

Kierkegaard and Binswanger on Faith's Relation to Love:

A Response to Schrijvers

Megan Fritts

In Joeri Schrijvers' (2016) book *Between Faith and Belief*, Schrijvers discusses various answers to a deceptively simple and yet complex question: What can be said for religious faith "at the end of metaphysics?" Although Schrijvers engages a variety of thinkers in the elaboration of his thesis, he takes particular interest in Ludwig Binswanger, a Swiss existential psychologist, whose contemporaries include Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Buber. Although Schrijvers does not discuss it in his manuscript, it is important to note that Binswanger was heavily influenced by the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. This influence is particularly apparent in Binswanger's understanding of the transcendental nature of human love. Demonstrating the degree to which Binswanger draws on Kierkegaard, Elisabetta Basso writes, "What is undeniable, in any event, is the fact that Kierkegaard is almost everywhere present in Binswanger's work" (Basso 2011, 35). Anyone familiar with Kierkegaard's authorship should also be able to see his ideas shining through Binswanger's work; but what are as interesting as their similarities are their divergences.

In this engagement with Schrijvers' book, I will attempt to think alongside him by presenting a Kierkegaardian response to Binswanger's notion that love *does not* involve a uniquely religious stance towards the world. If Binswanger is right about the nature of human love, it is a transcendental being-beyond-the-world-in-the-world, which is essentially focused on the beloved, but where the beloved only happens to be the individual that she is. Furthermore, this stance makes us, as it were, more than ourselves, and while it is *compatible* with religion, it

does not *require* any sort of religious stance. It is this notion of the beloved, however, which is at odds with Kierkegaard's, otherwise similar, take on human love—which takes the identity of the beloved to be critically important to the transcending nature of the love, and where love between the lover and the *specific* beloved must be, at its core, uniquely religious.

Kierkegaard's discussion of such transcendent relationships can be primarily found in *Fear and Trembling*. Therein, we encounter two parallel anecdotes describing a tragic case of love: the biblical Abraham and Isaac, and the Knight and the Princess. In each case, the two individuals find themselves caught in a paradox of love, which makes the continuation of the relationship appear impossible. The paradox takes the following approximate form: (1) true love between the lover and the beloved is impossible; (2) in order for the lover to become who he must be, he must have the beloved; (3) the lover will become who he must be. Silentio describes instances of such paradoxes as providing possibility conditions for a movement of faith, self-realization through this love is only possible with such a movement.

Schrijvers on Binswanger

Schrijvers presents Binswanger's psychology of love as a response to certain features of Heidegger's work. Specifically, Schrijvers understands Binswanger as coming up against Heidegger's notion that Dasein is *most* authentic when it is being-toward-death. According to Heidegger, it is in being-toward-death that my being is most truly "my own" (Schrijvers, 223), such that I am transformed into an authentic mode of being-in-the-world. Binswanger, however, is concerned that Heidegger, in his focus on death, ends up neglecting human love as another source of transformation and self-creation. As Schrijvers notes, "Binswanger is looking for a *tertium datur* between the ontic preoccupations of everyday Dasein and the ontological heroism

of authentic Dasein that faces (the possibility) of his or her imminent death” (Schrijvers 2016, 233). For Binswanger, alternatively, love between two humans, especially romantic or erotic love, allows one to “give [oneself] as an ‘I’” (Schrijvers 2016, 234).

Binswanger’s love also makes a funny thing of time. When the self becomes essentially oriented toward the other, time becomes either a tool to use for the benefit of the other (or, perhaps, a gift for her (Schrijvers 2016, 236)), or an irrelevant aspect of the world to which the two lovers are utterly immune. Schrijvers describes this aspect of love as not exactly a matter of timelessness, but of “worldlessness” (Schrijvers 2016, 234). Although not entirely outside of the world, the two lovers create their own haven within it, where time and space exist, not as limits, but only as tools to be used for their togetherness.

Finally, there are two more features of Binswangerean love that Schrijvers highlights: (1) for the lover, the particular beloved both is, and is not, the one who is loved; (2) this love is compatible with a stance of religious faith, but does not require it. Regarding (1), Schrijvers contends that, for Binswanger, while “empirically” the beloved is the particular person she is, and that particular person is who my love is directed toward, “factically” I could have fallen in love with anyone else (Schrijvers 2016, 239). My love for you does not “exhaust the essence of love,” and for Binswanger this seems to be an important feature of a sort of love which is essentially universal.

