacy established by the faith relationship of religiousness B. In that immediacy, the neighbor is seen straightaway as this specific individual, not as a member of some category—“neighbor” or “human being” or “homeless person.”¹⁵ The instant of facing the neighbor initiates love and action.

¹⁵ Come insists on how love finds individuality in the other: the word “love” “means the act in which I come to know and to affirm that another human being is also a focused

Can you read at once the hunger on the neighbor's face? Can you see the sorrow around her mouth? Can you capture at once the loneliness beneath his layers of bravado? This love calls for an attunement to the neighbor that then pulls one into action, into immediate response. Love is a com-*passion*, a suffering with, that cannot remain locked in the cold look of the stranger. I am not saying that one's previous knowledge, say, about what to do for a physical injury, does not enter here, but it arises after the movement of response to the neighbor and often without forethought, as languaging usually does.

Kierkegaard phrases this point one way: true faith's love needs to move a person outward towards another person and the world. The "interiority" of love must be expressed "existentially"; hence "interiority without outwardness is the most difficult interiority, in which self-deception is easiest" (CUP 406). There must be *works* of love, not just words. In this way Kierkegaard established a new ethics, a duty to love in acts that respond to the other in the other's full specificity. Such a call would then include the person's social position such as it might be embedded in systems of oppression. So, the response would need to be to both the current specifics of the other's situation and to the circumstances, those systems, which have as one result that situation.

From Kierkegaard's Immediacy to Experience from Zen Practice

I would like to give a provisional comparison between Kierkegaard and Zen, showing that parallel insights concerning this second immediacy, upon which Kierkegaard argues the duty to love rests, can be found in

center of self-consciousness, as unique and private and self-determining as my own self" (Kierkegaard's 92). Grøn would agree (Dialectic 151-152).

the immediacy experienced by the Zen Buddhist who has “realized” the true reality through enlightenment, an experience that also moves one outward in com-*passion*. In both Kierkegaard and Zen, we find discussions of processes of clarification with some type of transformative process that does not necessarily involve a preliminary conceptualization for a leap or transformation to take place, although these might be followed by a subsequent putting into words. In each case, for both Kierkegaard and Zen, there comes a decisive “break” following sufficient practice, a break from old realizations, old ways of taking something to be reality or of interacting with that reality. Zen Buddhism speaks about meditation practices clearing out the false perceptions of reality deriving from a deluded ego. There is a shift of “seeing.” For Kierkegaard, the second, ethical existence-sphere begins that shift: “immediacy is attained again only ethically” (JP 972) in that ethical life pulls us out of an ego-centeredness. But a more radical shift ensues in the leap to religiousness B, bringing with it a new ethics that is universal only in a peculiar sense—it must be enacted by all, but the action will be particularized to the individuals involved. And for Zen Buddhism this shift to a radicalized ethics begins with the Eightfold Path of moral effort, while the practice yields “realization,” which might be understood as an experience of an immediacy found in Zen-inspired life.¹⁶ David Loy puts it this way: “. . . I become no-thing, and discover that I am the world—or, more precisely, . . . a manifestation of it, interpenetrating it and interpenetrated by it” (184). Following from this experience one finds a new type of seeing such that the “other” is given in the immediacy of this momentary reality.

¹⁶ Edith Wyschogrod critiques any reading of the type of experience I am bringing under the title of Zen realization or emptiness that connects it to a social ethics: “Ecstatic experience . . . undoes repression but offers no starting point for action” (214).

And, just as Kierkegaard insists on the *works* of love, so too can this Zen seeing move one to a moment-to-moment call to engage with an other within the experiential connectedness and compassion of that individual's life.¹⁷ Zen immediacy, although reached differently from the Kierkegaardian faith movement in response to God's initiation or call, includes a sense of global connectedness with others that can move one to action in response to the other as individual, yet caught within a complexity of social and earthly interconnectedness/systems. This immediacy also calls one to live in this moment—the only real moment—and hence “to live both creatively and responsibly each moment,” as Michael Bannigan puts it (115).

According to this interpretation, neither Kierkegaard's religiousness B, with its emphasis on the one-on-one relationship to God, nor Zen immediacy allows one to remain within the zone of a “contemplative space”: they each call one to the love-in-action implicit in both of these. David Loy makes the comparison: In Buddhism “ethical principles approximate the way of relating to others that nondual experience reveals; as in Christianity, I should love my neighbor as myself—in this case because the neighbor *is* myself” (185). This Zen practice yields a capacity like the second immediacy: to be “fully aware of the present moment in the present moment,” so that “one [is] not thinking about one's pre-judgments” of the person one is listening to, as Jiko Linda Cutts describes it when listening to a possible human rights abuser in Colombia (King, *Socially*, 33). After telling of his early years of practice, Hakuin notes that

¹⁷ Heynekamp speaks of how the consciousness of the interwovenness of self and other would function within a therapeutic relationship, noting how “one learns not to cling to all sorts of concepts and theories. A concept never becomes reality. In a therapy session this means one flows with the stream of developments which occurs The here and now of the relationship of the therapeutic partners is immediately present in the experience” (260–261).

