
KIERKEGAARD AND THE ETHICS OF SACRIFICE AS PART OF THE ETHICS OF LOVE

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Abstract

The paper presents Kierkegaard's ethics of sacrifice as it can be reconstructed from his oeuvre. This ethics is a special case of his general ethics of love. The main thesis of the paper is that according to Kierkegaard only sacrifice founded on love for God is a true sacrifice. All other 'sacrifices' are in fact not genuine sacrifices at all but just forms of self-love in the negative sense of the term. The author analyses a broader frame of Kierkegaard's ethics of sacrifice and its main pillars (his conception of love, views on the meaning of God's commandment, a special position of Jesus, apostles and chosen martyrs, and suffering). He mainly focuses on love (as commandment and duty). In the concluding part, he applies Kierkegaard's ethics of love and sacrifice to our modern situation and explains the importance of psychological reasoning for Kierkegaard's findings and conclusions.

Keywords: self-love, conceptual grammar, duty, psychological aspect, Kierkegaard's ethics

"Instead of offering sacrifices to me, I want you to be merciful to others?"
(Matthew 12.7)

"Love, and do what thou wilt." Saint Augustine

1. Introduction

Sacrifice has from always been an integral part of human life. The most attention grabbing examples in present times are terrorist suicide attacks but the importance of sacrifice reaches broader and deeper. Anyway, the questions of the ethics of sacrifice are today at least as burning and topical as they were in the past: what sacrifice is ethical, right or responsible, what sacrifice is wrong, irresponsible, unethical? Are there any reasonable criteria to discern the first from the second? I think that Kierkegaard's ideas and insights can be useful in this regard. My general aim is contributing to better understanding of Kierkegaard's conception of sacrifice and developing of a Kierkegaardian ethics of sacrifice. As we will see such ethics can be developed only on the basis of his

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fundamental and general ethics which C. Stephen Evans felicitously called “Kierkegaard’s ethics of love” [1]. In short, according to Kierkegaard, the criterion of ethical, right and genuine sacrifice is love for God. Every ‘sacrifice’ which is not founded on love for God is in fact not true sacrifice at all but just a form of self-love in the negative sense of the term. This is the main thesis of this paper and in what follows I will explain it in more detail. I will show that Kierkegaard speaks in favour of responsible sacrifice. He bears in mind not only the responsibility of oneself to others, but also to oneself. Both are founded on love for God and harmonized by it.

2. The pillars of Kierkegaard’s view on sacrifice

Kierkegaard’s view on love is the most important pillar of his ethics of sacrifice but not the only one. The other important pillars are his views on the meaning of God’s command, a special position of Jesus, apostles and chosen martyrs, and suffering. These pillars are not entirely separated but rather interconnected. But, as I have already said, the most fundamental of them is his understanding of love so in what follows I will mainly focus on the analysis of it. Kierkegaard’s understanding of love is a variant of Christian understanding. In it, the main place is occupied by the kind of love which is non-preferential and for which he uses the Danish word *Kjerlighed*. I will refer to it as *Christian love* [2].

In order to correctly grasp Kierkegaard’s understanding of sacrifice we must as first take into account that, according to Kierkegaard, we have basically only one duty: to love others as much as we love ourselves. This is our only duty because our only duty is to fulfil the Law and love is the fulfilling and the sum of the Law [3]. To love someone according to Kierkegaard means to strive to love God as much as possible [3, p. 107]. From the Christian point of view this is perfectly logical because according to Christian belief someone’s true well-being is logically equivalent to their goodness. There is no person’s well-being without their goodness and vice versa. Hence, one should strive for the beloved person to become as good as possible. According to Christianity, a person’s goodness is ‘measured’ in their love for God. Therefore, to love someone means to help them love God. Besides, to love someone is a way of helping them to become as good as possible. Moreover, Kierkegaard justifiably – from the Christian point of view - believed that if there is anything that can help others and ourselves become better people, it is love [2; 3, p. 107]. This is the basic element of the background on which we should understand also Kierkegaard’s view on sacrifice. The second element is Kierkegaard’s belief that our only task is to become an image of God [2]. This claim in a certain sense means the same as the command that we should love our neighbour as we love ourselves. This starting point - that our only task is to become an image of God, i.e. an image that God intended for us – determines also the correct relation between preferential love on one hand, and non-preferential, or in other words Christian love, on the other. The last Kierkegaard calls *Kjerlighed*. According to