Regarding (2), Schrijvers points out that Binswanger “speaks not of God” in most of his work, remaining “admirably secular,” given his topic of choice (Schrijvers 2016, 7). Nonetheless, Schrijvers contends that Binswanger’s notion of love allows for, or perhaps even invites, a version of Christianity. This is because love for the beloved does not “exhaust the possibility” of love, but rather makes one into the sort of being who can enter into a universe of

love. Still, Schrijvers admits that such a psychology of love does not require or entail a stance of religious faith. Schrijvers explains the situation as follows:

Recall that what I am seeking in and retrieving from Binswanger is a secularism that does not *exclude* something like faith, as this is perhaps the least bad way to proceed in a world where “secularism” still remains truthful to the current “state of affairs.” But for faith and religion, too, it is perhaps better to deal with a secular context, instead of assuming that the option of faith is as viable as any other. (Schrijvers 2016, 8–9)

Schrijvers thinks that Binswanger’s psychology of love will give him just that; and, perhaps, it does. But the idea of a radical, self-making love that is *not* essentially religious encounters pushback in the works of Kierkegaard upon which Binswanger drew so heavily.

On Kierkegaard

“It was my only wish, it was my bliss.” With these words, which refer to Isaac, Silentio imagines a possible Abraham speaking as he relinquishes hope (Kierkegaard 1941 [1843], 32–33). For twenty-five years Abraham anticipated the birth of Isaac, propelled not only by the natural longing of a father for a child, but by the promise of God that this son would be the first of innumerable descendants who would form God’s chosen people. Through Isaac, Abraham was to become the “father of many nations,” and the fulfillment of this promise hung entirely on the late and long-awaited birth of this son. Abraham loved passionately the child who was his promise, purpose, and joy. As Silentio phrases it, Isaac was the “whole content of his life” (Kierkegaard 1941 [1843], 57).

In the parallel tale, Silentio speaks of “a young swain [who] falls in love with a princess, and the whole content of his life consists in this love” (Kierkegaard 1941 [1843], 57). The Knight has fallen deeply in love with a woman he can never be with; she is the purpose of his life, though she can never be his. Like Abraham’s father love, the Knight’s love for the Princess

goes far beyond ordinary romantic love and attachment. It is a “self-making passion” (Jech n.d., 21), a love through which the single individual can come to have a self. In both tales, we can see the form of the tripartite paradox played out:

(1) Love between the lover and the beloved is impossible.

Abraham must kill his son, and the Knight (for some reason) can never be with the Princess.

(2) In order for the lover to become who he must be, he must have the beloved.

Without Isaac, Abraham cannot become the “father to many nations.” Likewise, the Princess is the “whole contents” of the Knight’s life.

(3) The lover must become a self.

And not just any self—Abraham must become the father to many nations, and the Knight must become the lover of the Princess. In this way, Kierkegaard also diverges from Binswanger, as the lover does not just happen to love any particular individual. Indeed, the lover could not have such a self-making love with any other because no other person would make him into the self he must be.

That humans do not start out with a fully-formed self is a theme explored more fully in *The Sickness Unto Death*: “Man is a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded, man is not yet a self” (Kierkegaard 1946 [1849], 147). The tripartite paradox of a self-making love creates the possibility conditions for what Kierkegaard calls the “double-movement of faith.” This double-movement is the combination of two different responses to the paradox: the movement of “infinite resignation,” and the movement of “faith.”

In order to illustrate these two different responses to the paradox, Silentio famously introduces two characters: the Knight of Infinite Resignation and the Knight Faith.

The first Knight performs the first sort of movement, “infinite resignation,” which is a movement away from the finite incarnation of the beloved. Indeed, the Knight no longer has any need to bother himself with such a worldly thing. Instead of dismissing his love for the Princess (a weak move, and impossible), or longing after her finite form (a life of sorrow and futility), the Knight chooses to dwell on his love in the realm where nothing can touch it—the infinite. The Knight of Infinite Resignation remains in a state of having the beloved infinitely resigned. Accordingly, he spends the rest of his life loving this dream, perfectly preserved in the realm of Ideality. As Silentio explains:

So when he has thus sucked into himself the whole of love and absorbed himself in it, he does not lack courage to make trial of everything and to venture everything. He surveys the situation of his life, he convokes the swift thoughts, which like tame doves obey his every bidding, he waves his wand over them, and they dart off in all directions. But when they all return, all as messengers of sorrow, and declare to him that it is an impossibility, then he becomes quiet, he dismisses them, he remains alone, and then he performs the movements. (Kierkegaard 1941 [1843], 53)

Yet, the Knight of Infinite resignation does not have faith. He does not have a self that is able to relate to the world, having surrendered his ties to the finite, and he lacks this kind of self because he has surrendered his beloved. In order to have faith, in order to commune with God, it is necessary to have a self that is fully in the world. This is why the Knight of Faith must, after infinitely resigning the beloved, make a second movement: the movement to faith. Silentio admits that “the movements [of resignation and faith] are frequently confounded” (Kierkegaard 1941 [1843], 59). Accordingly, he goes on to note the difference between them:

In resignation I make renunciation of everything, everything. [...] By faith I make renunciation of nothing, on the contrary, by faith I acquire everything. [...] Faith is precisely this paradox, that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal. [...] yet in such a way, be it observed, that [...] through the universal becomes the

individual who as the particular is superior to the universal. And yet faith is this paradox—or else [...] there never has been faith, precisely because it always has been. In other words, Abraham is lost. (Kierkegaard 1941 [1843], 59, 66)

It is clear, then, that the only way this self-making love can be realized (as opposed to relegated to the realm of Ideality via infinite resignation) is by making the movement of faith “by virtue of the absurd.” Faith, then, for Kierkegaard, is not merely compatible with such a self-making love, it is an essential feature of any such relationship.

So Kierkegaard and Binswanger agree on the initial, default condition of human selfhood as defined by a type of individualist lack. They also agree on the solution to such a lack—love. Additionally, they both put forth a view of love as a sort of transcendental experience, which makes us, to put it simply, more than ourselves. We *become* the relation that we come to have to our beloved—we become a lover. Yet, for Kierkegaard, such an experience requires—indeed, it essentially *is*—a stance of faith. But why?

The Paradox of Love and Necessity of Faith

The point of departure between these two figures is the place of religious faith in the phenomenon of self-making human love. While Schrijvers reads Binswanger’s love as leaving room for, though not requiring or entailing, religious faith, Kierkegaard finds the notion of this sort of love *essentially to be* the possibility condition for the movement of faith.

Kierkegaard’s take on the role of faith in love stems from the fact that human beings begin life in debt, in a state of lack—specifically, we lack a self. As previously noted, this essential human lack of self is a key point of agreement between Kierkegaard and Binswanger.

As Schrijvers writes:

If being unfolds with lack, gaps, and holes (Heidegger), then it not only falls to the human being to “endure” (*Aushalten*) such ontological insufficiency, it also *is* such a

lack. The human being, I suggest, is in default, like one can be in default when one fails to pay back a loan or return a borrowed item. If, for Binswanger, the world is what lacks love, this is so because the human being fails to love properly (just as Heidegger's Dasein most often fails to be authentic). (Schrijvers 2016, 303)

Binswanger himself attributes this notion of lack to Kierkegaard. Indeed, Basso notes the attribution of such ideas to Kierkegaard in Binswanger's works:

In this context, Kierkegaard is mentioned also—together with Heidegger again—in order to oppose to such an experience of “existential loss of the self” a “principle of the self” as “existential realization,” which consists in the awakening of the self from irresponsible and non-autonomous everyday life—that is, the “self as ‘they are [Man]’”—to the “authentic self.” (Basso 2011 40; citing Binswanger 1932, 25)

What Binswanger doesn't seem to see, however, is that this essential lack, this “finitude,” in Kierkegaard's words, makes the sort of love Binswanger describes impossible. That finite beings could expand beyond themselves, become whole through a very particular love which itself requires two whole individuals, is a paradox. Such a chasm of between us and the realization of this ideal can only be spanned by a leap to faith, a repetitive movement, of resigning the beloved and, in faith, receiving her back.

There are, perhaps, more similarities than divergences between the ideas of these two thinkers. Still, as it concerns the topic of Schrijvers' book, it seems crucial to note Kierkegaard's particularly weighty voice as concerns the role of faith in love. If Kierkegaard is right that a stance of religious faith is necessary to make sense of the possibility of love, then this might affect how plausible one finds Binswanger (Or religious faith! Or love!). In any case, perhaps Kierkegaard provides an option for those still looking for a notion of faith that can be grasped “at the end of metaphysics.”

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