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Kierkegaard on emotion: a critique of Furtak's *Wisdom in Love*

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Abstract: In *Wisdom in Love*: *Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity*, Rick Furtak argues that emotions are cognitive phenomena to be understood in terms of the relation between subject and object. Furtak uses his conception of emotion to argue (in what he takes to be a Kierkegaardian spirit) that love is the source of meaning and value in human (and, specifically, Christian) life. This paper places Kierkegaard's views, and the role love plays in them, in his historical context. I argue that Furtak's approach fails to account for the subtle and complex role religious love plays in Kierkegaard's thought, and ultimately leaves him at odds with Kierkegaard methodologically and metaphysically.

Introduction

In contemporary scholarship it is more common to find Kierkegaard treated as a philosopher than a theologian of his day.[1] In *Wisdom in Love*: *Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity*, [hereafter *WL*] Rick Furtak reads Kierkegaard as a philosophical and moral-religious psychologist, virtue ethicist, philosophical anthropologist, moral epistemologist, and ultimately as a metaphysician. Specifically, Furtak holds that Kierkegaard's 'radically original' conception of emotion, and particularly love, has an important contribution to make to our understanding the emotions as cognitive phenomena (*WL*, 41).[2] *WL* argues that emotions are cognitive phenomena, to be understood in terms of the relation between subject and object. Furtak uses his conception of emotion as a means to argue against Stoic views of the passions as false perceptions, and ultimately to establish (in what he takes to be a Kierkegaardian spirit) that love is the source of meaning and value in human (and, specifically, Christian) life.

This paper places Kierkegaard's views about subject and object, and the role love plays in them, in his historical context.[3] Furtak may generally be correct in

claiming that Kierkegaard conceived of emotions as cognitive. However, I shall argue that, for Kierkegaard, there is at least one emotion, specifically loving God, that cannot be accounted for in cognitive terms. Furthermore I shall propose that, given the centrality of religious love to Kierkegaard's thought, Furtak's being unable to account for such love is no small deficit in his account, but rather one that reveals his whole approach to be wanting. Specifically, my charges will be as follows. Firstly, Furtak cannot account for a *distinction* Kierkegaard wishes to draw between earthly and religious love. Secondly, Furtak cannot account for the *unifying* power that religious love is thought to possess by Kierkegaard. Thirdly and finally, that Furtak's methodological views ultimately place him at odds with Kierkegaard both methodologically and metaphysically.

I shall begin by outlining Furtak's views on the nature of emotion. I shall then provide a brief historical sketch of: Kierkegaard's views on subject and object, how these situate him with regards to his Hegelian-inspired contemporaries, as well as the role that love plays within these views. If my sketch is accurate it will suggest several respects in which Furtak's account is deficient. On this basis I turn to the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *Works of Love*, to determine whether the textual evidence speaks in favour of Furtak's account or my own. Finding in favour of my sketch, I consider the consequences of this for Furtak.

Furtak on 'making sense of emotion'

In his introduction Furtak states, '[m]y aim in this work is through a critical engagement with certain figures in the history of ideas [principally Kierkegaard] to develop a conceptual account of what emotions are' (*WL*, xi). *WL* argues that emotions are cognitive phenomena, Kierkegaard being, we are told, a thinker who 'understands emotions as cognitive phenomena' (*WL*, 46). Furtak argues against what he presents as the Stoic idea that emotions are false perceptions, and the associated moral ideal that one should seek to minimize attachments to things to achieve a life of emotional integrity (*WL*, 17). In this regard, Furtak holds that emotions are cognitive phenomena which reveal significant features of the world, 'even, perhaps, enabling us to attain a uniquely truthful way of seeing the world', but which cannot be understood independently from our engagement with reality (*WL*, xii, 4). By means of this argument, Furtak seeks to replace the Stoic ideal with what he takes to be a Kierkegaardian Christian view of emotional integrity as being committed to the reality of emotions while remaining open to reassessing one's evaluative dispositions (*WL*, 133), the suggestion being that loving could, or indeed does, embody or exemplify a type of wisdom, and that Kierkegaardian Christian faith can thereby be understood a matter of practical reason (*WL*, 95, 108, 121–136).

In making his case, Furtak calls upon Kierkegaard, in whose writings he thinks 'a passionate alternative to Stoicism can indeed be found'. Kierkegaard is,

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Furtak tells us, '[t]he thinker who provides the organizing principles and the particular insights that will together become *skeleton and flesh* of my argument' (*WL*, 41, my emphasis). Specifically, what Furtak wants to take from Kierkegaard is 'a method', 'a configuration' in which to answer the question of 'what it would take for passion to be as reliable as other modes of rational activity'. This 'configuration' is said to be 'the three spheres of existence' for, according to Furtak, Kierkegaard's distinctions between '[t]he aesthetic, ethical, and religious … provide us with *the* structure of an ''ascent of love'' that proceeds from the immediacy of feeling all the way to a religiousness that essentially consists in truthful passion'. To trace this ascent is said to be 'a means of identifying, step by step, *the* necessary conditions of reliable emotion' (*WL*, 51, my emphasis).

WL begins by attempting to develop 'a conceptual account of what emotions are' (*WL*, xi). In doing this one of the key points to appreciate is the distinction between sensations and emotions; indeed, the difference between these, Furtak claims, is '*categorical*' (*WL*, 13, my emphasis). According to Furtak, emotions, unlike sensations, are a kind of intentional perception that bear on intentional objects. For, 'unlike a sore leg or an itchy scalp … when we get angry or when we grieve, we feel anger *at* someone or grief *about* something' (*WL*, 4). Having an intentional object is the definitive feature of emotion for Furtak, differentiating it from sensations such as sore body parts and itches. You may be angry at *x* and I may be angry at *y*, but the idea appears to be that in each case there will be an object upon which our anger bears; and so Furtak can hold that 'what will be common to all cases of anger is a certain kind of intentional attitude'. Indeed, '*if* some of what we tend to describe as ''emotion'' or ''passion'' lacks this intentional structure, *then* it must be sensational' (*WL*, 12, my emphasis).

