Thought-Experiment:
On Loving the Oppressor

by

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Introduction

This is a thought-experiment, an attempt to put two great philosophers, Søren Kierkegaard and Paulo Freire into a conversation with one another on the notion of love. In *Works of Love*, Søren Kierkegaard explicated what the Christian neighbor love ought to be. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, on the other hand, Paulo Freire stated that the oppressed must love the oppressor but without providing reasons. This strange connection of the notion of love between these two thinkers is the object of this thought-experiment. What can we say about Freire’s unelaborated statement using Kierkegaard’s ideas of neighbor love? This thesis stands upon this simple question.

I read Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for the first time when I was in a Sociology of Education class taught by Professor Daniel Long. If I remember correctly, many of my peers expressed their struggles with Freire’s convoluted writing style. Some students also mentioned the ambiguity of philosophical terms such as “dialectical struggles” and “formation of consciousness,” which Freire frequently uses without explaining their meanings. At the time, I was reading Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* in the Post-Kantian European Philosophy class with Professor Joseph Rouse, so I immediately recognized that these unexplained terminologies came from Hegelian philosophy. Upon listening to students’ concerns about the clarity of Freire’s argument, I was inspired to make Freire’s ideas accessible with a clear and coherent explanation of Freire’s Hegelian background.
The other pivotal moment that significantly contributed to my topic’s formulation was when I read Freire’s statement that the oppressed must love the oppressor to end the dialectical struggle with them. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire never elaborated on this statement, and for this reason, the sentence struck me as mysterious. Around the same time, I was also doing research on Kierkegaard at the Hong Kierkegaard Library in Northfield, Minnesota, where I encountered Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*. Reading Kierkegaard and having the question about love between the oppressed and the oppressor, then, evoked in me the urge to understand Freire’s statement in terms of the Kierkegaardian idea of neighbor love. What would happen if I were to combine their ideas? This simple question came to my mind and stayed there as a curiosity during my research period. Hence, the first goal of this project became to adequately elaborate on Freire’s remark on the necessity of the oppressed’s love for the oppressor using Kierkegaard’s idea of neighbor love.

The other goal of this project is tied back to the point raised earlier that the readers of Freire seem to have a hard time understanding his claims because of his complex, convoluted writings. Freire, however, is not the only philosopher who is guilty of this tendency. Hegel and Kierkegaard are also notorious for their peculiar—often incomprehensible—writing styles as well as for the complexity of their ideas. Therefore, in working on this project, I have set a second goal: to present all of these thinkers ideas in a coherent, accessible manner to the general audience.
The general audience in this context means those who may or may not have been previously exposed to the three thinkers but have the intellectual capacity to understand their ideas if explained in a clear and coherent manner. Thus, the first chapter is devoted to explaining Freire’s ideas and his significant debt to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* in an accessible language as well as to raise the initial question about love between the oppressed and the oppressors. The second part of this project is dedicated to presenting the general outline of Kierkegaard’s theory of neighbor love with a focus on three key notions: inwardness, the triadic relationship between God and human beings, and actions. Finally, in the last chapter, I have presented my own analysis of the love between the oppressed and the oppressor using the Kierkegaardian model of neighbor love introduced in the previous chapter.

Before moving onto the first chapter, I would like to mention two limitations inherent in this project. The first is that my elaboration of the love between the oppressed and the oppressors suggested by Freire stays within the Kierkegaardian framework of neighbor love. This means that my analysis of the love between the oppressed and the oppressors is based not on what love means in general but on what neighbor love means in the Kierkegaardian sense. Thus, I would like to inform my readers that the Freirian idea of the love between these two parties can be interpreted in number of different ways.

I believe, however, that the theoretical dialogue between these two thinkers that I present in the final chapter still has intellectual significance and uniqueness. This is because, as far as my research went, no scholar has ever undertook the same
kind of analysis. There have been several scholars who left expansive commentaries on Freire’s philosophy of education and his relation to Hegel such as Professor Andy Blunden, the author of “Paulo Freire’s Intellectual Roots: Hegel,” and Professor Carlos Alberto Torres, who wrote an article named “Education and the Archeology of Consciousness: Freire and Hegel.” However, there has been no scholar or philosopher who went beyond explaining Freire using Kierkegaard, and for this reason, I am hoping that this project will contribute to the current scholarship on Freire.

The second limitation of my thesis is that the argument remains in the theoretical realm. In other words, the question as to how the Kierkegaardian analysis of Freire’s idea of love could be applicable in the practical sphere remains untouched in this project. That is, this is a theoretical consideration of the notion of love as opposed to an empirical or practice-oriented one. This is why I named this project Thought-Experiment.

Part of the conclusion of this project, the argument about beliefs and hope in particular, may sound implausible or too idealistic to those who are concerned with practical applications of ideas or theories in general. I would like to emphasize, however, that theoretical considerations are often great sources of inspiration for practice. As this project will shed light on Freire’s idea of love between the oppressed and the oppressors from a completely new angle using Kierkegaardian philosophy, I envision that this project will become a thought-provoking source for further understanding Freire’s philosophy of education.
Chapter 1: Question

Question 1: The most influential Marxist explanation of the October Revolution was Trotsky’s. Discuss and critique his analysis in light of other accounts. Keep in mind these possible causes of the uprising’s success: the “objective” alignment of classes in Russia and in the world generally, the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, the influence of one individual (Lenin), and mere chance.¹

Question 2: which of the following was introduced into the diet of Europeans only after European contact with the Americans in the fifteenth century?

A. Tea  
B. Rice  
C. Cinnamon  
D. Sugar  
E. Potatoes²

Let us explore what kind of social implications we can draw from these different forms of inquiring through which students learn history. The first question is an essay prompt for an undergraduate history seminar, and the second is a SAT World History Subject Test practice question for high school students. Aside from this point, there is a stark difference between these two kinds of questioning: the first type of asking questions demands an elaborate, reflective and critical analysis of the subject matter, while the second does not entail such thought-provoking elements and merely requires one to memorize historical facts.


The first kind of questioning prompts students to engage with the enriching process of learning the complexity behind historical events, for instance, by asking deeper questions such as “What kind of problem is inherent in Trotsky’s theory?” To this kind of question, students can draw diverse conclusions from numerous perspectives, and the answer will depend on the writer’s critical engagement with the given materials. The second type of problem, on the other hand, gives students a completely different learning experience. The test-takers only have to choose one answer out of the given options. Solving the second kind of questions will certainly require some level of reflections, but ultimately it will remain a matter of memorization.

What will be the social and political implications of these different ways of asking questions to students and thereby determining students learning experiences? What would happen if students cultivated their intellectual abilities only by engaging with the second type of questions? In other words, what would be the social implications of educational system in which students do not learn how to critically interact with different ideas but rather focused only on memorizing fixed sets of facts?

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher of education, took the implications of memorization-based education to heart and articulated its issues by writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which became one of the most influential books on education. It is equally vital to note that Paulo Freire not only addressed the issues of passive learning but also connected his theory of education to the larger issue of society—the
problem of social progress being hindered by this memorization-based education in particular. For Freire’s intellectual novelty and his contributions to the improvement of educational systems around the world, prominent educator Herbert Kohl describes Freire as “perhaps the most significant educator in the world during the last half of the century.”

Freire’s problem, however, is that he is not widely read, even by the contemporary scholars or students in the field of educational studies. In the introduction to the 30th anniversary edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, professor of English and critical theorist Donaldo Macedo notes, “In a lecture at Harvard that analyzed Paulo Freire’s theories ... a doctoral student approached me and asked the following: ‘I don’t want to sound naive, but who is this Paulo Freire that Professor Flecha is citing so much?’" This anecdote illustrates a shocking yet important point: the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire is not as much read and understood by many students of educational studies as critical theorists like Donaldo Macedo would expect. Hence, the first account presented in this work is dedicated to making his philosophy of education accessible to the general reader by clarifying certain terminologies and philosophical concepts that he inherited from his great philosophical inspirations. In this chapter, I hope to answer the very basic question that the graduate student in Macedo’s story asked: “Who is Paulo Freire? What are his ideas?”

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1.1. Freire’s Problematization

As the title of the book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, suggests, the ideas behind the book are deeply tied into the issues of the oppressed, especially those in the state of poverty. It would certainly not be an exaggeration if one were to characterize Freire’s entire life—as a Brazilian, a father, a philosopher of education and, needless to say, as an educator—as a ceaseless struggle to resolve the issue of poverty.

Freire’s first encounter with the Brazilian society’s state of penury took place during his childhood. Liberation theologian Richard Shaull describes as follows:

> As the economic crisis in 1929 in the United States began to affect Brazil, the precarious stability of Freire’s middle-class family gave way and he found himself sharing the plights of the “wretched of the earth.” This had a profound influence on his life as he came to know the gnawing pangs of hunger and fell behind in school because of the listlessness it produced; it also led him to make a vow, at age eleven, to dedicate his life to the struggle against hunger, so that other children would not have to know the agony he was experiencing.⁵

As this biographical description illustrates, Freire’s dedication to education comes from his compassionate desire to resolve the issue of poverty in Brazil, not only for his contemporary generations but also for the future generations of Brazilian citizens. But, if poverty is the problem that he strove to resolve, why did Freire write a book not about practical solutions to the issue of poverty but about education? What is the connection between them that Freire took so earnestly?

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In 1946, as a young, passionate idealist, Freire started teaching for the working class as the educational director of SESI (Social Service of Industry). Freire’s motivation to fight for the poor and his teaching experiences led him to connect the issue of perpetuating poverty with the educational practices in his society. As he developed his ideas, he came to a realization that poverty is merely the surface of the problem. In the eyes of Freire, the root of the problems of the poor lay in the memorization-based educational practices that turn the poor into docile citizens of the oppressive society.

In explanation of this idea, Freire presents the notion of the “banking” concept of education and explicates how this model is the key factor that contributes to the maintenance of the oppressive state. The “banking” concept of education, according to Freire, is a way of teaching students so that students focus only on absorbing knowledge without seeking its reasons or meaning. To raise an example, Freire writes as follows:

“For four times four is sixteen; the capital of Pará is Belém.” The students records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance of “capital” in the affirmation “the capital of Pará is Belém,” that is, what Belém means for Pará and what Pará means for Brazil.”

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7 Pará is a state in the north of Brazil.

The “banking” concept of education is a metaphorical way of describing the particular style of pedagogy that the teachers of regular schools in Brazil employed. In the “banking” style of education, teachers are the depositors of information, while the students become receptors of information as Freire states, “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher ... makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.”

Defining the memorization-based education in this way, Freire highlights several characteristics of the “banking” concept of education. Before moving onto the explanation of them, however, it should be noted that these characteristics are not separate from one another, but rather are interconnected with each other. Furthermore, these characteristics are crucial in understanding the central point raised by Freire, namely that the “banking” concept of education hinders social progress.

The first feature of the “banking” concept of education is that it disconnects the content of learning from the world. Freire writes:

His [a teacher’s] task is to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.

For Freire, knowledge, facts, mathematical equations and so on are all products of humans’ engagement with the surrounding reality that they belong to. Newton’s

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9 ibid, 72.
10 ibid, 71.
revolutionary theory of gravity, for example, was a result of his attempt to understand why apples fall down from trees. According to Freire, what students learn in classrooms, therefore, are all subsets of the surrounding world.

Memorization of these subsets of the human world, however, renders the content into sets of dry facts and therefore creates a distance between knowledge and the surrounding human reality. In the “banking” style of education, teachers tell the students to memorize the phrase, “Four times four is sixteen.” The reality is that the expression, “four times four is sixteen” is an abstraction of a complex and diverse phenomena such as a group of oranges that are organized in a square with four oranges on each side. By memorizing only the equation without seeing how it is applicable in reality—for instance, to calculate the number of oranges—students are disabled to see the connection between what they learn and the reality, the very source of the contents of their learning. As a result of this process, they are hindered from recognizing the fact that what they learn in classroom come from their surrounding reality.

The separation of the contents of learning from the dynamic reality surrounding students leads to the second and the vital drawback of the “banking” concept of education: the alienation of students from the reality. “Worse yet,” Freire asserts, “it [the “banking” concept of education] turns them into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be filled by the teacher.”\footnote{ibid, 72.} By being treated as receivers of knowledge, students fall into the idea that they ought to be passive in order to fulfill the teachers’
expectations, thereby internalizing the docile attitude within themselves. Freire notes this tendency as follows:

They call themselves ignorant and say the “professor” is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen...“Why don't you,” said a peasant participating in a culture circle, “explain the pictures first? That way it’ll take less time and won’t give us a headache.”

Furthermore, this observational account reveals that there are two kinds of mindsets internalized by students themselves. The first is that knowledge is external to students themselves. Since, in the “banking” style of education, knowledge is disconnected from the reality in which the very students themselves belong to, students perceive knowledge as something that exists outside of themselves. To rephrase this with the example of multiplication, students participate in class under the assumption that the equation, “four times four equals sixteen,” is unrelated to their treatment of numbers in their daily life.

The second kind of mindset that students adapt through the “banking” style of education—which is relevant to the first mindset yet more central in Freire’s criticism of the “banking” concept of education—is that students perceive themselves as utterly incapable of creating knowledge. Freire notes, “Almost never do they realize that they, too, ‘know things’ they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men.” Students who memorize the multiplication table in this way, for instance, would never realize that, just as Newton extracted knowledge from his surrounding world, they are also capable of becoming independent in seeking

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12 ibid, 63.
13 ibid, 63.
knowledge. Instead, what students instill in their minds is that, because the contents of learning is separate from their surrounding world, they need to be taught by someone else. Therefore, the first problem of the “banking” style of education—the disconnection between knowledge and the reality—leads to the second issue of the “banking” style of education: the assimilation of the false belief that they are also separate from knowledge and that they are incapable of creating or discovering knowledge. This is the very issue that Freire sees as problematic.

But why is being the active knowledge-creator so important for Freire? In other words, when we flip the side of Freire’s criticism of the “banking” style of education, we can see the crucial assumption under which Freire’s second criticism operates: students must participate in the creation of knowledge.

