Faith, Hope, and Love in Critical Perspective

Green Paper (February 2017)

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THE ETHICS OF POWERLESSNESS

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1. Introduction

In our previous Green Paper, we reviewed the history of the reception of faith, hope, and love as virtues within the theological tradition. While there were some dissenting voices to the characterisation of the three as virtues, and although there was disagreement about the relative hierarchy between them, generally there was acceptance that each was in its own way valuable. Notably, however, in each case the positive reception of faith, hope, and love was firmly pegged to their theological character. This commitment presents a major obstacle to their positive reception in contemporary contexts, philosophical or otherwise, which largely reject the theological problematic to which Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and others were responding. Are faith, hope, and love essentially theological virtues, and if so can they be accepted in contexts that reject the theological presuppositions? Alternatively, can faith, hope, and love be accounted for independently of theological presuppositions, and if so are have they any role to play in the good life? In this Green Paper, we present a number of problems that will need to be addressed by any answers to these general questions. In the next phase of the project, we shall directly consider the questions of whether faith, hope, and love can be 'secularised' and whether they are viable in contemporary settings.

In the first section of this paper we shall rehearse a number of lines of objection against the suggestion that faith, hope, and love are constitutive of the good life. Specifically, we shall sketch reasons to think that faith, hope, and love are irrational, outdated, and quietist. In the second section, we shall discuss more general theoretical problems with the 'secularisation' of faith, hope, and love. If we are to ask whether faith, hope, and love can be secularised, we first need to fix what we mean by 'secularisation'. But this is no small task. In the final section, we shall identify two possible responses to the first set of objections. Here we shall suggest that, even if one accepts that faith, hope, and love are not constitutive of the good life, they may plausibly be either genetic preconditions of the good life or important 'secondary virtues', fall-back options when one experiences the good life to be beyond one's grasp.

2. Objections to Faith, Hope, and Love as Constitutive of the Good Life

A. Faith, Hope, and Love as Irrational

Firstly, one might argue that faith, hope, and love are irrational and, for that reason, incompatible with the good life. There are certainly many champions of this kind of claim. Aristotle, for example, claimed that hope was common among drunkards and young men; Simone de Beauvoir argues that 'loving involves massive self-deception which can lead to personal annihilation for the woman involved' (Morgan, p.118); and it is a standard trope of the 'new atheists' to argue that faith is irrational, on the supposed ground that it cannot be backed up by evidence from the empirical sciences. The range and diverse nature of these claims, however, should make it obvious that there is a number of things one might mean in calling the three 'irrational'. Let us look at a number of possible ways of developing these complaints in a little more detail.

i) Faith, hope, and love yield irrational judgement or action.

By this line of thought, faith, hope, and love lead agents into making irrational judgements or actions: where love desires, reason may justifiably counsel to abstain; where faith would believe, reason may justifiably demur; where hope would hold out, reason may justifiably hold back, and so on. We might take the following example of romantic love gone awry as an example of the conception of irrationality in play:

> When Jordan Cardella's girlfriend broke up with him, he figured his best shot at getting her back was literally a shot. So he asked his friends to shoot him, and one did exactly that. Seeing him in pain certainly would cause the young woman to have a change of heart and take him back, right? Not even close. The ex-girlfriend did not come to visit the 20-year-old South Milwaukee man in the hospital as he had hoped. Police, however, did stop by. At a sentencing hearing for the shooter this month, Milwaukee County Assistant District Attorney Christopher Rawsthorne said he meant no disrespect, but "this has to be the most phenomenally stupid case that I have seen. It's unbelievable what happened here." Michael C. Wezyk and his lawyer didn't disagree. "I mean, sorry to bring something so stupid into your courtroom," Wezyk, 24, of Cudahy, told Circuit Judge Rebecca Dallet.[1]

[1] http://archive.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/126225293.html (Accessed 30th December 2016 15:36pm)

Now one might wish to resist attributing to love any explanatory role in this case, perhaps on the grounds that most of the work was done by staggeringly bad instrumental reasoning. Nonetheless, we can certainly tell a story in which love played the decisive role and that Cardella's broken heart and Wezyk's loving sympathy paved the way to the deed.[2] Love is plausibly irrational in the manner sketched in this story, if only because it is deeply self-deluded or responsible for the blind faith Wezky put in his friend. If faith, hope, and love are irrational in this way, as they conceivably could be, there is some cause for complaint.