Furtak points out that such intentional objects need not be external to a subject's body, for I might be angry at the blood clot in my leg. What is central to this account of emotion is that such objects are representable in common conceptual and linguistic form (cf. *WL*, 5). Indeed, the thought appears to be that it is only in virtue of bearing upon some commonly representable object that my emotions can be counted *as* such. For, Furtak tells us, '[m]y subjective experience of emotion *cannot be fully described without reference to objects*' (*WL*, 4, my emphasis), the idea apparently being that such an object is necessary not just for me to count what I am experiencing *as* an emotion, but also for others to ascribe that emotion to me. Furtak thereby holds that 'an emotion *depends for its existence* on particular significant objects' (*WL*, 81, my emphasis).

That Furtak thinks of emotions as defined in virtue of having intentional objects appears non-accidentally connected to his more general views about how they are to be accounted for philosophically, the general position Furtak defends in this regard being one that implicates both self and world, or subject and object.

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This point comes out in Furtak's explication of why he has chosen to account for emotions as 'perceptions of significance', for, we are told:

> [t]he word 'perception' nicely suggests both a subject who is perceiving *and* an object which is there to be perceived. Likewise, the reason for my preference of 'significance' … is that it more obviously implicates both self and world: a significant circumstance is one in which there is value (or meaning) for *me*, in *this*. (*WL*, 6)[4]

One of the methodological virtues of integrating subject and object in this way is that it allows for the dissolution of philosophical questions based on an absolute distinction between them, questions such as: is emotion in the world, or is it projected onto the world by us? For, Furtak hopes, we will recognize that 'in the emotional space between mind and world, between the loving subject and the beloved other, there is a delicate balance which makes all questions about value subjectivism and objectivism collapse' (*WL*, 120). From this position Furtak can say that 'naïve realism and blasé relativism go equally wrong with regards to significance by assuming that it must reside solely in either the subject or the object' (*WL*, 7). For Furtak, emotions are not properties of reality as if viewed from nowhere, nor are they projected on to reality by us. Nonetheless, emotions are part of reality: cognitive responses which are capable of revealing significant features of both the world and ourselves, and even capable of being true or false.

On this basis, Furtak attempts to construct a qualified moral realism, virtue ethics, and ultimately a metaphysics of love. This is attempted by arguing that the formation of certain primary dispositional attitudes is a necessary condition of emotion. Only against a background of such attitudes, within a context of habituation and acculturation to an environment in which agents make axiological distinctions, does it make sense for me to have emotional responses to particular events. Furtak terms our development of dispositional attitudes a 'primary affective disposition', and characterizes it as love (*WL*, 5, 9). So characterized, Furtak claims that it is love that 'bonds us to objects' and in doing so 'sets up the conditions of our vulnerability to all other emotions' (*WL*, 8). In this respect, we are to understand that love is the 'primary condition' of other emotions, which 'establishes in us a readiness for being affected' (*WL*, 11, 10). Love plays a fundamental role in Furtak's account of the emotions. For it is only against a background of such love that it makes sense for a subject to have other emotional dispositions and responses.

The final chapter of *WL*, 'Love as necessary premise', turns '[t]o address the metaphysical (or axiological) question: upon what interpretation of reality as a whole does passionate cognition rely?' (*WL*, 91). This is the question: '[I]n what sense are we right or wrong to perceive things as significant – to find value in the world-in the first place?' (*WL*, 9). In terms of Furtak's account, the question may be put: If our dispositional attitudes are necessary conditions of emotion, what in turn necessitates them? On what grounds could we justify our primary dispositional attitudes? Furtak's answer is basically a metaphysical version of his

argument concerning the necessity of such attitudes. In this, Furtak does not merely wish to claim that the transcendental nature of love is a condition for creatures such as we are, or a psychological fact about us, but reveals something about *the ultimate nature of reality*. In this regard, 'we are ontologically dependent upon love' (*WL*, 99). We are to consider love 'a basic component of the natural world' in which 'being reveals itself as love' (*WL*, 123). To comprehend this revelation is said to be to come to a Kierkegaardian 'religious understanding', and to share 'Kierkegaard's vision of religious existence'; and 'affirmation of loves divinity' (*WL*, 101, 134, 108, cf. 103).

I shall not be directly concerned with Furtak's attempt to construct a qualified moral realism, virtue ethics, or metaphysics, but with his account of what emotions are. I have briefly sketched how Furtak seeks to develop his views into a metaphysics to make the following point. Furtak does not attempt to establish his claim that Kierkegaard has a cognitive view of the emotions by considering what Kierkegaard has to say about various emotions, and asking whether or not they can be understood cognitively. *WL* rather proceeds by means of a transcendental investigation, and one in terms of which *love* has an integral role to play. If, therefore, it should transpire that Furtak's interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of love is wanting, this will be particularly damaging to his account.

Kierkegaard versus Hegelianism: subject, object, and love

What we need to get Kierkegaard's views about love straight is, I think, a historical and theologically sensitive approach to his work. Locating Kierkegaard historically, his work is a response to Hegelianism: specifically, the Hegelian-inspired theological views of his Danish contemporaries.[5] In this section I will briefly sketch a Hegelian theological view as prevalent amongst Kierkegaard's contemporaries. Against this background, I shall cast Kierkegaard's alternative conception of divinity, how this relates to his views concerning subject and object, as well as what this suggests about the role love has to play in his thought.

I shall not be so ambitious as to try to make my sketch immune from any argument to the contrary, but this is not to say that it will be entirely unjustified. My sketch will suggest certain respects in which Furtak's account of Kierkegaard is deficient. In the following two sections of this paper I shall consider the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, as well as the text upon which Furtak mounts his case: *Works of Love*. If these texts furnish sufficient evidence then I will take my sketch to be vindicated. By these means, my sketch will receive sufficient justification to be considered a more plausible interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of love than Furtak's; and this it all the justification it needs to perform its function. In this way my sketch will provide a basis upon which to judge whether Kierkegaard can be enlisted to Furtak's position or, if not, exactly where his views diverge.

