



Love as Divine Gift in Kierkegaard and Pieper: A Phenomenological Analysis¹

Rashad Rehman
Western University

Abstract

This work is a philosophical exposition and defense of the writings on love found primarily in Søren Kierkegaard's Works of Love and Josef Pieper's On Love. Because these two thinkers lived almost a century apart, their works have received no comparative treatment as philosophical texts exploring the nature of love as a divine gift. In this work, I adopt a phenomenological reading of their work as an entry point, unveiling the experiential significance of love as a divine gift. Methodologically, I first show why my phenomenological reading of these authors is philosophically significant and justified. Second, I describe the inwardly transformative nature of love as integral to an authentic experience of love and thus how love is valuable. Third, I explicate their responses to threats to an authentic experience of love within our phenomenology. Fourth, I move on to the subject of the phenomenology of love as a divine gift in light of death. This fourth section reveals the most existentially significant facet of the discussion, namely, that our phenomenology of love is—as Kierkegaard and Pieper say—sustained by God even in the face of death and that He will not let love end at the grave.

Which of God's gifts can be compared to love.

—Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

Love has the nature of a gift.

—Josef Pieper, "On Love"

Although love as divine gift has received treatment in the history of philosophy and theology, my contention is that there are some historical threads to be put back together between love as divine gift and philosophical analysis.

1. I would here like to thank Prof. Antonio Calcagno for his contributions to this work. Our conversations over the course of the fall 2017 semester have been invaluable, and I am thoroughly grateful. I would also like to thank the editors at the *Midwest Journal of Undergraduate Research* for their careful reading of this work and the helpful comments they provided.

Specifically, though the general structure of this work has as its goal to unwrap the philosophical significance of love as divine gift, the work attempts to reveal the nature of the experience itself, and thus is a *phenomenological* analysis (though not a *wholly* phenomenological analysis). By phenomenological, I will mean nothing other than experiential, although I will make particular reference to how we experience love on the level of introspection. It is to this notion of the phenomenology of love as divine gift that I devote this work. In beginning this discussion, I suggest that there are two largely unreconciled texts, namely, Søren Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* (1847) and Josef Pieper's *On Love* (1974). The Danish existentialist philosopher, Kierkegaard, involves himself with a phenomenological, though unapologetically Biblical, analysis of love in its concrete, temporal manifestations—"works" in his terminology. In the next century, the German philosopher, Josef Pieper, wrote his tractate on love both as a response to much philosophical misunderstanding and to address a need for a thorough investigation of love in reference to divine love. For Pieper, though, the proper beginning point is within our language and within our experience—that is, within our phenomenology.

I will divide this work into four parts. In the first part I will outline a brief background to the discussion and provide the requisite foundational assumptions which both Pieper and Kierkegaard share, including their phenomenological methods, ontological axiomatization of the existence of divine love, and their conviction that love has an essential nature, namely, as God. In the second part, I will exegete how Pieper and Kierkegaard address the inward-transformative effect of love in the life of the lover and how love is valuable. In the third part, I will list specific threats to an authentic phenomenological experience of love as divine gift in Pieper and Kierkegaard. In the fourth part, I explore love as divine gift in light of death and argue that, while it never occupied Kierkegaard or Pieper extensively, glimpses of a response remain to be extracted from their work. I finish by an evaluation of what I regard to be real contributions to the philosophy of love generally, limitations which merit further attention, and finally what I regard to be the ultimate phenomenological insight from their work.

Among the earliest philosophical discourses on love, Plato's famous *Symposium* recounts an evening of talks by Socrates and other Athenians on the profound question, "what is love?" Not unlike in recent times, the need for a thorough understanding and delineation of love was felt in the *Symposium*. At the beginning of Eryximachus' speech, the first of many speeches on love, he remembers what Phaedrus had told him recently, when he says, "Isn't it a shame, Eryximachus, that while certain of the other gods have hymns and songs of praise addressed to them by the poets, not one in all the multitude of poets has ever composed a single panegyric of so ancient and mighty a god as Love?"² Phaedrus is pointing out a felt need for a more thorough conversation on love. As a preparatory analysis, I regard it worth while to reflect on some usages of "love" in various languages, for each accentuates love uniquely. The Greek language has

2. Plato. *Symposium*. trans. Walter Hamilton (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 40.

well over a dozen words for love, while the Latin contains at least half a dozen terms.³

Two usages, however, stand out as relevant to the current discussion, namely, the Latin *diligere* and the Greek κένωσις (*kenosis*). As to the former, Pieper writes:

No one fails to recognize that the passively blind process of spontaneously “being pleased” cannot be everything, that an element of probing judgement and selective preference enters in. Love that comes from the center of existence, engaging the whole human being essentially implies *diligere* also. The word means electing and selecting. In Latin and the languages derived from it, *dilectio* (*dilection*) seems to be an indispensable word in the vocabulary of love—indispensable in defining the personal, mental quality of human love.⁴

Diligere implies that there is a selection of whom we love and this will prove highly significant for Pieper. Regarding κένωσις, the term refers specifically to God’s self-emptying love (I will speak more of this in the next part). The linguistic capacity of the Greek and Roman languages required Pieper to remark that German is a rather defective language for talking about love.⁵ For instance, he notes that the only word for love in German is the noun, *Liebe*. While Pieper notes that the alleged poverty in the German language “tell[s] us not to overlook the underlying unity in all the forms [of love] and to keep this broad common element in mind in the face of all the misuses that result from narrowing down the concept,” he notes that one such instance of misuse required an entire word to leave the German language: “*Minne*, for instance, is a word that was totally eliminated from living German speech because it had been so misused.”⁶ Hence there is a danger of misusing words within a natural language such that they eventually become obsolete, meaningless, and thereafter removed altogether.

Russian, however, contains two peculiar words on which it is worth reflecting. First, the term *lubovatsia* means “to love with the eyes,”⁷ what Pieper says is “a form of loving that becomes a reality through seeing.”⁸ Second, and for Pieper more importantly, the word *blágot* means “the love of God for men” and therefore if we want to understand love’s “full breadth and depth,” we must

3. Josef Pieper. “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston and Sister Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997 and 2012), 146, 152; Thomas J. Oord. *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific and Theological Engagement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), Chapter 2.

4. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 152.

5. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 146.

6. *Ibid.*, 147, 148.

7. *Ibid.*, 161. Pieper is here quoting Abel.

8. *Ibid.*, 161.

consult this usage.⁹ However, given this brief linguistic backdrop, the question becomes the following: What about “theories” of love? In the case of Pieper and Kierkegaard, one does not get a theory of love; instead, what we derive are elements of love derivative from concrete, phenomenological experience aiming at an *essentialist* understanding of love. An essentialist understanding of love argues that love has an *essence*; that is, it is the affirmation that there is an essential nature of love. However, the question deepens: In theorizing about the essence and nature of love, how do we come into contact with love? In answer, we here ought to direct our attention to the primary mode of experiencing love, namely, *within* experience.¹⁰

We know, that is, have epistemic access to, the essence of love through experience. This is only to say that we come into contact with love from our concrete experience as we do with ordinary sensory objects of experience. Just as there is an immediate knowledge of sensory objects around us, so there is also an experience which is immediate to us, namely, of love. Hence the primacy of experience is a sufficient ground to approach love not merely theoretically, but *phenomenologically*, that is, from our direct experience in the world. This does not mean other methods of approaching love are all epistemically worrisome, though they certainly might be; rather, the suggestion is that the primacy of experience not only grounds our apprehension of the existence and reality of love, but also in experiencing its existential-transformative power. For this reason, a phenomenological account of love is needed, and this opens the space for the notion of love as divine gift within our phenomenology to emerge.