Kierkegaard, the measure of our relationship towards others lies in achieving an image of God. If preferring the needs and desires of others leads us away from reaching our own image of God, then we should not prefer others but rather 'ourselves'. The way of becoming an image of God lies in fulfilling God's will and absolute obedience to Him. In this sense, Abraham 'preferred' himself, and above all God, before Isaac: Abraham can become an image that God intended for him only if he unconditionally fulfils God's will. The primary task of a believer is not to understand God. Moreover, a true believer knows he cannot understand God entirely. His duty is to listen to Him and to fulfil His will. At the same time, he believes that this is the best for him and for everyone. In this sense Abraham would have done something bad to Isaac if he hadn't offered him to God.

The next important element is Kierkegaard's view on suffering. Kierkegaard thought that two beliefs, two assumptions, are needed in order for man to carry the yoke of suffering with ease and even joy: firstly, the suffering we suffer we deserve or it is a way for us to become better persons. Suffering is 'medicine'. Secondly, God loves us. Life without suffering is perhaps a theoretical possibility but practically impossible. In order for human beings to withstand it and be joyful, they must first believe that they have sinned because only this makes sense and is compatible with the belief that God loves them. In this context, the dogma concerning original sin gets its true meaning. We can see that it serves the joy of man [4, 5]. In that sense, we must also understand suffering, which is a part of sacrifice or offering. We should bear it as much as possible with the joyful belief that our suffering is something good. Of course we shouldn't look for it or even cause it intentionally. The suffering which is not in accordance with the will of God is bad and we should avoid it. This is true also regarding martyrdom. As Josef Pieper explained, being a martyr is a gift and one should not force it [6]. A forced 'martyrdom' is not martyrdom at all, moreover, it is something bad, something which is not in accordance with God's will. Pieper deals with martyrdom in the context of consideration of the cardinal virtue of boldness. *Boldness* is translation of the Latin word *fortitude*. This expression we can also translate as *firmness of mind*, or, in a certain sense, as *courage*. No doubt Kierkegaard would in essence agree with Pieper, but, on the other hand, he warned against using humility as an excuse for disguising cowardice: "But honest he must be, and he must not speak of this lack of courage as humility, since, on the contrary, it is pride, whereas the courage of faith is the one and only humble courage" [7]. Anyway, the outlined view of Pieper fits very well with Kierkegaard's reflection in his essay 'Does a Human Being Have the Right to Let Himself Be Put to Death for the Truth?' which we can hold for deepening Pieper's view. In it Kierkegaard gives an analysis of Jesus or apostle as somebody who may let himself be killed for truth because he is in an entirely special relationship with God. Because of this relationship, there is no doubt that his sacrifice is fulfilling God's will. But for an ordinary Christian, according to Kierkegaard, the avoidance of sacrifice which demands that other people make their hands dirty is that which is appropriate. In this

sense, the life of an ordinary Christian should be non-dramatic, life in shades of grey [8]. This Kierkegaardian position represents a fruitful starting point for approaching the so called paradox of a victim - that is the paradox of the utilization of the executioners of an innocent victim. It consists in sacrificing some people (e.g. the executioners) for the good of someone else in such a way that they (e.g. the executioners) commit something bad. Moshe Halbertal points to the problem of persecuting the Jews for the murder of Jesus Christ [9]. But they were involved in God's plan. They were just an instrument in His hands. How can we blame them? Are not they in fact the victims? Of course, we should not forget the Romans, but due to historical consequences, the persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust, Halbertal stresses the example of the Jews. Anyway, there appears an important question: is the sacrifice of somebody for the sake of somebody else to become a better person ever moral? Is it rather not a contradiction? Kierkegaard's answer is that the only one who can sacrifice is God or man as an executor of His will or command. Only God is master of sacrifice, not man. The man who puts himself in the place of the master of sacrifice has fallen to idolatry. 'Sacrifice' of the other, but also of oneself, is a form of idolatry if it is not founded on God's command. Idolatry consists of pronouncing something or someone that is not God for God. An often origin of idolatry and violence is a belief that I myself am a victim, pronouncing myself as a victim. There are some elements of Kierkegaard's view that oppose the self-victimisation. In this respect, I should stress two of them: his account of suffering, and his belief that the one who loves cannot be a victim, but rather a victim is the one who does not love. The next element which opposes the sacrifice of the other is Kierkegaard's view on mercifulness which he developed in his *Works of Love* [3, p. 315ff]. Mercifulness is, according to Kierkegaard, more important than charity. Somebody who can give nothing can still be merciful. Even if we became ordinary beggars, we should never allow the world to take away our mercifulness. And last but not least, I should also mention – as important for the question of Kierkegaard's view on sacrifice – his understanding of love as infinite debt, Christian self-resignation, self-negation and annihilation before God, which are the integral parts of his view on love. Also these topics were subjected to most detailed and deep investigation in his *Works of Love*.

