

“True self-love and true self-sacrifice”

‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’.¹ But how do I, and how should I, love myself?

According to Harry Frankfurt in his recent book *The Reasons of Love*, true self-love is ‘the deepest and most essential ... achievement of a serious and successful life’.² Recent naturalist accounts of self-love like Frankfurt’s have been criticised for lacking a concept of self-sacrifice or self-denial.³ Yet self-love and self-sacrifice are notorious problems in Christian thought, and the tradition is littered with apparently incompatible claims about them. For Kierkegaard, ‘self-denial ... is Christianity’s essential form’.⁴ Whereas for Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘self-sacrifice ... is as much of vice, as much of a sign of inadequate moral development, as selfishness’.⁵

Countless philosophers and theologians have grappled with the problem of true self-love. This article takes its cue from the distinction in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* between true and improper forms of self-love, and the relation between true self-love and self-sacrifice. Numerous commentators have pointed out that Kierkegaard makes a version of the former distinction. M. Jamie Ferreira, for instance, notes his distinction between ‘proper’ and ‘selfish’ [*selvisk*] self-love, while a similar contrast between defensible and indefensible forms of self-love that associates the latter with selfishness is found in the analyses of Sylvia Walsh and Claudia Welz.⁶ Walsh claims that the following is Kierkegaard’s view:

‘Christian love is self-denying love. Proper self-love is achieved inversely through the renunciation of selfishness; love of others is expressed by the transferral of one’s own desires and love of oneself to the neighbor through self-sacrifice and a willingness to endure any amount of ill for the neighbor’s sake; and love of God is

shown by inwardly realizing one's nothingness before the divine and becoming an instrument in the deity's service.'⁷

Welz claims that the affirmation of love as self-sacrifice that one finds in both Kierkegaard and Levinas should be read against the background of their critique of selfish love.⁸

In aiming to advance our understanding of true self-love,⁹ I argue, first, that the term 'selfish' is a too vague (and sometimes downright inaccurate) contrast term to use. To illustrate why, I draw on Robert Merrihew Adams' distinction between selfishness and another 'vice of self-preference',¹⁰ self-centredness. Second, in trying to understand self-sacrifice, I draw upon feminist worries about its valorisation, but rather than ditch the concept (as some feminists have argued that we should), I consider Ruth Groenhout's suggestion that we would be better off trying to understand where proper self-sacrifice fits on a sliding scale between self-limitation and self-annihilation.¹¹ Finally, these reflections lead in a perhaps surprising direction: the need to rehabilitate a certain species of *pride* as a virtue that is integral to true self-love. I close by sketching what form such pride, necessary to avoid the dangerous slide from proper self-sacrifice to outright self-annihilation, should take.

1. Selfishness and self-centredness

It is not hard to see why 'selfishness' might be chosen as the opposite term to true self-love. Indeed, Christian love is often described as 'selfless', a term to which 'selfish' looks like a natural antonym.¹² But what does 'selfish' mean? Consider two dictionary definitions:

'concerned chiefly with one's own profit or pleasure at the expense of consideration for others'.¹³

'caring too much about oneself and not enough about others' and/or '(of behaviour or attitude) motivated by self-interest'.¹⁴

These fit with the link between selfishness and exclusivity made in Kierkegaard's critique of erotic love and friendship.¹⁵ They also begin to bring out what we might call the grasping, acquisitive element of selfishness. But even such basic definitions are enough to suggest that merely avoiding selfishness in this sense would not be sufficient to be able to claim truly to love oneself. The mere fact that I love and care about others as well as myself - thus avoiding the exclusivity charge - does not make my self-love legitimate. In order to see why not, we should note two things. First, that the term selfishness does not seem to capture many of the examples Kierkegaard himself uses of 'improper' self-love. None of 'the bustler' who 'wastes his time and powers in the service of futile, inconsequential pursuits'; 'the light-minded person' who 'throws himself almost like a nonentity into the folly of the moment'; 'the depressed person' who 'desires to be rid of life, indeed, of himself'; or the person who 'surrenders to despair'¹⁶ seem well described by the term 'selfish'. If we are tempted to describe the would-be suicide as selfish - on the grounds that he is thinking solely of himself and not others affected by his suicide - I suggest we should be given pause in reaching this conclusion by considering the important distinction between selfishness and self-centredness. In *A Theory of Virtue*, Robert Merrihew Adams has recently argued that self-centredness is a 'vice of self-preference that is distinguishable from selfishness'.¹⁷ One can still be inappropriately self-centred despite lacking the 'grasping' or acquisitive quality attributed to selfishness above. This, I take it, is what Adams means when he says that self-centredness 'is not in general to be understood in terms of what one *wants*'.¹⁸ To illustrate this, he gives an example of a father playing basketball with his young daughter. As Adams sets this up, the father desires that all of the following apply: they have fun; they take the activity seriously; and they do their best at it. The father genuinely wants both his daughter and himself to enjoy themselves, so his concern is not selfish (in the sense of exclusive), as he genuinely cares