Beginning with Kierkegaard, his *Works of Love* opens in a telling way: “If it were true . . . that one should believe nothing which he cannot see by means of his physical eyes, then first and foremost one ought to give up believing in love.”¹¹ Immediately at the beginning of his text Kierkegaard rejects the notion that there is an analyzable love which is subject to scientific detection. This is, in other words, a staunch rejection of understandings of love which are ontologically grounded in concrete material experience, i.e., any empiricist theory of love.¹² In *The Psychology of Loving*, Ignace Lepp reminds the reader of the shift that has been made in thinking about love: “Love is no longer the special preserve of the

9. Ibid., 162.

10. By suggesting that this takes place within experience, I do not mean the phenomenology of experiencing love as a divine gift is performed by our own cognitive and spiritual powers. As C.S. Lewis put it in his *The Four Loves*, “God enables men to have a Gift-love towards himself” and therefore “bestows two other gifts; a supernatural Need-love of Himself and a supernatural Need-love of one another.” (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 128, 129. Ultimately these capacities are themselves gifts and are given to us by God. While this is the basis of this work, it is not its focus and thus I do not go into any detail regarding this outside the context of Pieper’s and Kierkegaard’s analysis.

11. Søren Kierkegaard. *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 23. For instance, David Hume wrote “We never advance one step beyond ourselves” Quoted by Robert Spaemann in “Hans Saner und Robert Spaemann – Glaube an Gott und Vernunft? (Gespräch)” Accessed February 17, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE0rUaiCIKY>

12. See Max Scheler’s *The Nature of Sympathy*. trans. Peter Heath (Hamden, CT: Transaction Publishers, 1970), Chapter 5.

poets and novelists. It has become an object of scientific knowledge.”¹³ However, love is not, at least for Kierkegaard, subject to such analysis since it is not reducible to a physical substratum. While one might argue that without physical substratum, i.e., a brain, one could not love at all. While this is no doubt spurious for a host of reasons—mainly from a question-begging definition of love—all this would show *even if true* would be that a physical substratum is a necessary but not sufficient condition for loving—at least human love. However, the distinction between loving and love must be made, for the former refers to the doing of love, and the latter to the ontology of love itself. In other words, it is an obvious truth that bodies make knowing one another possible, and that is a tremendous good which allows love to move concretely in the world. However, it is a faulty inference to go from this premise to the conclusion that therefore there cannot be love without a body, or that love is just indexed to a physical substratum.

Instead, Kierkegaard points out, “love . . . is an event, the greatest of all and the happiest of all.”¹⁴ In calling love an event, Kierkegaard admits that our phenomenology of love speaks not merely of facts about reality—such as are delivered by science but that love in fact is an event. Unfortunately, Kierkegaard abandoned this notion—at least explicitly—soon after he presented it in his chapter, “Love Seeks Not Its Own.”¹⁵ Kierkegaard would want to preserve the notion of event within works of love. Since he is concerned about the *works* of love as concrete *deeds*, he does come close—though not explicitly—to understanding love as event. For instance, he comes close to this event-structure of love, when he writes, “This quality of building up has the essential characteristic of giving itself up in everything, of being one with all—like love.”¹⁶ Though it is not clear how event fits here, consider how Kierkegaard justifies what upbuilding looks like, when he says, “When we see a large family cramped into close quarters and at the same time see that they inhabit a cosy, friendly spacious place, then we say it is up-building to see, because we see the love which must be in each and every individual.”¹⁷ It is precisely on this point that M. Jamie Ferreira has brought Pieper into conversation with Kierkegaard in her *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love* (2001). She writes that “one could construe [Kierkegaard’s notion of] upbuilding as a repetition of the divine creative act, which affirmed creation as ‘Very good’ [pointed out by Pieper].”¹⁸ Further, Ferreira has stipulated that Pieper, inasmuch as he argues that in love—*ceteris paribus*—one moves beyond mere repetition and imitation, informs Kierkegaard’s notion of upbuilding.¹⁹ To qualify Ferreira, I would suggest that although contained

13. Ignace Lepp. *The Psychology of Loving* (New York: Helicon Press, 1963), 16.

14. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 248.

15. Though in *Works of Love* in the chapter “Love is the Fulfilling of the Law” Kierkegaard writes that “Christian love . . . is sheer action,” 106.

16. *Ibid.*, 202.

17. *Ibid.*, 203.

18. M. Jamie Ferreira. *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 140.

19. *Ibid.*, 140–141.

within God's creation of the world the underlying, primal foundation of love as affirmation is revealed, it is not the *only* story-event of upbuilding love which reveals God's love as affirmation (at least for the Christian). For instance, the self-sacrificial love of Jesus is profoundly displayed in the upbuilding story of His sacrificial death on the cross.²⁰ It is Jesus' love—and therefore His *affirmation*—of His children which explains His desire that none should perish, but that all should find eternal life in Him. For Kierkegaard love both is, and is embodied within, the *event*, and it is phenomenologically apprehended directly and immediately from a mere gaze. In two places Pieper agrees with Kierkegaard when he—first—notes that it is possible that “the reality most relevant to man is not a set of facts but rather an event, and that it accordingly cannot be grasped adequately in a thesis but only . . . in the representation of an action—in other words, in a story.”²¹ In other words, “We . . . show our love . . . in those infinitely difficult and wholly inconspicuous acts of which the New Testament [1st Corinthians 13] speaks.”²² In this way, a phenomenological analysis of love is most apt to get at the nature of love most extensively.

Pieper argues on phenomenological grounds, too, in that he advocates for the position that love is best understood from an evaluation of our phenomenology. To establish the grounds of reading Pieper phenomenologically, consider the following: “All these attempts [by previous authors, such as Sartre] to describe phenomenologically what love is really about ascribe to it the power to sustain existence.”²³ It is plausible that Pieper places himself with the same phenomenological coterie of those he calls phenomenological by putting the phenomenological method—the method of beginning with concrete experience—at the forefront of his analysis. Pieper begins with the experience of love itself (as affirmation) as a means of revealing the ontological foundation of love. As he puts it, “We shall keep our eyes fixed upon the phenomenon of love as we encounter it in our experience,” and “what really matters here is the living experience.”²⁴

Pieper's phenomenological insight is that love is best understood as affirmation: “In every conceivable case love signifies much the same as approval. . . . It is a way of turning to him or it and saying, ‘It's good that you exist, it's good that you are in this world!’”²⁵ For Pieper, love is an affirmative willing—taking place phenomenologically—which confirms the existence and goodness of a given thing or person. Pieper reminds us, however, that affirmation and love are not synonymous with “undifferentiated approval of everything the beloved

20. I do not mean to say that this is *merely* a story (for it is was a real, historical event).

21. Josef Pieper. *The Platonic Myths*. trans. Dan Farrelly (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2011), 4. This would account for a very universal experience that stories of love are much more transformative than facts about love. For instance, see Mother Teresa. *In the Heart of the World* (Novato, CA: New World Library), 1997; Luciana Frassati. *A Man of the Beatitudes: Pier Giorgio Frassati* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).

22. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 193.

23. *Ibid.*, 170.

24. *Ibid.*, 274, 178.

