

## Article

# Patriotism and Love of the Neighbor: A Kierkegaardian View of a Contested Virtue

C. Stephen Evans 

Institute for Ethics and Society, University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle, WA 6160, Australia;  
c\_stephen\_evans@baylor.edu

**Abstract:** Though patriotism has traditionally been considered a virtue, in many countries of the world today, the status of patriotism as a virtue has been challenged. Philosopher John Hare has recently defended patriotism as a virtue. Kierkegaard, with his suspicion of “the crowd” and attack on “Christendom” has sometimes been thought to be one of the critics of patriotism. This paper argues that Kierkegaard’s view is actually close to Hare’s. Kierkegaard does believe that patriotism can be a virtue, though it is perhaps especially susceptible to distortion and corruption. Patriotism, like other natural forms of “preferential love”, must be infused with the love of the neighbor to be a genuine virtue.

**Keywords:** patriotism; neighbor-love; preferential loves; John Hare; virtue; cosmopolitanism



**Citation:** Evans, C. Stephen. 2023. Patriotism and Love of the Neighbor: A Kierkegaardian View of a Contested Virtue. *Religions* 14: 1203. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091203>

Academic Editor: Philip Goodchild

Received: 31 July 2023

Revised: 15 August 2023

Accepted: 19 September 2023

Published: 20 September 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Patriotism has traditionally been regarded as a virtue, one passed on to children by parents and in schools. For example, in my own elementary and high schools, the school day always began with a recitation of the United States “Pledge of Allegiance” to the “flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands.” (We also were supposed to pray the Lord’s Prayer, although it was a state-supported school in a country where church and state were supposed to be separated.) Throughout my early teenage years, patriotism was, in my world, seen as a non-controversial (though not exciting) virtue, one honored by singing the national anthem at sporting events, paying respect to war veterans, and attending parades on various national holidays.

However, things changed in the USA during the late 1960s, as the Vietnam War became a dominant national issue. Those who opposed the war, either on moral grounds or on pragmatic grounds as unwinnable, were seen by defenders of the war as unpatriotic, or even treasonous. Defenders of the war employed the slogan “my country: love it or leave it.” Many young men who opposed the war did indeed leave, fleeing to Canada to avoid the draft. Although some who opposed the war claimed to be patriots and argued that criticizing one’s country when it was wrong was a patriotic act, patriotism was increasingly seen as a polarized, politicized quality rather than a generally accepted virtue.

Since that period, in the USA, patriotism has continued to be viewed in this politicized way. Other foreign wars in Iraq and Afghanistan played a role somewhat analogous to the Vietnam war, with critics of the wars seen by many as unpatriotic, while critics of American foreign policy (not to mention its record on race and other issues) increasingly came to see those who waved the banner of patriotism (often by literally waiving the national flag) as hypocrites or worse.

So, what should we say about patriotism? I shall try to answer this question with the help of Kierkegaard. However, I shall begin by discussing the work of one of the few contemporary philosophers to defend the virtue of patriotism: John Hare. Hare’s recent *Unity and the Holy Spirit* discusses the Christian view of the work of the Holy Spirit, especially with respect to the work of the Holy Spirit in the created world, which can be distinguished from the work of the Spirit that is focused on the Church (Hare 2023). One might think that such a book would be of mainly theological interest. However, Hare discusses the work of the Holy Spirit by appealing to ethical principles, particularly from a

Kantian perspective. The book appeals to philosophical arguments that give force to those who have no theological commitments.

In Chapter Four of *Unity and the Holy Spirit*, Hare focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit in fostering unity among human persons and deals with a problem that many ethical thinkers, both philosophers and theologians, have discussed: the relationship between the love of one's country and the love of humanity. Many have seen these two loves as the source of a problem. The love of one's country, or patriotism, seems to require a kind of privileging of one's own country and its people over others, while the love of humanity, or perhaps better, human persons in general, seems to require a kind of disinterested view, since all human persons are, in Kant's language, ends in themselves and seem equally worthy of moral regard.