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Hegel's philosophical position can be said to be one that seeks to understand philosophical questions or issues in terms of the relationship between subject and object, and without making an absolute distinction between them. What is pertinent to understanding Kierkegaard in this respect is, I propose, a Hegelian account of the incarnation. For Hegel, or Kierkegaard's Hegelian contemporaries, Christ's incarnation is an event that can be wholly understood in terms of the rational capacities of human beings. Indeed, the paradox that Christ's incarnation presents, as one being that is both human and divine, can be mediated and resolved by human reason. In this, the incarnation is treated not as the point at which it became possible for humanity to come into relationship with a transcendent divinity, but as the point at which *geist* became conscious of something about its own nature. In the figure of Christ, spirit achieves a degree of self-consciousness: it recognizes the diversity in its own nature and yet on some level conceives this to be different aspects of one and the same thing. For Hegel, the paradox Christ presents is a point at which reason unfolds in its ever increasing richness and complexity, a point amenable to reason, and one that can ultimately be comprehended in terms of the movements of spirit.

What specifically concerns Kierkegaard is, I propose, the claim that Christ's incarnation is an event that can be wholly understood in terms of the cognitive capacities of human beings, and thereby regarded as a point within the Hegelian philosophical system. According to Kierkegaard, in holding that the incarnation can be mediated, the Hegelian is tacitly assuming that human beings can comprehend God by their own efforts (as opposed to requiring faith and grace). Kierkegaard holds that the Hegelians' claim to have mediated the incarnation is simply false – with the result that he conceives of their project as one that aims to rationalize and naturalize divinity. Kierkegaard envisages Hegelianism as the naturalization of the supernatural; a movement that effectively secularizes Christianity by no longer having *any* role for a transcendent divinity existing over and above the human world.

Kierkegaard's point against Hegelianism in this regard is that one cannot conceive of Christ's divinity in human terms without relativizing that divinity to those terms. For this reason, to attempt to understand the incarnation by means of human reason is effectively to try to reduce the absolutely other nature of divinity to humanity. Kierkegaard envisages Hegelianism as undertaking just such a reduction. In so doing, the truth that the incarnation makes possible – that a human being can have a personal relationship with God – is represented as a tautological accompaniment of being human *per se*. A truth that Kierkegaard thinks human beings can only attain through responding to the absolute paradox of the Christian message, and subsequent receipt of faith and grace, is held to be a predicate of human nature. In terms of the Hegelian position as Kierkegaard understands it, human beings are thought to stand in the correct relationship to God (i.e. to be Christians) simply in virtue of their nature alone.

In representing the incarnation as a tautology, Kierkegaard envisages Hegelianism as an attempt to abolish the true meaning and significance of Christianity. In encouraging us to conceive of ourselves as Christian simply in virtue of our own natures, and as members of a Christian society, Hegelianism is effectively endeavouring to abolish any notion of Christianity as concerning a relationship between individual and transcendent God. What the Hegelian is doing, Kierkegaard thinks, is robbing Christianity of Christ, and thereby dissipating its very essence. In this way, Kierkegaard thinks that Hegelianism would transform Christianity into an abominated version of itself, such that there would be no essential difference between it and paganism. In conceiving of the incarnation as a tautology rather than as an absolute paradox, and attempting to substitute humanity for divinity, Hegelianism is attributing the capacities and functions that properly belong to Christ (viz. to connect human beings with the ultimate nature of reality) to humanity (and specifically to human reason).

Kierkegaard agrees with Hegel that Christ as the union of man and divinity presents a paradox but, *contra* Hegel, this is not a paradox that can be resolved or mediated by human reason but an *absolute* paradox. In order for mediation to be effected we should have to be familiar with both of the notions to be reconciled. Yet Kierkegaard simply denies that we can be acquainted with Christ's divinity (or, certainly, not without God's help, and certainly not in virtue of our naturalistic cognitive capacities). For Kierkegaard, Christ's incarnation is not a moment in the system which reveals something about man's own nature, but the boundary at which man stands before a transcendent God. The incarnation is thought not to be a point internal to the movement of reason, but rather to demarcate the boundary between human reason and divinity. Kierkegaard moves against Hegelianism by making an *absolute* distinction between humanity and divinity: positing a notion of Christ's divinity as transcendent from the world, and beyond the linguistic and cognitive capacities of human beings.

This consideration of the Hegelian position that Kierkegaard is reacting against, and how his own position differs, is enough to get a sense of how he intends to use the terms 'subject' and 'object'. We might think of objectivity as the world described by the Hegelian system, which is coextensive with the realm of human cognition and language. Subjectivity, in contrast, is the domain of divinity. If subjectivity can be conjoined with objectivity, and divinity integrated with human reason, then the Hegelian position is thought to follow. It is important to Kierkegaard that subjectivity and objectivity are, and remain, *absolutely* distinct. Indeed, it is precisely by this move that Kierkegaard seeks to avoid the attempt to integrate divinity to human reason, mediate the absolute paradox, and secularize Christianity. If this is right, Kierkegaard's positing of an absolute distinction between subject and object is motivated by his attempt to avoid the unwelcome consequences of Hegelian theology, and in service of his alternative conception of the relationship between human beings and God.

Kierkegaard's absolute separation of divinity from humanity is an important and central move against Hegelianism, but it is not the end of the story. It is not the end because, for Kierkegaard, it is possible for human beings to come into relationship with Christ's divinity. It is Christ's humanity that gives human beings, as fellows of Christ the man, the possibility of coming into that relationship. Human beings do not simply have an objective and natural existence, but in virtue of Christ have the possibility of becoming subjective – to partake of divinity. By responding to the absolute paradox of the Christian message, and receiving faith and grace, the Christian believer becomes subject to an existence qualified by divinity, one no longer explicable in naturalistic Hegelian terms.