Against this assumption, we could argue that the absorption of knowledge is necessary for students to some extent, especially for those who are placed in the state of penury and are seeking the way out of it. Engineers, for instance, would have to memorize not only the multiplication chart and but also other numerous laws of physics to formulate the tactic for how to construct an efficient engine. Furthermore, the former developing countries that demonstrate rapid economic growths employ memorization as the locus of their teaching methods. In his research on mathematics education in East Asia, professor of education Fredrick K. S. Leung describes the East Asian style of teaching as follows:

Instruction is teacher dominated, and student involvement is minimal. Memorization of mathematical facts is stressed and students learn mainly by rote.
There is ample amount of practice of mathematical skills, mostly without thorough understanding.\textsuperscript{14} East Asian teaching style provided by Leung seems to bear clear semblance to what Freire defines as the “banking” concept of education. However, with the “banking” style of education, these countries have achieved enormous economic growth, which may have contributed to resolve the issues of poverty.\textsuperscript{15} Can this be an indication that the “banking” concept of education is not necessarily an evil practice as Freire suggests, but rather is a permissible pedagogical style—especially in the context of economic development and, hence, the resolution of poverty? Why is this not the case for Freire? On what basis does he justify his claim that every human being ought to be an architect of knowledge rather than a receiver of knowledge?

Regarding this point, Freire writes as follows:

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, though the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.\textsuperscript{16}

To rephrase Freire’s claim, the reason why students’ active inquiries are indispensable in education is that the very action of questioning and connecting one’s learning with the surrounding world is the essence of the humanity. For Freire, the “banking” concept of education is an educational practice that hinders students from inquiring


\textsuperscript{15} more statistical evidences to be added.

\textsuperscript{16} page number
and from associating their learning with their lives. This is why Freire claims that the 
“banking” style of education ought to be abolished.

The passage above, however, does not seem to answer the question completely, since we could still raise a question as to why and how the inquiry and praxis constitute the essence of humanity. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire never clarifies this point. It is not to say, though, that Freire does not elucidate this problem because of the ambiguity of his ideas themselves. Rather, it is that Freire inherited these ideas from the Marxian tradition of Hegelian philosophy and hence treated it as the basis of his theory of education. Therefore, for us to fully grasp Freire’s philosophy of education, it is necessary to uncover these assumptions by making the connection between Freire, Marx and Hegel clear.

In the following section, I will first present the very source of inspiration that Marx received in claiming his take on the theory-praxis relationship by introducing Georg W. F. Hegel notion of dialectics. By doing so, I hope to clarify the whole reasoning behind Marx’s claim on the subject matter. Secondly, I will connect Marxian notion of theory-praxis relationship with that of Freire so that the reader can adequately grasp the whole complexity behind Freire’s above-mentioned quote on the relationship between knowledge and praxis and its significance in education. Lastly, with these accounts, I will further relate Freire’s idea of knowledge and praxis with his criticism of the “banking” concept of education and with his notion of the “problem-solving education,” the style of education that Freire proposes as an alternative resolution to the “banking” style of education.
1.2. What Kind of Education is Important for Freire and Why?

In 1807, philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel published the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which came to influence those in the continental philosophical tradition, including Freire himself. Readers who have never read the book may wonder what phenomenology is in the first place and what Hegel means by the mysterious word, “Spirit.” They may also wonder how his idea of the “Spirit” is related to Freire’s theory of education. As I mentioned earlier, the purpose of this section is to introduce the reader to the reasoning behind Freire’s criticism of the “banking” style of education, rather than to discuss the entirety of this dense philosophical text. For this purpose, I shall first briefly introduce what Hegel’s phenomenology of spirit is about, shed light on the parts of the book that are most relevant to Freire’s ideas, and finally illustrate how they are relevant to Freire’s theory.

What exactly is phenomenology? In the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes as follows:

> By way of that assurance, it declares its power to lie in its being. However, untrue knowledge equally appeals to the same thing, namely, that *it exists*, and it *assures* us that in its eyes science amounts to nothing... It is for this reason that the exposition of phenomenal knowledge is supposed to be undertaken here.17

For Hegel, knowledge, theories, ideas are all about what is true. Some scientists and philosophers in the medieval period, for example, claimed that the earth

is not a flat plate but rather is spherical. This claim about the shape of the earth made by these scientists is a claim about the true shape of the earth. Therefore, knowledge, theories and ideas and so on are claims about what counts as true.

There are, however, truth-claims that we think are untrue. For instance, may in the medieval period also argue that the earth is a flat plate and that the earth is the center of the universe. They claimed their knowledge regarding astronomy to be true while others argued that it was untrue. How, then, should we distinguish true claims from false ones? Scientific methods such as mathematical deduction, laboratory experiments and so on were developed so that we can assure ourselves what claims are true and what claims are not.

Nonetheless, even if we already have a very well established system of assuring the validity of knowledge, there is no end to doubting the certainty of our truth-claims. That is, there is always a possibility that what we think we know is an illusion or a product of a delusion, and so on. In response to this skepticism that seems to be never-ending, Hegel claims in the passage just quoted, “It is for this reason that the exposition of phenomenal knowledge is supposed to be undertaken here.” Thus, phenomenology for Hegel means a theoretical inquiry into the creation and the evolution of truth-claims. How and why do certain claims appear to us as true ones? How do widely accepted truth-claims turn out to be false? These are the questions that Hegel attempted to answer in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

The other crucial part of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit* is, as the title shows, the notion of “Spirit.” Generations of philosophers have presented different
interpretations of this notion. Among these different understandings of the “Spirit,” the one that best suits my purpose to explain the reasoning behind Freire’s criticism of the “banking” style of education is Terry Pinkard’s interpretation.

In his commentary on Hegel’s Phenomenology of the Spirit, Pinkard explains the notion of the Spirit by writing, “‘Spirit’ therefore denotes for Hegel not a metaphysical entity but a set of fundamental relations among persons that mediates their self-consciousness, a way in which people reflect on what they have come to take as authoritative for themselves.” In other words, according to Pinkard, “Spirit” is a social space in which human beings communicate with each other and form their own reflections on what they perceive as true and thus as authoritative. The authoritative accounts that a communities’ “Spirit” underwrites include things such as empirical claims, social and cultural norms, morality, and so on.

“Spirit” also learns. Over the course of the complex process in which authoritative accounts shift from one to another, the “Spirit” incorporates the past experiences into the formation of itself. Thus, the formation of the “Spirit” at one particular historical moment is isolated neither from the past nor from the future. “Spirit” embodies a transformative process where the constituents continue to engage with the making of authoritative accounts. The authoritative accounts that “Spirit” reflect upon include things such as social and cultural norms, morality, and so on.

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18 As shown in his notes, in this passage, Pinkard is responding to influential Hegelian philosophers such Charles Taylor who interpreted the notion of “Spirit” as a metaphysical entity. Terry Pinkard, Hegel’s Phenomenology: the Sociality of Reason (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14n.

The other crucial aspect of “Spirit” is that it contains within itself a certain negativity. For example, Hegel states:

... when the result [of skepticism] is grasped as determinate negation, that is, when it [the result of skepticism] is grasped as it is in truth, then at that point a new form has immediately arisen, and in that negation the transition has been made by virtue of which the progression through the complete series of shapes comes about on its own accord.  

Against the knowledge that the “Spirit” has taken as authoritative, there emerges skepticism. When the constituents of the “Spirit” create skepticism of the internally constructed knowledge “in its truth,” that is, in such a way that the knowledge gets undermined according to the internal logic of the knowledge itself, there emerges a new knowledge that overturns the validity of the old knowledge. Hegel calls the capacity of the “Spirit” to generate this kind of skepticism that emerges from within negativity.  

When the “Spirit” forms a self-reflective life in which it produces objections against its own norms, ideas, theories and so on, the “Spirit” replaces the already-accepted ideas with the new ones. This new reflective forms of the “Spirit” in turn takes itself to be that which is necessary in order to overcome the issues that the “Spirit” used to have within itself. This new form of reflective life, however, eventually generates its own self-undermining skepticism of itself. According to Hegel, this is how the “Spirit” maintains the progression of itself. This pattern of the progress of the “Spirit” is generally called dialectic.

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20 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 76.

Given these accounts of phenomenology, the characteristics of the “Spirit,” and dialectic, one can conclude that the Phenomenology of the Spirit is Hegel’s attempt to uncover the dialectical matter in which the “Spirit” creates authoritative, normative accounts and then gradually progresses through overcoming its self-undermining criticisms of these accounts, replacing them with new and more satisfactory ones.

To illustrate an example of a dialectical progression of the “Spirit,” Hegel presents an analogy which he names “mastery and servitude.” In the “Spirit” in the analogy, there are two agents who first engage into a deadly battle and form a master-slave relationship.22 While the master’s existence as a master depends upon the servitude that the slave provides, the master does not recognize his or her dependence on the slave, but instead sees the slave as a mere instrument to exploit. The slave, on the other hand, internalizes the master’s perception of the slave and takes it as the authoritative, “correct” account of him or herself.

However, the slave also realizes that the internalized perception of himself as the slave, and therefore, the master’s dependent, is true only when the slave keeps serving the master. In other words, the slave eventually will come to discern that the master’s perception of the “Spirit” is solely dependent upon the slave’s servitude. This awareness results in prompting the slave to reflect upon his own servitude, thereby giving him an unexpected sense of independence: what the slave took to be the “correct” viewpoint of his or her relationship with the master, in fact, is dependent

upon him or herself. Furthermore, this enables the slave to be critical of this authoritative worldview imposed by the master and to achieve a more “objective” standpoint of the “Spirit.” The slave’s criticism (negativity) of the master’s worldview and his overcoming of it, therefore, is a dialectical progress of the “Spirit” in this analogy.

So, how is all of this related to Freire’s criticism of the “banking” concept of education? In order to answer this question, let us uncover the parallel as well as the difference between Hegel’s analogy of mastery and servitude and Freire’s account of the oppressed and the oppressor.

In Hegel’s narrative of the master-slave relationship, the slave first internalizes the master’s perception of the relationship but eventually becomes critical of it and, in the end, constructs a more objective view of the “Spirit” as a whole. The line of the story indeed presupposes that the slave is capable of generating such self-undermining criticism of the “Spirit.” By realizing that the master’s “correct” point of view is dependent upon his own servitude to the master, the slave acquires a new form of knowledge of the nature of the “Spirit” in which he or she is situated.

But what if the slave is placed in a situation in which his or her criticism is hindered by some forces generated by the master? This is what Freire attempts to address in Pedagogy of the Opppressed. In that book, Freire also draws the contrast between the master and the slave, but he does so by replacing the two terms with those of “oppressor” and the “oppressed”. Just as Hegel argued, Freire claims that the

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23 Pinkard, Sociality of Reason, 62.
oppressed internalize the oppressors’ worldview: “They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.”

Thus, for Freire, the two agents in Hegel’s analogy of mastery and servitude represent two social groups in a society: the “oppressor” represents those in the higher stratum of economic, social and political hierarchy; the “oppressed,” on the other hand, stands for those in an economically, politically, and socially disadvantaged position. According to Freire, it is the former who set the terms in which their social system is conceived and organized (the “Spirit” of their community). This includes the educational terms, which Freire claims are embodied the “banking” concept of education.

Unlike Hegel’s narrative of mastery and servitude, however, Freire sees the oppressed who are taught under the “banking” style of education as incapable of overcoming the master-slave relationship. Where does this observation come from? Before unpacking the question, I shall first analyze Hegel’s analogy of mastery and servitude from a somewhat different, Freirian angle.

Hegel’s account of the master-slave dynamic presupposes that the slave himself already is critical enough to be able to step back and contemplate the nature of his or her relationship with the master. However, it is possible that the degree of

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24 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 48.

Alternative quotes:

“One of these characteristics is the previously mentioned existential duality of the oppressed, who are at the same time themselves and the oppressor whose image they have internalized.” (61)

“Submerged in reality, the oppressed cannot perceive clearly the ‘order’ which serves the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalized.” (62)
self-consciousness of the master and that of the slave is so unequal that the slave stays uncritical and ignorant of the master’s worldview. But Hegel’s narrative does not take this possibility into account and hence takes for granted the slave’s ability to critically reflect upon the master’s self-consciousness that he or she once embraced.

What if the slave is made uncritical by the master in such a way that the slave never gets to generate the self-undermining criticism of the relationship with the master? In fact, Freire thinks that this possibility actually occurs in the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed, a relationship that was actualized in his period of time. This is why Freire criticizes the “banking” style of education: for him, the “banking” style of education is the very architecture made by the oppressors with the purpose of keeping the oppressed uncritical.

The disconnection of what students learn in school from the surrounding reality, which the “banking” style of education creates, makes it impossible for the students of the oppressed to realize that they are the participants of what Hegel calls the “Spirit.” Freire writes, “Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator. In this view, the person is not a conscious being...”

The “banking” concept of education, for Freire, means the deprivation of the students’ awareness of themselves as active agents who are partly responsible for their own social world, and who have the capacity to question their surrounding

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environment in seeking for a better society. In such an educational system, students become passive spectators of the society who does not question their oppressors even in the state of injustice or unfair treatment.

This is why Freire finds the “banking” style of education problematic. True, as I mentioned above, such a cramming system of education may help students attain higher economic status. Nevertheless, for Freire, that is far from enough. In order to maintain the “Spirit” as it is, that is, in order to sustain the constantly self-reflecting, evolving society, the constituents of the “Spirit” themselves must be able to reflect upon the “Spirit.” But this indispensable aspect of the “Spirit” is prevented because of the dominance of the “banking” style of education, which makes people uncritical and non-reflective. This is the concern and the reasoning that Freire had when criticizing the “banking” style of education.

As an alternative to the “banking” concept of education, Freire proposes “problem-posing” education as he states:

> They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. ‘Problem-solving’ education ... rejects communiqués and embodies communication.”