3. Christian love

Firstly, we should stress that according to Christianity love is a command. This is, according to Kierkegaard, the novelty of Christianity [3, p. 24]. Therefore love is not an emotion that can come and go but rather a duty. This is what makes it permanent. Secondly, we must love all people equally, all humanity. This means that we love, without difference, ourselves and all other people. According to Kierkegaard, it is blasphemous to say that I love one human being, myself or someone else, more than others. The only one a true lover loves more than others is God. Moreover, we must love God more than all

others. We must love God the most. As Kierkegaard put it, God must be our first priority [3, p. 149]. This is why the first commandment is “believe in one God and love him with all your heart, soul and mind”. The second is that we must love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Our neighbour, according to Kierkegaard, is every human being. From that it follows, entirely logically, his definition of love: to love somebody means to help him love God [3, p. 107]. This means that we too - when loved - are loved by someone who helps us love God as much as possible. And to love myself means that I love God. Kierkegaard points out that according to Christianity love is not only a relationship between human persons but rather “that love is a relationship between: a person-God-a person, that is, that God is the middle term” [3, p. 107]. For Kierkegaard, love is in opposition to violence, and it is clear that he refuses any violent way to bring other person into love for God. In any case, he was convinced – according to the Bible (Ephesians 4.2-3, 15) - that we must actualize truth in a loving way. On the other hand, Christianity is also ‘self-love’ in the sense that for a Christian only his relationship with God who demands absolute humility or obedience is really important on a fundamental level. The story of Abraham’s offering of Isaac testifies to this. In the final instance Abraham took into account only God and was prepared to sacrifice Isaac despite anxiety and distress, which he experienced because of this. Such ‘self-love’ or ‘egoism’ is, according to Kierkegaard, something positive; moreover, it is an attitude that is essential for every true Christian. It is good because it is based on eternity, founded on the contact with eternity. This contact is a necessary and sufficient condition for everything that is right and good [10-13]. But it is exactly the loss of contact with eternity, to become deaf to God’s call or even refuse it, that is the fundamental origin of evil [14-17]. The basis of this contact is faith and love for God. Therefore the words of the apostle Paul “anything you do against your beliefs is sin” (Romans 14.23) are of central importance for Kierkegaard’s position. Every attitude which prefers anything before God is a form of self-love. Such self-love is the core of idolatry which again and again generates crimes with horrible dimensions. Here we should point to Kierkegaard’s distinction between Christian love at one hand and preferential love on the other [2]. Kierkegaard isn’t opposed to preferential love, yet he points out that every preferential love not founded on Christian love is only a form of self-love, which violates the Christian commandment that we must love. Every preferential love, in order to be right, must make place for Christian love. We may love our spouse, children, parents, country etc., but only in a way that we do not love them more than God. As radical example of this truth, we can allege Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. At the same time we must be aware that according to Kierkegaard the right relationship to God is only absolute obedience and humbleness. God is infinitely superior to man and He is not obliged to issue any bills for what he has done. God’s wisdom infinitely surpasses human sagacity. But on the other hand man needs God’s command to act justly. He alone is not capable of that. Only by taking into account God’s commands, he is able to overcome his self-love. Without a command, it can only