In the above fashion the figure of Christ, for Kierkegaard, does not merely serve to *separate absolutely* human beings from divinity, but to *unite absolutely* particular human beings with the ultimate nature of theological reality – God. Kierkegaard is careful to point out that such unification with God does not negate human nature. A human being's coming into relationship with God does not thereby mediate, or dissolve, the absolute difference between them. Christians are natural creatures, existing as part of the natural world, but are not wholly explicable within its terms because their subjectivities admit of divine qualification. Kierkegaard gives us an account of how human beings can come into relationship with God, and the absolutely different character of divinity be preserved, without divinity being reduced or naturalized to human nature. This is an account of how human beings can come into relationship with divinity, and so of the integration of subject and object, but in such a way that Christian faith and life remain insulated from Hegelian analysis.

In the Hegelian view reality unfolds and unites in virtue of reason. For Kierkegaard, the world is divided and united by a God that is both human and divine. Christ separates human beings from the ultimate nature of theological reality, as well as serving as the singular means by which human beings can come into relationship with that reality. Christ is both separator and mediator of subject and object. In this respect, the role that Christ plays within Kierkegaard's thought can be held to be analogous to the role played by reason in the Hegelian system. The difference lies in the fact that for the Hegelian it is reason that serves to unite subject and object. For Kierkegaard, human beings are not integrated with the ultimate nature of reality in virtue of their cognitive abilities but, I will suggest, in virtue of an experience of love.

If the above sketch captures the position Kierkegaard adopts in relation to his contemporaries, what role might love play in his thought? I have suggested that Christ is central to Kierkegaard's views concerning the relationship between subject and object. We can say something about the role love plays within Kierkegaard's thought upon this basis because, for Kierkegaard, Christ is both a symbol of the ultimate human love, as well as *being* divine love. In this regard it is

not just Christ but Christ *as source of divine love*, I suggest, that plays this separating and mediating role.

If this suggestion is correct, we can expect Kierkegaard to be concerned to make two moves: firstly, to draw an *absolute* distinction between human and divine love; secondly, to claim that human beings can come into contact with God in the experience of love. To count against the Hegelian position these moves must be made in such a way that they cannot be characterized, and thus become explicable in terms of, a relation between subject and object. Given that Furtak approaches Kierkegaard in terms of a conception of emotion that understands *what emotions are* in virtue of their incorporating subject and object, we can expect his account to be wanting in these respects. In other words we can expect Furtak's account of love to be deficient with respect to the separating and unifying power of religious, Christian, love in Kierkegaard's thought.

Against the background of an intellectual position that he believes makes being a Christian a tautological accompaniment of human nature, Kierkegaard becomes concerned with specifying *the* essential or definitive feature of Christianity. What, precisely, is this definitive feature? Kierkegaard's answer, as we shall see in the following two sections, is Christian love.

Christian pathos in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

To see whether Furtak's account breaks down in the ways my sketch suggests, this section will consider textual evidence from Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* [hereafter *Postscript*]. The next section will consider the text upon which Furtak builds his case: *Works of Love*. I shall firstly outline Kierkegaard's concern with drawing an absolute distinction between divine and human love, before outlining Kierkegaard's move with respect to love's dissolution of subject and object in the Christian believer.

There are several places in the *Postscript* in which Kierkegaard is concerned to draw an absolute distinction between earthly and religious love, but I shall focus upon the concluding sections (*Postcript*, 607–616).[6] In these sections Kierkegaard revisits the considerations of the two parts of his work, and attempts to state what is *essentially* Christian. To this end he considers several definitions of Christianity, which he rejects on the grounds that they fail to capture *the essential* feature of Christian pathos, and thereby lack any *absolute* distinction between it and human emotion, more generally considered. What is required, rather, is to define 'the pathos of appropriation itself within the believer in such a way that it *cannot be confused with any other pathos* … [I]n other words, the appropriation *by which a Christian is Christian must be so specific that it cannot be confused with anything else*' (*Postscript*, 609, my emphasis). Kierkegaard wants an *absolute* difference between the pathos, passion, or emotion of which the Christian is capable and that it is possible for human beings to experience in general.

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In stating what he takes to be *the* essential feature of being a Christian Kierkegaard writes: '[b]ecoming and being a Christian are defined neither objectively by the ''what'' of the doctrine nor subjectively by the appropriation, not by what has taken place within the individual but by what has taken place *with* the individual: that the individual is baptized' (*Postscript*, 609–610). The essential feature of being a Christian is, Kierkegaard claims, baptism. But he is careful to point out that by this he does not mean the religious ceremony of having one's head anointed or being immersed in holy water. The baptism of which Kierkegaard speaks is that of being touched by God's spirit.

The Christian is not to reason that one has undergone the ceremony of baptism therefore one has been touched by God's spirit (a patent non sequitur for Kierkegaard) (*Postscript*, 366–388), but that one has been baptized by God's spirit and therefore must have undergone baptism. The conclusion of this argument does not rest upon historical premises ('I was baptized') subject to sceptical doubt, but the witness of God's spirit within the individual about which (if Christ is alive in me) Kierkegaard thinks I cannot be wrong. Kierkegaard continues:

> [I]f the conclusion is drawn in this way, the mark of being a Christian is quite rightly not Baptism [the ceremony] but inwardness, and thus once again it is necessary to have a specific qualification of inwardness and appropriation, whereby the witness of the spirit in a Christian is different from all other spiritual activity (more generally defined) in a human being. (*Postscript*, 610)

The unique and absolutely differentiating mark of Christianity is the inwardness and appropriation of God's spirit alive in me.

Kierkegaard is also concerned to make the second move my historical sketch suggests: that divine love unifies, reconciles, or dissolves the distinction between subject and object in the Christian believer. That love, or passion, plays this role in Kierkegaard's thought is anticipated in several places in the *Postscript*.[7] However I shall focus upon one of the most famous passages, as well as paying further attention to the concluding section we have already been considering. The passage to which I refer is the distinction between subjective and objective truth.

> *When the question about truth is asked objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself … . If only that to which he relates himself is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual's relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth.* (*Postscript*, 199, Kierkegaard's emphasis)

The key feature of subjective truth is thought to be the how of the individual's relation, by which Kierkegaard states that he means passion. Specifically, in the maximal state of subjective truth (that which Kierkegaard holds to be definitive

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of Christian faith), this is said to be 'the infinite passion of inwardness' or 'the passion of infinity' (*Postscript*, 200–203).