According to Freire, “problem-posing” education prompts students to question their surrounding world and to seek solutions to the issues that they find. By communicating with teachers and other students as equals, students learn how to think critically and cultivate the capacity to take actions using their own ideas. In this

26 ibid, 79.
way, Freire envisions “problem-posing” education as a solution. It gives the oppressed a means to revolutionize the society from the ground-level and end the dialectical struggles with their oppressors.  

As we can see in this section, this explanation of Freire’s reason to problematize the “banking” style of education is based on Hegelian ideas of the “Spirit.” However, Freire certainly has his own uniqueness in thinking about the solution to the conflicts between the oppressors and the oppressed. He argues:

In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity, become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both... And this fight, because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors’ violence... 

In Hegel’s analogy of mastery and servitude, the slave and the master are in conflict with each other just as the oppressed and the oppressors in Freire’s scenario. In Hegel’s narrative, even when the slave acquires a more “objective” worldview and therefore enables the progress of the “Spirit,” there will eventually emerge another self-undermining contradiction between the constituents of the “Spirit.” Hence, the conflicts continues to exist but only in other forms regarding other issues. The point here is that, when the slaves overthrow the masters, they themselves become the new “masters”—different, of course, from the mastery of their former owners. The new masters, however, are still in charge of the new form that “Spirit” takes and are still

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27 ibid, 79-81.

28 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 44-5.
over and against the new slaves that this form creates. Conflict and domination remain even as the individual players continue.

In Freire’s account, on the other hand, the constant presence of conflicts within the “Spirit” is not necessarily the case. As the quote above shows, the oppressed’s move to resolve the conflict with the oppressor somehow should complete the struggle and thereby free both parties. Moreover, Freire claims that this resolution must be done by an act of love on the part of the oppressed.

But what is an act of love in the first place? What does it mean for the oppressed to love the oppressor? In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire makes these statements to pose a solution to the dialectical conflict between the oppressed and the oppressors. However, all of these statements are quite vague and are undeveloped. There are quite a lot of questions that can be made about this crucial part of his theory of education, and this is the focus of this thought-experiment.

In order to expand the notion of an act of love ambiguously presented in Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I will use philosopher Søren Kierkegaard’s ideas of neighbor love explicated in *Works of Love* as the lens of analysis. How can we elaborate on Freire’s vague statement about the love between the oppressed and the oppressors? The following two chapters will be devoted to answer this question.

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29 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 44.
Chapter 2

“These Christian deliberations ... will be understood slowly but then also easily, whereas they will surely become difficult if someone by hasty and curious reading makes them very difficult for himself.”
— Søren Kierkegaard

The discussion of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed presented in the first chapter illuminated two crucial points in understanding Freire’s ideas of the oppressed-oppressor dynamics. The first is that they are heavily influenced by Hegel’s master-slave analogy. The second is that, while owing many of his ideas to Hegel, Freire claims an entirely new idea by arguing that the resolution of the dialectical struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors requires the oppressed’s love for the oppressors. According to Freire, this is the only way to end the conflict between the two social groups.

This idea marks Freire’s divergence from the strictly Hegelian scenario in which the progress of the “Spirit” that accompanies the dialectical struggles requires that the antagonists fight with each other and that one of them comes to dominate the other. However, Freire’s breakaway from Hegel regarding the oppressed-oppressor dynamics is controversial since Freire never elaborates on this point in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed. As it is commonly understood, arguments made without reasons can be quite unconvincing. This does not follow, however, that the claims he presents without particular reasons should be dismissed. Rather, the extent of his influence in

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educational practices should be enough to illustrate the importance of delving into his claim, and perhaps providing an analysis where he lacks one. The analysis then may be able to help the reader understand Freire’s claim in depth and to appreciate its merits.

As the passage above suggests, the hasty attempt to answer this difficult question will rather make the issue more difficult for it has not even been established what it means for one to love the other. In other words, the answer to the initial question seems to require the answer to the more fundamental question, “What does it mean for one to love the other in the first place?” In particular, what would it mean for the oppressed bent on liberation to love their oppressors? Without having a clear view of love between human beings in general, it will be impossible to talk about the specific kind of love that Freire suggests when talking about the oppressed-oppressors dynamics. Therefore, in preparation for a careful analysis of the central question of this project, I will first take a pause and draw ideas from Works of Love written by the Christian existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard.

2.1 Point of Departure: Christianity as Absolute Normative Force

Every discourse, particularly a section of a discourse, usually presupposes something that is the starting point. Someone who wishes to deliberate on the discourse or statement therefore does well to find this presupposition first in order then to begin with it.\(^{31}\)

\(^{31}\) ibid, 17.
What is the presupposition of the commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself?” In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard identifies the presupposition of the commandment as self-love. Focusing on the phrase “as yourself,” Kierkegaard explains that the commandment, which demands one to love one’s neighbor, presupposes that the subject already has to be self-loving. Kierkegaard writes, “When it is said, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ this contains what is presupposed, that every person loves himself. Thus, Christianity ... presupposes this [self-love].”32 Without loving one’s self, humans would not be able to love the neighbor as themselves, and this is the reason why Kierkegaard pinpoints self-love not only as the presupposition of the commandment but also as the starting point of the discussion.

A secular or non-Christian point of view, however, may challenge the presupposition of the commandment that Kierkegaard uncovers. This is because of the way that Kierkegaard views the presupposition itself—that is, that Kierkegaard takes the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” as the commandment —already has an underlying assumption: that this is an imperative command.

This assumption under which Kierkegaard operates is a product of his active engagement with Christianity as the *absolute normative force*. Kierkegaard clarifies this point by writing, “No, least of all has Christianity ... engaged in describing or dwelling on how a person *is*... Christianity begins immediately with what *every* person *should become*.”33 Thus, for Kierkegaard, Christianity is never a means to

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32 ibid, 17.

33 ibid, 180.
present positive descriptions of the way that a human being exists. Rather, by reflecting upon Christianity, Kierkegaard articulates how human beings ought to love the neighbor. Consequently, the following elaboration of his argument in *Works of Love* will inevitably contain normative claims.

One needs to be careful in understanding Kierkegaard’s normative arguments as to how humans ought to love the neighbor. Kierkegaard’s normative claims in *Works of Love* are not about how he thinks humans ought to fulfill the commandment but about how he thinks Christianity demands humans to fulfill the commandment.

Kierkegaard’s presupposition that Christianity is the absolute normative force may make *Works of Love* appear to be merely preaching. As the discussion in the preceding sections shows, Kierkegaard boldly makes imperative statements that appear to be words of a preacher. However, the reader of *Works of Love* should note that this is exactly the opposite of what he intends to do. Kierkegaard wrote the work with the intention to encourage his readers to reflect on their conventional understanding of the notion of neighbor love.

In the *Preface*, he introduces the work by writing, “They are Christian deliberations...” The word, “deliberations” in this context means a form of discussion that is intended to provoke the participants’ thoughts on the subject matter. The important thing to note here is that Kierkegaard used the word “deliberations” against the background of another similar word, “discourse.” In one of his journal entries, Kierkegaard remarks on the difference between deliberations and discourses:

34 ibid, 3.
An upbuilding discourse about love presupposes that people know essentially what love is and seeks to win them to it, to move them.... A deliberation ... does not presuppose the definitions as given and understood; therefore, it must not so much move, mollify, reassure, persuade, as awaken and provoke people and sharpen thought.35

By writing *Works of Love*, therefore, Kierkegaard aspired to lead the reader to break away from the comfortable understanding of neighbor love or other forms of love in general.36

In conclusion, the points noted above will be enough information to set the first step of understanding *Works of Love*: that it is not only Kierkegaard’s reflections on the Christian commandment but also his challenge to the readers’ common understanding of love between themselves and others.

### 2.2 Who is the Neighbor?

Let us think of people that we meet throughout the course of our life — family members, friends, employers, passersby, romantic partners, those who have significant influence on our life, those who do not matter to our life and so on. It is certainly impossible to make an exhaustible list of every single person that we meet in our life.


36 “Therefore a ‘deliberation’ must first fetch them up out of the cellar, call to them, turn their comfortable way of thinking topsy-turvy with the dialectic of truth.” (Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 470.)
Now, let us think of how we treat each single individual that we meet. The common way of treating those that we meet would be to make certain prioritization. For example, we tend to care about friends more than just passersby, and family members more than friends. Moreover, typically each relationship that we form with those whose presence is significant in our life, such as friends and those with whom we share romantic love, is exclusive. Kierkegaard calls this kind of exclusive form of care “preferential love” and the object of such love “the beloved” or “the friend.” As he writes,

... this [friendship or erotic love] ... based on preference: to love this one person above all others, to love him in contrast all others. Therefore the object of both erotic love and friendship has preference’s name, “the beloved,” “the friend,” who is loved in contrast to the whole world.\(^{37}\)

Kierkegaard forms his notion of neighbor love against this background of preferential love. For Kierkegaard, neighbor love is not preferential or exclusive; rather, it ought to be inclusive in such a way that the notion of “the neighbor” encompasses all humanity. Kierkegaard writes, “The Christian doctrine, on the contrary, is to love the neighbor, to love the whole human race, all people...”\(^{38}\)

Kierkegaard’s claim that the neighbor is all of humanity suggests two points. The first is that the subject of neighbor love (that is, you in the commandment) is also included as the object of neighbor love. Kierkegaard makes this point clear by writing,

\(^{37}\) Ibid, 19.

\(^{38}\) Ibid, 19.
When it is said, ‘You shall love your neighbor [Næste] as yourself,’ this contains what is presupposed, that every person loves himself. Thus, Christianity, which by no means begins, as do those high-flying thinkers, without presuppositions, nor with a flattering presupposition, presupposes this.\textsuperscript{39}

Kierkegaard’s claim that neighbor love includes all of humanity indicates that “the beloved” and “the friend,” the objects of preferential love, are also neighbors. For Kierkegaard, friendship and romantic love and neighbor love are not necessarily mutually exclusive to each other. For instance, Kierkegaard thinks that it is still possible to have a romantic partner and be an essential Christian at the same time as he writes, “The Christian may very well marry, may very well love his wife, especially in the way he ought to love her, may very well have a friend and love his native land...”\textsuperscript{40} For Kierkegaard, Christian neighbor love must not be exclusive to a specific form of relationships but rather must be the most fundamental form of care that human beings ought to have in every kind of relationship with others.

Another way to illustrate this point would be that in loving others human beings must first see the similarities of the neighbor as opposed to their dissimilarities which distinguish the neighbor from themselves. In the third deliberation, You Shall Love the Neighbor, Kierkegaard claims that humans, including both Christians and non-Christians, tend to focus on dissimilarities among themselves—dissimilarities of

\textsuperscript{39} ibid, 17.
\textsuperscript{40} ibid, 145.
social class, intelligence, appearance, and so on. He writes, “There is plenty of dissimilarity in the world; there is dissimilarity everywhere in temporality...”

The epitome of this tendency, according to Kierkegaard, is the way that socio-economically advanced classes treats lower classes. He illustrates a hypothetical situation in which a person from higher class holds a banquet and invites his friends who belong to the same or similar socio-economic class and who share similar cultural or intellectual backgrounds with the host. Kierkegaard argues that the host in this situation is making an obvious distinction between those that deserve to be invited to the banquet and others who do not. Neighbor love avoids this kind of discrimination.

Indeed, Kierkegaard argues that the genuine Christian ought not to do this. Would it be, then, enough to invite those who belong to a different socio-economic class and/ or those who do not share the same cultural and intellectual background? In response to this question, Kierkegaard answers, “… so scrupulous is Christian equality and its use of language that it requires not only that you shall feed the poor; it requires that you shall call it a banquet.” For Kierkegaard, the kind of action that one takes for the sake of demonstrating that one is blind to the dissimilarity is not enough.

The reason why Kierkegaard thinks that inviting “dissimilar people” is not a sufficient way of loving one’s neighbor is that inviting a group of such people means that the host is still conducting his actions based on dissimilarity. True neighbor love, according to Kierkegaard, must come from one’s indifference to dissimilarity and

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41 ibid, 81.
42 ibid, 82.
from one’s acknowledgement that every single human being is one’s neighbor.

Kierkegaard claims, “The one who feeds the poor—but still has not been victorious over his mind in such a way that he calls his meal a banquet—sees the poor and the lowly only as the poor and the lowly. The one who gives the banquet see the neighbor in the poor and the lowly.”^43

Acknowledgement of all human beings as the neighbor regardless of their difference from one is probably best expressed in his analogy of theater. Kierkegaard writes,

> It is just as in the play. But when the curtain fall on the stage, then the one who played the king and the one who played the beggar etc. are all alike; all are one and the same—actors. When at death the curtain falls on the stage... then they, too, are all one, they are human beings. All of them are what they essentially were, what you did not see because of the dissimilarity that you saw—they are human beings.^[44]

According to Kierkegaard, to truly love the neighbor, one must not be deceived by any forms of difference among human beings—difference of social classes, cultural or intellectual backgrounds and so on—but one must focus on the essential similarity of all human being: that they all are human beings.

### 2.3 Inwardness

*Indeed, what else is Christianity but inwardness!* —Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love^[45]*

^[43] ibid, 83.

^[44] ibid, 87.

^[45] ibid, 137.
The first word of the commandment, “You Shall Love the Neighbor as Yourself,” is “you.” Regarding this doer of the commandment, Kierkegaard does not think that it can be any kind of person such as lazy ones, selfish ones, and so on. In *Works of Love*, he provides insights into what kind of person one ought to be in order to fulfill the commandment by emphasizing the importance of inwardness and outwardness. The notions of inwardness and outwardness and their relationship with each other constitute a crucial part of his view of Christianity and the commandment.