Hare attempts to argue that one does not have to choose between the kind of love found in patriotism and the kind of love that many ethical thinkers hold that we are enjoined to have for all persons. The second kind of love (or regard), which Hare sometimes refers to as cosmopolitanism, is frequently seen as in tension with patriotism, or even in contradiction to it. Hare argues that the two can be seen as compatible. To make this plausible, Hare claims that patriotism can be seen as a "perfection" of the love of humanity (Hare 2023, p. 122), an idea that parallels Scotus's view that the individual essence or *haecceity* that is possessed by a particular human individual is a perfection of universal human nature. Thus, the love of an individual human person as particular does not contradict the love of that person as human but is rather an enriched version of the love of a human. In a similar way, in loving the people of one's own country, one loves them as humans, but this love is an enriched form of the love of humans and does not contradict it.

To be sure, Hare recognizes that patriotism comes in many forms, and he affirms that some of those versions of patriotism do conflict with one's obligation to have moral regard for all persons. He gives as an example someone for whom love of country implies that national borders should be closed in such a way that is impossible for those suffering persecution in some other country even to have their case for asylum fairly heard. Patriotism in this case has become debased because there is a "practical contradiction" between a "human value" that is internally connected to a praiseworthy love of country, and the policies supported by this patriot, whose refusal to consider the humanity of the person seeking refuge, creates a tension between his love of country and the moral duty to treat all human persons as ends in themselves.<sup>1</sup> We might say that this debased form of patriotism is not an enhanced way of loving human persons because the debased patriot does not really love all human persons.

I am sympathetic to all of what Hare has to say here. However, I think the account he gives, while helpful and right as far as it goes, still leaves many questions unanswered. Even if we agree, as I do, that Hare's criterion that patriotism becomes morally suspect if the form of patriotism in question in some way undermines or contradicts a moral concern for all humans is helpful, we still need to know much more about how my obligations to my fellow countrymen and my obligations to others, who may be strangers or even enemies, are to be related. I believe that Kierkegaard has something to say about this issue that is helpful and which provides further support and even illumination for what Hare says. Although Hare relies on Kierkegaard at many points in the book, there is no mention of Kierkegaard in Chapter Four. So, I am going to try to show what Kierkegaard can contribute to the discussion of patriotism as a virtue. As I will argue, there are limits to Kierkegaard's view as well. So, in conclusion, I will try to show that additional help can be gained from both a divine command theory of moral obligation and a natural law-type account of the good. The former is arguably part of Kierkegaard's view, while the latter I view as consistent with it. The conclusion is that Kierkegaard does recognize the virtue of patriotism, though he views it as one that is especially liable to be distorted if it is not infused with the love of the neighbor.

## 1. Kierkegaard's Discussion of Preferential Loves

In Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, there is a long discussion of the relationship between types of love that Kierkegaard variously calls preferential, natural, or spontaneous forms of love, and what Kierkegaard calls neighbor-love. Kierkegaard's initial thrust is to sharply distinguish the two kinds of love. Neighbor-love is distinguished by its demand that no one is to be excluded; the neighbor is the first person you happen to see but also the stranger you will never meet (WL, 21; SKS 9, 21–22).<sup>2</sup> Most strikingly, even one's enemies are one's neighbors. Kierkegaard emphatically claims that love of the neighbor in this sense is not only inclusive and, thus, not preferential; it is also not natural or spontaneous. The examples he discusses at length of preferential loves are friendship and romantic love, but much of what he says about these loves would also be true of forms of family love and patriotism. All of these loves are preferential in character. Friendship love is love for my friends, not love for everyone. Romantic love is the love of my romantic partner, not love for everyone. Parental love for children is love for one's own children, not love for everyone. And patriotism is love for one's own country, not all countries.

