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Conscientious subjectivity in Kierkegaard and Levinas

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Abstract. Levinas distances himself from Kierkegaardian analyses by suggesting that "It is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the other." This seems an obvious misreading of Kierkegaard. "Resistance," for Kierkegaard, never legitimately arises from the "I," but from a "God-relationship" that breaks through the "sphere of immanence" and disturbs the system. But, for Levinas it is problematic to suggest a "God-relationship" distinct from interhuman relationships. "Transcendent" *interhuman* relations, Levinas contends, "give theological concepts [their] *sole* signification." Yet, similarities in their accounts of ethical subjectivity and conscience may tempt one to suggest, as a recent commentator does, that "appropriation of the Kierkegaardian framework by Levinas is problematic insofar as it is misapplied to interhuman relationships… ." I resist this understanding of the problem. Levinas is not only concerned with denying the "interlocutor" (i.e., God) in Kierkegaard's description of the "transcendent" awareness that grounds conscience. Levinas also questions the nature of *interlocution* implied by Kierkegaard. Levinas' criticisms of Kierkegaard set an important agenda for the study of Kierkegaard by demanding that one address the difficulties that the "problematics of hearing" raise for Kierkegaard's account of conscientious subjectivity. His challenge could profoundly affect and, in my opinion, enrich the Kierkegaardian account.

1.

There are aspects of Kierkegaard's analyses of "religious" subjectivity and Levinas' analyses of ethical subjectivity that reveal remarkable consonance between the two. Specific expressions of such consonance[1] appear rooted in a similar attitude toward what Kierkegaard refers to as "modern speculative thought" and its unchecked striving after an "abstract identity between thinking and being."[2] Levinas likewise describes a concern over "the traditional teaching of idealism"[3] which when "completely carried out reduces all ethics to politics" (TI, p. 216) and would subordinate human experience to "the immanent essence of consciousness, the coinciding of being with its manifestation" (OTB, p. 63). Accordingly, Kierkegaard's and Levinas' polemics against, for example, the tendency to reduce human consciousness to the processing of apophantic truths,[4] should be located within a broader concern over a prevailing presumption about what is "real" of human experience and the world

within which that experience is situated. They are both concerned that the "idealistic" picture of human experience places human being in a world increasingly devoid of the possibilities that Kierkegaard and Levinas will try to describe as a legitimate sense of "transcendence."[5] Their consonant desires to undermine the hegemony of the idealist picture of subjectivity leads Kierkegaard and Levinas to present alternative accounts of subjectivity. Their respective presentations often provoke expectations that Levinas' appreciation for Kierkegaard's thought should run deeply. Thus, we are surprised when Levinas' discussions of Kierkegaard generally revolve around what Levinas seems to believe are deep disagreements between them.[6]

For example, early in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas tries to distance himself from Kierkegaardian analyses by suggesting that "It is not I who resist the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the other" (TI, p. 40). On the face of it, this appears to be an obvious misreading of Kierkegaard. Resistance to "the system," for Kierkegaard, never legitimately arises from the "I" (i.e., from the self-enclosed "self"). Such "resistance" always arises from a "God-relationship"[7] that breaks through the "sphere of immanence"[8] and disturbs the system, thereby interrupting any absorption into "totality."[9] Contra Levinas' apparent reading, for Kierkegaard it is an Otherness, not "I," that determines the possibility of transcendence within human experience. But, to defer to a "God-relationship" as the source of our awareness of transcendence – or, as a source of "revelation"[10] – is to make a move that Levinas will be uncomfortable with. In *Totality and Infinity* he tells us that "Revelation is discourse [and] in order to welcome revelation a being apt for [the] role of interlocutor, a separated being, is required" (TI, p. 77). Levinas goes on to imply, however, that 'God' is not the kind of being that is apt for the role of interlocutor: "The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us… [a]nd it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me" (ibid., p. 73). Thus for Levinas it becomes problematic to talk about the "God-relationship" as distinct from the interhuman relationship. "It is our relations with men," Levinas contends, "that give to theological concepts the sole signification they admit of" (ibid). In Kierkegaard's works, by contrast, God's revelations are distinct from "our relations with men" in a way that the God-relation is not distinct in Levinas' account.[11] Specifically, Kierkegaard is comfortable admitting the possibility of an immediate relationship to God. Consequently, "God" distinct from the human other may serve as a legitimate interlocutor for Kierkegaard in a way Levinas appears to preclude.

At this point, however, we seem to be in a position to write-off the main differences between Kierkegaard and Levinas as being rooted mostly in theological differences. Levinas simply does not believe in the same kind of "God"

that Kierkegaard does. But, if this is the extent of Levinas' objection to Kierkegaard, or even the root of it, we may just as well be tempted to suggest, as a recent commentator does, that "the appropriation of the Kierkegaardian framework by Levinas is problematic insofar as it is misapplied to inter-human relationships… ."[12] That is, might we extrapolate, from Levinas and Kierkegaard, the same basic "framework" for relating subjectivity to the possibility of "transcendence" and then assume that the only substantial difference between them is over who the legitimate other is that gives the subject "the necessary condition for understanding"[13] the truth that transcends apophansis? I want to resist this understanding of the problem. It seems to me that Levinas' concern is not simply with the fact *that* Kierkegaard's "God" enters into an immediate relationship with the individual, but also with *how* this immediacy manifests itself. Levinas' objection is not only oriented toward denying the *interlocutor* in Kierkegaard's description of "revelation" (i.e., God); his objection also calls into question the nature of *interlocution* implied by Kierkegaard's description.

2.

The difference between Kierkegaard and Levinas that I want to eventually hone in on is intimately related to the fundamental agreements between them with respect to "Western philosophy." I want to consider this agreement more closely in order to suggest interesting ways that their disagreements arise out of it. We have noted how the tradition of Western philosophy is represented by them in terms of an "idealist" subjectivity (Levinas) and the "modern speculative thought" (Kierkegaard) for which "knowledge is *objectively* related to something existent *as its object*…" (CUP, p. 197; italics added). What unites their concern is a shared perception of what they believe to be the motivation behind this picture of subjectivity. The subject-object relation is obsessed with the freedom of cognitive subjectivity. Such freedom is bound only by the ideas that would constitute objective realities out of what would otherwise remain mere phenomena. Accordingly, Levinas will insist that "Philosophy itself is identified with the substitution of ideas for persons, …a whole philosophical tradition that sought the foundations of the self in the self, *outside of heteronomous opinions*" (TI, p. 88; italics added). Levinas wants to counter this concept of freedom with the suggestion that "The presence of the Other, a *privileged heteronomy*, does not clash with freedom but invests it" (ibid.). Ethical responsibility arises for Levinas through this sense of privileged heteronomy and, accordingly, his claim that such heteronomy "invests" freedom can be

understood as a formulation of his idea that "idealist" subjectivity is, in fact, grounded in a more fundamental ethical subjectivity.

Kierkegaard is also concerned with protecting a sense of legitimate heteronomy from theories of subjectivity that would remain averse to all heteronomy. In *Works of Love* he explains:

> attempts are made nowadays in so many ways to free men from all bonds, beneficial ones as well, so men seek to free the emotional relationship between man and man from the bond which binds him to God… . Serfdom's abominable era is past; so there is the intention to go further… to abolish man's serfdom in respect to God, to whom every man not by birth, but by creation from nothing, belongs as a bondservant… .[14]

Kierkegaard intends to direct our attention to what Edmund Husserl refers to as a fundamental "paradox of human subjectivity": the fact that human beings are both subjects for the world and, at the same time, objects in the world.[15] An unrestrained desire to turn the world into objects for subjective revelry finds itself confronted by the realization that such presumption is answerable to, at least, the inter-subjective community within which our individual consciousness locates itself. We are naturally bound by the possibility of having our subjective representations called into question. This possibility provokes a sense that the world is, in some important way, prior to those subjective presentations. Husserl labels this possibility the "enigma of creation and that of God" (CES, p. 180). Thus, Kierkegaard similarly locates an essential sense of heteronomy in the concept of God as creator and the idea of self as beginning with "creation from nothing." Husserl assumes that this "enigma" is simply a puzzle properly solved by the "idealist" account of human consciousness.[16] Kierkegaard, by contrast, sees in the paradox an invitation to understand the idealist picture as limited by a fundamental human experience that transcends such accounts of consciousness.