The word “inwardness” suggests an inward movement of one’s thought, that is, self-reflection. However, Kierkegaard’s idea of inwardness is more than a matter of thought or feeling: inwardness is about one’s way of existing. He writes, “Christianity does not want to make changes in externals; neither does it want to abolish drives or inclination—it wants only to make infinity’s change in the inner being.” (emphasis is mine)46

Kierkegaard formulates his idea of inwardness against the background of humans’ tendency to be influenced by the external world. One of the good example that demonstrates this tendency is actions for the sake of getting recognition from others. It is not surprising to hear, for example, that some children try to be academically successful in order to gain acknowledgement from their parents. In this case, these children’s motivation to study hard depends on the parents’ reception of their grades, which is essentially externals. Grades and parents’ reactions do not belong to the children themselves, and yet those children’s perception of themselves

46 ibid, 139.
or how they relate with themselves can be heavily influenced by these external factors.

The desire for recognition is not the only instance of human beings’ tendency to be influenced by their surrounding environment. Humans, for example, tend to respect highly acclaimed people or people in a higher position in the society more than those who are abandoned by the society. The acclaims given to those select groups of people are shaped by the public’s reception of the persons, which belong not to any single individual but to the ambiguous groups of people called the public. In this way, there are many cases in which the way humans treat people, things, or truth can be heavily influenced by how the public perceives them.

Kierkegaard denounces this human tendency to be shaped in accordance with the opinion of the public as “selfish or cowardly and timorous hankering to win the approval of people—as if it were the approval of people that decides whether something is true or not.” For Kierkegaard, conformity with the public hinders individual human beings from being truly authentic, that is, from attaining their own authentic existence.

Thus, Kierkegaard writes, “Ah, to keep oneself unstained by the world is the task and doctrine of Christianity...” Kierkegaard claims that the purification of the

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47 In many of his writings, Kierkegaard often uses the word “the herd” to describe mass society. Mass society, for Kierkegaard, meant the European modern age in which the mass fell out of Christianity and became committed to pursuing self-interests. In this chapter, I will use the word “the public” instead of the “herd” to avoid using the metaphorical expressions every time I talk about mass culture and society. (Merold Westphal, Kierkegaard’s Critique of Reason and Society, (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987, 44)


49 ibid, 74.
self is achieved through inwardness, that is, relating to the self. Furthermore,
Kierkegaard contends that relating one to the self is relating one to God and to the
one’s conscience as he writes, “… they must first have answered the question whether
they have consulted with God and with their conscience”\textsuperscript{50} But what does it mean for
one to relate to God and to conscience?

To put it briefly, according to Kierkegaard one’s relationship to God can be
established only through self-denial. Relating to God requires one’s recognition of
God as the absolute higher power. Accordingly, Kierkegaard claims that self-denial is
the only way that enables humans to embrace God’s absoluteness. Thus, he writes, “…
it is self-denial that discovers that God is.”\textsuperscript{51}

Regarding the notion of self-denial, Kierkegaard makes an explicit distinction
between the non-Christian idea of self-denial and that of the essentially Christian.
Kierkegaard writes,

\textit{The merely human idea of self-denial} is this: give up your self-loving desires, cravings, and plans—then you will be esteemed and honored and loved as righteous and wise ... \textit{The Christian idea of self-denial} is: give up your self-loving desires and cravings, give up your self-seeking plans and purposes so that you truly work unselfishly for the good...\textsuperscript{52}

One extreme example that illustrates the difference between the non-Christian way of
self-denial and that of the essentially Christian is this: suppose that a father sees a car

\textsuperscript{50} ibid, 139.
\textsuperscript{51} ibid, 362.
\textsuperscript{52} ibid, 194.
running over his child. The expected course of action that the father would take in this scenario would be to save the child even if that would risk his own life.

However, what matters to Kierkegaard is not what the father does but rather why he does it, that is, the reasoning behind his actions. If the father employs the “merely human” idea of self-denial, his motivation to save his own child would come from his desire for his own child to stay alive, which Kierkegaard identifies as “self-seeking plans and purposes.”53 On the other hand, if the father acts according to the essentially Christian idea of self-denial, he would try to save the child not because he wants the child to stay alive but because that is what God wants.

In this way, Christian self-denial for Kierkegaard demands that one place God as the higher authority of conduct and as the intermediary of one’s relationship with others. Kierkegaard writes, “Worldly wisdom is of the opinion that love is a relationship between persons: Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between: a person—God—a person, that is, that God is the middle term.”54

Yet, God for Kierkegaard is not only the intermediary. God is the absolute higher power that enables you to do things as a “co-worker” as he writes, “An omnipotent one [God] cannot be your co-worker, a human being’s co-worker, without its signifying that you are able to do nothing at all, and on the other hand, if he is your co-worker, you are able to do everything.”55 In short, self-denial for Kierkegaard

53 ibid, 194.
54 ibid, 107.
55 ibid, 362.
denotes one’s denial of the self as an autonomous, capable being.\textsuperscript{56} The one who truly embraces the Christian idea of self-denial acknowledges that God exists and that, without God, one is not capable of doing anything.

Regarding his own idea of Christian self-denial, Kierkegaard notes, “What Christianity calls self-denial specifically and essentially involves a double danger...”\textsuperscript{57} The first danger drives from the necessity to give up the external rewards that one would get for practicing self-denial from the public and thus to bear with the possibility of being scorned by the public as a result. Kierkegaard writes, “... put up with being abominated almost as a criminal, insulted and ridiculed...”\textsuperscript{58} Hence, Kierkegaard emphasizes that one needs to exist inwardly to seek the source of moral conduct in God by writing, “... it is Christian self-denial when a person denies himself and, thrust back by the world precisely because the world shuts itself to him, he must now seek the confidential relationship with God.”\textsuperscript{59}

The second danger of Christian self-denial according to Kierkegaard is the possibility that one comes to think that one is relating to God in a genuine way. While the first danger is with the public, the second danger is to the self. Kierkegaard writes, “The second danger, or the danger in second place, is the very assurance that the relationship with God is in order, that it is a genuine relationship to God.”\textsuperscript{60} To phrase

\begin{ Disclaimer}

\textsuperscript{57} Kierkegaard, \textit{Works of Love}, 194.

\textsuperscript{58} ibid, 194.

\textsuperscript{59} ibid, 195.

\textsuperscript{60} ibid, 195.
\end{ Disclaimer}
it in a different way, the double danger that one needs to face is first the danger to the
self, and second the danger with the public. Kierkegaard contends:

... the truly Christian struggle always involves a double
danger because there is struggle in two places: first in
the person’s inner being, where he must struggle with
himself, and then, when he makes progress in this
struggle, outside the person with the world.61

In both cases of danger one needs to seek inwardness, that is, the way of seeking
one’s own being through the guidance of God. In the struggle with the self, one
always needs to strive for a genuine relationship with God; in the struggle with the
public, one must seek the help of God inwardly, giving up the external rewards that
the surrounding environment would have granted.

Interestingly, while Kierkegaard promotes the very specific notion of the
Christian self-denial, he thinks that self-denial presupposes self-love. Kierkegaard
writes:

“If the speaker is not the self-lover, he easily becomes
unsure or untruthful; either he will be tempted to gain
advantage for himself from the praising, which is to
defraud the object, or he will fall into a kind of
embarrassment so that he does not even dare to say
everything about how glorious this love is, out of fear
that someone would think that he is speaking of
himself. But if the speaker is a self-lover ... then, yes,
then he can freely speak about self-denial’s love...”62

The passage above suggests that the genuine Christian self-denial presupposes self-
love. According to Kierkegaard, if one is not self-loving enough, one would easily fall

61 ibid, 192.
62 ibid, 372.
for seeking affirmations from the public. Here again, Kierkegaard talks about the
tension between the individual and the public, and hence, one can see the importance
of inwardness in his argument.

“The essentially Christian is this,” Kierkegaard writes, “truly to love oneself is
to love God...” Thus, for Kierkegaard, just as it is the case for self-denial, self-love
is loving God. This point suggests an eccentric juxtaposition of the common
understanding of the relationship between self-denial and self-love. In the eyes of the
non-Christians, self-denial and self-love appear to diametrically stand against each
other, but for Kierkegaard, they are one and the same thing: to love God, which is
achieved through inwardness, the establishment of one’s own consultancy with God.

The second element of inwardness is the establishment of one’s relation to his
or her own conscience. Kierkegaard brings up an example in which a clergyman asks
a couple at their wedding ceremony if both parties agree to make their marriage their
life-long choice. He explains:

No, they must first have answered the question whether
they have consulted with God and with their
consciences. Christianity does not want to make
changes in externals; neither does it want to abolish
drives or inclinations—it wants only to make infinity's
change in the inner being.

In this passage, by referring to “the inner being,” Kierkegaard indicates that he is not
only explicitly talking about inwardness but also claiming that the realization of
inwardness requires one to consult with God and with one’s conscience.

63 ibid, 114.
64 ibid, 139.
This point seems to suggest that Kierkegaard views God and conscience as separate. However, later in the same chapter, Kierkegaard writes, “... to relate to God is precisely to have conscience.” If relating to God as explained earlier in this section is exactly the same as having conscience, why did he not write that one needs to consult only with God as opposed to “with God and with conscience”? What kind of implicit difference between God and conscience does this apparent contradiction imply?

The short answer to this question is that, for Kierkegaard, conscience is one’s relation to the self through the guidance of God which forces the self to be aware of one’s responsibility as an individual human being as well as one’s immediate dependence on God for the wherewithal to do anything at all. Kierkegaard writes, “What is conscience? In the conscience it is God who looks at a person; so now in everything the person must look at him. This is how God brings us up.”

Kierkegaard’s description of conscience illuminates two points. The first point is that the realization of God’s surveillance individuates one from the public, thereby enabling one to view oneself as the single individual as opposed to an anonymous constituent of the public. The first point leads to the second, which is that, by becoming aware of the simple singularity of one’s own existence, one becomes aware also of one’s own responsibility to lead one’s life. To have conscience, therefore, means to be summoned by God to be aware of one’s eternal responsibility for what one chooses to do as the single individual separate from the public.

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65 ibid, 143.
66 ibid, 377.
For Kierkegaard, inwardness is an indispensable element of the essentially Christian. Through relating oneself to God, one first needs to love one’s self so that one does not fall into the abyss of the public; second one ought to place oneself in the state of self-denial, thereby acknowledging the debt of his existence to God; third, one needs to recognize and accept through inwardness oneself as a single individual human being who is entirely responsible for his course of actions and choices. As the proceeding sections will demonstrate, this notion of inwardness is not only necessary for one to comprehend Kierkegaard’s idea of Christianity but also crucial in his idea of the neighbor love.

2.4. Tripartition of Neighbor Love

The love-relationship requires threeness: the lover, the beloved, the love—but the love is God.
—Søren Kierkegaard

In addition to an inclusive notion of the neighbor and the concept of inwardness, Kierkegaard proposes another element to work on in considering what it means to love one’s neighbor as oneself, namely the tripartite relationship among God, the neighbor, and the self. Before discussing the significance of this triadic relationship of the three parties and the practical implications of this relationship, I will introduce two underlying ideas that Kierkegaard employs in his explications of the notion of neighbor love.

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67 ibid, 121.
The first is that God is love. Throughout *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard repeatedly states, “God is love.” This point suggests that when one loves others God is present as the source of this love so that the relationship between oneself and one’s neighbor is never merely dyadic but instead is triadic. In other words, in the relationship of neighbor love, love—which is God—functions as the intermediary between oneself and one’s neighbor; as Kierkegaard writes, “In the Christian sense, to love people is to love God, and to love God is to love people...”

The second is that love is that which human beings universally are granted by God. Kierkegaard makes this underlying idea explicit by writing, “But can one human being implant love in another human being’s heart? No ... It is God, the Creator, who must implant love in each human being, he who himself is Love.” For Kierkegaard, therefore, the crux the commandment is not that humans must have love since humans already have it. The point at issue is rather about “how you are to love all human beings universally-humanly.” Kierkegaard expresses his frustration of humans’ misusage of love deeply rooted in their nature by writing, “So deeply is love rooted in human nature, so essentially does it belong to a human being, and yet people very often hit upon escapes in order to deprive themselves—of this blessing.”

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68 ibid, 364.
69 ibid, 384.
70 ibid, 216.
71 ibid, 143.
72 ibid, 157.
These points lead into Kierkegaard’s formulation of the idea that to love another person is to help him love God. This is firstly because God is love and consequently, just as God should be the intermediary in the relationships between humans, love also should be the intermediary of love between human beings. Thus, to love another person as the neighbor is not to make the person relate to yourself but rather guide them to relate the self to God, who is love, and to the person’s own conscience. Kierkegaard writes, “... to love another person is to help that person to love God, and to be loved is to be helped.”73

The practical implications of this idea can be illuminated when considering the case in which we have personal conflicts with others and, hence, wish them to change the way they are. Kierkegaard raises an example of two artists who have different attitudes on finding the beauty to paint. One artist complains that there is no one worth painting in spite of his long-time search for a beautiful person worth painting throughout his travel around the world. The other artist, on the other hand, says that, despite no previous experience of traveling, he does not have difficulty finding people to paint because he finds beauty in people who surround him. In the end of the passage, Kierkegaard writes,

Would this not be a sign that he is indeed the artist, he who by bringing a certain something with him found right on the spot what the well-traveled artist did not find anywhere in the world—perhaps because he did not bring a certain something with him!74

73 ibid, 121.
74 ibid, 158.
Kierkegaard laments over how common it is that humans find others imperfect or not worth loving by saying, “It is a sad but altogether too common inversion to go on talking continually about how the object of love must be so it can be loveworthy, instead of talking about how love must be so it can be love.”

On the case in which one demands the other to change so that the other comes more lovable, Kierkegaard claims that it is not the other that needs to change but rather the one demanding the change in others who really needs to change. In other words, he is again promoting the significance of inwardness in loving the other. Kierkegaard writes,

...when the defect or the weakness makes the relationship more inward ... then you love the person you see. You see the defect, but the fact that your relationship then becomes more inward shows that you love the person in whom you see the defect or the weakness or the imperfection.

The passage above comes to make sense given the importance of inwardness in being the essentially Christian. According to Kierkegaard’s idea of self-denial before God, one should always put God as the intermediary in the relationship with others. Therefore, the essential Christians ought not to be arrogant to think that they have the right to demand others to change. For Kierkegaard’s, it is not a task that human beings can assign themselves but a command that only God can give to humans.