Preferential loves come easily to us humans. We naturally and spontaneously love our lovers, our friends, our families, and our countries. As Kierkegaard points out, in all of these forms of love, there is a self-regarding aspect. The objects of love are included in the scope of my love because of how they are related to me. This does not mean that such loves are inherently selfish, and it certainly does not imply that they are vicious in character. Nevertheless, they do involve a kind of self-regard and this relation to myself is part of what grounds the love.

It is important to recognize that self-regard is not inherently bad. After all, the Biblical command is to love one's neighbor *as oneself*, and Kierkegaard affirms the legitimacy of self-love, even going so far as to say that, properly understood, the command to love the neighbor and the duty to love oneself properly are identical (WL, 22; SKS 9, 30). I take it that this means I am in a sense included in the category of "neighbor." To love anyone is to will their good, and, thus, it is proper for me to will my own good as well as the good of others. However, although self-regarding love is not inherently bad, the self-regarding character of such loves does open the door to various forms of distortion and corruption. We humans are selfish creatures and self-regard is often, perhaps usually, influenced by this selfishness.

Neighbor-love is different. On Kierkegaard's view, love for the neighbor is grounded not in a relation to myself but in a relation to God. If I love God rightly, I will love all humans because they are all made in God's image. It is for this reason that neighbor-love is inclusive, even to the point of loving one's enemies. I do not need any special relationship with any person in order to love that person as my neighbor. This does not mean that love for the neighbor must be thought of as instrumental. I do not love the neighbor as a means of developing my own relationship with God, and the value that my neighbor has is really their value. However, they have that special value because they were made in God's image, and this means that it is not possible to love God without loving the neighbor who resembles God. The major way humans image God is in their capacity to love. God is love for Kierkegaard, and he affirms that the capacity for love is something that God has placed in the foundation or ground of every person.<sup>3</sup>

The sharp contrast Kierkegaard draws between preferential loves and neighbor-love has led some commentators to claim that his view of neighbor-love is inhuman because it seems to such commentators that neighbor-love as Kierkegaard understands it is simply incompatible with natural loves that involve particularity.<sup>4</sup> If this interpretation were correct, then Kierkegaard would be of no help at all in dealing with the problem of patriotism and universal love. Rather, on this view, Kierkegaard would make the tension between the two kinds of love intractable.

However, I side with the majority of Kierkegaard scholars who think this view of Kierkegaard is mistaken. To be sure, there are texts that could be and have been read in ways that suggest that neighbor-love and preferential loves are incompatible. For example,

Kierkegaard says that to love the neighbor is “to exist equally for every human being,” (WL, 83–84; SKS 9, 85), and he also says that love of the neighbor is a love that “makes no distinctions” (WL, 58; SKS 9, 64). However, I think it is clear that what Kierkegaard means by these claims is that every human is equally a human person; to “exist equally” for all is to recognize that all humans are humans, worthy of regard. Neighbor-love does not make distinctions between human beings that exclude some humans from the scope of neighbor-love.

However, this does not mean that neighbor-love does not make any distinctions as to how love is expressed. Special relations with people will clearly make a difference in how various people are treated. For instance, the king is one’s neighbor, but one owes “homage” to a king that one would not owe to others (WL, 88; SKS 9, 92). To interpret the passages about equality and “making no distinctions” in a way that would put them in conflict with special relations would contradict many other passages, where Kierkegaard affirms the importance of such relationships.

The textual evidence for my view is very strong. Kierkegaard says very clearly that special loves, such as romantic love and friendship, are not incompatible with neighbor-love. For example, he says that the wife and the friend are not loved in the same way nor the friend and the neighbor (WL, 141; SKS 9, 143). He also says that “Christianity has nothing against the husband’s loving his wife in particular” so long as the wife is not viewed as “an exception” to the category of neighbor (WL, 141–2; SKS 9, 143). With respect to friendship, he makes a point of saying that even Jesus, the exemplar of neighbor-love, had special friends, and he provides a masterful account of Jesus’s relationship with his friend Peter (WL, 167–174; SKS 9, 168–174).