Like Kierkegaard, Levinas also links our sense of legitimate heteronomy to the concept of our being created: "In the conjuncture of creation the I is for itself, without being *causa sui*. The will of the I affirms itself as infinite (that is, free), and as limited, as subordinated" (TI, p. 294). Yet even here we run up against the theological question dividing Kierkegaard and Levinas. It is clear that Kierkegaard locates our most legitimate source of heteronomy in the relationship to God. As already indicated, however, Levinas' analyses of ethical responsibility will want to locate such heteronomy in an interhuman relationship. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that both accounts of human subjectivity want to free the subject from "idealist" subjectivity in order to access a legitimate concept of heteronomy. Moreover, they are both also

motivated to clear space for heteronomy in order to locate the truest sense of human responsibility.

If, however, Levinas and Kierkegaard want to incorporate into an account of subjectivity the concept of "legitimate" heteronomy, it becomes incumbent upon them to explain the criteria of legitimacy that would make such heteronomy possible. Both authors invoke the experience of conscience as a concrete correlate to the idea of legitimate heteronomy. "Conscience welcomes the Other," Levinas tells us, "It is the revelation of a resistance to my powers that does not counter them as a greater force, but calls in question the naïve right of my powers…" (TI, p. 84). Thus, the bond with transcendent Otherness represents, for Levinas, a matter of conscience. Furthermore, Levinas will insist that "Idealism's" allergic reactions to heteronomy indicate a subjectivity of desire, or "egoism."[17] Accordingly, the subjectivity that Levinas is arguing for, against the idealist interpretation, is grounded in conscience as distinct from an egoistic desire that would resist having "the naïve right of my powers" called into question.

In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard describes a bond with the human other that is similarly transcendent with regard to egoistic desire. "Neighbor-love" is a commanded love that is distinct from erotic love simply by virtue of its being commanded. Thus, neighbor-love is a love for which desirability of the other is absolutely inessential. The commanding of love, Kierkegaard will suggest, "changed the whole of love… by making love a matter of conscience…" (WOL, p. 147). He then goes on to say that "*Love is a matter of conscience and must therefore be from a pure heart and sincere faith*." To qualify conscience as coming from "a pure heart" is to access another significant consonance between Kierkegaard and Levinas on the nature of the experience of conscience: conscience is a terribly uncomfortable experience.

> A pure heart is not in this sense a free heart, or this is not what our discussion is about; for a pure heart is first and foremost a *bound heart*. Therefore it is not so pleasant to speak about this as it is to speak about freedom's blissful self-esteem and self-esteem's blissful delight in the boldness of devotion. (WOL, p. 148.)

Here we find not only another expression of heteronomy, but also an important qualification that indicates its legitimacy. The "not so pleasant" sense of the bound heart refers to the "offense" that is essential to Kierkegaard's ideal God-relationship, Christianity. "Take away from Christianity the possibility of offense or take away from the forgiveness of sin the battle of an anguished conscience, [then] lock all the churches… or turn them into places of amusement which stand open all day long!" (WOL, p. 193) Thus, conscience is rep-

resented by an "offended" consciousness, and we become familiar with the idea through many of Kierkegaard's other works.

We see the same sense of "anguished" conscience in Levinas' work with the idea of a "persecuted" consciousness. The Other who becomes a proper concern for the ethical subject is one who, on Levinas' account, has called me into this responsibility by resisting my tendencies to want to "thematize" her and subsume her under some category of thought. She demands my complete attention to her particularity. Thus she "accuses" the consciousness whose nature is to thematize its objects. To acknowledge this accusation is, in Levinas' terminology, to become "obsessed by" (OTB, p. 84) the Other (as opposed to objectivizing her). "In obsession the accusation effected by categories turns into an absolute accusative in which the ego proper to free consciousness is caught up (OTB, p. 110)." Levinas goes on to explain that "This accusation can be reduced to the passivity of the self only as a persecution…" (OTB, p. 112). The experience of conscience demands a new account of subjectivity precisely because it "offends" and "persecutes" the striving of the "free consciousness" for whom the categories of thought provide a haven and ideal in contrast to an "accusation," and for whom the "unbound heart" provides "self-esteem's blissful delight." That is to say, conscience offends and persecutes the subjectivity that Levinas and Kierkegaard have both described as the ideal of idealism.

Thus, in describing the kind of subjectivity that could, in opposition to the idealist picture, account for the essential aspects of ethical sensibility Kierkegaard and Levinas end up offering a kind of phenomenology of conscience that overlaps in important ways. Levinas' description of ethical subjectivity as born from the *persecuted* consciousness that provokes an *obsession* for the Other (rather than a power over, or an egoistic desire for, the Other) should be understood as resonating with Kierkegaard's ideas of an *offended* consciousness that gives rise to a religious subjectivity and that is provoked to *passion* for an Otherness (again, as opposed to freedom over, or an egoistic desire for, the Other). And yet, there is another aspect of their respective accounts of conscience that reveal an equally important dissonance.

3.

Kierkegaard's description of conscience is of an experience that is heavily mediated by the "God-relationship." For example, in *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard tells us:

> Usually when they speak of one's loving his wife and friend conscientiously, …[one] also sees that it is the wife and friend who shall determine whether the manifested love is conscientious. Herein is the lie, for *it is God who by himself* and by means of the middle term neighbor *scrutinizes whether love to wife and friend is conscientious*. Only then is your love a matter of conscience. (WOL, p. 143; italics added.)

This kind of account, where the authenticity of an experience arises from allowing God to "scrutinize" it, is typical of Kierkegaard. But again, one might expect Levinas to be disturbed by this God-mediation constantly holding sway in Kierkegaard's thought.

Out of fairness to Kierkegaard we should recall the precise context within which the above claim was made. We read that "Usually when they speak of one's loving his wife and friend conscientiously, they mean *loving them preferentially* in the sense of separateness or, what amounts to the same thing, in the sense of joining together in such a way that they have nothing to do with other men" (ibid.). Indeed, Levinas offers a similar resistance to this preferential sense of love.

> The metaphysical event of transcendence – the welcome of the Other, hospitality – …is not accomplished as love… . The person [loved] enjoys a privilege – the loving intention goes unto the Other, unto the friend, the child, the brother, the beloved, the parents. But a thing, an abstraction, a book can likewise be objects of love… . [As an] enjoyment of the transcendental almost contradictory in terms, love is stated with truth neither in erotic talk where it is interpreted as sensation *nor in spiritual language which elevates it to being a desire of the transcendent*. (TI, pp. 254–255; italics added.)