The second point that is related to the passage is that conflicts between humans should lead each one of them to individually relate themselves to God, who is

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75 ibid, 159.
76 ibid, 167.
love, and to their own conscience. Therefore, as just shown, the one who demands the change in others must remind the self of being self-denial in front of God through inwardness. Kierkegaard writes, “To be able to love a person despite his weakness and defects and imperfections is still not perfect love, but rather this, to be able to find him lovable despite and with his weaknesses and defects and imperfections.” In other words, Kierkegaard claims that one ought to love the other for who they are.

It does not, however, follow that one should blindly love the person despite their faults as Kierkegaard writes:

... we do not mean to recommend a childish infatuation with the beloved’s accidental characteristics ... Far from it ... the relationship itself will with integrated power fight against the imperfection, overcome the defect and remove the heterogeneity.

The conflicts should also lead “the other,” the one who is demanded to change or is at fault, to strive for the inwardness and hence for relating the self to God and conscience so that he or she can reflect upon one’s way of living in the eyes of God. Inwardness enables one to return to who one really is because it is a process of Christian purification as mentioned earlier. Therefore, what Kierkegaard means by saying that humans ought to love others “as they are” is not that humans ought to uncritically love others. Rather it is that humans ought to help others relate to God and to conscience so that the ones in need of help can find the way to overcome their faults and defects.

77 ibid, 158.
78 ibid, 166.
79 ibid, 166.
Kierkegaard reproduces the same point in a different way when he presents a discussion of helping others to be independent. He contends, “... it is every human being’s destiny to become free, independent, oneself.” For his contention, Kierkegaard claims that the highest one can do for the neighbor is to help them become the master of themselves and writes, “... in the world of spirit, precisely this, to become one’s own master, is the highest—and in love to help someone toward that, to become himself, free, independent, his own master, to help him stand alone—that is the greatest beneficence.”

To be free, independent and one’s own master, for Kierkegaard, is precisely to relate oneself to God and to conscience as opposed to relying on the interpersonal relationships in which one’s conception of the self is dependent on the beloved’s response. “Love is indeed devotion and sacrifice,” Kierkegaard writes, “and therefore the world thinks that the object of love ... is to determine whether devotion and sacrifice have been shown, and whether the devotion and sacrifice shown are love.” The love-relationship in which one is directly related to the beloved without having God as the intermediary is thus a relationship in which one is dependent on the beloved as Kierkegaard writes, “Erotic love is defined by the object; friendship is defined by the object; only love for the neighbor is defined by love.” Kierkegaard would claim that, in this kind of relationship, one will never be able to become

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80 ibid, 274.
81 ibid, 107.
82 ibid, 66.
independent. Becoming independent from others is to relate oneself to God and to the one’s own conscience.

Moreover, one’s establishment of the relationship with God and with his or her own conscience leads one to rediscover the “primordial self.” This point is tied back to Kierkegaard’s argument, mentioned earlier, that Christianity purifies one from the defilement of the earthly world. Kierkegaard states:

The small-minded person has never had the courage for this God-pleasing venture of humility and pride: before God to be oneself—the emphasis is on ‘before God,’ since this is the source and origin of all distinctiveness.\(^\text{83}\)

According to Kierkegaard, by establishing the confidential relationship with God, separate from the public, one would be able to find who they really are, that is, his or her own distinctiveness given by God.

Based on these claims, Kierkegaard provides an additional argument that the true lover must help the neighbor to be independent and free in such a way that the one helped would not notice that he was helped. Kierkegaard states, “To help a human being in that way is really to deceive him.”\(^\text{84}\) According to Kierkegaard, if the helped one becomes aware of the lover’s help, as an obvious consequence, the helped one would not see the self as his or her own master.\(^\text{85}\)

Kierkegaard also develops the idea of “like for like” based on this triadic relationships between God, the lover, and the neighbor. The notion of “like for like”

\(^{83}\) ibid, 271.

\(^{84}\) ibid, 274.

\(^{85}\) ibid, 274.
denotes that what the lover does to the neighbor is what the lover does to himself or herself. Kierkegaard expresses this idea when discussing forgiveness as he writes, “... your forgiveness is your forgiveness; your forgiveness of another is your own forgiveness; the forgiveness you give is the forgiveness you receive, not the reverse, that the forgiveness you receive is the forgiveness you give.” For Kierkegaard, to love the neighbor is to love God, and to love God is to love oneself. In other words, relating to others through God as the intermediary reflects how one relates himself or herself to God. Kierkegaard writes, “In the Christian sense, to love people is to love God, and to love God is to love people—what you do unto people, you do unto God” How one treats others mirrors how one treats God, which discloses one’s way of living. Therefore, how one treats others is how one treats himself or herself.

In this way, the triadic relationships between God and human beings play a crucial role in understanding Kierkegaard’s idea of what neighbor love ought to look like. In order to truly love a person in the Christian sense, one ought to put God as the intermediary and as a source of moral guidance. To love the neighbor, therefore, is first to relate oneself to God and to the conscience, and at the same time, it is to help the neighbor to love God. The neighbor love is never a direct relationship between human beings. For Kierkegaard, God, who is Love, is the one who always and solemnly sits in the middle of the relationship.

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86 ibid, 380.
87 ibid, 384.
2.5 Outwardness

... to promise is nothing at all; perhaps it is less than nothing.—Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard begins the third deliberation by discussing the emptiness of making with an anecdote of a father who asks two of his sons a favor. In the story one of the brothers tells the father that he will not be able to fulfill the request while the other brother promises that he will. In the end of the narrative, however, the one who promises did not fulfill the task without telling his father. In this scenario, who is morally superior?

Kierkegaard’s answer is this: “...the brother who would say no would be closer to doing his father’s will insofar as he was closer by being aware that he was not doing his father’s will.” Kierkegaard argues that saying yes to others’ requests entails uncertainty for there are possibilities that the promise will be made or will not be made. “A no does not,” Kierkegaard continues, “hide anything, but yes very easily becomes an illusion, a self-deception, which of all difficulties is perhaps the most difficult to overcome.” This analogy that Kierkegaard presents to illuminate the danger of making promises is, of course, a hypothetical situation of the human world.

Kierkegaard contrasts the world of the essential Christian with the human world that permits humans to make empty promises easily by writing, “Christian love

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88 Ibid, 91.
89 ibid., 94.
90 ibid, 94.
is sheer action, and its every work is holy, because it is the fulfilling of the Law."\(^{91}\)

Just as Christianity is the the absolute normative authority for Kierkegaard, he also sets this claim as one of the basis of his deliberation. He states that Christ “taught, so does he answer, with divine authority, since the authority is to assign the task.”\(^{92}\)

Thus, for Kierkegaard, inwardness is not enough for one to truly love the neighbor. The true neighbor love must entail not promises but actions on the part of the lover. But what does Kierkegaard mean by the word, “actions”? As it is the case for inwardness, Kierkegaard’s idea of action is so peculiar that it may be of help to elaborate on this first.

Let us remind ourselves of the notion of inwardness, which rests on the idea that there is a boundary between a single individual human being and the outside world. One’s selfhood constitutes the inner or the internal and everything that exists outside oneself, including other human beings, is external. Employing this mode of thinking, Kierkegaard views actions as movements that take place from the inner to the outer, that is, outwardly. More importantly, according to Kierkegaard, this is done by “self-sacrificing unselfishness.”

Self-sacrificing unselfishness is an action of self-sacrifice that one takes following the love commandment, that is, as an instrument of God. Think of the above mentioned example of a father trying to save his child. In this context, the father’s attempt to save his child as a result of his inward consultancy with God and with his own conscience is one example of self-sacrificing unselfishness. By risking

\(^{91}\) ibid, 99.

\(^{92}\) ibid, 97.
his life, the father is taking a self-sacrificing action. With inwardness, that is, a self-denying acknowledgment that one’s existence is God’s gift, the father is saving his own child as an instrument of God, not because of his self-serving purposes. This counts as unselfishness. Thus, taking an action in Kierkegaard’s mind is self-sacrificing unselfishness.

As the example above illustrates, actions of self-sacrificing unselfishness is not separate from inwardness. Rather, the two ought to be deeply tied with inwardness. He describes the connection by writing,

… self-sacrificing unselfishness is one and the same as self-denial… Thus self-sacrificing unselfishness is in a certain sense, that is, inwardly understood, an obvious consequence of self-denial or is one with self-denial.93

Indeed, for Kierkegaard, actions of self-sacrificing unselfishness are an outward expression of inwardness. For Kierkegaard, one who loves the neighbor in the essentially Christian sense ought to take actions to sacrifice themselves as an instrument of God, thereby expressing their inwardness outwardly.94

Regarding Kierkegaard’s idea of Christianity as an imperative of actions, there are two crucial points worth noting. The first is the idea that “ought implies can.” In other words, Kierkegaard fundamentally assumes that every single human being is capable of taking actions.95 The second is his warning against a human tendency to judge based on the appearances of the subject matter.

93 Ibid 366.
94 Ibid, 366.
95 Ferraira, Striving, 190.
First, Christianity’s command for actions presupposes humans’ capability to take actions to love the neighbor. Kierkegaard clarifies this assumption by writing that Christianity “assumes that every person can do it and therefore only asks if he did it.” It would indeed be an unfair or irrational command if one orders the other to do something that is beyond the other’s capability. Hence, the task to take actions in loving the neighbor assigned by Christianity was given to the humanity by God under the assumption that all humans are capable of doing so.

Secondly, Kierkegaard expresses his cautions against the danger of judging the actions based on their achievements. To illustrate his claim, Kierkegaard uses a parable of a poor woman, who donates two pennies to a temple despite the fact that they are all of her fortune. Certainly, two pennies in the eyes of many would be a small amount of money that cannot be comparable to the amount that more powerful people would donate to the temple. Consequently, it is not surprising that the majority of people would value those who donate more than two pennies. Kierkegaard denounces this line of thought as “the mercilessness of this earthly existence” and claims the injustice of the unfairly negative judgment given to the poor woman who gave up all of her wealth.

Drawing from this parable, Kierkegaard concludes:

… it is not on this [giving] that we focus attention, but on this, that one can be merciful without having the least thing to give. This is of great importance, since **being able** to be merciful certainly is a far greater

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96 ibid, 79.

97 Ibid, 318.
perfection than to have money and then to be able to give.98

Hence, for Kierkegaard, neighbor love ought not to be about showcasing one’s love for the beloved or focusing on the visible achievements. Rather, the lover must be capable of lovingly striving, whether the attempt fails or does not satisfy the criterion of the public.

For one thing, Kierkegaard emphasizes the superiority of basing the judgment on the process of actions as opposed to their consequences, since the consequence of actions are not necessarily in the hands of the doer. He explains, “What a person will or will not achieve is not within his power.”99 In addition to his idea that the essential Christian must not be deceived by the superficiality of appearances, Kierkegaard bases his anti-consequentialist stance on the simple yet crucial fact that human beings cannot be responsible for the external circumstances that may hinder their loving actions.

Using the word “mercifulness” interchangeably with neighbor love, Kierkegaard contends, “Is it mercifulness to give a hundred thousand to the poor? No. Is it mercifulness to give two pennies to the poor? No. Mercifulness is how it is given.”100 For Kierkegaard, therefore, what matters most regarding the issue of one’s outward expressions of love is how one strives to love the neighbor.

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98 Ibid, 317.
99 Ibid, 84.
100 Ibid, 327.
How can we use Kierkegaard’s ideas of neighbor love to elaborate on Freire’s ambiguous statement that the oppressed must love the oppressors? In this chapter, in addition to Kierkegaard’s underlying assumptions about Christianity as the absolute normative force, we have explored three key notions: inwardness, the triadic relationship between the lover, God and the neighbor, and outwardness. Kierkegaard’s ideas of neighbor love are so complex that the outline of his ideas presented in this chapter does not cover the entirety of *Works of Love*. However, relevant sections have been addressed to answer the initial question either as the basis or as the key element of analysis. From the next chapter, let us begin the thought-experiment.
Chapter 3: Experimentation

3.1 Point of Departure

In the first chapter, I outlined Freire’s overall criticism of the banking style of education by means of an expansive analysis of Hegel’s influence on Freire’s formulation of the oppressed-oppressor dynamics. For Freire, the oppressed represented socio-economically disadvantaged people whose learning style focused mainly on absorbing information, not on cultivating critical thinking skills. The oppressed consequently form their identity as passive learners, which then hinders them from taking actions to question their society and to solve social issues that they recognize.

Thus, Freire advocates for an alternative educational style in which students become active learners and problem solvers so that, just as the slave does in Hegel’s master-slave analogy, the oppressed can challenge the oppressor. The ultimate goal for Freire was, however, radically different from Hegel’s scenario: while Hegel sees the dialectical struggles to be continuous, Freire contends that the oppressed must love the oppressor to complete the humanity.\(^\text{101}\)

In preparation for a further theoretical elaboration on what it would mean for the oppressed to love the oppressor, the second chapter was devoted to present Kierkegaard’s idea of neighbor love. This chapter addressed three central ideas— inwardness, the triadic relationship between humans and God, and outwardness.

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\(^{101}\) Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.
Finally, in this chapter, I will attempt to put these two thinkers into a theoretical dialogue. By doing so, I will explicate and elaborate on Freire’s idea that the resolution of the dialectical struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor requires the oppressed’s love for the other.

As was mentioned in the introduction, the theoretical consideration of the possibility of the oppressed’s love for the oppressor will remain within the framework of Christianity. In Kierkegaard’s thoughts, God plays such an indispensable role as the absolute normative authority that it would indeed be a great violence to secularize Kierkegaard’s idea of neighbor love. Hence, the oppressed-oppressor dynamics according to the Kierkegaardian-Freirian picture that I will develop presupposes the existence of God as the definite normative force, and this is the final chapter’s point of departure.

What does the Kierkegaardian-Freirian picture of the oppressed-oppressor dynamics look like? In other words, how can we picture the love between the oppressed and the oppressor in a more concrete matter using Kierkegaard’s idea of neighbor love? In the following sections, I will attempt to answer these questions.