25. *Ibid.*, 163–164.

person thinks and does in real life.”²⁶ There is a distinction between willing, affirming, and loving the existence of the beloved and willing that same beloved’s wrong-doings since love only affirms being.²⁷ Pieper makes two notes about love, though, which serve as preliminary assumptions he is making. First, following St. Thomas Aquinas, he says that the most marvellous thing a being can do is to be. Second, the most intense form of affirmation resides in a *creatio*, creation, making to be, that is, the production of *creatura*, creature.²⁸ To this point, I have shown that both Pieper and Kierkegaard argue that love is best approached experientially, that is, phenomenologically. Our experience of love begins with this basic phenomenological awareness of the reality of love; however, both thinkers have come upon a point at which deeper justification for their views is now required: Kierkegaard has mentioned that love is not as the empiricist conceives of love, namely, as reducible to physical phenomena, and Pieper has argued that affirmation is related to the initial creation of *creatura*. The ground of these claims now requires philosophical treatment.

For Kierkegaard “love’s element is infinitude, inexhaustibility, immeasurability,”²⁹ all descriptions referring to God as the source of love. He therefore argues that the grounding of love is divine in two respective ways. First, he argues that without an eternal basis of love, what is left is anxiety and despair. Second, he argues that without an Eternal God there would be no obligation to love, and it cannot be a matter of indifference to love. The first argument, then, states that any temporal, rather than eternal, understanding of love makes space for possibility, and therefore anxiety (since there is possibility of change).³⁰ As for despair, since “despair is to lack the eternal,” anything which lacks the eternal, including love, would in the end be despair.³¹ Put otherwise, if love is only temporal, that is, grounded in anything but the eternal, change in loving is possible; however, only the eternal can keep love changeless and hence secure it.

With respect to the second argument, Kierkegaard invites us to “make a test: forget Christianity for a moment . . . and then see if it has ever occurred to you to think this: you *shall* love.”³² Kierkegaard staunchly rejects any attempt to flatten love to a matter of indifference or arbitrary duty, and so the question of whether we are obligated to love is a meaningful question.³³ What is distinctive about Kierkegaard’s argument is that he readily admits that instinctive, spontaneous, and inclinational love are valuable; however, they need the eternal for security. Rather than make temporal love less worthwhile, Kierkegaard argues

26. Ibid., 187. Karol Wojtyła makes the same point. See his *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993). Ultimately, this is rooted Biblically in Jesus, contrary to the desires and expectations of the Jewish authorities, eating with sinners.

27. St. Augustine points out that evil is a deprivation of being, and therefore if love wills being, it cannot will sin (it does not will non-being). See his *City of God. XI*, Chapter 9.

28. Ibid., 170.

29. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 176.

30. Ibid., 47.

31. Ibid., 55.

32. Ibid., 44.

33. Ibid., 42.

that it is only the eternal which makes love have eternal worth.³⁴ Such eternal love, however, is free, awake, secure, and an unconditional duty.³⁵ One might wonder, though: Why does God, granted He is the foundation of love, remain so hidden if the concrete manifestations of love are so clear and immediate phenomenologically? Kierkegaard argues that even though love cannot be seen with physical eyes, he says paradoxically “love dwells in the hidden, or is hidden in the inmost depths.”³⁶ In other words:

The hidden life of love is in the most inward depths, unfathomable and still has an unfathomable relationship with the whole of existence. As the quiet lake is fed deep down by the flow of hidden springs, which no eye sees, so a human being’s love is grounded, still more deeply, in God’s love. . . . As the quiet lake invites you to look at it but the mirror of darkness prevents you from seeing through it, so love’s mysterious ground in God’s love prevents you from seeing its source.³⁷

There are two notes to be made here. First, I had previously made the connection between the immediacy of love and the immediacy of sensory knowledge. While this passage might encourage a reading of Kierkegaard as rejecting the obviousness of love, I regard this reading as mistaken. Kierkegaard here is making a distinction between concrete manifestations of love and the ground of love, the former being plain to our experience and the latter hidden. Second, Kierkegaard is pointing out that love’s foundation, ground, reason, et cetera, is in God Himself, and this is *mysterious*, mystery understood as, as Pieper puts it elsewhere, “a light of such plenitude that it remains unquenchable for a knowing faculty or a linguistic capacity that is merely human.”³⁸ Like Kierkegaard, Pieper notes that the phenomenological experience of love “points beyond empirically knowable reality.”³⁹

For Pieper, the love we experience points beyond ourselves. In this way, our love is a resemblance or model of the original act of creation when, *ex nihilo*, God brought the world into being. In “On Love,” Pieper explains:

34. Ibid., 55.

35. Ibid., 53, 51, 51, 104.

36. Ibid., 26.

37. Ibid., 27. Kierkegaard reflects what Jesus says in John 7:39: “Whoever believes in me . . . streams of living water will flow from within him.” (ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ . . . ποταμοὶ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας αὐτοῦ ῥεῦσουσιν ὕδατος ζῶντος) (NIV). All Biblical Greek in this work is taken from the Nestle GNT 1904.

38. “Philosophy and the Sense for Mystery” in *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy*, trans. Roger Wasserman (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 308. It is worth noting that the word *mystery* has been used in connection with being and love, a formulation which no doubt Pieper and Kierkegaard would agree to: “Just as being itself is an unfathomably mystery, so love, which in its source is identified with being, must remain forever mysterious.” Robert O. Johann. *The Meaning of Love* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1954), 3.

39. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 274.

When we find something we see good, glorious, wonderful (a tree; the structure of a diatom seen under the microscope; above all, of course, a human face, a friend, one's partner, for the whole of life, but also one's own existence in the world)—when we see something good, I say, when we love something lovable, we might become aware of our actually taking up and continuing that universal approval of the creation by which all that has been created is “loved by God” and is therefore good.⁴⁰

Pieper is here saying that the free affirmation we make is *analogous* to God's initial creation of the world. The capacity for such analogical affirmation is in virtue of who we are as *creatura*. As *creatura*, we are also *status viatoris* (beings-on-the-way), beings who were—in the beginning—and are—in the present moment—“launched irresistibly toward our own fulfillment, towards our felicity too, toward the full realization of what was intended for us,”⁴¹ and consequently we are oriented towards Infinite Love Himself. Without this initial affirmation of the goodness of the world—in virtue of God creating the world—there would be nothing analogous to the affirmation we make of reality (no ground for the affirmation) and hence affirming or not affirming would be a matter of indifference. Put otherwise, if loving is affirming, and there is no reason to affirm rather than not affirm, it is trivial whether one does one or the other. While one might give reasons for affirmation based on particular features of human beings, i.e., rationality, consciousness, sentience, this proves highly arbitrary and, as German philosopher Immanuel Kant pointed out in his 1785 *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, “Moral principles are not grounded on the peculiarities of human nature.”⁴² If there is a God, however, then what our experience tells us is that any time we love (affirm) anything—people, nature, God—we are in effect continuing God's creative act as He did in the beginning of creation.⁴³

Pieper and Kierkegaard are arguing from within the Christian tradition, affirming Trinitarian monotheism, that is, the belief that God is Three Persons within One Divine Nature (the Trinity). It is clear that for Kierkegaard and Pieper God is the ground of love; however, what is not clear, at least thus far, is how exactly a Trinitarian God is the foundation of love, or what difference it would make from unitarian monotheism.⁴⁴ While Pieper frankly admits that our love should be a “reflection of the Creator's creative love,”⁴⁵ and Kierkegaard that “man's love

40. *Ibid.*, 275.

41. *Ibid.*, 237.

42. Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Allen W. Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 27.

43. And, of course, reflecting God's sustaining the world in being.

44. An emphasis on a full Trinitarian monotheism has proved fruitful in explications of divine love within the domain of practical theology. For instance, consider Scott Hahn's argument: “God gave us life in a natural family to lead us to a greater life, a larger family, a supernatural family: a family as big as God.” *First Comes Love* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 36.