As with Kierkegaard, Levinas insists that the "transcendent" bond with an Other must not collapse under erotic categories like preference. But, Levinas is also careful to insist that the bond not become rarefied into a desire for transcendence *per se*. The sense of transcendence that I detect through the Other must not distract me from her concrete Otherness. To subordinate "the face" of the neighbor to the "trace" of transcendence that marks her as legitimately commanding my responsibility is just another way to "thematize" the Other and undermine the resistance to thematization that provokes my conscience in the first place. Consequently, to lose oneself in some quality of the command – to become obsessed by the transcendent quality of Otherness, for example, rather than to be obsessed by the Other herself – diminishes the true signification of conscience.[18] The experience of transcendence may thereby become an escape from honest responsibility rather than an occasion for it. Such a response to the Other would transform erotic love into a "spiritual" love which "elevates it to being a desire of the transcendent."

Levinas suspects that Kierkegaard's insistence upon an essentially mediating "God-relation" is really just a form of this "spiritualizing" tendency. In fact, this suspicion is at the heart of their "theological" disagreement. The proper contrast to erotic desire is what Levinas refers to as "proximity". But he warns us:

> *A face does not function in proximity as a sign of a hidden God who would impose the neighbor on me*. It is a trace of itself… . The mode in which a face indicates its own absence in my responsibility requires a description that can be formulated only in ethical language. (OTB, p. 94; italics added.)

It is the face itself, the Other herself, that on Levinas' account provokes my conscientiousness. In apparent contrast to Levinas' suggestion here, however, Kierkegaard will advise us that conscientious love must come to the lover before the relationship with the "object of love." Kierkegaard tells us that "Love is a passion of the emotions, but in this emotion man, even *before he relates himself to the object of love*, should relate himself to God and thereby learn the demand that love is the fulfilling of the law" (WOL, p. 117; italics added). But, in this way conscientiousness comes before the relationship with the other *without coming from* the beloved. It comes only from God. And here is the key point of divergence in their respective accounts of conscience. Kierkegaard insists that, to avoid preferential love, "the wife and friend" are absolutely precluded from determining "whether the manifested love is conscientious"[19] (and, therefore, this determination must be attributed to something else – "God"). Levinas, by contrast, will insist that conscience is absolutely determined by "the wife and friend" insofar as they, by their own resistance to my preferential thematization of them, determine my responsibility.

On the other hand, to again defend Kierkegaard, even if we concede that the neighbor need not essentially refer to a demand made by another on her behalf, is it not still the case that, due to an improper sense of self, the Other may fail to speak on her own behalf and, thereby, encourages eroticism and thematization rather than resisting it? In the face of such a possibility, Kierkegaard's tendency to qualify the immediate interhuman relationship may serve an important function. In fact, the God-relationship often functions in Kierkegaard's works to condition the proper *self*-love of the parties engaged in an interhuman relationship so that, accordingly, the prior God-relationship guarantees the authenticity of the interhuman relationship.[20] Yet, even this concern with self-love (i.e., concern over a "proper" sense of self) might raise concerns for Levinas – if for no other reason than his aversion to the influence of some desire for "salvation" upon the movement of conscience. "The

relation with infinity," he insists, "does not oppose to the experience of totality the protestation of a person in the name of his personal egoisms or even of his salvation" (TI, p. 25). That this aversion is operative in Levinas' rejections of Kierkegaard is made explicit when he says that "The I is conserved then in goodness, without its resistance to system manifesting itself as the egoistic cry of the subjectivity, still concerned for happiness or salvation, as in Kierkegaard" (TI, p. 305).

Nonetheless, Levinas does not deny the inevitability of a concern for "salvation." He simply rejects the possibility of giving it any primacy since it is, in his account, derivative from the conscientious relationship with another human being. "My lot is important," Levinas concedes. "But it is still out of my responsibility that my salvation has meaning, despite the danger in which it puts this responsibility, which it may encompass and swallow up..." (OTB, p. 161). Thus "my own lot," my salvation, inevitably becomes a legitimate concern; but, this is the case only when conscientious subjectivity finds the face-to-face engagement with another human being confronted by a third person. In the presence of another for whom both I and my Other may be responsible, the primary experience of conscience becomes transformed.

> In proximity the other obsesses me according to the absolute asymmetry of signification, of the one-for-the-other: I substitute myself for him, whereas no one can replace me [in my responsibility for that Other.] The relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity... . There is a weighing, thought, objectification, and thus a decree in which my anarchic relationship with [the Other] is betrayed, but in which [there] is also a new relationship with [the Other]: it is only thanks to God that, as a subject incomparable with the other, I am approached as an other by the others, that is, "for myself". (OTB, p. 158.)

Thus, a true sense of "for myself," a proper sense of self-relation, does arise in Levinas' account. However, the *primary* experience of conscience arises only between the individual Other and me by virtue of the *asymmetrical* demand that the Other places upon me. In the beginning, I am not yet "one like the other" nor is she "one like myself." Only when a third person enters the scene of my conscientious "obsession" for a particular Other, questioning that obsession by presenting himself as *also* worthy of my respect as Other – only then is the asymmetry of the primary experience challenged such that we begin down a path of generalizing, for the sake of justification, our conscientious experience of Otherness. But, in this way the idea of "one like the Other," which also includes me, becomes derivative from the asymmetrical relationship.

Kierkegaard's ethics would *begin with* the commands "You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*," and "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and all thy mind" (WOL, pp. 35–36). To be clear, Kierkegaard's schema does not compromise Levinas' concept of asymmetrical relation by establishing between human individuals a merely symmetrical relationship. Kierkegaard's command to love the Other "as yourself" does not suggest that in doing so you love the neighbor "as the neighbor loves" you. Rather, in his beginning with another "as yourself," Kierkegaard seems to suggest that instead of being merely concomitant with the conscientious relationship between human individuals, a proper sense of self is somehow prior to that relationship. In fact, for Kierkegaard, the proper self-relation is concomitant with the proper God-relation so that the conscientious interhuman relation becomes derivative from these more fundamental relations. Thus, Kierkegaard will tell us that

> if any deceiver has deceived himself throughout his whole life by all sorts of verbosity concerning this subject, the eternal will only hold him to the terse word of the law, *as yourself*. No one, to be sure, will be able to escape this command. If its *as yourself* comes as close to the life of self-love as is possible, then one's neighbor is again a qualification as fatally close to self-love as possible. Self-love itself perceives that it is an impossibility to shirk this. (WOL, p. 37.)

With this, however, Kierkegaard suggests another possibility that Levinas never seems to entertain: that a person could have "deceived himself throughout his whole life" in such a way that he had need for God to "hold him to the terse word of the law" by commanding neighbor-love. Kierkegaard presumes that I may become completely deaf to the command, as it issues from the other person, that my relationship with her be "a matter of conscience." In the face of this danger I may consequently require a power higher than both me and the Other to guarantee the possibility of conscientious subjectivity.

This difference in presuppositions, I would suggest, is a non-theological divergence underlying the theological difference between Levinas and Kierkegaard. The possibility that merely interhuman relationship may become thoroughly devoid of the demand for conscientious subjectivity makes God essential for Kierkegaard's account of conscientiousness. By contrast, the absence of this possibility in Levinas' account makes the God-relation an unnecessary mediation of conscience (though something akin to a "God-relation" does appear to be an essential by-product of conscientious human subjectivity). [21] The net result of this divergence is that Kierkegaard's ethics demonstrates fundamental suspicion about an inherently conscientious human

nature. This suspicion leads to his effectively collapsing the experience of conscience into the God-relation.[22] By contrast, Levinas rests his confidence in conscientious subjectivity as the foundation of all other consciousness such that he becomes suspicious of any mediating relationships (including a mediating God-relationship). In effect, Levinas seems to collapse the essence of the God-relation into conscientious subjectivity (insofar as the God-relation is only derivative from a primary asymmetrical relation to another human being).

4.