Prima facie, the above might bode well for Furtak's attempt to use Kierkegaard to argue that passions are cognitive phenomena that can serve as a way of truthfully perceiving the world. For we appear to have Kierkegaard identifying a kind of truth with passion. However, it is apposite to ask, what is 'the passion of the infinite'? What does the person subject to the 'passion of the infinite' believe? James Conant suggests an answer when he writes: 'genuine faith requires that the object of one's interest admit of an ''infinitely passionate interestedness'', something Kierkegaard argues *no finite object can support*'.[8] The suggestion is that the passion of the infinite can only bear on something which is itself infinite which, given Kierkegaard's concerns, further suggests that the only thing one can believe in with 'the passion of the infinite' is God. If Conant's suggestion is correct, as I think it is, the problem is that even if the believer is related to the right idea (i.e. an idea of the true God as opposed to a pagan idol) (*Postscript*, 201), this is still *insufficient* for the believer to be in the passion of the infinite. If the passion of the infinite cannot bear on anything finite, it cannot bear on an idea in the mind of a finite creature, no matter what that creature has in mind (i.e. no object *per se*).

On the basis of this point let us return to the concluding section of the *Postscript* 'Being a Christian is defined subjectively in this way' (610–616). There, in the wake of the claims about Christian pathos outlined above, Kierkegaard claims that 'a person, just by describing the ''how'' of his inwardness, can indirectly indicate that he is a Christian without mentioning Christ's name' (*Postscript*, 613). The footnote to this claim reads:

> With regard to loving … it holds true that a person cannot say what or whom he loves by defining his 'how'. All lovers have the same 'how' of erotic love in common, and now the particular individual must add the name of his beloved. But with regard to having faith *sensu strictissimo*, it holds true that this 'how' fits only one object. (*Postscript*, 613–614)

With regard to love more generally considered, the object of one's love cannot be individuated simply by saying 'I love', or describing one's feelings in detail. For such descriptions might be given by other lovers as well (the objects of whose love is different), and, as such, will fail to pick out the possibly unique particular I love. For human love in general describing the quality of my love is insufficient to individuate its object, and so to do this I must specify the object by name. This is contrasted with the passion of Christian faith, which is said to fit only one object, the point apparently being that God is not one amongst a number of objects about which one could experience such an emotion, and which might in principle be substituted one for another, but is the unique object about which such passion can be felt. It is presumably in virtue of this that Kierkegaard can claim that a human being, simply in virtue of describing his love, can indicate that he is a Christian without having to mention Christ.

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Yet, Kierkegaard is clear that it is not simply that such love uniquely individuates its object, but rather that such love and its object are *identical*. We read: 'The passion of the infinite, not its content, is the deciding factor, for *its content is precisely itself. In this way the subjective "how" and subjectivity are the truth*' (*Postscript*, 203, my emphasis).[9] The content of the passion of the infinite *is* infinite passion, the suggestion being that it has no intellectual or conceptual content *at all*. It is in this regard that 'the passion of the infinite *is the very truth*', for 'God is a subject and hence only for subjectivity in inwardness' (*Postscript*, 203; cf. 200, 231, 323). To the Christian believer God's divinity is not an object amongst others, but a subject (or indeed a love) alive in me, (as the above account of baptism as the witness of the spirit might already have been taken to suggest). Conversely, being subject to God's love *is* having God alive in me, and one cannot describe being subject to this love and fail to be loved by God. Divine love *is* its own object; or rather cannot really be understood in terms of subject and object at all.

If the above interpretation is sound, the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is concerned to make both of the moves my historical sketch suggests. Kierkegaard is concerned to draw an absolute distinction between human love and the divine love that Christ makes possible, definitive of Christianity, as well as integrating them in the case of the Christian believer. Can the same be said of the text upon which Furtak grounds his interpretation, *Works of Love*?

Neighbour love in *Works of Love*

As the prefaces to both parts inform us, *Works of Love* [hereafter *Works*] is a text concerned with what is 'essentially Christian'; with a love that is 'essentially indescribable' (*Works*, 3; cf. 207, 376).[10] In this text, Kierkegaard is indeed concerned to make an absolute distinction between earthly and religious love. This distinction is drawn in multitudinous places throughout the text, specifically the first part. A small selection of these passages is as follows. In 'Love is the fulfilling of the law', we are told that: 'the world before the time of Christianity never saw that in loving there was the possibility of a collision between two conceptions between which *there was a difference of eternity*, between the divine conception and the merely human conception' (*Works*, 109, my emphasis), the point being that with Christianity comes the possibility of a love that is absolutely different from that available within paganism. Similarly, Kierkegaard tells us that 'to have a heart *by nature* is *infinitely different* from forming the heart *in the eternal sense*' (*Works*, 12, my emphasis). There is an absolute distinction between the capacity to love, and be loved, than man possesses by nature, and that which the eternal makes possible. Indeed, the absolute differentiation of earthly and religious love is so central to *Works of Love* that it is difficult to take the denial that such a distinction exists seriously (or, thereby, a position that would entail its denial).[11]

Works of Love is also concerned to make the second move that I have outlined. For instance, in '*You* shall love the neighbour', we read:

> [A]ll other love has the imperfection that there are two questions and for that matter also a certain duplicity: first there is a question about the object and then a question about the love, or there is a question about both the object and the love. But *concerning love for the neighbour there is only one question, the question about love; and there is only one answer of eternity; This is love … . Erotic love is defined by the object, friendship is defined by the object; only love for the neighbour is defined by love.* (*Works*, 66, my emphasis)

For erotic love and friendship one can ask two questions: about the object and about the type of love. These questions are legitimate because such loves are thought to be defined by both their object and the type of love concerned. Christian neighbour love is different. In the case of neighbour love there is only a question about the nature of love. The reason for this is that, once again, the object of such love is love itself, and therefore, strictly speaking, it has no object. This point is reiterated later in 'Love does not seek its own', where Kierkegaard writes: 'the only true object of a human being's love is *love*, which is God, *which therefore in a more profound sense is not any object, since he is Love itself'* (*Works*, 265).[12]

This latter move, I suggest, has a central role to play in the more general project of *Works of Love*, and specifically its vision of Christian community. One way of outlining this is by considering the following passage from 'You shall love *the neighbour*'.