45. *Ibid.*, 193.

mysteriously begins in God's love."⁴⁶ The *particular* Trinitarian love of God in His entirety is not necessarily captured here. While it is certainly true that Jesus is paradigmatic in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, what is still needed is a reference to God in His Trinitarian nature. I am not suggesting that the fullness of God's love was not expressed in Jesus' incarnation; rather, I am arguing that the fullness of Jesus' love is best understood within the Trinitarian context. Thus, there is one more distinctive element of God's love from a specifically Trinitarian perspective that Pieper and Kierkegaard tend to overlook. On Trinitarian monotheism, God is self-giving from eternity past. Love has the nature of giving one's self away freely and wholly, and this, when reciprocated, results in a mutual self-giving love. This occurs from eternity passed among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, implying that God never wholly loves Himself in a Divine Narcissism, but is always giving Himself away in love.

As philosopher Robert Spaemann puts it:

Paradox is the mark of the overcoming of abstraction. Only what is abstract is subject to the logic of identities. That is why God in Christianity is not understood as a person, but as a community of persons. Only in this way does the statement "God is love" have an intelligible meaning. In the concrete unity of love, the lovers do not disappear, but rather are elevated to the highest level of their possibilities.⁴⁷

In fact, it was from the love of the Father and Son that the Holy Spirit came forth.⁴⁸ In saying the Holy Spirit came forth, I do not mean to imply a temporal process.⁴⁹ As theologian Frank Sheed reminds us: "All our verbs of our language are in themselves misleading in one way or another."⁵⁰ That is, applying temporal language to a timeless Being results in difficulty talking about coming forth without time. However, this out-pouring love, *kenosis* in Greek, describes God more wholly and sheds light on the nature of love more fully. Sheed says this of the Holy Spirit: "The Third Person [The Holy Spirit] is like the First and Second not because loving as such produces resemblance but because in this instance the lovers have put themselves wholly into their love."⁵¹ In this way, our self-giving acts of love reflect more fully the nature of God as the Infinite Being giving Himself away from eternity past. Given this full Trinitarian monotheistic context, Jesus' actions (described mainly by Kierkegaard rather than Pieper) are contextualized in the Godhead; since God is a self-giving being, when Jesus gives

46. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 27.

47. Robert Spaemann. *Love and the Dignity of Human Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann, 2012), 24.

48. For the analogical extension of this into human beings, especially in the context of erotic life, see Karol Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility*.

49. I would here like to thank Patrick Sullivan for our lengthy conversation on this topic.

50. Frank Sheed. *Theology and Sanity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 100.

51. *Ibid.*, 107–108.

His life for the forgiveness of our sins and to make eternal life possible, He shows us how to model our lives to reflect the Infinite Love of the Trinity. I have here outlined one way in which the Trinitarian monotheism of Kierkegaard and Pieper can be accentuated to support their understandings of love; however, I have yet to discuss how exactly love as divine gift emerges.

Phenomenologically, we experience love as a phenomenon which is grounded in God and apprehended as valuable. At this point, Pieper's understanding of affirmation as the nature of love is clearly an apprehension of *creatura* as a divine gift: "Love has the nature of a gift."⁵² Both ourselves and all external reality is a gift, and we have merely to respond in gratitude: "It is gratitude that we are actually receiving what we by nature long for and love: to be able wholeheartedly to approve of something, to be able to say that something is good."⁵³ Pieper's understanding of affirmation, then, verges on the closest representation of modelling divine love by apprehending what is good and affirming its existence as a divine gift. The phenomenological experience of such apprehension of divine love requires first that we see in what precise ways the divine gift of love makes itself clear to us. Pieper has given us one way in which it makes itself present as a divine gift, namely, as *creatura*.

However, is there another particular dimension of *creatura* which speaks of love as a divine gift? Consider a passage from Kierkegaard in his *The Lily of the Field and The Bird of the Air: Three Godly Discourses*, an evaluation and exposition of Matthew 6: 24–34. He writes:

For of course no one can seriously believe that what the lily and bird rejoice over, and similar things—are nothing to rejoice over! Thus, that you came into existence, that you exist, that "today" you receive the necessities of existence, that you came into existence, that you became a human being, that you can see—consider this: that you can see, that you can hear, that you have a sense of smell, that you have a sense of taste, that you can feel; that the sun shines for you and for your sake, that when it becomes weary, the moon begins to shine and the stars are lit; that it becomes wonder, that all of nature disguises itself, pretends to be a stranger—and does so in order to delight you; that spring comes, that birds come in large flocks—and do so in order to bring you joy; that green plants spring forth, that the forest grows into beauty, has its nuptials—and does so in order to bring you joy; that autumn comes, that the birds fly away, not to make themselves precious and hard to get, oh, no, but so that you will not become bored with them; that the forest puts away its finery for the sake of the next time, that is, so it can give you joy the next time: Is this supposed to be nothing to rejoice over!⁵⁴

52. Pieper, "On Love" in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 227.

53. *Ibid.*, 227.

54. Søren Kierkegaard. *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Godly Discourses*, trans. Bruce H. Kimmse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 79.

In this way, as Kierkegaard is pointing out, each *creatura* is oriented towards God's love for human beings, and speaks of *creatura* as a divine gift. Nevertheless, does this speak of *love* as a divine gift? It speaks of God's love as a divine gift and just as God loves what He creates, so we love God and what He has created—in this sense, both our capacity to and our decision for love are divine gifts as well. It is a change or transformation within our phenomenological lives to apprehend the extent and magnitude of God's love for us, whether it be in all that is around us or among our relations with others, and receive it as it is supposed to be received: as a gift.

Kierkegaard and Pieper agree that our phenomenology of love as a divine gift creates an inward transformation of the person. Though Pieper mentions the specific ways in which we are inwardly transformed, Pieper's analysis has the implication that love orients us toward existential fulfillment, wholeness and union.⁵⁵ As such, it is possible that this orientation *itself* causes us joy within our phenomenology, though Pieper himself does not entertain this idea explicitly.⁵⁶ More concretely, Pieper points out that love inwardly transforms us in opening the ontological space for forgiveness, joy and happiness (including union), and active love.⁵⁷ In Pieper's Christian context, such love—and with it happiness and joy—is a gift, though the gift has to be accepted and received freely. As human beings who have fallen into sin,⁵⁸ however, we must ask the question: What is the relationship between love and forgiveness, and what existential-phenomenological significance does it have? For Pieper, "forgiveness is one of the fundamental acts of love," which is not necessarily surprising given that "to love a person" just is "to wish that everything associated with him may truly be good."⁵⁹

The phenomenological significance of forgiveness as a divine gift is manifest since within our encounter of the beloved, the reality of sin need not prevent a person from accepting love as a divine gift and allowing it to re-shape the person. Within the horizon of our phenomenological lives, our apprehension of love includes God's forgiveness (and thus rather than cause a problem for apprehending love, enhances our capacity to see it).⁶⁰ Within such a horizon,

55. Pieper argues for the former at greater length in "On Hope" in *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston and Sister Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997, 2012).

56. It is worth asking whether if Pieper had read Hans Blumenberg's theory of myth if Pieper would have argued that our need for symbolic orientation in the world was fulfilled by our being oriented towards love, being, fullness, et cetera (necessary conditions), and having it fulfilled in God (sufficient condition).

57. On a technical note, Pieper does make the distinction between "happiness" and "joy." To show that the former is always primary, whereas the latter is always secondary, additional, a by-product, he invokes the following image: "Just as the state of having drunk and the good taste of the drink are two different things, so too happiness and joy are two different things." *Happiness and Contemplation*. trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 46.