So, neighbor-love does not exclude natural, preferential loves. But how is neighbor-love related to natural loves? It is clear that Kierkegaard does not want to see the relationship as merely additive, such that one must add neighbor-love to the natural loves one already has. Rather, his view is that all forms of natural, preferential love should become special cases of neighbor-love. None of the natural loves can be “withdrawn from the relation to God” (WL, 112; SKS 9, 116). Instead, neighbor-love “should lie at the base of and be present in every other expression of love” (WL, 146; SKS 9, 147–148). When this happens, these natural loves are transformed; they become instances of neighbor-love, without losing their own particular distinctiveness. They then become instances of “the Spirit’s love.” (WL, 146; SKS 9, 147). The transformation is one in which natural loves become purified by removing the sinfulness (chiefly selfishness) that permeates all natural loves (Elisher 2023; Davenport 2017; Lippitt 2013, 2015).<sup>5</sup>

If I am right and this is Kierkegaard’s general view of how neighbor-love should be related to natural, preferential forms of love, does it offer any help in understanding the relationship between patriotism and cosmopolitanism? One might think the answer is no, since Kierkegaard does not often discuss patriotism and in some places seems positively suspicious of it. One might think that there is a crucial difference between romantic love and friendship, which are loves for particular people, and love of one’s country. A country, while it may be closely identified with its inhabitants, is not identical to a person or a group of persons. Furthermore, as a sharp critic of “Christendom,” Kierkegaard has special worries about the way patriotic love can be deformed by idolatry, for example, by becoming a form of Christian nationalism. I think it is for this reason that Kierkegaard does not speak often about patriotism. He is very worried about “the crowd,” and he also instinctively recoiled from the kind of view found in his contemporary, Grundtvig, who blended Christianity and Danish patriotism with a kind of glorification of being “Nordic” or “Scandinavian” that is uncomfortably close to some repugnant twentieth-century ideologies (Backhouse 2011).<sup>6</sup>

It is for this reason, I think, that Stephen Backhouse thinks that for Kierkegaard, patriotic love is simply not a good thing at all (Backhouse 2011). However, I think Backhouse is wrong. I see no reason why Kierkegaard would think that the love of one’s country would be uniquely subject to corruption, though he may have thought that patriotism lends itself more readily to this than other forms of preferential love. And, in fact, there is

one important section of *Works of Love* where Kierkegaard explicitly says that patriotism is, like friendship and erotic love, a form of love that can also be a form of neighbor-love.

The crucial passages are near the end of Discourse IIIB, “Love Is a Matter of Conscience.” In this section, Kierkegaard argues that neighbor-love does not require the abolition, or even the essential alteration, of natural human forms of relationship. The discussion begins with a discussion of monasticism, which Kierkegaard says is a misunderstanding of the Christian view that dethrones marriage and erotic love (WL, 144; SKS 9, 146). Kierkegaard says that Christianity does not oppose marriage in any way but transforms it by making marriage a matter of conscience, in which each party must consult with God before deciding to marry. He then makes a similar point about other forms of human relationship, including patriotism: “Through a similar misunderstanding of Christianity, through a similar piece of childishness, people thought that it was Christian to betray the secret, to express in a worldly way Christianity’s indifference to friendship, to the family relationships, to love of the fatherland—which is indeed false because Christianity is not indifferent in a worldly way to anything;” (WL, 144; SKS 9, 146). The same thought about the place of natural human relationships is expressed more positively a few lines later: “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, but yet in all this there must be a basic understanding between himself and God. . .” (WL, 145; SKS, 9, 146). So, it is clear that love of one’s country, like love of one’s spouse or friend, can be transformed by being infused with neighbor-love.