> Ultimately, love for God is the decisive factor; from this originates love for the neighbour – but paganism had no inkling of this. It left out God, made erotic love and friendship into love, and abhorred self-love. But the Christian love commandment commands loving God above all else, and then loving the neighbour. In erotic love and friendship, preferential love is the middle term; in love for the neighbour, God is the middle term. (*Works*, 57–58)

Erotic love and friendship, or preferential loves, which we are told are ultimately forms of self-love, are based on the contingencies of particularity, time, and place (*Works*, 19). In contrast, in Christian love God mediates the relationship between human beings (*Works*, 58, 67, 107, 119). Such love overcomes the relative differences between individuals, and thereby preference, enabling each and every human being to be loved in terms of their theological essence – as a Christian neighbour. The vision of community contained in *Works of Love* is not one grounded by means of a generic category of human reason that would serve to encompass and unite each and every individual in virtue of their human nature. *Works of Love*'s vision is rather that of a Christian community grounded upon, and in which the relationship between individuals is mediated by, God's divine love. The *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *Works of Love* are united in their view of the separating and mediating power of religious love.

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Keeping system and Christian subjectivity apart

Kierkegaard exhibits a remarkable degree of self-consciousness concerning the consequences of the above moves for the explanatory prospects of the theological views of his Hegelian contemporaries with respect to understanding Christian believers. For instance, in the chapter of *Works of Love*, 'Our duty to remain in love's debt to one another', and in considering the idea that Christians stand in an infinite debt of love to one another, Kierkegaard writes:

> An accounting can take place only where there is a finite relationship, because the relationship of the finite to the finite can be calculated. But one who loves cannot calculate. When the left hand never knows what the right hand is doing, it is impossible to make an accounting, and likewise when the debt is infinite. *To calculate with an infinite quantity is impossible, because to calculate is to make finite.* (*Works*, 178, my emphasis)

Only in a relationship where both of the *relata* are finite, and so the relationship between them is finite, can ratiocination take place. The relationship between Christian and God, or that between Christian and Christian, cannot be understood in these terms both because human reason is finite, and in each case at least one of the *relatum* is *infinite*. The subjectivity of the Christian believer, being qualified by divinity, cannot be understood as a finite *relatum*. Moreover, the relationship between Christians cannot be said to be a finite relation (for recall from above that it is God's divine love that mediates, or constitutes, the relationship between Christians). Given this, to attempt to comprehend the relationship between Christians *qua* Christians (as opposed to *qua* natural creatures) will of necessity risk finitising infinity; thereby reducing divinity to humanity, and naturalising the supernatural.

Such self consciousness is perhaps most evident in Kierkegaard's remarks concerning the third, explanatory, factor he envisages to be employed by Hegelianism. Kierkegaard tells us that '[t]his third party, what thinkers would call the idea, is the true, the good, *or more accurately, the God-relationship*' (*Works*, 339, my emphasis). In the *Postscript*, two thirds of the way through the chapter upon 'The issue in *Fragments*', Kierkegaard writes:

> *Absolute passion cannot be understood by a third party*; this holds for the relationship of others to him and for his to others … [*A*] *third party cannot understand him because a third party will understand him generally in relation to an object of passion but not in relation to the absoluteness of passion* … [I]n absolute passion … and in the intense ''how'' of this passion, *the individual is definitely most removed from this third.* (*Postscript*, 509, my emphasis)

Others are unable to understand the absolute passion to which the Christian believer is subject, neither can the believer make him or herself understood in respect to it. The reason for this is that understanding between individuals takes place in relation to, or by means of, some third party (general, common

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conceptual, terms). To attempt to understand the Christian believer will of necessity be to do so by means of such terms, i.e. in relation to an object. Yet to try and understand *absolute* passion by means of relating it to an object will relativize, or finitize, it to that object. In the how of absolute passion, (otherwise, I suggest, known as 'the passion of the infinite') '*the individual is definitely most removed from this third*', the claim being that in respect of absolute passion one person cannot understand another in virtue of a common object or conceptual term.

Kierkegaard returns to the notion of a third in *Works of Love*, in 'Our duty to remain in love's debt to one another'. With regard to Christian love, there we are told:

> [W]hat is able to take love out of its element? *As soon as love dwells on itself, it is out of its element*. What does dwelling on itself mean? It means that love itself becomes an object. But an *object* is always a dangerous matter …; an *ob*ject is like a finite fixed point, like a boundary and a halting, a dangerous matter for infinitude … . [W]hen love dwells finitely on itself, all is lost … . Love cannot *infinitely* compare itself with itself, because it infinitely resembles itself in such a way that this only means that it is itself. In the *infinite* comparison there is no third factor … . (*Works*, 182, Kierkegaard's emphasis)

When Christian love attempts to reflect on itself, it tries to transform itself into an object and becomes finite. The result of this is that it is taken out of its element, God's divine love, and so 'all is lost'. In this way Christian love does not admit of comparison. Indeed, *being infinite*, if it did there would, *per impossibile*, be not one infinite love but two, and so neither would *be* infinite. The only relationship infinite love can stand in to itself is that of strict identity, and for this reason there can be no third comparative, mediative, and explanatory, factor.[13]

Against the background of my historical sketch, we can understand why Kierkegaard should be concerned to draw these consequences, as well as precisely how they play a part in his attempt to defend Christian life from Hegelianism. In the face of a philosophy that he envisages to make Christianity a tautological accompaniment of humanity, in virtue of human beings' rational capacities, it is perhaps unsurprising to find Kierkegaard characterizing the definitive features of Christianity as impervious to ratiocination. As we have seen, Kierkegaard is concerned with maintaining that the relationship between Christian and God, or Christian and Christian, cannot be understood in conceptual terms. It cannot be understood in such terms because he claims such relations are not conceptual; and so there just are no concepts from which Hegelian analysis might begin in its quest to mediate Christian subjectivity to the system.