Though Kierkegaard's suspicion about an inherently conscientious human nature need not represent a theological concern, it is true that it lends itself to theological interpretation and, for Kierkegaard, gives life to Christian concepts like "Creation," "sin," and "grace".[23] That Kierkegaard adopts this mode of interpretation may raise concerns for those of us who do not adhere to his Christian tradition. But, in considering whether we might prefer Levinas' account of conscientious subjectivity to Kierkegaard's, we might focus on the non-theological essence of the difference between them. Specifically, if we join Kierkegaard in questioning Levinas' assertion that conscience "does not function in proximity as a sign of a hidden God who would impose the neighbor on me," we need not do so out of a wish to preserve the idea of some "hidden God." The more basic question is whether Kierkegaard might be correct to wonder whether merely interhuman relationship may become corrupted to the extent that it requires a power higher than both me and the Other to guarantee the possibility of conscientious subjectivity. Merold Westphal appropriately recognizes that this question is basic to Kierkegaard's thought when he suggests that

> Kierkegaard's authorship is a sustained attempt… to open the essentially relational self… to the thoroughgoing otherness of God and neighbor. If he focuses especially on the God relationship, it is because God is better able than my neighbor to resist the variety of strategies by which I or We might try to reduce the other to the same, thereby retaining my Cartesian or our Hegelian self-sufficiency. (OOT, pp. 145–146.)

Thus, it seems to me that a preference for Kierkegaard's account of conscientious subjectivity need not involve an adhesion to his Western and Christian conception of God. Rather, we need only share Kierkegaard's suspicion about whether the interhuman relationship is, by itself, powerful enough to vouch-

safe to human experience a conscientious subjectivity. Further, this suspicion raises a deeper concern for what the fate of conscience may be if we are not able to recognize a "higher power" similar to Kierkegaard's "God." Might Kierkegaard be correct to suggest that the human Other may sometimes need this "higher power" to speak on her behalf and elicit my conscientious subjectivity? Though I hesitate to dismiss Kierkegaard's question I am nonetheless also hesitant, at this point, to recommend a preference for Kierkegaard's account.

Kierkegaard's willingness to admit God's mediation into the interhuman occasioning of conscience tends to go well beyond a willingness to allow God to speak on behalf of the human Other who is either unwilling or unable to demand, for herself, my conscientious love. Instead, God's mediation often seems to *preclude* the human Other from speaking *for herself*. Accordingly, the God-relation comes to have a special authority that creates problematic possibilities within interhuman relationships. These problematic possibilities will become the focus of Levinas' particular concern over Kierkegaard's account of the God-relation.[24]

Perhaps the most striking example, where Kierkegaard's God-relation silences the influence of interhuman relations, is the argument in *Fear and Trembling* claiming that "Abraham *cannot* speak" (FT, pp. 113–116). Abraham's calling "by God" binds Abraham in such a way that it cannot be appropriately expressed to everyone most affected by what Abraham's conscientious relation to God demands: the sacrifice of his son. Accordingly, "Abraham did not speak" (FT, p. 115). He did not allow his wife and son to participate in the drama playing out, for Abraham alone, as a matter of conscience.[25] Levinas will insist that, through this analysis from *Fear and Trembling*, conscientious subjectivity has become too permissive in what it allows one to do to other people based on what *the subject and "God" alone determine* to be appropriate. In this way the Kierkegaardian analysis tends to permit a kind of collusion between God and man that Kierkegaard has made a point to deny the relationship between people. We recall that Kierkegaard insists upon God's "scrutiny" of the interhuman relationship so as to inhibit love becoming preferential "in the sense of separateness or, what amounts to the same thing, in the sense of joining together in such a way that they have nothing to do with other men." *Fear and Trembling* seems to preclude a similar scrutiny of the God-relationship. According to Kierkegaard a man *must* consult God regarding the legitimacy of his "loving his wife and friend conscientiously," but regarding the truth of his God-relation "Abraham *cannot* speak."

Kierkegaard's claim in *Works of Love* that it is not "the wife and friend who shall determine whether the manifested love is conscientious" admits of seemingly nefarious possibilities in *Fear and Trembling*. By excluding other per-

sons from questioning the legitimacy of what he perceived to be conscientious obedience to God, by "concealing his undertaking from Sarah, Eliezer, and from Isaac,"[26] Abraham simply assumes that the ordeal is properly intended to be his alone. Most troubling from Levinas' perspective is that Kierkegaard's reduction of conscientious subjectivity into the "God-relation" prevents Kierkegaard's pseudonyms from entertaining other, perhaps less nefarious, interpretations of Abraham's "ordeal." Levinas will again complain:

> [Kierkegaard] describes the encounter with God at the point where subjectivity rises to the level of the religious, that is to say, above ethics. But one could think the opposite: Abraham's attentiveness to the voice that led him back to the ethical order, in forbidding him to perform a human sacrifice, is the highest point of the drama. That he obeyed the first voice is astonishing: that he had *sufficient distance with respect to obedience* to hear the second voice – that is the essential. (PN, p. 77; italics added.)

Thus, Levinas favors an interpretation of the Abraham story that refuses to make it a merely personal ordeal for Abraham. Kierkegaard's interpretation, he insists, is *not* the only legitimate interpretation, nor does Levinas believe it is the most humane.

Kierkegaard's failure to locate the "highest point" of Abraham's ordeal at Abraham's turning "back to the ethical order" – the point where Abraham finds his willingness to sacrifice an Other trumped by a responsibility for the suffering of that Other – represents, on Levinas' account, an abortion of the true intention of conscientious subjectivity. Levinas explains that in genuine fulfillment of conscientiousness the Other:

> …imposes himself because he is other, because this alterity is incumbent on me with the charge of indigence and weakness… . The intention *toward another*, when it reaches its peak, turns out to belie intentionality. *Toward another* culminates in a *for another*, a suffering for his suffering… (OTB, p. 18).

Certainly, Levinas cannot accuse Kierkegaard's Abraham of indulging in the subjectivity of self-interest that marks "idealism." Kierkegaard's pseudonym for *Fear and Trembling* emphasizes that Abraham's ordeal is essentially grounded in a profound self-denial.[27] And yet, because *Fear and Trembling* does not culminate in a conscience that represents "a suffering for [the] suffering" of the human Other (i.e., of Isaac), Levinas cannot recognize Kierkegaard's Abraham as a legitimate example of conscientious subjectivity.

By falling short in this way, the Abraham of *Fear and Trembling* absolves himself from what Levinas would call the "most lucid humanity of our time":

> The least intoxicated and most lucid humanity of our time, at the moments most free from the concern "that existence takes for its very existence" has in its clarity no other shadow, in its rest no other disquietude or insomnia than what comes from the destitution of the others. Its insomnia is but the absolute impossibility to slip away and distract oneself. (OTB, p. 93.)

In *Fear and Trembling*, Abraham's self-denial may be a "disquietude" of a sort, and his concern is thus distinct from the "*Esse* as *interesse*"[28] that Levinas – and Kierkegaard, for that matter – would transcend in their respective accounts of conscientious subjectivity. And yet, in *Fear and Trembling* Abraham's disquietude is decidedly not an "insomnia" issuing from "the destitution of the others." This is a root of Levinas' concern over allowing "personal egoisms or even… salvation" to ever usurp the primacy of "what comes from the destitution of the others." That Kierkegaard's account recognizes no repentance of Abraham's (initial) willingness to place unconditional obedience to God above the suffering of Isaac (and Sarah) is something that makes Abraham's action, as interpreted by Kierkegaard's pseudonym, "inhumane" on Levinas' understanding. The Kierkegaardian interpretation of Abraham's drama becomes, for Levinas, an example of how one's own "salvation" and private "God-relations" too easily permit one "to slip away and distract oneself" from the most essential experiences of conscientious subjectivity.