seem to man that he has overcome it but this is only an illusion [18, 19]. Any 'sacrifice' for the other which is not based on the attitude for which God is the first priority is still only self-love. In the case of a self-sacrifice of a lover for his beloved without whom he cannot live because she means everything to him, she is for him a priority, so we still deal only with self-love. In every human relationship which has not made a place for God, we deal with self-love alone, with only a fusion of two self-loves in one. In true or real love the boundary between mine and yours is deleted, in self-love it is not. There it still exists although in the form of ours/yours. Real love is only such love which is duty and which is founded on the love for God. We may say that Christian love - which means that we love God more than anything and anybody - is the substance of all other real loves [2]. This means, to put it in ontological terms, that all loves which are real are only accidents of Christian love and are one-sidedly dependent on it. For only Christian love makes them true loves and as soon as they are detached from it, they are only forms of self-love. On the other hand Christian love is, as any true substance, independent of any of its accidents. This of course does not mean that, according to Kierkegaard, a person that truly loves does not need to love other people, that they may love only God whom they do not see, but it is not their duty to love the neighbours they see. No, to the contrary! But we must distinguish two things: the foundation of Christian love on one hand and the revealing of Christian love on the other. Although Christian love reveals itself in our love for our neighbours, whom we see, it is not founded on this love but rather originates from our love for the Invisible. Kierkegaard also refuses 'love' for God that is inspired by negative feelings to other people. Such attitude is blasphemous because it degrades God to a mere instrument to which we direct our need for love.

Thus far I have presented the basic integral parts of Kierkegaard's view on love and sacrifice. In the following part, we will give a further supplementation to the above said for better understanding. What needs to be stressed is that the elements of love are "infinite, inexhaustible, immeasurable" [3, p. 180]. What can tear out love from these elements? According to Kierkegaard what is fatal in this respect is that love becomes a subject of calculation and comparison. According to Kierkegaard, this means that we want to live only for ourselves. But then we lose our contact with eternity. The arrow, which flies and which Kierkegaard compares to love, falls to the ground because it wanted to dwell on itself [3, p. 183]. For this reason, according to Kierkegaard, Christianity is not enthusiasm or fanaticism, because enthusiasm is already a moment when we stop, when we stagnate. To the contrary: Christianity speaks seriously and in few words says something which is totally useless for human enthusiasm. About love it says that "it is a duty and thereby removes from love everything that is inflamed, everything that is momentary, everything that is giddy" [3, p. 188]. According to the Christian view, there is no man who could accomplish "the highest in love" [3, p. 188] in the sense that they could justly stop to love and stop carrying out works of love because as soon you finish one work of love, there is already before you another and so to infinity. There is no rest, love

cannot dwell on itself. In a truly Christian way of life, there are no idle moments, no moments of stagnation, except maybe only the moments of enthusiasm when we lack courage. The task of Christianity is to refine love, to “manage love” [3, p. 189], to form its mastery. Christianity at the same time – maybe paradoxically – both pushes and tames love. Exactly because it does not just admire love, like the purely human view of love does, but it controls love and keeps it occupied, Christianity accomplishes the flourishing of love and avoids its stagnation. In contrast to the purely human view of love, “Christianity knows how to control love and to teach it that there is a task at every moment. It knows how to persevere with love so that this humbled love will learn that wanting to remain in the debt is no platitude, no fanaticism but earnestness and truth.” [3, p. 189]

In Christianity God lovingly took the bill of exchange upon himself. “It is God who, so to speak, lovingly assumes love’s requirement; by loving someone, the lover incurs an infinite debt - but in turn to God as guardian for the beloved. Now comparison is made impossible, and now love has found its master.” [3, p. 189] In accordance with his belief - that the lover is infinitely indebted - is Kierkegaard’s refusal of those who claim that they would love if only there was a man worthy of their love, but alas there is none. Kierkegaard claims that the genuine Christian attitude is that we must bring love into the world and that we should make others “loveable” [3, p. 158] or “worthy” of love. “When this is the duty, the task is not to find the lovable object, but the task is to find the once given or chosen object - lovable, and to be able to continue to find him lovable no matter how he is changed.” [3, p. 159]

The one who loves in the Christian sense can expect no payment for their love, no recognition of their sacrifice and not even a bit of gratitude, says Kierkegaard. But we think that this is only one side of the coin. In order for Kierkegaard’s account of love to be coherent, as a whole, we must add that it is possible to experience such an attitude from all, but probably not. Certainly from some because Kierkegaard claims that love should take as its starting point the assumption that love is present everywhere [3, p. 222ff]. It can be hidden or veiled but the one who loves starts from the assumption that love is present in every human. So if we believe this assumption is true then it is not all dark not only regarding heaven but also regarding our earthly existence. Life is neither all light nor total darkness. It is *chiaroscuro*.