Kierkegaard's (non)cognitive religious love

Having considered the textual evidence with respect to Kierkegaard's historical and theological background, we are now in position to evaluate whether

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the evidence speaks in favour of Furtak's account, or my historical sketch. I hope to have presented overwhelming textual evidence to justify my claims that, for Kierkegaard, religious love is both absolutely distinct from human love as well as united with the Christian believer. Neither of these moves can be understood in terms of a subject–object schema, because they are precisely concerned to prevent divinity from being integrated to a philosophical system that employs just such a schematic. Let us look in more detail at where, and indeed why, Furtak's interpretation goes wrong.

That Kierkegaard is concerned to make a distinction between human and divine love is not entirely lost on Furtak. With regard to Kierkegaard's distinction between pagan and Christian love Furtak writes: 'Like the Greek authors, Kierkegaard uses more than one word to refer to love … these different *shades of meaning do not amount to a technical separation of the two terms.*' Furtak continues: 'this lexical range is used in order to point out *different aspects or manifestations of love, not to form discrete categories*' (*WL*, 102, my emphasis). Thus, according to Furtak, Kierkegaard's distinction between pagan and Christian love is only relative and not absolute. For Kierkegaard's use of different terms, or talk of different meanings, we are told, really refer to one and the same love.

The above may be true for Kierkegaard in the general theological sense that we are all created by God, and so our ability to engage in erotic love and friendship is ultimately dependent upon that creation (if that creation is understood as an expression of divine love).[14] However, Furtak's claim that Kierkegaard conceives of pagan and religious love as continuous and not to inhabit different categories is simply false. For, as we have witnessed, Kierkegaard *is* concerned to carve an *absolute* distinction between pagan and Christian love. Pagan and Christian love are not aspects of one and the same love for Kierkegaard. The object of pagan love is, ultimately, man (thus such loves, at bottom, constitute but different varieties of self-love), while the object of Christian love (metaphorically speaking) is that which is absolutely other: divinity (*Works*, 19). It is important to Kierkegaard that humanity and divinity are kept *absolutely* apart if the Hegelian system is to be held at bay. Indeed, as we have seen, that there is an *absolute* distinction between human and divine love for Kierkegaard is precisely one of the means by which he seeks to foreclose divinity from being incorporated to the Hegelian system.

That Furtak's interpretation of Kierkegaard is inadequate on this point is evident in that if it were correct all love would, *ipso facto*, be divine. For Furtak's argument that our 'primary affective disposition' is to be characterized as love, and that such love is a metaphysical necessity in which 'being reveals itself as love', we were to understand as Kierkegaard's 'affirmation of loves divinity'. Yet the love that is so divinized by Furtak is not God's but man's, making divinity a tautological accompaniment of humanity. For this reason, Furtak's interpretation

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is not simply unable to account for an *absolute* distinction between human and divine love, but *any distinction at all*.

As for the second move, that in the case of Christian belief religious love unifies the individual with God, Furtak writes the following. '[H]e [Kierkegaard] does not agree [with Hegel] that *the Spirit of God is objectively present* in Our Civilization; for him, *divinity is a subjective influence available only to the individual qua individual*' (*WL*, 96, my emphasis). Similarly we are told that, for Kierkegaard '[*I*]*t does not make sense to speak of divinity as if it could be encountered as an object*; it is understood *only in the experience of loving*', and that '[*t*]*he religious sensibility of the true Christian* is … not a belief in God as a very large bird, an elderly uncle, a fluffy marshmallow, *or any other objective entity* that can be imagined to exist on a cloud somewhere, *apart from human inwardness*' (*WL*, 98, 111, my emphasis). Yet, if this is correct, one might fairly ask how Kierkegaard's view of religious love is to be incorporated into a cognitive and dual-aspect theory of emotion, in terms of which emotions are only understood as such in virtue of incorporating subject and object? The answer is that it cannot.

On the basis of this point it is evident that the failure of Furtak's account to do justice to Kierkegaard's view of religious love is endemic to his very methodology. For in approaching Kierkegaard by means of a conception of emotion in which only what incorporates subject and object can possibly register, Kierkegaard's views will necessarily fail to count. The unfortunate consequence of this is that the love of Christian *qua* Christian for God or the love of Christians for each other, as Kierkegaard portrays them, cannot be counted as emotions *at all*. Such religious loves must rather be counted by Furtak amongst sensations: such as sore body parts and itches.

The reason for this is that there being an intentional object in play is the categorical difference between emotion and sensation for Furtak, such an object being a definitive feature of emotion. As outlined at the beginning of this paper, central to Furtak's account is the idea that such objects be representable in common conceptual, and linguistic, form – such representation being necessary for ascriptions of emotion, in both first- and third-personal cases. Yet, as we have seen, that there is such an object (and thereby that such representation is possible) is precisely the move that Kierkegaard is concerned to deny the Hegelian in the case of religious love. Kierkegaardian religious love cannot be understood as an intentional perception, or perception of significance, simply because there is no object for perception to bear upon.

Furtak attempts to take from Kierkegaard 'a method', by means of which to answer the question of 'what it would take for passion to be as reliable as *other modes of rational activity*'. In this, Furtak takes Kierkegaard to be providing 'a means of *identifying*, step by step, *the necessary conditions* of reliable emotion', a means that will allow us to ascend 'from the immediacy of feeling *all the way to a religiousness* that essentially consists in truthful passion'. Upon this basis

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Furtak constructs a metaphysics in which 'being reveals itself as love', and which allows us to share 'Kierkegaard's vision of religious existence'. Yet all of the above claims result from a serious misunderstanding of Kierkegaard's views. For Kierkegaard's treatment of religious love is one precisely concerned to prevent that love from being rationalized, and incorporated to a metaphysical system.