about his daughter and her enjoyment. But Adams points out that this description applies equally to two possible cases. In the first, the father thinks about what a good father he is being; how good he is at basketball for a man not as young as he once was; and how he wishes *his* father had done this with him. In the second, the father thinks about how much his daughter enjoys basketball; how good at it she's getting; and what a 'neat kid' she is.¹⁹

Why, *ceteris paribus*, do we think less of the father in the first case than in the second? The answer lies not in his being *selfish*, but in his being too *self-centred*. In both cases, Adams suggests, we may presume that the father desires all of the following: to be a good father; his daughter's physical and social development; and that the father-daughter relationship is good and healthy.

'The difference between the two cases is rather a difference in focus. In wanting a largely relational complex of ends essentially involving oneself it is possible for one's interest to be centred overwhelmingly on one's *own* role in the complex, or much more on *other* persons, or other features, involved in it. Self-centredness, as its name suggests, is typically a perversion in this sort of centering.'²⁰

In other words, Adams is drawing our attention to different ways in which the self can loom too large in one's life: in one's *desires* or in one's *thoughts*. While it seems appropriate to describe the former as selfishness, we need another term – self-centredness, or something like it – for the latter.

We can extrapolate from this distinction. Various 'vices of self-preference' (Adams' term) or self-focus (mine) – such as arrogance and vanity – can and should be distinguished from selfishness.²¹ And yet – if we recall the centrality to Kierkegaard's thought of 'becoming a

self²² – we need to make room for a *proper* kind of self-focus too. As a preliminary, note Adams’ observation that self-regard of various kinds is ubiquitous in human motivation:

‘The class of self-regarding motives is very wide – so wide that they are probably involved in almost all our actions. Desiring a relationship for its own sake – whether one desires the continuance of one’s marriage, or to be a good parent or friend to so-and-so – is always a self-regarding motive, inasmuch as the relationship essentially involves oneself. Likewise conscientiousness is a self-regarding motive, inasmuch as it is a commitment to act rightly *oneself*’.²³

It makes no sense, therefore, to condemn *all* kinds of self-regard or self-focus. But is there no more to be said about legitimate and culpable forms of self-focus than that so many of our actions are in various ways self-regarding? It is here that the feminist critique of self-sacrifice becomes important.

2. A feminist critique of self-sacrifice

In a classic, much cited article, Valerie Saiving Goldstein argued that men and women are prone to different types of sin: men to pride, women to ‘triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one’s own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence ... in short, under-development or negation of the self’.²⁴

The view of pride as the ultimate sin,²⁵ and the valorisation of self-sacrifice in response, may be a perfectly appropriate diagnosis and cure for males, but disastrous for females, since the proposed cure simply reinforces what is, for Goldstein, woman’s besetting sin. Later feminists, such as Barbara Andolsen, have suggested that: ‘Women have a tendency to give themselves over to others to such an extent that they lose themselves. Thus they squander

their distinctive personal abilities. ... a one-sided call to a self-sacrifice ... may ironically reinforce women's sins.'²⁶ A major part of the worry here is that this makes normative for women a set of values that ensure their subordination – and in some cases even leads to a blind eye being turned to abuse.