58. See Pieper's *The Concept of Sin*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001).

59. Pieper, "On Love" in *Faith, Hope Love*, 189, 190.

60. Coinciding with Pieper's Catholicism, the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) could be used to argue that within our phenomenological lives our experience of God's mercy is much more concrete than it otherwise would have been if He had not given authority to particular human beings to forgive sins (John 20:23).

including the offering of forgiveness for wrong-doing, Pieper argues that “all love has joy as its natural fruit,” and therefore “is by its [joy’s] nature something secondary and subsidiary.”⁶¹ Our phenomenological apprehension of love as a divine gift, then, is not bare experience but involves a sense of *joy*. Naturally, this is a normative claim, not necessarily a descriptive claim; however, such normativity, arguing that our encounter of love *should* include joy, describes an ideal situation in which the person is transformed from the joyous event.⁶²

When Pieper speaks of the happiness that is derived from love, he says “all human happiness” is “fundamentally *the happiness of love*.”⁶³ In this regard Pieper reminds us that *caritas* is intrinsically bound with felicity, writing:

If happiness is truly never anything but happiness in love, then the fruit of that highest form of love must be the utmost happiness, for which language offers such names as felicity, beatitude, bliss. . . . [*F*]elicit^y means not so much the subjective feeling of happiness as the objective, existential appeasement of the will by the *bonum universale*, . . . a good that cannot be grasped in words.⁶⁴

As a concrete example in human experience, Pieper says that in erotic love “what happens . . . is thus not ‘gratification’ but an opening of the sphere of existence to an infinite quenching that cannot be had at all ‘here.’”⁶⁵ What is operative is not merely pleasure or gratification, but instead a quenching of an existential desire for love which is oriented above and beyond the here and now.

The existential desire, however, cannot be for mere joy and happiness isolated from the notion of union; for in love we seek to be united with *another*. As psychoanalyst Eric Fromm puts it in his *The Art of Loving*: “The deepest need of man, then, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of aloneness.”⁶⁶ Pieper concurs, writing “What is really sought, human closeness, overcoming of loneliness, union with another personal being—all that can be had only in real love.”⁶⁷ Though Pieper does not outline specifically how this union unfolds phenomenologically in *On Love*, he gives the examples of prayer, silent reflective contemplation, and immersion into the depth of things in an act of

61. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 224.

62. In my discussion of preventions to an authentic experience of love as joyful later in the article, I will argue that this has to be a normative, not descriptive claim.

63. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 224.

64. *Ibid.*, 278.

65. *Ibid.*, 252.

66. Eric Fromm. *The Art of Loving* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1956), 9. This need for self-transcendence is not bound to discussions of love. For instance, in *An Experiment in Criticism*, C.S. Lewis claims that myth and stories are modes of self-transcendence, arguing “Good reading, therefore, though it is not essentially an affectional or moral or intellectual activity, has something in common with all three. In love we escape from our self into one other”, 138. Elsewhere he argues that most of life is spent trying to exit the prison of separateness from others (in his *Letters*, for instance).

67. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 268.

unadulterated perception as examples of finite loving union with God.⁶⁸

Finally, Pieper speaks of how our phenomenology of love as a divine gift puts our love into action and transforms us inwardly. In continuing with his insistence that the reality most relevant to us human beings is an event or story, he recalls Mother Teresa as an example of what he had previously called “taking up and continuing that universal approval of the creation,”⁶⁹ writing:

She [Mother Teresa] taught English literature in her order’s high school for girls. One day she could no longer endure seeing, on her way to school, deathly ill and dying people lying in the street without receiving any humane aid. She therefore persuaded the city government to let her have an empty, neglected pilgrims’ rest house and in it established her subsequently famous Hospital for the Dying. I have seen this shelter, which at the beginning was a most dismal place. Of course people die inside it likewise—but now they need no longer perish amidst the bustle of the streets. They feel something of the presence of a sympathetic person.⁷⁰

In re-enacting the initial affirmation of *creatura* by God *just is* to love. Pieper gives two supplementary comments to this story of Mother Teresa. First, this work of mercy is connected with the supernatural and natural elements of love. Secondly, in this real encounter with love, what is taking place “cannot so easily be reduced to a common denominator with friendship, liking, fondness, being smitten—and so on”; rather, what is taking place is, again, a re-enacting of “the primal affirmation that took place in the creation.”⁷¹ Pieper concludes that “perfection always includes transformation.”⁷² Indeed, Pieper, close to the end of *On Love*, reminds us that this transformation, perfection in *caritas*, “in order to attain the ‘foreverness’ that it naturally desires, must transform itself altogether, . . . resembl[ing] passing through something akin to dying.”⁷³ Pieper here affirms how we, and our phenomenological lives, to be transformed—by dying to ourselves in love.⁷⁴ Kierkegaard, however, takes up this phenomenological change in a similar fashion, though abiding very closely to the Biblical text.

Kierkegaard extensively emphasizes that Christendom begins with inward transformation, exclaiming “what else is Christianity but inwardness!”⁷⁵

68. See his *Only the Lover Sings*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990); *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (Scarborough, ON: A Mentor Book, 1963).

69. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 275.

70. *Ibid.*, 274–275.

71. *Ibid.*, 275.

72. *Ibid.*, 280.

73. *Ibid.*, 280–281.

74. Hence in Matthew 16:24: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἕλθειν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοί) (RSV).

75. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 138. Kierkegaard also says that God’s law demands inwardness, 132.

As a precursor to discussing how, for Kierkegaard, we come to be inwardly transformed by apprehending within our phenomenology the reality of love as a divine gift, it would be significant to appreciate first how Kierkegaard understands inward change as intrinsically basic to Christianity. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard writes:

When a man in the infinite transformation himself discovers the eternal so near to life that there is not the distance of one single wish, of one single evasion, of one single moment from what *he* in this *now*, in this second, in this holy moment *ought* to do—then he is on the way to becoming a Christian.⁷⁶

For Kierkegaard, infinite transformation is basic to Christianity, and is bound with the concept of ought, that is, the eternal *you shall*.⁷⁷ Interesting is Kierkegaard's admission, too, that this divine authority, really "means precisely to set the task."⁷⁸ To do a task requires action, and thus even within Kierkegaard's definition of divine authority there is reference to *action*. In inward transformation being basic to Christianity, Kierkegaard notes how "inwardness is determined not only by the love-relationship, but by the God-relationship."⁷⁹

What comes next is not surprising, namely, that this inwardness is—as Pieper said, though using the term dying—"the inwardness of self-renunciation"; in other words, "the inwardness of love must be sacrificial and therefore must not require any reward."⁸⁰ The antithesis of such inwardness is the world, where "inwardness plays the stranger amid worldliness."⁸¹ Christianity itself is predicated on the desire to transform a human being inwardly for love. Returning to the initial question of how our phenomenological lives are inwardly transformed, Kierkegaard gives a comprehensive analysis of these inward-transformations at the beginning of each chapter in *Works of Love* (and each chapter begins with the Biblical text he is exegeting). It is my contention that his basic premises, can be understood from a few theses of Kierkegaard's. First, the inward transformation of our phenomenological lives should result in loving like God, namely, impartially, universally, and unconditionally.⁸² The curious question that arises though is how loving like God transforms our phenomenology. Consider what Kierkegaard has to say: "When one walks with God . . . one is also constrained to see and to see

76. Ibid., 98.

77. Ibid., 98.

78. Ibid., 104.

79. Ibid., 133.

80. Ibid., 133.

81. Ibid., 144.

82. Ibid., 38, 37, 74. W. L. Craig has used this as an argument against the God of Islam. See W. L. Craig's "God's Unconditional Love." Accessed November 29, 2017. <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/gods-unconditional-love/>.