In arguing that Kierkegaard has a cognitive view of the emotions, and that understanding him in these (and metaphysical) terms allows us to come to a Kierkegaardian 'religious understanding' of love, Furtak seriously misrepresents Kierkegaard's views. For in assimilating Kierkegaard to his own views Furtak is effectively attempting to make Kierkegaard compatible, in principle at least, with the very naturalization of divinity he is concerned to argue against. (For, as outlined above, Furtak makes divinity a tautological accompaniment of human love, in an analogous fashion to that in which Kierkegaard envisages Hegelianism to make divinity a tautological predicate of humanity.) Kierkegaard would consider Furtak's 'affirmation of loves divinity' to be yet one more attempt by human beings to understand divinity in virtue of their naturalistic cognitive capacities, and thereby reduce divinity to humanity. *Wisdom in Love* is yet one more attempt at the reduction of faith to reason, and theology to philosophy, that Kierkegaard's intellectual endeavour is precisely concerned to argue against.

It should now be apparent that the failure of Furtak's account to be able to cope with Kierkegaard's view of religious love is no minor deficit. As outlined, Furtak gives a central role to love in his account of the emotions; taking himself to have outlined Kierkegaard's 'religious understanding' of love. Kierkegaard's concern with distinguishing religious from earthly love, as well as his concern to make religious love definitive of Christianity, means that such love plays a central role in his thought too. Given the centrality of religious love to both, and their contrary understanding of what such love amounts to, that Furtak cannot account for Kierkegaard's view is devastating to his interpretation. For even though religious love is but one counter-example to Furtak's general claim, given its centrality to his account, that he cannot do justice to it entails that his account cannot be rectified by some ad hoc fix – a fix that would allow Furtak's interpretation to continue being a plausible characterization of Kierkegaard's view of emotion is, unfortunately, unavailable.

Conclusion

This paper has considered Rick Furtak's claim that Kierkegaard understands emotions as cognitive phenomena, and his subsequent attempt to enlist Kierkegaard to a dual-aspect theory of the emotions. I have situated Kierkegaard's views in his historical context, as responding to the theological consequences of Hegelianism. Against this background, I have argued that Kierkegaard gives an account of religious love such that it cannot be accommodated by, or reduced to,

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human nature or reason. Put otherwise: Kierkegaard is concerned to make the case that religious love cannot be understood as a variety of cognitive phenomena, precisely to prevent it from being naturalized to Hegelian terms. Given the centrality of religious love to both Furtak and Kierkegaard's projects, this is a conclusion that cannot be accommodated by Furtak's interpretation but must rather spell its demise. My purpose has not been to defend Kierkegaard's conception of religious love but merely to outline it. Whether there is greater wisdom in Furtak's thinking about emotion or in Kierkegaard's is, of course, an altogether different question.[15]

Notes

1. For a recent survey of contemporary Kierkegaard scholarship see, Jamie Turnbull 'Kierkegaard and contemporary philosophy', in R. Králik, P. Šajda, R. Pavón, L. Llevadot, C. Dobre, and J. Jurová (eds) *Kierkegaard and Great Philosophers* (Šal'a: Sociedad Iberoamericana de Estudios Kierkegaardianos, 2007), 173–186.
2. Rick Anthony Furtak *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).
3. I am not persuaded by the argument that Kierkegaard's texts should be attributed to his pseudonyms. Attributing the texts to Kierkegaard does not foreclosing being able to give an account of his work in which pseudonymity plays a pedagogical function. Whereas attributing them to the pseudonyms concedes too much to the interpretative position that holds Kierkegaard's works to be hermetically sealed particulars.
4. Similarly, Furtak writes that '[s]ignificance … is … likely to require both a perceiving subject and an external world to be perceived: it is neither a property of ''objective reality'' as viewed from nowhere now a weirdly self-projected light that radiates out from us onto a featureless environment'; Furtak *WL*., 7.
5. See Jon Stewart *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
6. Søren Kierkegaard *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). For instance, Kierkegaard can be said to draw such a distinction on the following pages: 440, 455, 492, and 509.
7. Specifically, the following two passages suggest that passion plays this role: 'Only momentarily can a particular individual, existing, be in a unity of the infinite and the finite that transcends existing. This instant is the moment of passion' (Kierkegaard *Postscript*, 197); 'An existing person cannot be in two places at the same time, cannot be subject-object. When he is closest to being in two places at the same time, he is in passion' (*ibid*., 199).
8. James Conant 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and nonsense', in T. Cohen, P. Guyer, & H. Putnam (eds) *Pursuits of Reason* (Lubbock TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 214, my emphasis.
9. Similarly, in the journals we read: 'God himself is this: *how* one involves oneself with Him. As far as physical and external objects are concerned, the object is something else than the mode; there are many modes; someone perhaps stumbles upon a lucky way, etc. In respect to God, the *how* is *what*'; Søren Kierkegaard *Journals and Papers*: II, F-K (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1970), 123.
10. Søren Kierkegaard *Works of Love* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). Cf. 207, 376.
11. For example, see Kierkegaard *Works*: 7–9, 12, 17, 18–19, 21, 24–25, 29–31, 32–34, 35–37, 38–39, 40, 44, 49–50, 52, 53, 57, 61, 64–65, 66–67, 109, 112, 113, 114–115, 118–119, 120–121, 124, 129, 142, 143, 146, 311, and 369.
12. For this reason I find myself in disagreement with Stokes when he claims that for Kierkegaard, 'passion is … *always intentional*. If I am passionate, I am passionate *about something*'; Patrick Stokes '''Interest'' in Kierkegaard's structure of consciousness', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, **48** (2008), 452, first emphasis mine.

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13. Cf. Kierkegaard *Works*, 50, 165, 339; cf. the passage on explanation 202–203.
14. God is the 'source of all love'; Furtak *WL*, 3; cf. 9–10.
15. This paper has benefited from comments by Rick Anthony Furtak, Peder Jothen, and Anthony Rudd. The interpretation of Kierkegaard advanced in this paper, as holding to a kind of acosmism, is a controversial one. It is, nonetheless, precisely what is required to conceive of his views aright.