4. Concluding reflection - the morals of Kierkegaard’s analysis of love

According to Kierkegaard, only the sacrifice originating from Christian love is legitimate. All others sacrifices are wrong and are forms of self-love. Therefore, they are forms of idolatry because God is not an absolute priority for their subjects. They substitute God for this or that idol. Every self-love is a form of idolatry and every idolatry is – following Kierkegaard – a form of self-love. Let’s consider from this standpoint our current situation, for instance the violence of radical Islamists. Those who carry it out say that they obey God’s

will. Following Kierkegaard, I do not believe this. The basic reason is that their actions are incompatible with Jesus' teaching which opposes killing people just because they do not share our belief or they do not want to accept it. Their 'God' is opposite of love incarnated in Jesus. Secondly, many reputable Muslim leaders and scholars claim that Muslim God is not such as presented by radical Islamists [20-23; *A Common Word Between Us and You*, <http://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/>, December 7, 2017]. This is another reason for claiming that 'God' of radical Islamists is an idol. As such 'He' is their own creation. This provides a basis for empirical explanation of their violent actions. Experience shows that idol, created on the basis of frustration and belief that we are victims, is a 'God' who demands violence and blood [8, p. 119-140].

We can draw the second moral from Kierkegaard's finding that love is a commandment and a duty and that we should not confuse it with love as pure inclination. We can establish that our society stresses only the importance of pure feeling, pure inclination, and neglects duties. In order to understand this point clearly and correctly, we must first distinguish between feeling and duty and then between pure feelings and feelings, or emotions, that are commanded, which are duties. This distinction allows that feeling is a duty; but as soon as it becomes a duty such a feeling is not any more a pure or immediate feeling. In what follows I will use the term 'feeling' just for pure feelings. Our fundamental duty is love for God. All our other duties ultimately follow from it. In our age, many stress the importance of feelings. But feelings cannot be a basis for our action because feelings come and go. The problem of our age is that we stress the importance of feelings too much, and that we would like to solve problems just on the basis of feelings, but they can be solved only through fulfilling our duties. A mature and ethical person is not moved by feelings but rather by duties, more precisely, if we follow Kierkegaard, by the Duty, i.e. Christian love. Our actions and attitudes should not be based on feelings, but rather on duties. This applies to our relationship to migrants, to the attitudes of doctors, teachers, priests, etc. They must act on the basis of their duties to patients, pupils, believers, etc. This is the basis for their right action even if they have (sometimes) negative feelings towards some people. Sometimes negative feelings cannot be prevented. In such cases, actions based on negative feelings are themselves negative, bad. But if actions are based on duties they can be right despite negative feelings. Feelings can play a positive role, considered integrally and in a long run, only if they are rooted in and shaped by proper duties, i.e. in/by the Christian love.

I think that this is the correct conclusion if we follow Kierkegaard. But if we leave it like this, it can be easily misunderstood because this is not the whole story. What is missing is the remark that works of love according to Kierkegaard are not just "a sort of teeth-gritting doing of one's duty, such that it is only the behaviour that counts, or at most the commandment-respecting attitude" [24]. No, to the contrary, "Christian love is a warmth of affection for the neighbour just because the individual with this virtue sees the neighbour as his or her kin in

God” [24, p. 157]. It requires not just a correct action but also a proper “qualification of the lover’s heart” [24, p. 158]. A Christian lover should call the banquet to which cripples, beggars, the blind, the halt are invited a feast, not “a charitable gesture” [3, p. 19; 24, p. 157-158] A lover who gives a feast sees in the poor and unimportant their neighbours “however ridiculous this may seem in the eyes of the world” [3, p. 92]. Kierkegaard is at the same time a brilliant grammarian of love and moral life, and a very lucid psychologist. As a grammarian, he knows that an attitude cannot qualify as Christian love if it is not “tender hearted and enthusiastic” [24, p. 158]. As a psychologist, he knows how difficult it is the above outlined ‘vision’ that love requires, and that it demands “a victory over one’s mind” [24, p. 158]. So he accepts the subjection of the feeling to command(ment) [24, p. 158]. In the following passage from *Works of Love* Kierkegaard describes this dialectic between feeling, emotion, and duty in his typically brilliant paradoxical way: “I do not have the right to harden myself against the pains of love, for I *ought* to sorrow; furthermore, neither do I have the right to stop sorrowing, for I *ought* to sorrow. So it is also with love. You have no right to harden yourself against this emotion, for you *ought* to love; but neither do you have the right to love despairingly, for you *ought* to love; just as little do you have the right to misuse this emotion in you, for you *ought* to love.” [3, p. 57]