in a unique way.”⁸³ This seeing is changed, transformed, and constrained by God; put alternatively, as God sees and loves us, so we begin to see and love as He does. The prerequisite, however, is to *see* God first, and this requires an inner faith and pure heart.⁸⁴ In this regard, the Biblical text says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῆ καρδία, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν Θεὸν ὄψονται).⁸⁵ In aspiring to love as God does by walking with him (with a pure heart) our love changes, and hence our phenomenology of love as a divine gift does too. To give a concrete example, consider Kierkegaard’s chapter “You Shall Love your Neighbor,” in which he argues that neighbour love is higher than erotic love and friendship because of its universality, noting that the demand is harder than one imagines, writing:

He who feeds the poor but yet is not victorious over his own mind in such a way that he calls this feeding [of the poor] a feast sees in the poor and unimportant only the poor and unimportant. He who gives a feast sees in the poor and unimportant his neighbors—however ridiculous this may seem in the eyes of the world.⁸⁶

Kierkegaard invites us to become victorious over our own minds—with their biases, prejudices, and contingencies—in seeing our neighbour *as* a neighbour—a divine gift.⁸⁷ The apprehension of love as a divine gift allows us to see in a unique way, thereby making room for this unique sight to transform our phenomenology.

In another chapter, “Our Duty to Love Those We See,” Kierkegaard speaks of the inward transformation that takes place in a person upon realization that “Christian love grants the beloved all his imperfections and weaknesses and in all his changes remains with him, loving the person it sees.”⁸⁸ For Kierkegaard, our phenomenology of love is changed inasmuch as we now have to see our neighbours as divine gifts to us, and our capacity to move beyond the temporal differentiations between persons allows us to love as God does. In other words, since our phenomenology is transformed, we not only have our sight changed but also have our orientation towards friendship shifted towards the divine, for “to be loved is to be helped by another person to love God.”⁸⁹ Kierkegaard puts this

83. *Ibid.*, 87.

84. *Ibid.*, 147. See Kierkegaard’s *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing: Spiritual Preparation for the Office of Confession*. trans. Douglas V. Steere (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956).

85. Matthew 5:8. (RSV).

86. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 92.

87. I point this out in my book chapter “Ethics, Homelessness and the *Artes Liberales/Serviles* Distinction,” in *The Ethics of Homelessness: Philosophical Perspectives*, 2nd ed., ed. G. John M. Abbarano (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2018). (forthcoming).

88. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 169.

89. *Ibid.*, 114.

humorously, writing “If this were not so [that we could love a person with their imperfections], Christ would never have loved, for where could he have found the perfect man!”⁹⁰

In his chapter, “Love Abides,” Kierkegaard gives another way in which we are transformed by our realization of love as a divine gift. Love transforms us by providing a glimpse of eternal life. It is not that by loving we merit eternal life; instead, our loving tells us that the Love which is the ground of all finite love is what brings us knowledge of our own immortality. As Kierkegaard puts it, “But what is it which gives a human being immortality, what else but that love which abides?”⁹¹ For Kierkegaard there is a way to let this transformation occur so as to accept the challenge to love. For him, we can find such strength in silence and solitude, although the silence of one’s own inwardness is greater than the silence of, for instance, the mountain or forest.⁹² Nonetheless, for Kierkegaard silence and solitude reveal many insights about human beings and the nature of the world. First, it is where we encounter what we ought to do.⁹³ Second, it is where we learn what mercifulness is.⁹⁴ Third, it is where we encounter God.⁹⁵ Fourth, it is where we encounter what the highest is.⁹⁶ To put the strings together, Kierkegaard elsewhere remarks that it is solitude itself which is antithetical to worldliness (and thus is evidence of its being related to the eternal).⁹⁷ For Kierkegaard, love is the challenge to walk with Love, allowing Him change our finite love to resemble Himself in such a way that the lover’s phenomenology of love as a divine gift causes an inward transformation of the person. There has been a question lurking, however, regarding the greatest stumbling blocks towards an authentic phenomenology of love as a divine gift. It is worth mentioning that both Pieper and Kierkegaard take up the challenge of responding to these counter-voices, though the former deals with it more explicitly and comprehensively.

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard lays out distinct threats to an authentic experiencing of love as a divine gift. He argues that both worldly and temporal love manifested in selfishness, utilitarian, or calculating love, as well as the deception of not thinking one does not need love, all prevent one from experiencing love as eternal (as a divine gift grounded in God). To begin, Kierkegaard reminds his reader that Christianity has nothing to do with practicality and that is *exactly* the way it should be, saying, “If your ultimate and highest purpose is to have life made easy and sociable, then never have anything to do with Christianity.”⁹⁸

90. Ibid., 169.

91. Ibid., 289.

92. Ibid., 144.

93. Ibid., 88. It is worth noting that Kierkegaard does not qualify what we ought to do, and so it is perhaps not *strictly* bound to the moral realm. For instance, the silence can tell us what we ought to do in reference to our knowing how to put our moral obligation of love into concrete form. In other words, by silencing our selfish desires and plans, the way to love *in concreto* is manifest.

94. Ibid., 304.

95. Ibid., 339.

96. Ibid., 88.

97. Robert Bretall. *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 363.

98. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 127.

With respect to the former, aside from inverting the characteristics of divine love, i.e., impartiality, unconditionality, and universality, there is a distinct threat, because “what the world calls love is selfishness.”⁹⁹ Kierkegaard himself gives an interesting example of this through his analysis of worldly self-renunciation:

Men will sacrifice this or that and everything, but they still hope to be understood and thereby to remain in a meaningful human context in which one’s sacrifices are recognized and rejoiced over. They will leave everything, but they do not mean thereby to be deprived of the good opinion and understanding of men. The movement of sacrifice becomes, then, a thing of appearance; it makes a show of forsaking the world but nevertheless remains within the world.¹⁰⁰

It is no surprise that for Kierkegaard selfish love—as the illustration displays—is antithetical to how the Christian understands love. Christian love certainly rejects modern values inconsistent with the nature of love; indeed, Kierkegaard perceptively reminds us that Christian love is not worldly and so it is worth asking “if Christ had not been love and if in him love had not been the fulfillment of the law” whether “he would have been crucified.”¹⁰¹ With respect to calculating love as a preventative of experiencing love as a divine gift, he notes that it is only fundamentally a non-calculating love which *acts*. As he writes in *Works of Love*:

The person who really loves always has a head-start, an infinite head-start, for every time the experimentalist has worked out, computed, discovered a new expression of devotion, the loving one has already accomplished it, because the loving one needs no calculation and therefore wastes no time in calculating.¹⁰²

It is categorically fallacious to ascribe calculations to love—calculating love is an oxymoron. There is no cost/benefit analysis of loving within Christianity and hence loving is a moral obligation and duty. Consequently, it is without warrant that loving should be considered optional or a matter of indifference. Finally, there exists in Kierkegaard’s work an emphasis on the deception of not needing love: “To cheat oneself out of love is the most terrible deception.”¹⁰³ While the connotation is that the lover has chosen to step out of love having already loved, this statement also applies to the human being who does not love at all. The necessity of love in a human life is especially clear from what exactly is at stake:

99. Ibid., 123.

100. Ibid., 133.

101. Ibid., 125.

102. Ibid., 176.

103. Ibid., 23.

In the temporal world a man may succeed in getting along without love; he may succeed in slipping through life without discovering the self-deception; he may have the terrible success, in his conceit, of becoming proud of it; but in eternity he cannot dispense with love and cannot escape discovering that he has lost everything.¹⁰⁴

The problem of this deception too is that it is very difficult to overcome provided that deceptions themselves are difficult to overcome: “A delusion is easy to find, but it is very difficult to find the way back.”¹⁰⁵ As Plato put it in his *Symposium*, “in this very point is ignorance distressing, that a person who is not enlightened or intelligent should be satisfied with himself.”¹⁰⁶ Kierkegaard is optimistic about overcoming such deceptions. In an insightful way he reminds us that it is part of the works of love which overcome both the temptation to give up on a person who deceives herself out of love and also the temptation to disassociate ourselves from the despairing person as if we were isolated beings. He writes, “never give up any man, not even at the last moment; do not despair.”¹⁰⁷ We are morally responsible for one another and so the deceived person needs the lover’s sober capacity to love to unveil the need for love once again. Kierkegaard’s challenge is also a test of our resistance to despair. After all, “it is possible that even the most prodigal son can still be saved.”¹⁰⁸ Pieper himself, largely in agreement with Kierkegaard, warns us of ways in which our phenomenology is hindered, resulting in love not being experienced as a divine gift.