“the true practicing monk walks but does not know he is walking, sits but does not know he is sitting” due to this type of immediate awareness amidst activity (*Zen* 33). Hakuin’s comment indicates his concurrence with a strong streak of anti-quietism in the history of Zen Buddhism and with a criticism of such non-action that remains absorbed in the bliss of *satori*—something he called “dead Zen” or dead sitting (*Embossed* 57): “I used to think that the Way of the Buddha was nothing other than keeping the mind in absolute calm and quiet. I was always searching out dismal places and sitting there as if I was dead.” He found a different method of meditation, one that included a “relative samadhi” because it was carried out “actively.” Hakuin cites Zen Master Ta-hui who thought that “meditation in the midst of activity is immeasurably superior to the quietistic approach” (*Zen* 33) and he points to a series of busy people engaged in the most “worldly” activities of the courts: “In their performance of the Way each of these excelled those who meditate under the trees [in calm]. . . , [for] they have never for one instant interrupted their performance of the Way [during their public business]” (*Embossed* 79-80). This principle of Hakuin (who does not advocate choosing *between* this two ways of meditating [*Zen* 33]) can be extended to understanding the method of activity to include the compassionate action toward someone who is suffering, activity extended both toward the change of the person’s immediate need and the circumstances that habitually bring it about due to structurally violent social settings. Hakuin’s extraordinary rant against the “quietists”—“the sort of men who think that it is sufficient to sit in emaciated meditation, and who call what is but a deathly calm the ‘root’ Zen and are dying of starvation on hills and valleys” (*Embossed* 80)—might be taken as support for the claim that Hakuin would probably agree that Zen practitioners are called to some form of interaction with one or many concrete individuals, perhaps to a socially en-

gaged Buddhism.¹⁸ Similarly, Kierkegaard's person of true faith is called to a socially informed ethic, despite critics' claims concerning Kierkegaard's "acosmism" or neutrality to the surrounding world. Either of these calls can move a person's action from this individual seen just in the here-and-now (even though this "individual" might end up a construct based on separation rather than with the connectedness noted above) into the social/political contexts and institutions out of which this individual's needs in part arise.¹⁹

Zen Buddhist writings speak of the nonduality of reality. A Zen kōan from *The Book of Serenity* [*Shōyōroku*] might point to what is meant by that phrase: "Ganto came to Tokusan. He straddled the threshold of the gate and asked, 'Is this ordinary or is this holy?' Tokusan shouted, 'Kaatz!'" The appropriate response here according to the teacher was a shout; alternatively it could have been silence, or an invitation to tea.

¹⁸ For discussions of engaged Buddhism, see, e.g., Kolter; Queen; King (*Being, Socially*); Loy. Some writers see Zen as incapable of a social ethic. For a rebuttal of this lack of a Buddhist social ethics, see Ives (*Zen*) and Carter, especially chapter five, and essays by Park, Ives (Not Buying), Wright, and Kasulis in the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 13 (2006). Park and Wright question the assumption of a mutual co-arising of enlightenment and morality in a Zen practitioner. In contrast, Dietrick argues that while there is an authentically Buddhist social ethic (contra Weber 206), *engaged* Buddhist social ethics is "probably best regarded as nominally Buddhist" given its failure to distinguish clearly mundane/worldly from spiritual suffering (265). He rejects claims of Queen and might find King's theoretical explication inadequate. My discussion here sidesteps Dietrick's position.

¹⁹ Ferreira rebuts a long-established reading of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* as presenting "an ethic that is asocial, otherworldly, nonmutual, and unlivable" (*Love's* 6). I would see the social ethic as stemming from what one sees in seeing a specific other; i.e., the concrete contexts out of which a suffering springs, which many times have social and institutional aspects that require one's attention in order to address the demand that this neighbor's presence places on the person of faith. See also Piety (24) and other essays in this collection. Piety is arguing against one of several influential interpreters claiming Kierkegaard's acosmism, Louis Mackey.

The teacher is demonstrating the futility of speaking ahead of time of a division of deeds into “ordinary” or “holy.” A Zen realization undercuts the intellectual movement of such a division, since in a specific moment the way one would be “following Buddha” may be the most ordinary of deeds like washing dishes or walking a path or it may be sitting in meditation.

Similarly, Kierkegaard’s distinguishing within Christianity between two possible modes of existing as a Christian, religiousness A and religiousness B, describes for us not necessarily a “false” and a “true” way of being a Christian, but rather one way A that is overburdened with accretions of institutionalized religion and then a second way B in which the insertion of God on God’s own time clarifies those accretions for the individual in faith, freeing up that individual to exist faith and love more immediately but without necessarily leaving behind all aspects of the institutionalized way of life from religiousness A. In other words, the two modes of religiousness A and B themselves live within the paradox of the God-individual relationship by the impossibility of separating them out completely. John Llewelyn (101) expresses this paradox one way, stating that persons of faith must suffer “the doubleness of existence,” so that they appear to others, including members of their parish community, exactly as they did before the leap of faith—in other words, everyday actions continue, what others can observe one doing remain much the same, but the inwardness of the person has changed.