But the danger with this, of course, as Sarah Coakley notes,²⁷ is one of excessive generalisation and crude stereotypes of both genders (such gender essentialism as 'all men are vain and arrogant; all women are oppressed into submissiveness'). Yet early feminists such as Goldstein and her successors shed important light on the role of self-denial and self-sacrifice in Christian thought and practice. Beyond the stereotypes, the worry that one can sin by 'failing to establish oneself as a self', as Darlene Fozard Weaver puts it,²⁸ seems a very important observation. And for all the emphasis on self-denial in some of his works, it also contains an important echo of Kierkegaard. Recall *The Sickness Unto Death's* famous observation that: 'The greatest hazard of all, losing the self, can occur very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can occur so quietly; any other loss - an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc. - is sure to be noticed.'²⁹ The point is that excessive self-sacrifice or self-abnegation can potentially be at least as big a worry as excessive self-love.

I suggest that this shows the value of the project Ruth Groenhout pursues: to offer a classification of kinds of self-sacrifice, noting their relation to selfhood. As a Christian feminist, Groenhout argues that important though the dangers are against which several of her fellow feminists have warned, 'self-sacrifice is an important part of feminist theory in general' and that 'any feminism worth its salt will have to incorporate some notion of self-sacrifice into its theoretical apparatus'.³⁰ Groenhout's taxonomy builds upon the typology of possible meanings of *kenosis* in the Christian tradition discussed by Coakley. Coakley notes a 'sliding-scale of meanings' of *kenosis* 'from "risk" to "self-limitation" to "sacrifice" to "self-

giving” to “self-emptying” – and even to “annihilation””.³¹ Groenhout argues that this list is too broad: the incarnation, atonement and resurrection of Christ can hardly be captured adequately by the term ‘risk’, and at the other end of the spectrum, outright ‘annihilation’ of the self is incompatible with orthodox Christianity. Further, ‘sacrifice’ is insufficiently determined to occupy a definite place on the list, and is better thought of as a general category of which the others are sub-categories.³² But most of the middle ground, she suggests, is promising territory, especially if we add in between self-limitation and sacrifice giving up prerogatives to which one’s nature entitles one. Let us explore this.

Groenhout reads *self-limitation* as retaining a definite continuity of selfhood: ‘The limitations imposed are imposed *by the self*, implying that the self *retains* some sense of robust identity.’³³ Also, though self-limitation can be performed for others (such as when a poverty-stricken single parent denies herself food so that her children may eat), it can also be done in the interests of a higher good which has no real reference outside the self’s ends at all (such as denying oneself tasty but high-fat foods in a bid to lose weight). Insofar as there is no necessary reference to the other, then, we do not seem yet to be very close to *kenosis* proper.

More likely to be other-directed is ‘*giving up prerogatives* that are due one on the basis of one’s nature’.³⁴ What Groenhout has in mind here is that a sense of a core self or identity is retained, but what is owed to that self is temporarily set aside. She doesn’t give examples, but I suggest the following: a worker employed by a charity undergoing cash-flow problems might temporarily forego the salary to which they are legitimately entitled in order that the charity’s good work may continue.

This seems to me to slide into what Groenhout calls *self-giving* where, unlike with mere self-limitation, we have ‘some measure of giving up self-determination’.³⁵ This is also *necessarily*

directed towards the other, since ‘to give of oneself is not possible unless there is a recipient’.³⁶

And so we reach full-blown *self-sacrifice*, in which ‘in some significant way the self is actually lost’.³⁷ Groenhout suggests this is again best understood as operating over a range, starting with ‘some sort of denial of the self’ which can still be a giving up of one part of the self for the sake of another part of the self. This is puzzling, since without further explanation (which she does not offer) it is unclear how this differs from the more modest kind of self-limitation. Perhaps what she has in mind is something like a life-long monastic vow of celibacy, since here I would be renouncing part of my former life forever, in the interests of a good I now perceive as higher. (Whereas, in the diet case, once our dieter hits one hundred and fifty pounds, he will celebrate by allowing himself a large chunk of brie.) At its height, however, self-sacrifice involves giving up the self, or life itself, altogether, for some other person(s) or good. This *teleological* aspect is important, as it distinguishes self-sacrifice from mere self-destruction or self-annihilation.