In *On Love*, Pieper lists a host of examples preventing an authentic experience of love as divine gift. First, he says that the absolutism of sex (sexualization) is a prominent, wide-spread phenomenon.¹⁰⁹ In this way, the making absolute of a divine gift misuses that for which the gift is intended. A contemporary example of this would be a recent volume on sex by the *Gazette*—a (by and large, though there are exceptions) low-quality, to put it mildly, forum for opinion-pieces at Western University—which makes no reference to real love, only hedonistic and egocentric enjoying oneself untethered from any authentic, coherent ethic. Anecdotally, I remember seeing the display poster of the volume which displayed two half-naked women, purposely inviting the viewer to see them as purely sexual objects (it is no surprise that their faces were not in the photograph). The display was entirely visible for the public to see—including those who one might forget pass, by i.e., students and professors with children, visitors, et cetera. It is interesting that in a school which (attempts) to sustain the dignity of women that in the name of autonomy and consent they—the *Gazette particularly*—have merely re-iterated the consequences of a systematically

104. *Ibid.*, 24.

105. *Ibid.*, 160.

106. *Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 204A.

107. *Ibid.*, 238.

108. *Ibid.*, 238.

109. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 262.

groundless attempt to secure the dignity of the human person independent of love and a consistent moral ontological framework.

Second, on a more pedagogical note, Pieper warns that since sex often precedes youth's understanding of *eros*, that is, because youth's consciousness is first of sex and then *eros*, "experiencing real love is hampered if not blocked permanently."¹¹⁰ What fosters this is seduction and commercial manipulation.¹¹¹ Third, stemming from the second, sex as a purely material engagement done for itself not only rids the person of her dignity as a person but causes a delusion of union.¹¹² Love, though, desires not only to see the beloved, but to be in union with her (as the Russian term *lubovatsia* that I mentioned earlier conveys). While the capacity for sex without responsibility of any sort sounds like utterly unadulterated freedom, Pieper reminds us that this so-called freedom is simultaneously an attitude of apathy. Loving the person is a matter of indifference since love is, on this understanding, purely lustful, seeking an "it" rather than a "you" (as Pieper puts it). He quotes, as he often does, Goethe's dictum that "every century . . . tries to make the sacred common, the difficult easy, and the serious amusing—to which there really could be no objection if it were not that in the process seriousness and amusement are destroyed together."¹¹³

Philosopher Paul Coates shares a telling story which highlights this. There was a man who had passed away from this world and went to meet God. When he met God, God asked the man what it was that he wanted for eternity. The man, pondering ever so carefully before the omnipotent God who can come to actualize any of his desires, says he wants . . . and the list begins. He wanted to have sex with many beautiful women, he wanted to see and experience the most beautiful parts of the world, and he wanted to live in unending luxury. In sticking to what God Himself promised, He gives the man what he wants and allows him to indulge in what it was he thought his heart longed for. After achieving all his desires for many years, the man came back to God and said, "I do not understand." And God said, "What is it you do not understand?" The man replied, "I had all the sex I ever wanted, saw the places I longed to see, and had all material wealth I could have dreamt of . . . why am I *still* unhappy?" God looked at the man and said, "My son, it is because you are in hell."¹¹⁴ It is here that we see how easy sexual encounters can be, and thereby how easy it is to rob a sacred act of its meaning, enjoyability, and capacity to be an opportunity for self-transcending

110. Ibid., 264.

111. Ibid., 264. Bernard Häring makes a similar, more general point about manipulation in his *The Ethics of Manipulation*: "In all times, the dominant elite has tried to conform the masses to its objectives and world views. The wealthy, the powerful, and those having the privilege of higher education have better access to the media of communication. The government, the military establishment, and the political parties often use these media not so much for respectful persuasion as for manipulation." (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 21.

112. Ibid., 265.

113. Ibid., 266.

114. I would like to express gratitude to Paul Coates for allowing me to re-print this story taken from his philosophy lecture(s). In asking permission to re-print this story, he reminded me that the story emphasizes both "the delusion that happiness depends upon the senses alone" and that "de-sacralising [sex] is reductionism towards objectification and tends toward animalism."

love. Fourth, consumer sex, for Pieper, prevents seeing love as a divine gift, since the effects of such consumption are lethal. It turns the beloved into an object and thereby dehumanizes and destroys the beloved.¹¹⁵ However, Pieper ties the fourth way with the previous three, saying consumer sex consists:

The lie consists in this: that with an enormous expenditure of money (the whole thing is a big business, after all), but also with the investment of tremendous psychological knowledge, with a maximum of skill in dealing with words and pictures, and with impressive subliminal use of music, color, form (and so on), the consumer is made to believe that sex is the same as eros and that all the gifts of eros, all the joyful raptures of “togetherness” can be had in sex consumption. It isn’t offered for free, certainly not, but still it is basically available to everyone.¹¹⁶

Pieper here is noting not only how deception is at work, but how the deception is fostered, consumed, and made readily available to anyone. Pornographic content is a concrete example of what Pieper has in mind. In his currently untranslated “Freedom and Pornography” (1975)—his only explicit engagement with the subject of pornography—Pieper calls pornography a “big business”, “whose profit is based on nothing other than the impairment [*Schmälerung*] of freedom.”¹¹⁷ Although *Schmälerung* can be faithfully translated as “belittlement” or “diminishment”, in English one hears “impairment” as implying drunkenness, a lack of sobriety, a sense of disconnectedness from the world. Thus *Schmälerung* as “impairment” precisely accentuates and emphasizes pornography’s intrinsic capacity to impair. Pornography’s universal availability, cheap promise of happiness and claim upon the lives of many with their relationships is more than a mere danger—it is the beginning of a ruin, not only in relationships, but in the foundations of appreciating love as a divine gift.¹¹⁸

Notice the similarity between Pieper’s description, and Craig Nakken’s idea in *The Addictive Personality* that “Addiction is a process of buying into false and empty promises: the promise of relief, the promise of emotional security, the false sense of fulfillment, and the false sense of intimacy with the world.”¹¹⁹ Such a destruction can only come about by the maker of fictitious realities—as Pieper says, the *sophist*.¹²⁰ Finally, Pieper—quoting Kierkegaard—argues that there exists a desire to escape the demands of love (and thereby forestall appreciating

115. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 268–269.

116. *Ibid.*, 270.

117. Pieper, Josef. “Freiheit und Pornographie” in *Miszellen* (Bande 8.1, 8.2) in *Josef Pieper: Werke in acht Bänden*. ed., Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000–2008), 396. My translation.