3.2 Questioning the Status Quo?

The nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had.
—Mahatma Gandhi\textsuperscript{102}

\textit{In order to love your enemies, you must begin by analyzing self.}
—Martin Luther King Jr.\textsuperscript{103}

As was explained in the first chapter, in \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, Freire proposes “Problem-Solving Education” as an alternative to the passive, memorization-based learning style which he calls the “banking style of education.”\textsuperscript{104} According to Freire, the “banking” style of education turns students into passive learners, thereby hindering them from questioning their surrounding environment and from taking actions to overcome their dialectical struggles with the oppressors. The “Problem-solving” education, on the other hand, encourages students to think critically, not by forcing them to memorize fixed sets of facts but by asking them questions.

The direction of the questions that students are encouraged to ask as they cultivate their intellectual and critical-thinking capacity in Freire’s system of this “problem-solving” education can be both inward, outward, or a mixture of both. Students can, for example, inwardly ask themselves questions regarding their own identities based on their own interests, sexuality, and so on. They can also critically question the outside world that Freire would describe as oppressive.

These kinds of questions would count as outward movements of thought in the


\textsuperscript{103} Martin Luther King Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” 17 November 1957, transcript, The King Center, http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/loving-your-enemies-0.

\textsuperscript{104} Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, 72.
eyes of Kierkegaard who identifies the inner with the self and the outer with the surrounding world. However, the distinctions between inward and outward questions are not necessarily clear when one, for example, inquires into his or her own identity based on one’s socio-economic background, race, and so on. A question about the identity of the self is *about the self*, and thus, it is an inward question. However, when the question is tied to the social construction of the self, it becomes an outward inquiry since it will entail considerations of one’s surrounding environment. In this way, the Freirian idea of “questioning” does not specify which kind of questioning should be prioritized.

The lack of this specification produces a crucial issue in thinking about the love between the oppressed and the oppressor. The oppressed, according to Freire, *must love* the oppressor while questioning the oppressor’s authority. The oppressed’s love for the oppressor seems to indicate the outward direction from the oppressed to the oppressor just as the oppressed’s challenge to the oppressor does. In other words, the lack of the specification of the directionality in Freire’s notion of “questioning” illuminates an ambiguity in his thesis that the oppressed *must love* the oppressor.

Kierkegaard, who emphasizes the importance of inwardness in one’s relation to others, would suggest that the oppressed must seek inwardness before establishing their relationships of neighbor love with the oppressor. Thus, in the eyes of Kierkegaard, Freire’s idea of “questioning” must first be inward. This Kierkegaardian specification of the direction of questioning that the students of the oppressed should pursue allows us to see in a more concrete way than Freirian ambiguous elucidations
what way of living that the oppressed students should seek. Consequently, before
discussing how the oppressors ought to treat the oppressed, this section will
concentrate on addressing how the oppressed ought to relate to the oppressors. In the
eyes of Kierkegaard, the oppressed students’ inward questioning of their self enables
them to be humble (self-denying), confident (self-loving), and yet aware of their own
responsibilities (conscientious); it does so for the following three reasons.

The first is that Kierkegaard urges that one should not seek to establish direct
relationships with others without having God as the intermediary authority.
Kierkegaard claims that relating to others without God encourages one to pursue self-
constructed purposes and goals and to treat others according to one’s own desires.
Consequently, it disables one from embracing self-denial, the acknowledgement that
one owes his or her existence to God and that one is an instrument to realize God’s
command. And as we have seen, without self-denial, genuine neighbor love is not
possible.

Thus, Kierkegaard would claim that the oppressed must come to acknowledge
that they are not autonomous being without God and that God is the sole, absolute
power to give commands to love the neighbor, that is, all of humanity. The
oppressed’s self-denial in this context means that the oppressed ought to realize that
the question as to how the oppressed ought to treat their oppressors is not in the hands
of the oppressed but only in the hands of God.

As explained earlier, Kierkegaard does not think that one should just abandon
the possibility for others to change. Rather, he argues that to love others is to help
them to relate themselves to God and to their own conscience. Moreover, the highest
good that one can do for others is to help them become independent from other
human beings and be their own masters. Becoming independent and one’s own
master for Kierkegaard means cultivating one’s inwardness and relationship with God
so that one completes one’s existence with the help of God as opposed to with
reliance on other human beings. Therefore, the most noble the lover can do for the
neighbor is to help the neighbor stand on his own by cultivating inward relationship
with God.

The original Hegelian scenario that Freire follows is in stark contrast to the
Kierkegaardian prescriptions. In his master-slave analogy, Hegel illustrates that the
origin of the dialectical struggles between the master and the slaves lies in the
disparity of their respective perceptions of their relationship with each other. While
the master views the self as autonomous and the slave merely as an instrument, the
slave realizes that the master’s existence as a master is, in fact, dependent on the
slave’s servitude. In Hegel’s analogy, the slave’s realization, then, creates a
motivation to make the master engage with the process of reconceptualization of their
mutual relationship. In Hegel’s scenario, then, the slave engages with the master
based on slave’s desire to make the master change the previous perception of the
slave. In other words, the questions that the slave would come up with in the attempt
to resolve the dialectical struggle with the master would be, “How can I change the
master’s perception of me so that it is in accordance with mine?”

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105 See Chapter 2.
The hypothetical Kierkegaardian solution, on the other hand, is radically different from this scenario. In this scenario, the slave becomes aware that the master’s perception of himself as autonomous is false. Moreover, the slave realizes that the master fails to recognize two crucial facts about his existence. The first is that his or her supposedly “autonomous” existence as the master is dependent on the slave’s servitude. The second is that the master also is not aware that he owes his existence as a human being to God, the source of everything.

Given this setting, then, if the slave is to employ Kierkegaardian approach, the slave would first have to place him or herself in the state of self-denial before God. This means that the slave would have to acknowledge that he or she ought not to impose on the master the self’s own desire to change the master’s perception of the slave. Rather, as Kierkegaard argues that to love others is to help them relate to God and to their own conscience, if the slave is to love the master as the neighbor, the slave would have to reflect not on how to change the master’s mind but on how to help the master to relate him or herself to God. This would, then, lead the master to be self-reflective on his or her own way of living that is dependent on the servitude of the slave.

As explained in the second chapter, the highest good that the lover can do for the neighbor is to help the neighbor become independent and hence the self’s own master. In the Kierkegaardian lens, therefore, what the slave should do is to alter the being of the master by helping him or her to be self-reflective to the extent that he comes to realize that his existence both as a master and as a human being is reliant on
something that he has failed to recognize as the source of everything.

In Freire’s scenario, the oppressed replaces the slave, and the oppressor is the master. The oppressed must first come to acknowledge that their existence is not an autonomous, independent being but rather an instrument of God’s command. This should then lead the oppressed to realize that what needs to be done to resolve the dialectical struggles with the oppressor is to help the oppressor come to the exact same realization.

Self-denial is not the only constituent of inwardness. Another crucial element of inwardness for Kierkegaard is self-love. In the second chapter, I described that, for Kierkegaard, to love oneself is to relate oneself to God and to one’s own conscience. The difference between self-denial and self-love is that, while self-denial is the acknowledgement of one’s debt to God for one’s existence, self-love is one’s confidence in the establishment of the personal, inward and confidential relationship with God. According to Kierkegaard, if one is not self-loving, that is, not certain about the indispensability of knowing that one is loved by God, one will devalue oneself and thus one can easily fall for the opinion of the public.

Interestingly, Freire notes the oppressed’s tendency to rely on the opinion of others as authoritative when he describes one of his former students in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. The student who said, “Why don’t you ... explain the pictures first? That way it’ll take less tie and won’t give us a headache.” Using this example, Freire claims that students who have long been exposed to the “banking” style of

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106 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 63.
education tend to lack the confidence in their ability to know and to find their own answers to the questions that they encounter both inside and outside the classroom.

From the Kierkegaardian perspective, the oppressed students’ inclination to seek answers outside themselves indicates that they are not self-loving enough and hence can be easily influenced by the voice of the public. By establishing a personal and confidential relationship with God in their inner sphere, the oppressed ought to learn how to love themselves, that is, they must become confident that the answers do not lie outside but rather inside themselves. In other words, in the eyes of Kierkegaard, the oppressed must be confident in their own ability to separate themselves from the public and to seek his or her own inward relationship with God and with their own conscience.

However, these changes in the oppressed’s inner being still leave rooms for them to act violently against the oppressed, which would lead to producing further conflicts as opposed to the resolution of the problem. The oppressed, for example, can believe that God commands them to dominate the oppressors, thereby overturning the oppression. What does Kierkegaardian resolution entail for how the oppressed ought to treat the oppressors? In order to answer this, we must consider the last key element of inwardness, namely, conscience.

Conscience for Kierkegaard means one’s awareness that he or she is a separate being from the public who is in turn responsible for the entire course of his or her own life. To phrase it in a different way, conscience is one’s awareness that existing as a single individual is a dreadful burden that only the self is capable of bearing.
There is no one to live one’s life but the person himself or herself, and in front of God one is solely responsible for one’s own life. “Am I living my own life in the truest sense? Can I present my being in front of God?” These are the questions that one would ask if one is to relate the self with his or her own conscience. In this way, conscience both individuates individual human beings and consequently informs each single one of them about their single unique burden to lead their own life.

The oppressed’s formation of their relations with their own conscience would instill in the their minds the determination to lead their own life without interference of anyone outside yet with firm awareness of their own responsibilities. By relating to their own conscience, the oppressed would become aware that their perception of themselves as incapable learners who cannot independently find answers is shaped so much by the “banking” style of education. This awareness of the dominance of the voice of the public in their formation of their identity in turn would lead them to pursue the opposite direction, that is, to seek their own individual relationship with God and with themselves.

Most importantly, by having God as the absolute surveillance during the entire course of their respective lives, the oppressed would come to see their God-given duty to be permanently responsible for their own actions. Their awareness of the responsibilities in front of God would encourage the oppressed to constantly question themselves whether they are loving the neighbor in the essentially Christian way. Ideally speaking, the constant questioning of one’s own action through inward consultancy with God, who is love, should become self-critical and creates rooms for
better changes of the way that the oppressed treats the oppressors.

The lack of the specificity in Freire’s idea of active education that stimulates the oppressed to question the status quo resulted in creating an ambiguity in his image of how the oppressed should approach the issue of the dialectical struggle with the oppressor. The employment of Kierkegaard’s normative emphasis on inwardness as one’s way of living helps us to formulate a more vivid picture as to what kind of way of living the oppressed must seek. A Kierkegaardian lens make us realize that the oppressed’s establishment of the inward relationship with themselves and with God would lead them to realize three major points. The first is that, through self-denial, the oppressed should not impose their own selfish desires to change the oppressor’s minds. Rather, they should approach the issue by assisting them in becoming more self-reflective and aware of the dependence of their existence as the oppressors on the oppressed and as human beings on God. The second is that, by learning to love themselves, the oppressed should become confident in their formation of the relationship with God, separate from the turmoil of the public. This will entail their growing sense of their own self-worth and power. The third is that, by way of relating themselves with their own conscience, the oppressed should be able to see themselves as single unique individual who ought to be responsible for their own lives.

Lastly, if the oppressed were to adopt the self-denial, self-love, and conscience that together comprise the inwardness of love, they would attempt to instill these very same way of living in the oppressors themselves since to love the neighbor is to help the neighbor relate him or herself to God and to his or her own conscience. In short,
by acting out of love towards the oppressors, the oppressed ought to prompt in them inwardness.

As Kierkegaard claims in *Works of Love*, however, inwardness is not enough in realizing one’s love for the neighbor. Neighbor love needs to be expressed in actions. But what kind of actions should the oppressed take to truly love the oppressor as the neighbor? What if the oppressor never succeeds in becoming more inward? Or what would happen if the oppressor reaches the same level of inwardness as the oppressed? Does it then mean the end of the dialectical struggle?

In what follows, I will develop two hypotheses A and B. Hypothesis A is based on the possibility that the oppressed’s effort to turn the oppressors spiritually inward does not produce any tangible results. In other words, the analysis provided in Hypothesis A is an answer to the question above, “What if the oppressor never succeeds in becoming more inward?” Hypothesis B is based on the other possibility, that is, the case in which the oppressed achieve their goal to help the oppressors relate themselves to God and to their own conscience. In Hypothesis B, I will introduce the Kierkegaardian approach to this situation and attempt to elucidate how the oppressed and the oppressors ought to treat each other out of neighbor love.

**3.2 Hypothesis A**

As was argued in the previous section, inwardness prompts the oppressed to realize that, in order to love the oppressor as their neighbor, they ought to make an effort to help the oppressor to become independent by evoking self-reflections in
them. It does not follow, however, that the oppressed’s selfless efforts will have an
actual affect on their oppressors. In other words, there is no guarantee of the
possibility that the oppressors will recognize their dependence on the oppressed and
that they will resolve to strive for independence by cultivating inwardness within
themselves. Let us name this situation, “Hypothesis A.”

One can resolve this issue by considering the two major points that
Kierkegaard emphasizes in *Works of Love*. The first is the lover’s duty to stay patient
with the wrongful deeds of his or her neighbor and to believe in the possibility that
the lover’s effort to help the neighbor relate the self to God and to the self’s
conscience will come into fruition. The second is Kierkegaard’s claim that one ought
not to pursue the visible achievements or results of one’s love but rather seek to
maintain one’s own striving.

In the second series of *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard devotes several chapters to
elucidating the significance of believing, hoping, and maintaining love for one’s
neighbor. These deliberations are respectively titled, “Love Believes All Things—and
Yet Is Never Deceived,” “Love Hopes All Things—and Yet Is Never Put to Shame,”
and “Love Abides.” What does Kierkegaard mean by all these seemingly very
optimistic phrases? How can one possibly believe in and hope for everything and
continue to love one’s neighbor when, for instance, the circumstances are not
promising?