This distinction, and a related point about how self-sacrifice can easily slide *into* self-annihilation, is crucial for Groenhout’s analysis. She notes that: ‘The paradox of kenotic self-emptying arises because the self that is emptied must continue to exist as a self to *be* emptied.’³⁸ Self-annihilation fails this test. But as an example of how it can be mistaken for self-sacrifice, Groenhout cites the following passage from Simone Weil:³⁹

‘I cannot conceive of the necessity for God to love me, when I feel so clearly that even with human beings affection for me can only be a mistake. But I can easily imagine that he loves that perspective of creation which can only be seen from the point where I am ... I must withdraw so that he can see it. I must withdraw so that God may make contact with the beings whom chance places in my path and whom he loves. ... It is as though I

were placed between two lovers or two friends. I am not the maiden who awaits her betrothed, but the unwelcome third who is with two betrothed lovers and ought to go away so that they can really be together.’⁴⁰

What we see here is precisely the kind of self-annihilation about which feminists are rightly concerned. In this passage, Weil presents herself as intrinsically unlovable, a view that seems based on a sense of herself as lacking intrinsic value. In doing so, she fails to pay attention to the ‘as yourself’ of the second love commandment. The view of herself as merely an obstacle to God’s being able to be alone with his creation fails to recognise herself as a unique *part* of that creation. In contrast to this, Groenhout argues, proper self-sacrifice ‘must emphasize the worth of the self that is emptied out’.⁴¹

What this suggests is two-fold. First, that the self which is to be in some sense sacrificed is, and must be recognized as, something with intrinsic value: ‘the self-emptying that Jesus models for us originates in recognizing that, since the self is precious, emptying it really is a sacrifice’.⁴² Merely *squandering* the self is morally objectionable. (Adams suggests: ‘In many contexts children who take an effective interest in their own good are “being good”, and children who don’t are letting the side down, damaging a project in which others have invested much’.⁴³ This seems right – and not only in the case of children.) The second point follows from this: that proper self-sacrifice is not self-sacrifice for its own sake, but rather needs to be *oriented towards the good*. (In the absence of Christianity’s claims about its salvific power, Christ’s death on the cross is arguably just tragic.⁴⁴) If this is right, then nobody - of either gender - should commend themselves for the fact that they have made of themselves a doormat for their oppressors. This is so in part because by failing to resist oppression, we contribute to the advance of evil rather than good.⁴⁵

Of course, Groenhout's (or any other) taxonomy will hardly give us an easy set of techniques that guarantee appropriate behaviour in any circumstances: practical wisdom will still be needed. But such observations on proper self-sacrifice arising from feminist theology do remind us of the need to recognise the importance of true self-love in our deliberations about self-sacrifice. The Christian tradition has perhaps tended to warn more forcefully of the dangers of improper self-love than of improper self-sacrifice. But either, taken to an extreme, can be both practically disastrous and incompatible with the Christian ideal.⁴⁶

We should also recognise that *true self-love and love of others are often inextricably linked*. On this point, consider the fuller version of the passage from MacIntyre I quoted in the opening paragraph:

'We do indeed as infants, as children and even as adolescents, experience sharp conflicts between egoistic and altruistic impulses and desires. But the task of education is to transform and integrate those into an inclination towards both the common good and our individual goods, so that we become neither self-rather-than-other-regarding nor other-rather-than-self-regarding, neither egoists nor altruists, but those whose passions and inclinations are directed to what is both our good and the good of others. Self-sacrifice, it follows, is as much of vice, as much of a sign of inadequate moral development, as selfishness.'⁴⁷

In other words, a vital part of true self-love may involve combining the good for oneself and the good for others in a way that makes the language of self-sacrifice (and of egoism versus altruism) inappropriate. Daniel Russell makes a similar point about self-respect (which I have already suggested must surely be part of true self-love).⁴⁸ Taking as an example the lawyer Atticus Finch's decision to defend Tom Robinson in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Russell notes that evading this unpopular decision would be unthinkable for Atticus. Why?

Because, he tells his young daughter, it would betray everything he believes in. But to ask whether he does this out of respect for himself or respect for Tom sets up a false opposition. Having good will towards and acting to help a man whom he sincerely believes to be innocent is part of who Atticus is. Thus ‘the line between respecting oneself and respecting others no longer seems very sharp’.⁴⁹ There is no practical difference between Atticus’ acting out of respect for himself and acting out of respect for Tom: both the action and the reason for the action are the same.