All of our natural loves are subject to being corrupted by our sinfulness, not just patriotism. Although a country is not a person or a group of people, it is a particular that can be loved, and the expression of that love will involve how people are treated. This means that the love of country, like other natural loves, can become a form of neighbor-love. This does mean that in some cases, the people in one’s own country will be treated differently than people in other countries, just as one does not always treat a spouse or a friend exactly as one would act towards a stranger. It is crucial that one has neighbor-love for all people, including strangers and enemies, but it does not follow from this that how that love is expressed will be exactly the same for all people. I conclude that there is an analogy between patriotism and other forms of preferential love and that it may be helpful to see if Kierkegaard’s view can help us understand how to relate the love of a country to the love of people in other countries.

Clearly, there is a substantial amount of agreement between Kierkegaard and Hare here. Both would agree that the universal regard owed to all people must be compatible with the special regard one has for one’s fellow citizens. Both would agree that there are forms of patriotism that are not compatible with this universal love and that those forms are for that reason deformed. I already mentioned one criterion Hare gives for such a deformed patriotism, drawn from a case where a patriot wants to deny the right to apply for asylum to those suffering persecution. The criterion is that deformed patriotism involves “a practical contradiction with a human value that is internally attached to that love” (Hare 2023, p. 127).

I think Kierkegaard’s way of putting this same point would be something like this: One way that one’s love of one’s country should express itself is in a love of one’s fellow countrymen, which is a form of neighbor-love. However, genuine neighbor-love does not make distinctions with respect to whom one should love. If my love for my countrymen is genuinely a form of neighbor-love, then I should have a love for all humans since all humans are my neighbors. My refusal to consider asylum for desperate people who are being persecuted amounts to treating them as if they did not exist as human persons, and, thus, the love I profess for my countrymen turns out not to be genuine neighbor-love at all.

The test for preferential loves is that they must be purified by having neighbor-love as their foundation, and this corrupt form of patriotism fails the test. Genuine neighbor-love can and does allow for special treatment for those with whom one has a special relation, but it rules out as illegitimate treating anyone as if they are not human persons and have



no moral standing at all. Kierkegaard's view seems very like Hare's, but to my mind, it gives a clearer picture of what is wrong with deformed patriotism. All true and genuine loves turn out to be forms of neighbor-love, and forms of patriotism that fail that test, thus, turn out to be morally defective. Kierkegaard's view is helpful in that it implies the moral task is not one of "balancing" two different types of love, which could be seen as in tension, but rather deciding how appropriately to express two different forms of neighbor-love.

## 2. The Pragmatic or Casuistic Problem

Both Kierkegaard and Hare would recognize that there is more to say. In particular, there are pragmatic and casuistic problems raised by the finitude of human moral agents and lovers. Suppose it is the case that every human person is my neighbor and, thus, must not be excluded from my love (using Kierkegaard's language), or my moral concern, to use the Kantian language Hare generally employs. Nevertheless, it is easy to see that the scope of human need vastly exceeds the capacities of human moral agents. Accepting the appropriateness of treating friends, family members, and fellow citizens in special ways only exacerbates this problem, since any resources devoted to these special persons will mean that there are fewer resources for those who are strangers but still my neighbors. One answer to this problem is to appeal to cooperative social action, since there are problems that individuals acting alone cannot possibly deal with that can be profitably dealt with by collective action. However, even cooperative social action still leaves a version of the problem, since there are many more charitable agencies dealing with such problems than I as an individual can donate time or money to.