Kierkegaard defends himself against these sceptical concerns first by pointing
out the subjectivity inherent in one’s interpretations of situations or people, and
second by arguing that interpretations are ultimately one’s *choice*. The following passage summarizes his ideas:

> It is always the explanation that makes something what it now becomes. The fact or the facts are basic, but the explanation is the decisive factor. Every event, every word, every act, in short, everything can be explained in many ways... Therefore, the view, the explanation is a choice, just because a diversity of explanations is possible. But if it is a choice, it is always in my power, if I am one who loves...\(^\text{107}\)

There can be various explanations that human beings can give in understanding why or how people act in certain ways. To understand a friend’s betrayal, for instance, one can give an explanation that the friend is an evil person by nature and therefore that it is not surprising to discover the friend’s treacherous actions. One can, on the other hand, also take a completely different stance and interpret the friend’s action as the only thing that the friend could do in the specific context. In this way, according to Kierkegaard, to one explanation there exists another and even opposite explanation that can be given about the same subject matter.

For Kierkegaard, therefore, the question as to which explanation to believe in is a matter of *one’s active choice*. Knowledge, information or facts, of course, can be useful tools to comprehend a situation, but the final decision is in the hands of the explainer. Kierkegaard writes:

> Mistrustingly to *believe* nothing at all (which is entirely different from *knowledge* about the equilibrium of opposite possibilities) and lovingly to *believe* all things are not a cognition, nor a cognitive conclusion, but a

\(^{107}\) Works of Love, 291-2.
choice that occurs when knowledge has placed the opposite possibilities in equilibrium...\textsuperscript{108}

Given this, when judging one’s neighbor’s behavior from among a myriad of possibilities of explanations, one should choose the one that is most lenient for the neighbor; as Kierkegaard states, “By a mitigating explanation the one who loves hides a multitude of sins.”\textsuperscript{109} What is higher than believing in these “mitigating explanations” is, according to Kierkegaard, forgiveness of the neighbor’s wrong deeds or faults.

Kierkegaard’s prescription for how one ought to perceive the mistakes of one’s neighbor is based on his idea that the choices that one makes throughout the course of one’s life reveals the way of one’s living, that is, one’s existence. According to Kierkegaard, humans are faced with the necessity to make choices at every moment of their lives. Kierkegaard explains, “... every moment you live existence is judging you, since to live is to judge oneself, to become disclosed.”\textsuperscript{110} The more mistrust that one chooses to believe in, that is, the more skeptical, ungenerous and narrow-minded explanations one gives, the more it means that one’s existence is a mistrustful one. Adopting mistrust as a way of living is against one’s duty to love; in order to love one’s neighbors, one ought to live in a loving way, that is, actually believe in the most lenient explanations of their actions.

\textsuperscript{108} Works of Love, 234.
\textsuperscript{109} ibid, 291.
\textsuperscript{110} ibid, 227-8.
Kierkegaard’s idea that one’s judgment of others discloses one’s existence is tied with his idea of “like for like.” According to him, because of the triadic relationship between the subject, God, and the neighbor, what the subject does to the neighbor directly reflects what he or she does to God. Consequently, if one chooses to show mistrust this means one is actively choosing to mistrust God, who is the absolute highest power. This is another reason why Kierkegaard asserts that one has a duty to believe in the most lenient explanations for the faults of one’s neighbor.

Neighbor love, for Kierkegaard, also needs to be permanent; as he writes, “‘Love never falls away’—it abides.”\(^{111}\) Note that Kierkegaard claims, not that neighbor love will abide, but that love abides. This is the case for Kierkegaard for two reasons. The first is that neighbor love that believes in the most lenient explanations for the neighbors’ errors, belongs to eternity, not to temporality. No matter how likely the shattering of the neighbor love relationship seems, from the perspective of eternity, the relationship itself still has a possibility. Kierkegaard writes:

> Seen from the angle of the past the break becomes more and more obvious with each day and each year; but the loving one, who abides, indeed belongs, by his abiding, to the future, the eternal, and from the angle of the future the break is not a break but a possibility.\(^{112}\)

Thus, the lover who truly loves the neighbor belongs to the future as opposed to the past or the present. Even when the relationship with the neighbor appears to be falling away, the lover who belongs to the future sees the break merely as a possibility. In the eyes of the essential Christian, what appears to be a break is

\(^{111}\) ibid, 302.

\(^{112}\) ibid, 305.
ultimately a stage in the transformation of the relationship from one of antagonism to
one of mutuality. He contends, “... that the relationship came to a break cannot be
directly seen, it can be known only in the sense of the past. But the one who loves
does not want to know the past, because he abides, and to abide is in the direction of
the future.”¹¹³ Thus, the true lover of the neighbor must believe in the possibility that
his or her relationship of love with the neighbor is not over even in the most difficult
situation.

These ideas proposed by Kierkegaard can be the source of empowerment for
the oppressed. As discussed in the previous section, the Kierkegaardian-Freirian
approach suggests that the oppressed ought to help the oppressors to relate themselves
to God and to their own conscience. The path toward this goal can be strenuous in
that the oppressors may not show any indications of improvements in their
cultivations of inwardness. However, even when it seems difficult to help them relate
to God and to their own conscience, if the oppressed continue to employ these
Kierkegaardian recommendations for keeping love’s abiding, then all they must do is
to maintain their belief in the possibility of the betterment of their oppressors.

3.3 Hypothesis B

Suppose that the oppressed’s strenuous effort to develop inwardness in the
being of their oppressors turns successful and the oppressors become aware of their
duty to love the oppressed as their neighbors. The oppressors in this scenario would

¹¹³ ibid, 306.
then start or, at least attempt to, embrace the idea that they are not autonomous beings with no need of God and instead would become confident in establishing their spiritual relationships with God. Finally, by relating themselves to their own conscience, they would grow their awareness of their responsibilities for their own choices.

What would this mean for the disparity in power that still would exist between the oppressors and the oppressed? This is what I shall call “Hypothesis B,” a situation in which the oppressors as well as the oppressed seek to deepen their inwardness even as the inequality between them remains. How should, then, the oppressed and the oppressors act in such a situation?

Now, let us remind ourselves of the analogy of banquet presented in the second chapter. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard demonstrates that one ought not to be deceived by how the neighbor is dissimilar to oneself and must instead see the neighbor in the person. That is, to love others as the neighbor is to recognize the universally common fact that one shares with the neighbor: that every single one of us is a human being. Kierkegaard calls this fundamental common ground of all humanity “human similarity.”⁷⁷ Hence, the oppressors’ and the oppressed’s mutual willingness to love each parties as “the neighbor” would enable them to see this human similarity.

This in turn would mean that both the oppressors and the oppressed should not immerse themselves into narrowing the gap that lies in between themselves. The gap in this context can be any form of glaring dissimilarities such as socio-economic

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⁷⁷ ibid, 77.
disparities, the difference of abilities, and so on. Indeed, one cannot possibly choose the socio-economic circumstances, natural talents or disposition that one is born into or with. Some people are born into wealthy and privileged families while others are not.

For Kierkegaard, these apparent dissimilarities between human beings are mere appearances of human society that belong to the temporary world.\textsuperscript{115} Neighbor love, which belongs to eternity and the world of the essential Christians, hence, needs to transcend these manifest dissimilarities. Kierkegaard states, “Christianity allows all the dissimilarities of earthly life to stand, but this equality in \textit{lifting oneself up} above the dissimilarities of earthly life is contained in the love commandment, in loving the neighbor. (emphasis mine)”\textsuperscript{116} According to Kierkegaard, therefore, if one is to be the genuine lover of the neighbor, he or she must not be affected by the human dissimilarities of temporality.

What, then, should the essential Christian do instead of clinging to mitigating the apparent dissimilarities with the neighbor? Regarding this question, Kierkegaard provides a vague answer by writing, “To love the neighbor is, while remaining in the earthly dissimilarity allotted to one, essentially \textit{to will to exist equally for unconditionally every human being} (emphasis is mine).”\textsuperscript{117} Unfortunately, in \textit{Works of Love}, Kierkegaard never presents a clear explanation of what it means for one to \textit{will to exist equally for unconditionally every human being}.

\textsuperscript{115} ibid, 81.
\textsuperscript{116} ibid, 72.
\textsuperscript{117} ibid, 84.
First, Kierkegaard hints at his notion of equality with this phrase against the background of preferential love. As explained in the second chapter, preferential love is based on the premise that, for the lover, particular groups of people are more important or deserve better treatment than others. Neighbor love, on the other hand, loves all humanity. The neighbor for Kierkegaard is all the human beings in the world.

However, it does not follow that the lover ought to treat every single individual in the exact same way. For Kierkegaard, as mentioned in the second chapter, acknowledgment of the individual’s uniqueness or distinctiveness constitutes the essential part of neighbor love. Kierkegaard writes:

... it [the neighbor love] makes no distinction, none at all; next, which is just like the first, it infinitely distinguishes itself in loving the diverse... So it is also in the relationships of love among human beings; only true love loves every human being according to the person’s distinctiveness.

Thus, willing to exist equally for unconditionally every human being for Kierkegaard means this: while one ought to help the neighbor, that is, all humanity, relate the self to God and to the self’s own conscience, thereby provoking the change in their inner beings, one also ought to love the neighbor for who they are. And this way of treating others is not about having a certain attitude toward them. For Kierkegaard, it defines one’s existence. Therefore, to sum the points above, Kierkegaard’s statement that the neighbor love requires one to lift the self up above

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118 Ferreira,
119 ibid, 270.
the manifest dissimilarities means this: one ought to exist in such a way that one is unconditionally willing to help all humanity (equally) cultivate inwardness in their beings and, at the same time, to love the neighbor for his or her own distinctiveness.

The application of this Kierkegaardian idea into the context of the oppressor-oppressed dynamics necessitates a consideration as to whether the oppression that the oppressors impose on the oppressed is part of “who they are.” That is, the question arises as to whether the oppression on the part of the oppressors counts as their distinctiveness. If the oppression is part of the oppressors’ human nature, then, the Kierkegaardian prescription suggests that the oppressed ought to love the oppressors as the neighbors for imposing the oppression. If the oppression is not part of their distinctiveness, the oppressed ought to help them develop inwardness while loving the oppressors for their distinctiveness, which excludes their oppressive characteristics.

To this question, the Kierkegaardian theory of neighbor love and human existence would suggest not only that the oppressive characteristics must not be part of uniqueness of any human being but also that it is not part of human nature.

Before delving in to the discussion, let us clarify what Kierkegaard means by the distinctiveness. The distinctiveness of humans, for Kierkegaard, does not denote one’s outstanding characteristics in relation to others. For example, when there are one hundred people in a room and ninety-nine people are wearing red clothes while only one person is in a black shirt, then the one in the black shirt can be called “distinctive.” But this is not what Kierkegaard defines as distinctive. In other words,
distinctiveness of human beings for Kierkegaard is not one’s quality determined by
the comparison to others.

Kierkegaard defines distinctiveness as one’s being that emerges as a result of
being purified by Christianity, that is, one’s primordial “self”\textsuperscript{120} as he writes, “... before God to be oneself—the emphasis is on ‘before God,’ since this is the source
and origin of all distinctiveness. The one who has ventured this has distinctiveness; he
has come to know what God has already given him ...”\textsuperscript{121} Thus, for Kierkegaard, the
authentic being that one attains through relating to God is the distinctiveness of the
person. In other words, one’s distinctiveness is one’s inward being.

This Kierkegaardian definition of human distinctiveness precludes
oppressiveness in one’s being. As the Hegelian analogy of masters and slaves
demonstrates, oppression entails the oppressors’ dependence on the oppressed. In the
previous chapter, however, we have seen that, according to Kierkegaard, one
redisCOVERS who one really is (the primordial self) by establishing a confidential
relationship with God. Furthermore, by cultivating inwardness, one becomes
independent from other human beings, thereby becoming one’s own master with
God’s help. In other words, one’s primordial self, that is, one’s distinctiveness \textit{is} one’s
independent being.

Thus, if we are to employ Kierkegaardian idea of authentic distinctiveness to
Freirian dynamics of the oppressors and the oppressed, the oppressors’ dependent
way of living should be categorized as something that is separate from the
oppressors’ distinctiveness. As was argued in the previous section of this chapter, the same point should be raised here again: that it is the oppressed’s loving duty to help the oppressors overcome their inauthentic being, that is their dependent way of living. In other words, what the oppressed and the oppressor ought to focus on in order to love each other as the neighbor is to help them cultivate their own respective authentic existences, that is, their individual distinctivenesses that is granted by God.

Regarding attaining distinctiveness, Kierkegaard notes, “To have distinctiveness is to believe in the distinctiveness of everyone else, because distinctiveness is mine but is God’s gift by which he gives being to me, and he indeed gives to all, gives being to all.” Here gain, Kierkegaard’s idea of “like for like” dominates. For one to have distinctiveness, one ought to exercise the power of believing in the distinctiveness of the neighbor. That is, one ought to believe first that there is authentic distinctiveness of the neighbor and that the neighbor can acquire the distinctiveness through cultivating inwardness.

For the oppressors to have distinctiveness, then, the oppressors ought to pursue to overcome their oppressive and dependent characteristics to acquire authentic being while believing in the distinctiveness of the oppressed. Likewise, the oppressed must also work on trusting the oppressors’ ability to attain their own distinctiveness while pursing the distinctiveness of the oppressed themselves.

The recurring theme that plays a crucial role in both of the hypotheses is the significance of belief and hope. As was mentioned in the previous sections of this

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122 ibid, 271.
chapter, Kierkegaard relates believing and hoping to the essential Christian and
eternity. For him, the essential Christian belongs to eternity, not to temporality, and,
therefore, views the temporal occurring from the perspective of the future.