Adams makes a related point about how the good for me can be deeply interrelated to the good for my community:

‘Self-love can be positively rather than negatively related to community. Fully accepting my own membership in a good community involves accepting my own good as a project, both as a common project of the community and as part of the common good. At the same time my good is a project that a good community regards, and expects me to regard, as mine to care about in a special way (though not necessarily *more* than about the good of others or in isolation from the good of others). Being willing to be special to myself in this way is appropriately responsive to my place in communities (not to mention my place in the universe). This is a relatively unalienated and unselfish way of taking my own good as a project. Are you tempted to feel guilty (as some people do) about *ever* pursuing your own good when it competes *at all* with the good of others? Then ask yourself whether you really think a society that did not have your good too as part of a common project would be an excellent society.’⁵⁰

One particularly fruitful resource for understanding what constitutes a contemporary account of true self-love is the work of Charles Taylor.⁵¹ Though a full account of this is beyond the scope of the present article, Taylor brings together very lucidly several of the above points.

An adequate conception of self-love needs to take into account the fact that we are *self-interpreting* beings whose sense of ourselves is intimately related to our *purposes*. Yet we are also *dialogical* creatures, immersed in ‘webs of interlocution’⁵² such that in an important sense we cannot be selves on our own. The ideas that my own self-interpretation matters; that I have projects and a sense of myself as *leading* a life (in other words, that I live by commitments that I have *made my own*; appropriated) and the centrality of *love of the good* to the ethical life all need to be taken into consideration in an account of true self-love and the relation between self-love and self-sacrifice. And as we noted, this love of the good is threatened if I make myself a mere doormat in your interests, as certain more extreme forms of self-sacrifice seem to commend.

I want in the remainder of this article to draw upon what I have said so far to argue that a certain kind of *pride* is an important aspect of true self-love. How so?

3. Pride: vice or virtue?

As we noted, within the Christian tradition, pride is usually considered to be one of the seven deadly sins; indeed, often, the source of all sin. Pride, on this view, looks like an obvious manifestation of excessive or improper self-love.⁵³ It is commonly conflated with some or all of the following: a refusal to admit one’s dependence upon God; a sense of one’s superiority to others; arrogance; and vanity. St Thomas Aquinas’ description of pride, in the course of an explanation as to why it is a sin, captures most if not all of these: ‘pride [*superbia*] is so called because a man thereby aims higher than he is’.⁵⁴ And such a view is hardly exclusive to Christians. A very similar definition is given by Spinoza, according to whom: ‘Pride should be defined as the pleasure arising from false belief, in that a man thinks himself above others. Pride is the pleasure arising from a man’s thinking too highly of himself’.⁵⁵

I would argue that the true picture is rather more complex than this. Tara Smith has argued that pride can function as a virtue.⁵⁶ Moreover, she does this in a way that is not just a return to Aristotle (for whom a species of pride was of course a virtue).⁵⁷ Pride's bad press means that we can easily be blinded to the thought that many things we might ordinarily call true self-love or self-respect contain an important element of pride. Two of Smith's examples are a student's unwillingness to turn in what he considers to be less than his best work and an unemployed person's seeking out work rather than begging for charity.⁵⁸ These may both be manifestations of pride, but hardly instances of vice, let alone sin. Smith offers the following definition of pride in the ethical sphere:

‘To be proud is to set high moral standards and to strive to become ever better in attaining them, i.e., more alert to all their demands and more consistent in fulfilling them ... pride, as a virtue, is the disposition to practice proper and demanding moral standards’.⁵⁹

Think of this as the application to the ethical realm of the idea of taking pride in one's work. And you would hardly assume that you were being accused of sinfulness if you overheard a colleague appreciatively saying of you that you take a real pride in your work.⁶⁰

Note that thus understood pride, far from being mere self-satisfaction or a ‘savoring of past glories’, is *future-oriented*. The proud person, in this sense, sets herself very high standards; won't settle for anything less; and consequently views the self as something upon which ethical work needs continually to be done. This sounds to me like an important aspect of true self-love. Indeed, Smith concludes: ‘The virtue of pride builds and bespeaks healthy love of self.’⁶¹