As a partial answer to this problem, Hare appeals to a principle he calls "providential proximity" (Hare 2023, p. 131). The idea is that God gives us special connections to the particular people or peoples he wants us to help. Hare rightly here appeals to his own divine command theory of moral obligation, a type of moral view that Kierkegaard shares, at least in my view, and, thus, notes that God gives us commands "both to enter into political community and then to go beyond it" (Hare 2023, p. 131; Evans 2004).<sup>7</sup>

Although Hare does not emphasize this point, I think that one of the strengths of a divine command theory of moral obligation stands out at this point. This type of moral theory, while recognizing that the goodness of an act gives a reason to do that act, does not, like consequentialist views of moral obligation, see moral obligations simply as reducible to maximizing good consequences. Rather, there are many actions that are good to do that are not obligatory. I am obligated to obey God's commands, but I am not God, and I am not obligated to do every possible action I could do that would further human good. Providence is the work of God and not myself. The principle of providential proximity helps me find a way to fulfill what Kant called "imperfect duties." I am required to be generous and do what is in my power, but I am not the ruler of the universe, and I must not think I have the power to make the world a utopia. Only God can and will establish his kingdom; my task is to work towards that kingdom in the ways I have been called to do.

We can extend the principle of providential proximity a bit by noting that God's providence does not merely put me in touch with people whom I am called to help. God also gives me, as a unique person created with an individual essence, special concerns and abilities. Perhaps, for example, if I have a disability or suffer from an illness, I may have a special motivation to help those who suffer from similar disabilities or illnesses. In other words, the idea that human persons have a particular calling or vocation also helps with the pragmatic problem, giving me a way forward that comports with my finitude.

There is one other point that helps with the problem. In Chapter 1, Hare begins by discussing accounts of the good life, mentioning three such accounts. Such views of the good, often found in natural law ethics, generally give "objective lists" of goods. These accounts of the good are, unlike the hedonistic view of the good found in such thinkers as Bentham, pluralistic in character. Though I may need to appreciate and respect all goods as such, the various forms of the good may be diverse and incommensurable.<sup>8</sup> Many defenders of a natural law ethic would say that, given the diversity and incommensurability

of the good, different individuals will legitimately seek to actualize somewhat different goods, choosing a kind of personal “life plan” that gives more weight to certain goods than others (Murphy 2001).<sup>9</sup> In my view, so long as this respects what is morally obligatory and morally permissible, and so long as the life plan seeks to comport well with the individual’s calling, then this seems legitimate and even praiseworthy. This does not mean that anyone is exempt from our duties to care for our neighbors. But it might help us make wise choices about how we are to do that.

### 3. How Do We Love the Neighbor?

Kierkegaard makes one other point that may be helpful. To love the neighbor is to will the neighbor’s good. This is by no means identical to fulfilling the neighbor’s desires. If the neighbor desires the good, then fulfilling that desire is good, but one does not properly love the neighbor by fulfilling a desire for what is bad or even evil. For Kierkegaard, the highest good (though not the sole good or complete good) is a relation to God, and, thus, it is always proper to help another come to know and relate to God properly.

If natural, preferential forms of love are transformed into instances of neighbor-love, then this point has important implications. Neighbor-love is not sentimental indulgence. If my neighbor does what is hateful or unjust or cruel, it is not loving to acquiesce to this because my neighbor is thereby distancing himself from God, who is both Love and the Good. So, neighbor-love is not something to “balance” against the requirements of justice. Rather, justice is something that neighbor-love itself seeks, both in oneself and in the neighbor. This means that forms of preferential love, if they have neighbor-love as their foundation, will seek to oppose injustice and further justice. This will be the case in a romantic relationship, a family, among friends, and also in love for one’s country. The admirable form of patriotism does not shrink from recognizing and opposing injustice in one’s own land but seeks justice, precisely out of love for one’s country. One of the highest forms of love for one’s country, one’s friends, one’s spouse, and one’s children, is to seek to help all of them love their neighbors as themselves.