This doubleness might also parallel in some of its elements the ways in which the enlightened Zen practitioner lives within the nonduality of reality.²⁰ Kenneth Kraft tells us one of the implications of this nonduality: “nirvana is present *within samsara*: that is, awakening or sal-

²⁰ See Loy, who connects the nondualistic experience of what I call Zen immediacy with the call to a social ethical response (184–186).

vation are not separate from suffering and its causes” (68). The immediacy of the Zen experience allows no separation between self and other, between enlightened self and suffering other. Ruben Habito puts the point this way: “The pain of the world, the pain of my neighbor, even the pain in my knees invites me to plunge into this world of nonduality in an immediate kind of way” (77). In the immediacy of seeing the pain of my neighbor I would then, like the Samaritan of the New Testament, do “immediately the most natural thing to do in that situation” and activate the power of compassion (77). One concept used by some writers for the “place” of nonduality is emptiness: Newman Glass offers an understanding of the concept, such that it “is not morally neutral” (11). He embeds this claim in an investigation of how “emptiness” can work and thus how emptiness can work (here “emptiness” works within a linguistic context, whereas emptiness works as reality), so that this latter is working prior to or preceding thinking in the sense of its experiential ground. Glass states: “The play of forces at work that precedes and gives birth to thought and action—the play of forces—the grain of nothing—can be worked” (107); here he indicates that the working would be similar to working the wave/particle difference of quantum physics, with one or the other at play, if not both (103).²¹

Compassion then stands in the immediacy of oneself and neighbor, just as for Kierkegaard God/love stands in that immediacy. No knowledge in the usual sense is needed to initiate a response to this other before one; the lover in true faith stands emptied, stands as fool. In

²¹ An alternative view of “emptiness” within Chan texts is described by Bernard Faure, such that “emptiness” is “largely symbolic or semiotic. To the objection that this is a reductionist interpretation of ‘pure’ or ‘immediate’ experience, one could answer by arguing that the allegedly nonsymbolic character of that experience does not entail that it is not culturally bound” (75–76). Thus, for Faure, Chan (Zen) Buddhism “meant to mark the phenomenal world with the seal of the absolute: in awakening, immanence turns out to be transcendence” (76).

some sense the lover disappears, just as in Zen the realization “disappears” and the compassionate one returns to the marketplace, the everyday life of the world, seeming to live much as before.²² For a Zen person this is a radical nothing that is not nothing; for a Christian this is the nothing and everything of God in the faith-full person. Yet both of these, in their very paradoxicality, would appear to “worldly” persons as fools.

Here then we once more come to the “fool”—for wouldn’t the sensible person parade one’s spiritual attainment for all the world to see? But to others, the fool might even appear as the opposite of a realized or authentically religious person. Kierkegaard writes that the true knight of faith, the one who has realized religiousness B and the one-on-one relation with God, becomes quite ordinary or even seemingly the opposite of what one would usually take a religious person to appear as: In *Fear and Trembling*, he writes:

the moment I set eyes on him I instantly push him from me, I myself leap backwards, I clasp my hands and say half aloud, ‘Good Lord, is this the man? Is it really he? Why, he looks like a tax-collector!’ . . . I examine his figure from tip to toe to see if there might not be a cranny through which the infinite is peeping. No! He is solid through and through. [He looks as though] he belongs entirely to the world, no Philistine more so. (68)

For Kierkegaard, “true inwardness does not demand any sign at all in externals” (CUP 414).²³ Yamada points out a parallel in the fully realized

²² Kirmmse notes how “love must live its life incognito” (316). Kierkegaard’s rejection of the appropriateness of monastic life as a manifestation of true faith can be understood in light of this claim; see *Works of Love* (WL 413–417).

²³ In fact Kierkegaard says: “if I had lived in the Middle Ages, I could never have resolved to choose the monastery. Why not? Because the person who did so was in all

Zen practitioner, the person in the last of the ten oxherding pictures that are taken to be a metaphor of the Zen path: “such persons give no outward sign of having achieved a magnificent satori but instead return to being fools, return to the world of ordinary people” (98).

But that does not mean there is no change, for there is the vast change which is the bringing out of the call to love neighbor and to compassion. It is curious that for both Kierkegaard and Zen the end point of the spiritual path is both (a) a return to “the world,” which many world religions call upon its members to depart from in some way, and is (b) an almost absolute indistinctness of this realized and engaged person from others, at least outwardly. For both Kierkegaard and Zen, then, there is a return to the world as the step toward spreading the fruits of the immediacy attained in realization from practice or the relation to God. Or to put it another way, Yamada says of the Zen practitioner who returns again to the “world” or the marketplace: “Visiting bars and fish stalls, you turn all into buddhas . . . you make withered trees burst into flower” (98).

earnestness regarded in the Middle Ages as a holy person” (CUP 415). The point adds another dimension: how having realized the inwardness or immediacy, does one “foster” it? Perhaps giving external signs of such runs counter to experiencing it in a way that one can foster it?

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