Such pride is a very long way from vanity; the proud person is not to be equated with the ‘vain, pompous show-off who is not content with her own self-estimate, but broadcasts her feats to make sure that everyone else is aware of them, as well’.⁶² In comparison to *that*, humility does seem attractive. But such vainglorious self-preening is, Smith argues, *counterfeit* pride, insofar as it seems to display an inappropriate need for the good opinion of others.⁶³

Smith also makes a point about one of the psychological payoffs of pride that serves as an important corrective to an excessive stress on self-sacrifice. Pride, she claims, ‘nourishes self-esteem. Insofar as *a positive view of oneself is necessary to live* – to the will to live, and to one’s sense of worthiness to live – this is its most significant payoff’.⁶⁴ This does seem, I suggest, a vital aspect of true self-love. The need for a positive view of oneself – as someone who has a sense of self-worth, and whose life is meaningful and valuable – is standardly and quite reasonably accepted as a vital aspect of psychological health.⁶⁵ Indeed, it is questionable whether a person lacking such a sense of herself could function as a moral agent at all. ‘She needs’, as Smith puts it, ‘a minimum of self-regard to consider her actions sufficiently significant to matter.’⁶⁶ Relatedly, Paul Ricoeur suggests that such a basic element of true self-love may be crucial for other-relatedness: ‘Must one not, in order to make oneself open, available, *belong to oneself* in a certain sense?’⁶⁷ Smith views a virtuous circle as operating thus:

‘Pride encourages moral action, which, in turn, nourishes belief in one’s goodness; this belief reinforces one’s commitment to strengthening that moral character. The practice of pride thus enables a person honestly to think of herself as fit to live, able to act as she should and to achieve all the rewards of so doing’.⁶⁸

Similarly, Russell suggests that a minimal self-respect is necessary in the first place to develop as a virtuous person – but that as one develops, the self one respects changes into someone increasingly *worthy* of respect.⁶⁹

We can return to Adams for a more specific point: an important one in a society of increasing life-expectancy. He notes how we admire ‘those whose commitment to their own well-being sustains them through a long and painful struggle to recover from a potentially disabling injury’,⁷⁰ and how old age ‘can set a context in which caring for oneself necessarily looms larger in one’s concerns, and we do admire people whose loyalty to their own good helps them to care for it sensibly and gives them the will to go on in that context’.⁷¹ Moreover, for the elderly and frail, ‘caring for oneself may become not only a very large part of what one can do, but also a large part of what other people desire of one’.⁷² The person who values their life sufficiently to maintain it in such circumstances hardly deserves our ire for being either ‘selfish’ or self-centred. This, too, is a significant dimension of true self-love: an excellent illustration of Adams’ more general point that ‘easily recognisable excellence in caring for one’s own good is often overlooked because moral perception is distracted by worries about selfishness’.⁷³

Finally, this last point enables us more clearly to say what is wrong with the view from Weil discussed in section 2 above. Russell suggests that ‘having a blind spot about one’s own value is a defect in one’s understanding of values, and is therefore incompatible with the possession of practical wisdom’.⁷⁴ More precisely, we can say that what Weil’s view sorely lacks is a deep and firm commitment to oneself (one’s interests; judgements; values; goals and development) as being *worthy* of love and respect. Note how this introduces a *reflective* element: not just *any* kind of self-commitment (such as the unreflective ‘me, me, me’ attitude of the selfish child) will do.⁷⁵

4. Summary and Conclusion

I have argued that in attempting to understand true self-love, we need to be careful about terminology. *Pace* some prominent commentators on Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, not all vices of self-focus can be captured under the heading of selfishness. But the vice of self-centredness has a far more handsome cousin, proper self-focus of the kind necessary for 'becoming a self'. As various feminist thinkers have enabled us to see, that proper self-focus will be missed if we valorise self-sacrifice too uncritically. But nor need the concept of self-sacrifice be ditched. By distinguishing points along a sliding scale of self-sacrifice, we can see the importance of avoiding the all too easy slide from appropriate forms thereof to outright self-annihilation. And we can notice, perhaps surprisingly, that this avoidance can be aided by recognising a certain species of *pride* as a vital part of true self-love.⁷⁶

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¹ See Matthew 22: 39; Mark 12: 31; Luke 10: 27.