Kierkegaard writes:

The present, the moment, is over so quickly that it actually does not exist; it is only the boundary and therefore is past, whereas the past is what was present. Therefore, when the eternal is in the temporal, it is in the future ... or in possibility. The past is the actual, the future is possible... To related oneself expectantly to the possibility of the good is to hope...\textsuperscript{123}

Neighbor love belongs to the essential Christian, and consequently loving the neighbor also is associated with the eternal. Loving the neighbor, in other words, is believing in the possibility as opposed to what is currently happening at the present. The application of this Kierkegaardian idea is that, if the oppressors and the oppressed are to love one another as the neighbor, that is, make themselves closer to the eternity, they ought to believe in the hopeful possibility that each party can acquire their own authentic distinctiveness given by God and love each other for who they really are.

In this way, the conclusion of the second hypothesis turns out to be somewhat similar to that of the first hypothesis, but it also entails more complex layers. The second hypothesis is that the oppressors are willing to love the oppressed as the neighbor as much as the oppressed are. However, the overcoming of the apparent dissimilarities such as equalizing their socio-economic statuses would not be the right

\textsuperscript{123} ibid, 249.
solution to the issue in the eyes of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaardian solution, on the other hand, would be to strive for acquiring the self’s own distinctiveness through cultivating inwardness while believing in the others’ distinctiveness so that both the oppressed and the oppressors can exist equally and unconditionally for each other.

This Kierkegaard’s idea of distinctiveness as one’s authentic being developed by the inward relationship with God leads us back to his theater analogy introduced in the second chapter. When performing, every actor plays a different role, acting as if they are different from each other. When the curtain falls down, however, everyone goes back into who they originally are: actors. The universal human similarity also parallels with this analogy in that, despite the various forms of apparent dissimilarities that are manifest to the human eyes, one ought to focus on the fact that the object of love is the neighbor.

Kierkegaard’s ideas of human similarity and of the lover’s belief in the neighbor’s acknowledgement of human distinctiveness suggest an intriguing point: while the oppressed ought not to see the oppressors as the oppressors, they must also recognize the oppressors as the oppressors. The oppressed should not view the oppressors as the oppressors precisely because of the idea embedded in the theater analogy. The idea of the oppressors is a produce of assimilating the apparent, temporal dissimilarities between the oppressed and the oppressors. If one is to perceive others based on Kierkegaard’s idea of “human similarity,” one ought to dismiss the distinction between the oppressed and the oppressors and instead concentrate on the fact that every human being is the neighbor. On the other hand,
recognizing the oppressors’ dependent, inauthentic way of living would presuppose
the oppressed’s recognition of those whose existence is constituted by their
dependence on the others by oppressing them as the oppressors. To phrase it in a
more accessible manner, the recognition of the oppressors’ inauthentic being and,
therefore, of the duty to help them cultivate their inwardness necessitates the
oppressed’s perception of the oppressors as the oppressors. In this way, Kierkegaard’s
two separate points seem to suggest two contradictory prescriptions centering around
the same issue.

The two different suggestions drawn from Kierkegaard’s ideas are not so
much exclusive to one another. This is because the latter suggestion that the
oppressed must not view the oppressors as the oppressors is the necessary step toward
the first suggestion. In other words, the oppressed’s discovery of the oppressors’
dependence, which requires the oppressed’s recognition of the oppressors as the
oppressors, serves as the first step since the identification of the problem is the initial
stage for the mutual neighbor love. What ought to come afterwards is the oppressed’s
willingness or acknowledgment of their duty to overcome seeing the oppressors as
the oppressors and to treat them as the neighbor because that is the solution to the
problem identified previously.

The above theoretical consideration of the second hypothesis suggests the
following Kierkegaardian-Freirian resolution. First, by viewing the oppressors as the
oppressors, the oppressed ought to recognize the issue that the oppressors are being
dependent on the oppressed via oppression. By doing so, the oppressed in turn should
realize their duty to love the oppressors and hence to help them become independent
and acquire authentic being through the cultivation of inwardness. This involves both
the continuous belief of the oppressed in the oppressors’ distinctiveness and vice
versa. This process, then, leads to the change on the part of the oppressed, that is, the
shift of the oppressed’s perception of the oppressors from the oppressive agencies to
the universally human category, the neighbor.
Conclusion

In the first chapter, I illustrated Hegel’s influence in Freire’s formulation of the oppressed-oppressor dynamics. Furthermore, by pointing out that the oppressed’s love seems to play a crucial role in the resolution of the dialectical struggle in Freire’s scenario, I set the point of departure of this thought-experiment: “What does it mean for the oppressed to love the oppressor?” To explicate this initial question raised in the first chapter, I have established three major phases in my analysis.

In the first phrase, I incorporated the Kierkegaardian idea of inwardness as the necessary condition for loving others as neighbors. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire proposes his “Problem-solving education” as the alternative to the “banking” style of education. The crux of this new style of education is the oppressed students’ act of “questioning.” Kierkegaard’s idea that true neighbor lovers must first cultivate inwardness in their being suggests that the first action that the oppressed students ought to take to love their oppressors is to question themselves.

As discussed in the second chapter, inwardness entails three elements: self-denial, self-love and conscience. The oppressed students’ development of inwardness in their being thus prompts students first to acknowledge that they are not autonomous beings without God, second to realize that God loves them, and finally to be aware of their permanent responsibilities for the entire course of their lives and, hence, for their choices of actions. Moreover, by having God as the intermediary and as the absolute power who constantly observes their actions, the oppressed become aware of their duty not to impose their own desires to change their oppressors’
treatment of themselves. Inwardness in the being of the oppressed, therefore, is the crucial first stage that is necessary if the oppressed are to love their oppressors as their neighbors.

The oppressed’s establishment of inwardness in their ways of living should lead the oppressed to realize that to love their oppressors as their neighbors is to help them relate themselves to God and to their own conscience, that is, to assist them in developing inwardness in their being. In this way, the oppressed will strive for the tripartite love relationship with their oppressors with God being the intermediary. This realization will then enable the oppressed to see that they ought not to force their oppressors to change according to their own will but rather to guide them to make a fundamental change in their own being.

The second phase of the analysis was devoted to analyzing two hypotheses that would describe the love relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed after their cultivation of inwardness. Hypothesis A is the situation in which, despite the oppressed’s continuous efforts to help the oppressors turn inward in their being, the oppressors do not appear to change. Hypothesis B is the inverse of Hypothesis A, that is, depicts the situation in which the oppressors come to will to love the oppressed as their neighbors.

The Kierkegaardian resolution to Hypothesis A amounts to the conclusion that the oppressed ought to stay patient with the situation in which the oppressors’ cultivation of inwardness appears stagnant. This is based on two points that he explicates in *Works of Love*. 
The first is that if one has true love of one’s neighbor, one ought to believe in the most lenient explanations of the neighbor’s mistakes and faults. For Kierkegaard, facts are the basis of explanations, but they are ultimately neutral when it comes to the issue of judgments. What is crucial in judging others is one’s active choice as to which explanations to believe among a myriad of different ways to explain the same subject matter. According to Kierkegaard, one’s choice, moreover, discloses one’s existence. That is, the more mistrust one chooses to have toward one’s neighbor, the more mistrustful a life one discloses about one’s own existence. However, for Kierkegaard, humans have the duty to love their neighbors, and thus they also ought to disclose their loving existence, that is, they are obliged to believe in the most lenient explanations for their neighbors’ wrongful actions. The application of this idea is simple in that, if the oppressed is to love the oppressors as their neighbors, they ought to actively believe in the most merciful explanations of the oppressors’ static or dormant progress.

The second idea that supports this thesis is Kierkegaard’s idea of eternity and temporality. For Kierkegaard, Christian neighbor love belongs to eternity, while the non-Christian and the pagan love belongs to temporality. The present, according to Kierkegaard, belongs to the past, which eternity is not concerned with. What matters to eternity, that is God, is the future, and if one is to love one’s neighbor, one ought to believe in the future possibilities of the good. Therefore, even in the most difficult situation in which the oppressed face constant struggles of helping the oppressors cultivate inwardness, the oppressed ought to keep believing in the future possibilities
of the good. That is, the oppressed are obliged to keep hoping that the oppressors will be willing to develop inwardness in their being.

Hypothesis B, the situation in which the oppressors become willing to love the oppressed as their neighbors, leads to the proposition that both parties ought to love each other based on their distinctiveness. Distinctiveness for Kierkegaard means one’s primordial “self,” which one rediscovers as a result of relating to God and to one’s own conscience and purifying oneself of the defilement of the earthly world. To help one’s neighbor love God, therefore, means to help one’s neighbor find his or her primordial “self.”

The pivotal point in this argument is that the oppressive characters of the oppressors do not count as constituents of the primordial “self” for any human being. One’s primordial self is a product of one’s striving for the establishment of one’s confidential and independent relationship with God. Hence, the acquisition of one’s primordial “self” necessitates one’s independence from other human beings. But oppressors are precisely dependent on the oppressed since oppression presupposes the presence of the object to oppress. This means that oppression should not be included as part of the essential distinctiveness of anyone, and therefore, in the eyes of Kierkegaard, any human being ought to strive for independence from other human beings, which includes non-oppressive relationships with others.

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard makes it explicit that one should not focus on mitigating the manifest dissimilarities with one’s neighbor but rather concentrate on
lifting him or herself up above those earthly and temporal dissimilarities. The issue of his argument is that Kierkegaard never clarifies what it means to do so.

However, given the above argument about distinctiveness, we can conclude that lifting one up above the manifest dissimilarities, that is, overcoming the deception of visible dissimilarities, means loving one’s neighbor for his or her own inner being, that is, for his or her own distinctiveness granted by God. The oppressed’s love for the oppressors, therefore, is the oppressed’s love for the oppressors’ individual distinctiveness.

It is certainly necessary for the oppressed to relate to the oppressors as the oppressors in order to become aware of the issue of their oppressive characteristics and their lack of inwardness. However, in loving one’s oppressors, because the true neighbor love requires one to see the neighbor’s inner being, the oppressed also must overcome being immersed into the label of the oppressors. What the oppressed ought to do instead is to strive to love the oppressors for who they really are, that is, for their own distinctiveness that each of them is granted by God. And this is the conclusion of Hypothesis B.

The overall argument presented in this concluding section of this thesis may appear idealistic or implausible because of its heavy reliance on the Kierkegaardian theory of neighbor love. Appearances, however, can be deceptive. In the final part of this section, let us consider one historical example that embodies to a surprising extent the Kierkegaardian-Freirian model of neighbor love between the oppressed and
the oppressor that I developed in the final chapter. This is the American civil rights movement lead by Martin Luther King Jr..

King’s philosophical principles mirror the Freirian idea that the oppressed’s reciprocation of implicit or explicit persecution would not resolve the struggle with their oppressors. As a political scientist Michael J. Nojeim notes on one of King’s theoretical aspect:

King insisted that nonviolence was not to be used to defeat or humiliate opponents but rather to win their friendship and understanding. King understood that converting opponents to his cause was far more effective than defeating them because defeated opponents would only seethe in defeat and bide their time until they could mount a vengeful counterattack.\(^{124}\)

In general, the literature on King, as well as King’s own remarks suggest a few crucial similarities with Kierkegaard’s idea of neighbor love. For King, the “friendship and understanding” that he advocated meant the Christian notion of agape. King expressed his understanding of agape by saying, “... agape is not love based on romance, kinship, or friendship. Rather, agape is ‘understanding [and] creative, redemptive, goodwill to all men ... A love which seeks nothing in return ... the love of God operating in the human heart.’”\(^{125}\) King’s idea of agape embodies Kierkegaard’s insistence that love must be the center of every human relationship, including the relationship between the oppressed and their oppressors.

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The idea of neighbor is not the only resemblance that they shared with each other. On November 17th, 1957, as one of the first African-American preacher with a university doctorate in theology and the leading figure of the civil rights movement, King made a speech and addressed the practical issue of loving one’s enemy.\textsuperscript{126} King first began his discussion by stating as follows:

How do you go about loving your enemies? I think the first thing is this: In order to love your enemies, you must begin by analyzing self... It seems to me that that is the first and foremost way to come to an adequate discovery to the how of this situation.\textsuperscript{127}

There are two points in this passage that echo Kierkegaard’s idea of neighbor love. The first and the most obvious is King’s statement that the action of loving the enemy begins by the lovers questioning of the self. This idea parallels Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the cultivation of inwardness in the lover’s being. The second is that King and Kierkegaard both claim that the analysis of the self or the cultivation of inwardness is a necessary condition for finding a resolution to the conflict between the oppressed and the oppressors, that is, for enabling the oppressed loving their oppressors as their neighbors.

King’s strategy also entailed elements that are similar to the claim that beliefs and hope on the part of the oppressed play a crucial role in overcoming oppression. Nojeim notes, “King was an eternal optimist about human personality and believed


\textsuperscript{127}Martin Luther King Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” 17 November 1957, transcript, The King Center, http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/loving-your-enemies-0.
that all people were redeemable and that nonviolence was the catalyst for that redemption.”

128 Without this optimistic belief, indeed, King would not have been able to endure the continuing struggle with racism.

The purpose of introducing the case of the American civil rights movement is not to claim that the Kierkegaardian-Freirian model that I developed in the final chapter has been shown to be plausible in the practical realm. It also does not mean to argue that King directly implemented these two thinkers’ ideas when he acted in the practical sphere. As Kierkegaardian scholar Nigel Hatton notes, there is little evidence to indicate that Kierkegaardian philosophy had direct influence in King’s ideas of neighbor love. 129 However, the case of the American civil rights movement at least prima facie indicates that King’s strategy sufficiently closely embodies both the Freirian and Kierkegaardian—or rather, the thesis’ combination of Kierkegaardian-Freirian ideas—to warrant the claim that these ideas are not utterly impractical when applied to the world of actual political struggle.

In other words, the case of Martin Luther King Jr. gives this thought-experiment a hope for the possibility that there can be practical implications drawn from its conclusion. The day when these potential practical implications become more concrete and implemented in social movements may come some day, or they also may not come at all. However, if we are to follow the advice from Kierkegaard, that is, to believe in the possibility of the good among a myriad of possibilities available,

128 Nojeim, Gandhi and King, 193.

129 Hatton, Martin Luther King Jr., 99.
then we certainly ought to believe in the possibility that this thought-experiment will someday prove helpful for those in need.
Bibliography