Of course, Kierkegaard would likely question the assumption that to deny God an independent voice, as Levinas tends to do, is to take a more "humane" path. However, Levinas' concerns reveal a deeper counterargument to Kierkegaard than this merely "ideological" difference over what constitutes a "most lucid humanity."[29] What strikes me as a radical difference in their accounts of conscientious subjectivity is made clear by Levinas' alternative account of the Abraham story: "sufficient distance with respect to obedience …*that* is the essential" (PN, p. 77; italics added). Kierkegaard seems to go out of his way to preclude the legitimacy of such "distance with respect to obedience" when it comes to the God-relation. Thus, in *Fear and Trembling* his pseudonym will claim an "absolute duty to God" that distinguishes the God-relationship from merely interhuman relationship. Similarly, in *Works of Love* the ground of conscientious subjectivity includes not only loving the neighbor "as yourself," but in contrast to this love of other persons we also find that "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and all thy mind." By making the God-relation primary to conscientious subjectivity, Kierkegaard not only gives God the "highest" place among the Others to whom my conscience must answer. Rather, he grounds conscientious subjectivity in a single relationship that is *uniquely without legitimate "distance with respect to obedience."*

This kind of ground is not only absent in Levinas' account of conscientious subjectivity, but the constant possibility, in *all* relationships, of such distance with respect to obedience is essential to the nature of conscience as Levinas understands it. Such distance refers to the "ambiguity" and "anachronicity" of conscience.

> It is through its ambivalence which always remains an enigma that infinity or the transcendent does not let itself be assembled… . [I]t leaves a trace of its impossible incarnation and its inordinateness in my proximity with the neighbor, where I state, in the autonomy of the voice of conscience, a responsibility, which could not have begun in me… . The fleeting trace effacing itself and reappearing is like a question mark put before the scintillation of the ambiguity: an infinite responsibility of the one for the other, or the signification of the Infinite in responsibility. (OTB, pp. 161–162.)

By claiming that "God's governance is not, in duty bound, answerable to your prudence," and that "All you have to do is obey in love," Kierkegaard would remove Levinas' "question mark put before the scintillation of the ambiguity" of conscience. For Levinas, however, this "question mark" constitutes my openness to "infinite responsibility" for the human Other. But, responsibility for the human Other does not reside only in obedience to her; rather, it resides in an openness to her questioning me and challenging my conscience. "For the ethical relationship which subtends discourse is not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates from the other" (TI, p. 195).

Nonetheless, though it emanates from the other, the question does not end with the other. Rather, the "scintillating ambiguity" before which the "question mark [is] put" lays responsibility upon the individual who is called into question – thus demanding a response, though not necessarily an uncritical submission to the Other. Accordingly, Levinas explains:

> The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity – its hunger – without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom… . The order of responsibility… is also the order where freedom is ineluctably invoked… . Thus I cannot evade by silence the discourse which the epiphany that occurs as a face opens[:] "To leave men without food is a fault that no circumstance attenuates; the distinction between voluntary and involuntary does not apply here," says Rabbi Yochanan. Before the hunger of men responsibility is measured only "objectively"; it is irrecusable. (TI, pp. 200–201.)

It is in this way that Levinas describes a new form of subjectivity changed by the demand for ethical responsibility that is invoked by conscientiousness. But, he stresses, "This mutation… is not produced as an insurmountable resistance… [but, rather] invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge" (TI, pp. 197–198). It is only by invoking my responsibility in this questioning (*and not bullying*) manner that I am called into the "transcendent" realm beyond "*esse* as *interesse*."

By putting the God-relation beyond question, Kierkegaard absolves the conscience founded in that relation from being fundamentally bound within Levinas' concept of the ethical relation that "puts the I in question." This is why Levinas will insist that a genuine sense of God-relation should always imply "a God subject to repudiation" and should always recognize its "permanent danger of turning into a protector of all egoisms" (OTB, p. 160). Because Kierkegaard's God appears completely beyond repudiation, Levinas suspects that Kierkegaard's God-relation is just such a "protector of all egoisms." Thus, he will accuse Kierkegaard of representing a "resistance to system manifesting itself as the egoistic cry of subjectivity, still concerned for happiness or personal salvation" (TI, p. 305).

To answer Levinas, perhaps Kierkegaard need not deny the special authority he wants to attribute to God. But, it is at the very least incumbent upon Kierkegaard to explain precisely how it is that the ambiguity of conscience is removed with respect to God. That is, he must explain how it is that one is able to hear the voice of God as one who is absolutely *beyond question*. And, if this voice is never *absolutely* beyond question, Kierkegaard must explain why there should be attributed to it a validity that *overwhelms* the voice of other human beings, i.e., that "teleologically suspends the ethical."

5.

This question, of how Kierkegaard may account for the possibility that conscientious subjectivity comes to ascertain that it hears the voice of "God" as one who is absolutely beyond human questioning, represents the essential division between Kierkegaard's and Levinas' accounts of "transcendence." We are confronted here with the question that Martin Buber refers to as a "problematics of hearing" that, he believes, is ignored in Kierkegaard's thought. In his essay "On the Suspension of the Ethical," Buber will worry that:

> Kierkegaard here takes for granted something that cannot be taken for granted even in the world of Abraham, much less in ours. He does not take into consideration the fact that the problematics of the decision of faith is

> preceded by the problematics of hearing itself. Who is it whose voice one hears? For Kierkegaard it is self-evident… that he who demands the sacrifice is none other than God… . It can happen, however, that… Moloch imitates the voice of God.[30]

Perhaps we should not accept as so clear Buber's suggestion that "For Kierkegaard it is self-evident… that he who demands the sacrifice is none other than God… ." Especially when we look at other Kierkegaardian texts, it appears less "self-evident" that the person of faith is certain "whose voice one hears;" rather, the certainty resides in one hearing *a voice* that somehow provokes a "self-evident" *need to obey*. Kierkegaard's pseudonyms often seem to suggest that this unique type of hearing itself constitutes a special validity (one that perhaps overwhelms the voice of other human beings). Thus, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* we are offered the following suggestion:

> If someone who lives in the midst of Christianity enters, with knowledge of the true idea of God, the house of the true God, and prays, but prays in untruth, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of infinity, although his eyes are resting upon the image of an idol – where, then, is there more truth? The one prays in truth to God although his eyes are resting upon the image of an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore in truth worshipping an idol. (CUP, p. 201.)

Such claims within the Kierkegaardian *corpus* seem to suggest that the validity of one's "worship" can somehow be divorced from the concrete identity of that toward which worship is directed. This is a key concern for complaints like those from Buber and Levinas. For them, one cannot legitimately dismiss the question about the identity of the one "worshipped" by reducing the "truth" of worship to a question of *how* one worships.[31] As the passage from Buber intimates, the legitimacy of obedience is affected by whether the voice to which one responds is truly the voice of "God" or is instead the voice of one who, like "Moloch," merely "imitates the voice of God."

Buber does not tend to dismiss Kierkegaard's claim out-of-hand. Consequently, when evaluating Kierkegaard's suggestions of an absolute need to obey the voice of "God," Buber will draw upon essential qualifications commonly referred to in Kierkegaard's various writings under Kierkegaard's category of "the Single One." Thus, Buber will interpret Kierkegaard's point as follows: "If one becomes the Single One ``then the obedience is all right`` even in the time… where otherwise the obedience is not all right."[32] Under the qualification of 'the Single One,' Buber's concern (which, again, I suggest dovetails with key aspects of Levinas' concern over the Kierkegaardian account of "religious subjectivity") becomes clearer. For, Buber continues,

> … on this point Kierkegaard seems to correct himself… where he asks the question, "And how does one becomes a Single One?" [He] begins with the formulation, obviously more valid in the problem under discussion, that one should be, "regarding the highest concerns related solely to God." [Yet,] If in this sentence the word "highest" is understood as *limiting in its content*, then the phrase is self-evident: the highest concerns can be put only to the highest. But it cannot be meant [by Kierkegaard] in this way; this is clear from the other sentence, "*Everyone* should [be chary about having to do with 'the others', and should essentially speak only with God and with himself]… ." Kierkegaard's meaning is evident that the Single One has to do *essentially* (is not "chary") only with God. (BMM, p. 51; italics added.)