² Frankfurt (2004, p. 68).

³ See Walsh (forthcoming).

⁴ Kierkegaard (1995, p. 56).

⁵ MacIntyre (1999, p. 160).

⁶ Ferreira (2001, especially p.31); Walsh (2004); Welz (2008).

⁷ Walsh (2004, p. 79).

⁸ Welz (2008).

⁹ Self-love that is defensible and indeed commendable has been given various names: one finds references in the literature to ‘proper’, ‘legitimate’ and ‘true’ self-love, amongst others. I adopt the last of these, since the other two both appear, at least *prima facie*, to carry a deontological flavour, and my own usage is intended to be more neutral than this.

¹⁰ Adams (2006, pp. 95-111).

¹¹ See Groenhout (2006).

¹² In fact, I think that ‘selfless’ is in fact a rather poor choice of term to capture Christian *agapic* love, but to argue for that is beyond the scope of this article.

¹³ Taken from the online Concise Oxford English Dictionary:
http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/selfish?view=uk. Consulted 13 October 2008.

¹⁴ See the online Collins English Dictionary: <http://www.collinslanguage.com/>. Consulted 20 August 2008.

¹⁵ For an analysis of this with respect to the latter, see Lippitt (2007).

¹⁶ Kierkegaard (1995, p. 23).

¹⁷ Adams (2006, p. 103).

¹⁸ Adams (2006, *ibid.*), my emphasis.

¹⁹ Adams, (2006, *ibid.*)

²⁰ Adams (2006, p. 104), my emphases.

²¹ I prefer the term ‘self-focus’ to ‘self-preference’ since it is not clear that the person who looms too large in their own thoughts necessarily *prefers* themselves to others. Consider, for instance, the kind of person who is always worried about the impression they have made on others. (‘Did what I said upset him?’ ‘What will she think of me now?’) Such a person is self-centred in a psychologically unhealthy way, but such an attitude is perfectly consistent with a – sometimes near pathological – desire to put the *preferences* of others above themselves, always giving way or retreating into the background.

²² This central theme dominates such major texts as *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *The Sickness Unto Death*; indeed, so important is it that Merold Westphal took it as the title of his commentary on the former text (Westphal (1996)).

²³ Adams (2006, p. 100).

²⁴ Goldstein (1960, p. 109).

²⁵ Pope Gregory attributes to pride (*superbia*) the position as the most deadly of the sins, a view built upon by St. Augustine. For a useful brief history, see Dyson (2006, chapter 1).

²⁶ Andolsen (1994, p. 151).

²⁷ Coakley (2001, p. 208).

²⁸ Weaver (2002, p. 69).

²⁹ Kierkegaard (1980, pp. 32-33).

³⁰ Groenhout (2006, p. 296).

³¹ Coakley (2001, p. 203). Coakley is reviewing the uses of the term *kenosis* made by other contributions to the volume of which her essay is a part. But it is clear that she recognises this range of possible meanings as symptomatic of the range over which the term is used in scholarly discussion about *kenosis* more generally.

³² Groenhout (2006, p. 298).

³³ Groenhout (2006, p. 297), my emphases.

³⁴ Groenhout (2006, *ibid*), my emphasis.

³⁵ Groenhout (2006, p. 298).

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸ Groenhout (2006, p. 301).

³⁹ Groenhout notes that there is another side to Weil that emerges when her focus is on others rather than herself. But she also notes that the aspect of Weil identified in what follows is described by even one of Weil's most enthusiastic advocates as a 'perverse version of sacrifice' (Springstead (1986, p. 79); cited in Groenhout (2006, p.301)).

⁴⁰ Weil (1952, p. 88-89), cited in Groenhout (2006, pp. 301-2).

⁴¹ Groenhout (2006, p. 302).

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ Adams (2006, p. 107).

⁴⁴ Cf. 1 Corinthians 15: 12-20.