118. A comprehensive defense against pornography consumption—on the basis of its damaging neurological, psychological and behavioral effects—is found in Matt Fradd’s *The Porn Myth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017).

119. Craig Nakken. *The Addictive Personality* (San Francisco: Harper/Hazelden Book, 1988), 14.

120. Pieper argues against sophistic philosophies and methods in his *Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

love as a divine gift). He points out that this “slothfulness of the heart”—*acedia*—is, as Kierkegaard says, “despair from weakness.”¹²¹ Kierkegaard, in his small text, *The Present Age*, thought of our own age as characteristically suffering from *acedia*, writing “No one is any longer carried away by the desire for the good to perform great things.”¹²² Pieper says this is, at its fundamental core, “the despair of a man’s not daring to be what he is.”¹²³ These are the dangers prohibiting, in varying degrees, the capacity to apprehend love phenomenologically as a divine gift. One might want to exclaim that, with Dante, when in Canto IV of the *Inferno* he writes that he “found [himself] upon the brink of the valley of the sorrowful abyss,”¹²⁴ Kierkegaard’s reminder that love overcomes any temptation to despair seems an adequate antidote to these threats to experiencing love as a divine gift.

I turn, finally, to the subject of love as a divine gift in light of *death*, an area of Kierkegaard’s and Pieper’s work which merits careful attention even though it does not occupy very much of their analyses. In other words, it is worth asking how to relate the fact of death with our phenomenology of love as a divine gift; is love a gift, if in the end it will be stolen away by death? Understood in this context, death is a threat, causing us anxiety, despair and, in the rarer case, a rejection of goodness and the reality of much of our experience. It is important, then, to address this basic problem of how to reconcile these seemingly contradictory realities between our phenomenology of love as a divine gift and death. Pieper addresses this seeming contradiction by quoting Gabriel Marcel’s dictum “to love a person means to say: You will not die.”¹²⁵ Again Kierkegaard: “what is it which gives a human being immortality, what else but the love which abides?”¹²⁶ For both Kierkegaard and Pieper, it is inconceivable that there should not be a sustaining of ourselves—by God—after our respective deaths. The gift-like nature of love demands that the gift not be taken away. If the gift is taken away, we can reasonably ask whether we will be re-united with it. To give a more concrete example, in loving our friends, we can wonder whether after their death we shall see them again. While we can have no good evidence of this thesis, there is still—within our finite lives—a longing, a hope that arises. We *hope* that we shall be re-united; however, we are only satisfied if there is a possibility of being re-united which moves beyond our wishful-thinking and natural human longing. Our phenomenology of love points beyond empirical reality, therefore, in two senses.

First, it points to love’s *source* not being contained in this world; secondly, it refers to love’s *sustaining* power beyond death. It is not clear, though, that there is an expressible philosophical framework in which this could be formulated, not because it cannot be done, but because the veracity of the argument—that love

121. Pieper, “On Love” in *Faith, Hope, Love*, 192.

122. Søren Kierkegaard. *The Present Age*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), 14.

123. *Ibid.*, 192.

124. Dante Alighieri. *Inferno*. trans. Anthony Esolen (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 33.

125. *Ibid.*, 169.

126. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 289.

transcends death—is *experiential*. Consider a moment in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* when Zossima—an elder of the Russian Church—receives a woman whom he is to console, who struggles with having little faith, especially about the afterlife. Zossima wonders:

“How can I become convinced [of life after death]? Oh, I am so unhappy! When I look around me, I realize that people don’t care, hardly anyone does, and I’m the only one who cannot bear it. It’s dreadful, just dreadful!”

“I am sure it is dreadful, but nothing can be proved, although one can become convinced.”

“How? By what?”

“By acts of love. Try to love your neighbors, love them actively and unceasingly. And as you learn to love them more and more, you will be more and more convinced of the existence of God and of the immortality of your soul”¹²⁷

It is the *acts* of love which transform our phenomenology of love as a divine gift and which convey the death-transcending nature of love. Kierkegaard’s focus on the *works* of love is highly significant and proves—as Dostoyevsky says—that love is not only experiential, but its nature becomes infused into the lover delivering truths which, as Pascal puts it, are truths of the heart.¹²⁸ In this way, we have two answers to the confrontation of the fact of death and our phenomenology of love as a divine gift. First, our phenomenology of love tells us of the sustaining power of love beyond the grave; second, it is within our phenomenology—in loving others *concretely*—that we become like the love that brings us into being and the love that sustains us beyond death.

In ending this work, I would like to suggest that the phenomenological significance of the divine gift of love, which ultimately emerges from Pieper and Kierkegaard, is the verification that we will live on with God beyond our short, finite lives. It is a *lived* confidence of trust (faith) which tells us this; however, it is apprehended within our phenomenology. While one might argue that it is finitude that makes loving all the more worthwhile,¹²⁹ and no doubt elements

127. Fyodor Dostoyevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York: Bantam Classic, 1970), 70.

128. Blaise Pascal. *Penseés*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 58.

129. I have argued against this thesis elsewhere. See my “The Ontic Foundation of Hope: Josef Pieper’s Critique of Atheistic Existentialism,” *The Oracle: York University’s Undergraduate Philosophical Review*. Issue 10, 2017: 23–31. Or perhaps the opposite; as Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it, “the finitude of existence always seems immediately to justify the finitude of love.” *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 68. However, in another small work *Life Out of Death*, Balthasar reminds us that “dying as well as being raised obligates one to the deadening of purely earthly concerns and to a life in the Christian mission, which is always a eucharistic life,” trans. Davis Perkins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 56–57.

of that perspective are true, we cannot forget that the infinite Love that brought creation into being—as Kierkegaard and Pieper argue—is the same infinite Love Who calls us not back to the nothingness out of which we came into the world but, instead, calls us back to Himself, making *every* moment meaningful, completing the finite love that yearns for more—something *trans-finite*, perhaps *infinite*. Pieper puts it this way when he says the gift (singular) spoken of by sacred tradition runs under the titles of “Perfect Joy, Eternal Life, Great Banquet, Crown, Wreath, Peace, Light Salvation – and so forth.”¹³⁰ Can we now put into linguistic form our phenomenological lives with the immense joy and gratitude that this eternal offer existentially provides for us?

Perhaps we have reached the limits of what language can express, and at best we can remain silent. As Patrick Sullivan says, we remain silent not insofar as silence is the absence of something, but the *presence* of something. Peter Kreeft, too, writes, “The last word is silence. The silence of love is not empty but full, too full for words, overflowing our thimble-sized words with an ocean-sized life.”¹³¹ In ending, I only have the impression that I have asked and provoked more questions than I can answer. But I do not mind having done this. This work attempts to show that Kierkegaard and Pieper are complementary philosophers of love whose work deserves further attention within theological and philosophical circles and within the literature on the philosophy of love generally. There is only one reference I would like to make in the end, and it is to a story which Kierkegaard tells in *Works of Love* which summarizes love as a divine gift in light of death in a way words cannot string together, and which merits our silence. Kierkegaard wrote:

When the couch of death is prepared for you, when you have gone to bed never to get up again, and they are only waiting for you to turn on your side to die, and stillness grows about you, and then after a while the friends of the family go away and it becomes quieter, because only the closest ones remain while death comes every closer, and then the closest ones go quietly away, and it becomes quieter because only the very closest of all remain, and then when the last one has bent over you for the last time and turns away to the other side, for you yourself turn now to the side of death, there is still one who remains by your side, the very last one at the death-bed, he who was the first, God, the living God.¹³²

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131. Peter Kreeft. *Love is Stronger than Death* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 110.

132. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 149.

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