### 4. What Is the Role of the Holy Spirit?

What does all of this have to do with the Holy Spirit? Kierkegaard, though he is Trinitarian and does speak of the Holy Spirit, does not do so frequently. He is, perhaps, wary of the way that Hegel and his Danish followers had used the concept of “Spirit” to develop a view of God that undermines divine transcendence. As the title of Hare’s book makes clear, Hare views the role of the Holy Spirit largely as working for various forms of unity, both within the self, between humans, and between humans and God. If we focus on the role of the Spirit as primarily working to develop a love of the neighbor in humans, and if we see all forms of human love as needing the love of the neighbor as providing a transformative foundation, we can add something to what Hare says. Perhaps the Spirit does not just work for unity but for purity. The work of the Spirit can reliably be recognized when human loves are transformed and purified so that all of them become specific ways of loving the neighbor. The Spirit does not simply work to develop patriotism but works to develop forms of patriotism that are also forms of the love of the neighbor.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that political and legal issues concerning asylum claims can be complex. Hare is here speaking only of the morality of how asylum seekers should be treated.

<sup>2</sup> All references to *Works of Love* will be made parenthetically as above. After WL the English pagination will be provided for this edition: Kierkegaard (1995). This will be followed by a reference to the now-standard Danish edition, designated as SKS, with the volume number and page number. SKS refers to *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, udg. af Niels Jørgen Cappelørn; Joakim Garff; m.fl., Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret 1997–2012 (tekster.kb.dk/sks).

- 3 This theme is particularly prominent in the First Discourse of the Second Series, “Love Builds Up”.
- 4 Sharon Krishek would be an example of such a commentator. See [Krishek \(2008\)](#).
- 5 For an excellent account of how neighbor-love transforms special loves without destroying them, see [Elisher \(2023\)](#). Elisher discusses and builds on the work of John Davenport and John Lippitt, but Elisher stresses that the transformation is not limited to a “filtering out” of negative aspects. See [Davenport \(2017\)](#) and [Lippitt \(2013\)](#). Also see [Lippitt \(2015\)](#).
- 6 See [Backhouse \(2011\)](#). Backhouse has a fine discussion of Kierkegaard’s relation to Grundtvig, and he explains why Kierkegaard is worried about patriotism. I agree with Backhouse that Kierkegaard decisively rejects Christian nationalism but I do not agree that this means he thinks the love of one’s country is never a virtue.
- 7 For my defense of the claim that Kierkegaard is a divine command theorist of moral obligations and sees God as the basis of the moral law, see [Evans \(2004\)](#).
- 8 I do not believe that Kierkegaard provides anything like a theory of value in his work and to my knowledge does not endorse a “natural law” view of the good. However, I believe his view of the good is similar in that he is a realist about value and recognizes a diversity of goods while holding that the highest good is to be found in a relationship with God. Perhaps, however, the distinctiveness of individual persons and their vocations means that the path to the highest good could be quite different for different individuals.
- 9 See [Murphy \(2001\)](#) for a discussion of incommensurable goods and also the importance of a “life plan,” pp. 133–35 and 184, as well as other passages.

## References

- Backhouse, Stephen. 2011. *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Christian Nationalism*, 1st ed. Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davenport, John. 2017. The Integration of Neighbor-Love and Special Loves in Kierkegaard and von Hildebrand. In *Kierkegaard’s God and the Good Life*. Edited by J. Aaron Simmons, Michael Strawser and Stephen Minister. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Elisher, Robert. 2023. Transfigured Partiality: Toward a Positive Account of Kierkegaardian Special Loves. Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA.
- Evans, C. Stephen. 2004. *Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hare, John. 2023. *Unity and the Holy Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1995. *Works of Love*. Translated and Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Krishek, Sharon. 2008. Two Forms of Love: The Problem of Preferential Love in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*. *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36: 595–617. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Lippitt, John. 2013. *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lippitt, John. 2015. Giving ‘The Dear Self’ Its Due: Kierkegaard, Frankfurt, and Self-Love. In *Love, Reason, and Will: Kierkegaard after Frankfurt*. Edited by Antony Rudd and John Davenport. New York: Bloomsbury, pp. 137–53.
- Murphy, Mark. 2001. *Natural Law and Practical Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.