Like Levinas, Buber feels that the Kierkegaardian tendency to place the God-relation and self-relation unconditionally *before* the relationship with "the others" tends also to undermine discernible limitations upon one's willingness to check oneself as to the legitimacy of absolute obedience to the voice that one *believes* to be "God's."

Indeed, Buber and Levinas both insist that "the others" may be essential to one's ability to "check oneself" in this way. In terms clearly not as strong as Levinas', Buber recommends that "God Himself demands of [me] as of every man (not of Abraham, His chosen one, but of you and me) nothing more than justice and love, and that he "walk humbly" with Him, with God (Micah 6: 8) – in other words, not much more than the fundamental ethical" (EOG, p. 118). Buber appears much more open to the exceptional possibility that Abraham was called beyond "the fundamental ethical" in a way Levinas is not open to. There is no tendency by Buber to interpret Abraham's story the way that Levinas does, and assume that only "the voice that led [Abraham] back to the ethical order… is the essential." Nonetheless, Buber, like Levinas, refuses to place God beyond the "ambiguities" of everyday conscience without demanding an adequate account of the "problematics of hearing."

Kierkegaard seems all-too-content to bracket the question of how Abraham *knows* that it is God that demands the sacrifice of Isaac. For example, this epistemological question remains a curiosity in the interpretation of Abraham's ordeal as it is presented in *Fear and Trembling*. But for people like Buber and Levinas, this question cannot remain a mere curiosity. It is an essential question. Levinas answers it by incorporating into his account of conscientious subjectivity an essential ambiguity in the experience of conscience itself. This precludes the possibility of removing all "distance with respect to obedience." As his discussion of the "third person"[33] makes clear, Levinas does not allow for this kind of absolute obedience in *any* particular conscientious relationship. All relationships must be questionable in order to bear witness to one's movement beyond egoism. This questionability places all relationships, in-

cluding any that one may be tempted to claim with "God," within the bounds of "justice." And, for this reason, conscientious subjectivity remains always open to the "disquietude or insomnia [that] comes from the destitution of the others." There is no "disquietude" higher than that – not even the disquietude provoked by a "God-relation."

It is just here that Levinas' understanding of conscientious subjectivity, and the relationship with transcendent Otherness that it refers to, is made radically different from Kierkegaard's. Any significant rapprochement between the two would require an account from Kierkegaard that would explain how it is that the unique kind of obedience that Kierkegaard attributes to the God-relation may arise for a genuine sense of conscientious subjectivity. More precisely, beyond the possibility that this unique type of hearing itself constitutes a special validity that, perhaps, overwhelms the voice of other human beings, there must be an indication of the positive extent to which the voice of other persons may also serve as a means to determining the legitimacy of one's willingness to obey the "divine" voice (even if only by the possibility of questioning that obedience).

There are works where, it seems to me, Kierkegaard shows significantly more concern for these problematics and qualifies this aspect of his concept of God-relation. For example, in striking contrast to the suggestion in *Fear and Trembling* that Abraham "cannot speak," we find in Kierkegaard's later work *The Book on Adler* the suggestion that, in a similar case of presumed "revelation" from God,

> after all, this extraordinary thing *must be communicated*. Silence must not mean the abortion of truth… . So the extraordinary must be communicated, it must be introduced into the context of the established order; and, the elect, the special individual, must receive the shock… .[34]

We should recognize that the "established order" referred to in this passage is just what Kierkegaard's pseudonym in *Fear and Trembling* means by "the ethical." Accordingly, we find here the suggestion that one's presumption of having experienced "the extraordinary" demand that would place one beyond "the established order" – i.e., a demand that would "teleologically suspend the ethical" – should, in fact, face the "shock" of having that presumption subjected to the scrutiny of the ethical. Thus, "it must be introduced into the context of the established order."

This possibility strikes me as essential to the acceptability of Kierkegaard's account of conscientiousness. It is important to give serious consideration to Kierkegaard's question of whether the interhuman relationship is, by itself, powerful enough to vouchsafe to human experience a conscientious subjec-

tivity. But, it is perhaps more important to acknowledge Levinas' concern over a "teleological suspension" that institutes a demand like that imposed on Abraham which, on the Kierkegaardian interpretation, is ambivalent, at best, about the suffering of another human being. I am inclined to agree with Levinas that such ambivalence is more easily understood as contrary to genuine conscience rather than as representative of it. Accordingly, Levinas' qualification of the God-relation as maintaining "distance with respect to obedience" of such demands seems particularly important to an account of conscientious subjectivity mediated by something like Kierkegaard's God-relation.[35] In works like *The Book on Adler* Kierkegaard seems to pass much closer to Levinas' sense of legitimate "distance with respect to obedience" insofar as one believes oneself to be called by "God." Nonetheless, I do not see this concern communicated adequately in works like *Fear and Trembling, Philosophical Fragments, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Works of Love*, etc. – that is, the concern is not adequately addressed in the works that seem to be most referred to in refutation of Levinas' complaints about Kierkegaard.

Levinas' criticisms of Kierkegaard set an important agenda for the study of Kierkegaard by demanding that one address the wide range of problems that the "problematics of hearing" raise for Kierkegaard's account of conscientious subjectivity. His challenge should encourage us to consider more closely points in Kierkegaard's work that may serve as an important qualification of the "exclusive" sense of God-relation that pervades much of Kierkegaard's most studied writings. Such qualification could profoundly affect and, in my opinion, enrich the Kierkegaardian account of conscientious subjectivity.

Notes

1. For example, we find an excellent expression of the essence of Kierkegaard's idea of a "teleological suspension of the ethical" in Levinas' concept of "justice" when the latter suggests that justice "is the necessary interruption of the Infinite being fixed in structures, community and totality." [Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, tr. Alfonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquense University Press, 1998), p. 160 (hereafter, OTB).] When Levinas claims to be outlining "the ethical" he describes this "ethical" field as overflowing the bounds established by "structures, community and totality." Levinas has, in this way, discovered an "ethical" that is diametrically opposed to "the ethical" that Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* would have "teleologically suspended." Kierkegaard's pseudonym in *Fear and Trembling* qualifies his meaning of "the ethical" as referring to "social morality." [Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, tr. H.N. Hong & E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 55 (hereafter, FT).] Thus, Levinas wants to describe justice as accessing a sense of absolute duty in a way that preserves the possibility that

Kierkegaard's pseudonym suggests when he claims that for Abraham "the ethical is the temptation" (FT, p. 115). To say that the ethical may serve as a temptation – that structures of "social morality" may divert one from a higher sense of duty – is to admit that recognition of the "higher" duty may require "suspension" of the "lower", merely socially determined morality. The "necessary interruption" that Levinas ascribes to justice echoes Kierkegaard's idea of "suspension": a refusal of the highest sense of responsibility to be subsumed into the structures of political discourse. Their point is that a properly ethical relationship to social mores preserves the relative nature of those structures and precludes their claiming an absolute authority. All of this reflects the "teleological" nature of the interruption that would deny *ultimate* meaning to "social morality" and its politically-oriented discourse. For both, there is a higher sense of responsibility that both relativizes and grounds the legitimacy of the latter discourse.

2. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, tr. H.N. Hong & E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 197 (hereafter, CUP).
3. OTB, p. 103; see also, Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, tr. Alfonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquense University Press, 1969), pp. 216–219 (hereafter, TI).
4. Kierkegaard's concept of authority expresses Levinas' idea that apophantic language "is only mediating" and, consequently, fails to encompass the full scope of signification intended within human communication. For both, signification overflows the content of propositions such that "Antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates..." (OTB, p. 5) there is implied a "pre-original saying" to which subjectivity remains essential – i.e., the *person* who both signifies by communicating and is signified through her communication remains essential. The truth of propositional content, what Levinas calls "the said" (OTB, pp. 35–36), is neutral with regard to *who* communicates that content; but, insofar as ethical authority *cannot* remain similarly neutral there is "an intrigue of responsibility" (OTB, p. 6) woven behind apophantic language (and the thought it encapsulates). Thus, our sense of responsibility points us beyond the "said" to a "saying" that refuses to be reduced to apophantic thought. Kierkegaard's concept of authority captures precisely this refusal of *saying* to be reduced to the *said* when he explains that:

> Authority is a specific quality which, coming from elsewhere, becomes qualitatively apparent when the content of the message or of the action is posited as indifferent. Let us take an example[:] When a man with authority says to a man, "go!" and when a man who has not the authority says "go!" the expression ("go!") and its content are identical; ...but the authority makes the difference. [Kierkegaard, "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" in *The Present Age*, tr. A. Dru (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 96–97 (hereafter, PA).]

Thus, obedience (to a command like "Go!") is often determined by something *other than* the propositional content of the command. Kierkegaard's idea of authority implies just such an "other than" and, thereby, indicates a "specific quality" which affirms Levinas' claimed overflowing of the "said" by the "saying." Concomitantly, the subjectivity attuned to moral authority also overflows the picture of consciousness that would reduce subjectivity to the mere processing of the "said" or its correlate, "being." Kierkegaard's pseudonym for *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* intends the same point by his (often abused) thesis of "Truth as Subjectivity" (see especially CUP, pp. 194–200). Again, the point is that essential human experiences, like a sense of responsibility and moral authority, extend beyond apophantic thought such that the tendency to reduce the "say-

ing" to the "said" chokes off these experiences. It is just such experiences, however, that Kierkegaard and Levinas want to preserve and (as Levinas, especially, attempts to make clear) whereas idealization of "being" and its "said" fails to account for our ethical sensibilities, the recognition of "pre-original saying" (i.e., "the intrigue of *responsibility*") as the ground of apophantic language preserves the possibilities, and advantages, of propositional truth. Consequently, Levinas' project is centered in explaining how it is that the sense of ethical responsibility, arising between the self and the human Other, precedes and grounds subject-object intentionality.

5. See, for example, Kierkegaard's "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" where he claims that "A genius and an Apostle are qualitatively different, they are definitions which belong in their own spheres: *the sphere of immanence, and the sphere of transcendence*" (PA, pp. 90–91). Accordingly, one way of expressing Kierkegaard's concern with regard to our discussion above is to suggest that he sees the concept of subjectivity prevailing in Western Philosophy as precluding the possibilities of "Apostleship." Similarly, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas wants to describe "Transcendence as the Idea of Infinity" such that the prevailing concept of subjectivity "excludes the implantation of the knowing being in the known being, the entering into the Beyond by ecstasy" (TI, p. 48). We will give this idea of a "transcendence" of the "idealist" picture of subjectivity more consideration.
6. As one Kierkegaard scholar would suggest: "Indeed, isn't it an irony that it was Levinas of all people who reprimanded Kierkegaard…" [Mark Dooley, "The politics of Statehood vs. a Politics of Exodus: A critique of Levinas's Reading of Kierkegaard" in *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* 40 (August 2000), p. 16.]
7. This "God-relationship" finds a variety of expressions in Kierkegaard's works: it is the source of a duty that transcends, an thereby suspends, "the ethical" in *Fear and Trembling*; it is "the God" in *Philosophical Fragments* who would provide both the occasion *and* the "condition" for the possibility of ideas that transcend our powers of *maieutically* inspired reminiscence; it is the source of our sense of "absolute obedience" which grounds the possibility of recognizing "the neighbor" (as "neighbor") in *Works of Love*; and, it is the "power that established" the created self (i.e., God as Creator) and to which, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, the authentic self becomes the self "that relates itself to itself and, in relating itself to itself, relates itself to another" which is its Creator; or, the God by whom the Apostle, in "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," is "called and appointed"; the list could continue to include nearly every one of Kierkegaard's works.
8. See Kierkegaard's *"*Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle*"* (PA, pp. 90–91).
9. "Totality" in the Levinasian sense of the word: "The visage of being [which dominates Western philosophy] is fixed in the concept of totality…. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of this totality) is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to to bring forth its objective meaning…. They are what they will appear to be in the already plastic forms of the epic" (TI, pp. 21–22). And, Levinas continues, "The void that breaks the totality can be maintained against an inevitably totalizing and synoptic thought only if thought finds itself *faced* with an other refractory to categories. Rather than constituting a total with this other as with an object, *thought consists in speaking*. We propose to call 'religion' the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality."

10. See TI, p. 73: "this is why language institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the *revelation* of the other."
11. Accordingly, Kierkegaard will frequently describe the God-relation specifically in terms of its distinctness from the relation "between man and man." Thus, for example, whereas "the God" in *Philosophical Fragments* must "teach" us in a way that Socratic *maieutic* cannot account for, nonetheless "Between man and man the Socratic midwifery is the highest relation...." [Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, tr. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 38 (hereafter, PF).] Similarly, in "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," it is only "divine authority" that introduces the Apostle into the "sphere of transcendence," whereas "between man and man, *qua* man, all differences are immanent" (p. 91), and "no *established* or continuous authority [is] *conceivable*..." (PA, p. 99). And again, in *Works of Love*, "There is only one whom a man can, with the truth of the eternal, love above himself – that is God..." [Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, tr. E.N. Hong & E.H. Hong (Harper & Row, 1962), p. 36 (hereafter, WOL)]. It is because this possibility is exclusive to God that "A man should love God in unconditional *obedience* and love him in *adoration*," whereas "It would be ungodliness if a man dared love himself in this way, *or dared love another person in this way*..." (ibid; italics added).
12. Brian Treanor, "God and the Other Person: Levinas' Appropriation of Kierkegaard's Encounter with Otherness" in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association: Person, Soul and Immortality* 75, 2001, p. 320.
13. PF, p. 17. See also pp. 12–19. Compare Levinas' discussion of "teaching" (TI, pp. 98–100).
14. WOL, pp. 120–121. The implication of philosophy here may be made more obvious when we recall that, in *Fear and Trembling*, Hegelian philosophy is made exemplary of this "intention to go further" than "the bond which binds [one] to God" (see especially, FT, pp. 32–33). Kierkegaard's reference to "Serfdom's abominable era" is intended to be placed within the context of Hegel's analyses of the "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness" in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (see especially §IV: The truth of self-certainty, and §VI: Spirit, pts. A & B).
15. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, tr. D. Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 178–181 (hereafter, CES).
16. Thus, the "idealist" subject resolves *itself* so that it is "wrong, methodically, to jump immediately into transcendental *intersubjectivity* and to leap over the primal "I".... It is *only an apparent contradiction* to this that *the ego – through a particular constitutive accomplishment of its own – makes itself declinable*, for itself, transcendentally; that, starting from itself and in itself, it constitutes transcendental intersubjectivity..." (ibid., p. 185; italics added).
17. See OTB, p. 179: "Kantianism is the basis of philosophy, if philosophy is ontology;" but, as long as ontology remains "first philosophy," then "The "egoism" of ontology is maintained" (TI, p. 46). Incidentally, we must distinguish here between "desire" as self-absorption and the "Desire" Levinas often refers to as "Metaphysical." The latter represents an openness to and welcoming of the absolutely other – the non-self – and, so, it is diametrically opposed to the egoistic "desire."
18. "A face... does not signify an indeterminate phenomena; its ambiguity is not an indetermination of a noema, but an invitation to the fine risk of an approach qua approach, to the exposure of one to another..." (OTB, p. 94).