⁴⁵ I think it is an open question to what extent some of Kierkegaard's remarks about self-denial fully recognise this. For instance, consider the potentially dangerous idea that 'being abominated almost as a criminal, insulted and ridiculed' (Kierkegaard (1995, p. 194)) is 'the very assurance that the relationship with God is in order' (1995, p. 195). In response, we might well ask a version of the question Gene Outka asked in his famous 'blank

check' objection: does *agape* allow 'any way to differentiate between attention to another's needs and submission to his exploitation, and any warrant for resisting the latter?' (Outka (1972, p. 21)). In other words: are there no limits to self-sacrifice? What about justice and self-respect? We shall return to the latter in section 3.

⁴⁶ It should perhaps also be repeated that the valorisation of self-sacrifice for its own sake might be especially damaging to women, given the prevalence of gender stereotypes to which the Christian tradition must admit that it has made a significant contribution.

⁴⁷ MacIntyre (1999, p. 160).

⁴⁸ Russell (2005, pp. 101-121). See note 45 above.

⁴⁹ Russell (2005, p. 119).

⁵⁰ Adams (2006, p. 110).

⁵¹ See especially Taylor (1989, 1991, 2007).

⁵² Taylor (1989, p. 36).

⁵³ Including to Adams, who rejects pride – along with conceit and egotism – as a vice of 'cognitive self-preference' (2006, p. 104).

⁵⁴ Aquinas (1964-1980, II-II q. 162 a. 1 c).

⁵⁵ Spinoza (1982, p. 186).

⁵⁶ Smith (2005, pp. 90-116).

⁵⁷ Note that despite the occasional reference to Aristotle in what follows, in arguing that a certain kind of pride can be a virtue, I am certainly not seeking to defend the whole package of what Aristotle means by *megalopsuchia* (greatness of soul). Aristotle's great-souled man not only has certain features that just seem amusing to a contemporary reader (such as his measured gait, deep voice and unhurried speech (Aristotle (1976, 1125a)). Far more importantly, his pride is also bound up with a sense of self-sufficiency that I find implausible (for instance, he 'is disposed to confer benefits, but is ashamed to accept them, because the one is the act of a

superior and the other than of an inferior' (Aristotle (1976, 1124b)). As the above quote shows, he also operates with a sense of some people as being of greater intrinsic value than others: an obvious problem for any ethic of neighbour-love.

⁵⁸ Smith (2005, pp. 93-94).

⁵⁹ Smith (2005, pp. 94-95).

⁶⁰ Russell suggests that the most important aspect of the Aristotelian virtue of pride is the self-respect of the virtuous person: 'pride consists in the virtuous person's trait of acting only in ways that are worthy of her dignity' (Russell (2005, p. 111)). But precisely because we are talking about a virtuous person – Aristotle insists that only the truly good person can be proud in the true sense (Aristotle (1976, 1123b)) – this 'dignity' has nothing to do with social face-saving, and is rather essentially the same as true self-respect.

⁶¹ Smith (2005, p. 105).

⁶² Smith (2005, p. 98).

⁶³ For Aristotle, too, the truly proud person (in the virtuous sense of the term) will not be a braggart. Eschewing gossip 'he will talk neither about himself nor about anyone else, because he does not care to be complimented himself or to hear others criticized' (Aristotle (1976, 1125a)).

⁶⁴ Smith (2005, p. 102), my emphasis.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Branden (1994).

⁶⁶ Smith (2005, p. 102).

⁶⁷ Ricoeur (1992, p. 138), my emphasis.

⁶⁸ Smith (2005, p. 103).

⁶⁹ Russell (2005, p. 105). If Russell is right that the most important aspect of *megalopsuchia* is self-respect, then this goes some way toward explaining why Aristotle thinks of it as 'a sort of crown of the virtues, because it enhances them and is never found apart from them' (Aristotle (1976, 1123b)).

⁷⁰ Adams (2006, p. 106).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Adams (2006, p. 105).

⁷⁴ Russell (2005, p. 108). Cf. Robin Dillon's point that self-respect is respect for something with moral worth, and so to fail to recognise this amounts to 'a kind of moral corruption' (Dillon (1992, p. 135)).

⁷⁵ Cf. Russell (2005, p. 109).

⁷⁶ I would like to thank audiences at Baylor, Oxford and Oslo Universities for comments on earlier versions of this paper.