My conclusion is that Kierkegaard is a holistic thinker. Following Kierkegaard, we cannot say that feelings of any individual are good or bad in general and without taking into account the integral person of that individual. The actions and feelings of a person who does not love are not good, and on the contrary, the actions and feelings of a person pervaded by love are in principle good and right, although they can make mistakes. The quality of feelings, attitudes and actions of an individual is in principle determined by the quality of their entire character and personality. The ‘power’ that shapes the entirety of a person is love for God, or its opposite, defying God. Love is the power that transforms people and ‘makes’ their feelings, thoughts and actions right and good [2]. Love qualifies our hearts so that - at least some of us and at least sometimes - we are capable to see lovingly, to make our neighbours loveable. But love does not act just locally. It includes the whole person. Therefore Kierkegaard’s ethics, which is the ethics of love, is a holistic ethics, ethics of an integral person. In the end, Kierkegaard is a Christian persona list [12]. What else could one expect from him? The same applies to the ethics of sacrifice. This ethics is, like all other ethics, just a special case of the general Kierkegaard’s ethics, which is the ethics of love.

Sacrifice, as understood by Kierkegaard, has a distinctively vertical or transcendent dimension. It cannot be reduced to any horizontal or immanent effect, aim or calculation. The reason is that it is founded on love. True sacrifice is a work of love. “*The work of love must be done outwardly in self-sacrificing unselfishness.*” [3, p. 365] Works of love - actions which ‘sing praise’ to love - must manifest themselves externally as pure incalculability and sacrifice. Actions without that vertical dimension are just actions of self-love. The

measure for being a true action surpasses this world and does not originate in it. In order to truly sacrifice themselves for others, one should love them, but that is not enough because - as Kierkegaard says in *Works of love* - love may manifest itself in human love for the fellow human, yet it is not founded in this love but rather in love for God. Kierkegaard's insistence on the transcendent ethics has many reasons. One is the prevention of identification of any immanent (political) movement or order with Christianity [25]. Nevertheless, one can commit true sacrifice in a complete isolation. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is the most famous example. The position that sacrifice is always intended for some other fellow humans - or other creatures (for instance animals) - is not acceptable from the Kierkegaardian standpoint. Moreover, whenever an action is not intended for God, more precisely, primarily intended for God, then the action is not true sacrifice but just self-love. To repeat Robertson's observation alleged above, at this point Kierkegaard again speaks not as a grammarian, but as a psychologist. Kierkegaard's reason for this claim is not logical or grammatical but rather psychological. His main aim was to find the way to tame human self-love and prevent its consequences (idolatry, violence, etc.). Self-love can be disguised in allegedly altruistic acts of 'sacrifice'. In a way, Kierkegaard exposed the true nature of such 'altruism' and 'sacrifice'. His position has a clearly Christian foundation. That's why non-Christians and non-religious persons may find it not suitable for them. But even they can - through studying Kierkegaard - deepen their understanding of the fact how almost unrecognisably disguised can human self-love be, and how hard is to bridle it, especially on the broader, societal, not just individual scale. When we are aware of this fact, only then we are prepared to seriously doubt about the possibility that practically and existentially working ethics can be grounded on non-transcendent measure. Kierkegaard was an excellent scholar, erudite, and grammarian of love and moral life. But above all, he was a genial psychologist. The impossibility of immanent bridling of human self-love is according to him not a logical, grammatical or even empirical impossibility, but rather psychological. But his psychology does not belong to secular humanities, but rather to transcendental or theological humanities [8, p. x-xi]. As such, it cannot be understood without corresponding theology and theological anthropology. Theology, theological anthropology, and theological psychology form the background, which only makes possible perfect understanding of Kierkegaard's ethics [8, p. 86-89]. This holds true in particular also for his ethics of sacrifice. Bearing this in mind, especially the psychological foundation of Kierkegaard's ethics, we can conclude with the claim that could seem daring and probably many will find surprising: Kierkegaard ethics is the ethics of common sense. The lack of common sense often originates in self-love and vice versa. Therefore, a self-loving person is gradually more and more captured in a downward vicious spiral of mutual strengthening between self-love and losing of common sense. I believe that studying Kierkegaard can help people to break this spiral and that this was one of the main reasons for his writing.

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