19. See WOL, p. 153 and refer to the discussion at the opening paragraph of this section.
20. This question of a proper sense of self is fundamental to Kierkegaard in a way that is foreign to Levinas' account. Levinas seems simply to presume a proper sense of *self*-love; or else, he assumes that an improper sense of self-love is insignificant to the possibility of conscientious love for the neighbor. By contrast, in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard establishes an essential connection between a proper self-love and a genuine love of neighbor (see especially WOL, p. 39). Furthermore, the God-relationship – *how* one relates to God, *in contrast to how one relates to other persons* – determines a proper self-love (WOL, especially pp. 36–37). Only this proper self-love, with respect to the God-relation, saves love from being a "despairing" love and, thereby, guarantees the possibility of proper neighbor-love (see WOL, p. 54). One should consider *Sickness Unto Death* for deeper reflection upon the connections between "despair," a proper sense of "self," and the "God-relation."
21. That is, the concept of God appears to be a natural occurrence once the "third person" appears alongside of the primal, asymmetrical, face-to-face relationship that gives birth to conscientious subjectivity. See TI, pp. 242–247. Consider especially, p. 244: "The idea of a judgment of God represents the limit idea that, on the one hand, takes into account the invisible and essential offense to a singularity that results from judgment and, on the other hand, is fundamentally discreet, and does not silence by its majesty the voice and the revolt of the apology." One should remember here that "judgment" in this concept presupposes the asymmetrical relationship and is thereby derivative from it (as, consequently, is this "idea of the judgment of God" that is extrapolated as a "limit concept"). These 'derivative' phenomena are what Levinas will talk about in *Otherwise than Being* in terms of "justice." In the proximity of the other, all the others than the other obsesses me, and already this obsession cries out for justice, demands measure and knowing, is consciousness.... In proximity the other obsesses me according to the absolute asymmetry of signification, of the one-for-the-other.... The relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity in which the face is looked at" (OTB, p. 158). See, also, OTB, pp. 157–161.
22. That is, Kierkegaard is suspicious of the essential *inherence* of conscientious subjectivity though he insists that everyone, as human beings, are capable of being called into the fundamental God-relationship and *thereby* attaining to conscientious subjectivity. Thus, it seems from Kierkegaard's account that not everyone is inherently conscientious but that *no one* is *precluded* from becoming conscientious (because all are included in the possibility of proper God-relation).
23. Merold Westphal offers a particularly helpful examination of how, for someone like Kierkegaard, Christianity can and should appropriate the "postmodern" concerns that we are suggesting Kierkegaard shares with Levinas. See Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); especially, pp. 128–147 and 253–255 [hereafter, OOT].
24. I am thinking here of Levinas' complaints about Kierkegaard as they are expressed in essays like "Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics" [in Levinas, *Proper Names*, tr. M. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 66–74 (hereafter, PN)] and "A Propos 'Kierkegaard vivant'" [ibid., pp. 75–79]; as well as the two passing references in *Totality and Infinity* (pp. 40 and 305).
25. Of course, Kierkegaard introduces a caveat within the story. His pseudonym will tell us that Abraham "did not pray *for himself*, trying to influence the Lord; it was only when

righteous punishment fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah that Abraham came forward with prayers" (FT, p. 21). Levinas complains in two different places that "Kierkegaard never speaks of the situation in which Abraham enters into dialogue with God to intercede in favor of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the name of the just who may be present there" (PN, pp. 74, 77). Clearly, Levinas is wrong when he claims this oversight in *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard's pseudonym speaks specifically of this "situation" in order to indicate a qualitative distinction between it and the situation within which Abraham finds himself in the call to sacrifice Isaac. Whereas Sodom and Gomorrah are at issue in the first case, and therefore conscience operates on their behalf, in the latter case, Abraham is at issue – thus "he did not pray *for himself*." This matter of conscience becomes *Abraham's* ordeal, it is between him and God alone.

26. FT, p. 82. See also FT, p. 114 for the full implications of Abraham's silence.
27. Thus he explains Abraham's faith as a one that, though it remains ever hopeful and trusting in the "God" that ordains it, nonetheless "drains the deep sadness of life in infinite resignation… [and] has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, [even though] the finite tastes just as good to him as one who never knew anything higher…" (FT, p. 40).
28. "*Esse* is *interesse*; essence is interest… Being's interest takes dramatic form in egoisms struggling with one another, each against all, in the multiplicity of allergic egoisms which are at war with one another and are thus together" (OTB, p. 4).
29. See OTB, p. 93: "Perhaps," Levinas concedes, "all our discussion [is] suspect of being 'ideology'".
30. Buber, "On Suspension of the Ethical" in *Eclipse of God*, tr. M. Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 118 (hereafter, EOG).
31. For example, "*Objectively the emphasis is on **what** is said; subjectively the emphasis is on **how** it is said.…* When subjectivity is truth, the definition of truth must also contain in itself an expression of the antithesis to objectivity… and this expression will at the same time indicate… the highest truth there is for an *existing* person" (CUP, pp. 202–203).
32. Buber, "The Question to the Single One" in *Between Man and Man*, tr. R.G. Smith & ed. M. Friedman (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1965), p. 49 (hereafter, BMM).
33. See especially, OTB, pp. 160–162. Also TI, pp. 216–219.
34. Kierkegaard, "Book on Adler," in *Fear and Trembling/Book on Adler*, tr. W. Lowrie (New York: Knopf-Everyman's Library, 1994), pp. 154–155 (hereafter, BOA). What is more, with this suggestion we find an interesting hero in "Book on Adler": the Bishop Mynster, "a man who, without being cruel or narrow-minded, by his own obedience has sternly disciplined himself with the strong emphasis or gravity of seriousness to dare to require of the others the universal…" (BOA, p. 145). Simply put, Bishop Mynster is the *anti*-Abraham. Rather than being one called to *offend* and transcend "the ethical," Mynster's vocation is to *defend* the ethical, i.e., "to dare to require of the others the universal." In contrast to Mynster, the central figure of "Book on Adler" is a Bishop Adler, a man who believes himself to have experienced "revelation" from God but who Kierkegaard determines is, unlike Abraham, mistaken in this belief. Kierkegaard describes the example of Mynster's defense of the ethical as the "shock" that must be faced by a mistake like Adler's. For our consideration, the key to the story is that it is *the ethical* that "shocks," questions, and corrects the false presumption that Adler is called to "suspend" *the ethical*.

35. And yet, as suggested in part IV of this paper, Kierkegaard's fundamental suspicion about an inherently conscientious human nature makes it adequately clear how the possibility of conscience may be compromised if we refuse to recognize a "higher power" similar to Kierkegaard's "God." The question of who's account is most adequate – Kierkegaard's or Levinas' – is ultimately determined by whether one thinks that Kierkegaard exaggerates the weakness of a conscientious subjectivity rooted only in the interhuman relationship and, because of that exaggeration, too quickly assumes that God is necessary as the guarantor of conscience.