ii) Faith, hope, and love yield judgements in irrational ways

One might hold, alternatively, that faith, hope, and love do not or need not conflict with the deliverances of rational judgement or action but, rather, arrive at their issuances by an irrational route. For example, where reason proceeds through discursive rationality, faith, hope, and love simply intuit, as though by gut feeling. By this line of thought, reason and the theological virtues need not conflict in their deliverances: yet the route by which those deliverances is attained marks the latter as irrational. Linda Zagzebski has argued along these lines against the Reformist Epistemology of George Mavrodes. Now Zagzebski holds that religious belief is rational. Her point is just that if we come to religious belief in the way that Mavrodes suggests, then such belief would be irrational. Mavrodes invites us to think of religious belief as being directly caused by an act of God's grace:

> Suppose that we think of God as being powerful, perhaps even omnipotent. And suppose that we think of God as being the creator of the world. It would seem plausible to suppose that an agent of that sort would probably be able to produce psychological effects in human beings. In fact, it might well seem plausible to think that God could produce some such effects directly. Suppose, for example, that someone who has had no discernible theistic belief throughout his life goes to bed one night, and he wakes up in the morning with the firm conviction that there is a God who is the creator of the world. Could it be the case that God has caused him to have this belief, inserting it, we might say, into his mind overnight? It looks like the answer to that question should be "yes." At least, if we think only of the divine power, it seems as though an effect of this sort ought

[2] We might also note that hope also gets a bad name in this story: it was, it appears, hope that his girlfriend would find herself newly enamoured that motivated Cardella's plan. Perhaps this is also an example, then, of the sort of hope of young men that Aristotle spoke against.

> to fall within the scope of that power. This would be one example of what I am calling the causation model of revelation. (Mavrodes, quoted in Zagzebski, p.204)

Zagzebski holds that on this account, the belief that God exists would be irrational, even if true. This is because the agent has not exercised epistemic virtue in the attainment of the belief. Indeed, far from the belief being an exercise of virtue, it is, according to Zagzebski, a plain case of epistemic vice:

> Suppose that God causes me to have many true beliefs by inserting them into my head overnight on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, but the devil also causes me to have many false beliefs by inserting them into my head overnight on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Let us suppose that phenomenologically the cases are identical, so that I cannot tell the difference from the inside. Am I justified in believing the ones produced by God? Even if half of the beliefs I wake up with are true, it seems to me that I am not justified in believing any of them any more than I am justified in believing half of the beliefs I acquire by flipping coins. (Zagzebski, p.219)

In other words, the religious believer who would believe simply because the belief has popped into his head would be no more rational than someone who believed on the basis of flipping a coin. The belief is not irrational because of its content, by this view, but rather because of the manner of its acquisition.

One might run a similar line of argument against hope and love. By such an argument, faith, hope, and love would not granted the status of epistemic virtues, excellences of character by the exercise of which we might reliably arrive at true belief. Alternatively, and abandoning the virtue epistemic framework, one might argue that faith, hope, and love offer no reliable procedure or causal process for the acquisition of true belief. By any such route, faith, hope, and love would count as irrational not in virtue of their deliverances, but the manner in which they deliver.

iii) Faith, hope, and love are irrational states

Rather than (or as well as) holding that faith, hope, and love disagree with rational judgement or arrive at their deliverances through irrational means, one might contend that the three are 'irrational states', sorts of mania, frenzy, or even hallucination. Take, for example, the following case presented by Berit Brogaard in her recent monograph

On Romantic Love: Simple Truths about a Complex Emotion. Brogaard tells us that she has a friend called Zoe, who had been in love with a man named Brandon.

> He was unbelievably romantic. He took her to picturesque locations and whispered sweet nothings in her ear. He also promised her things they would do in the future: walks by the river, hikes in the countryside, picnics on the Michigan Lake beaches, Romantic getaways to secluded cabins in the woods. Then he would fall off the grid. Weeks would pass. Zoe unwearyingly waited for him and the idyll to resurface. When she occasionally wrote to him in the meantime, he would either not respond or respond laconically and dismissively. Then out of the blue, when she thought it was over, he reappeared in her life. She had wild mood swings, from being disheartened to euphoric. She described herself as being frantically in love with this guy. She had never felt the same way toward any other man. His kisses and his lips were silky soft and enthralling. His way of holding her made her feel irresistible. When she thought of him or heard from him, she felt mind-blown, exhilarated, jittery, joyful, smitten. (Brogaard, p.3)

Eventually, Zoe came to resent Brandon. The state described here, however, could easily be taken to exemplify the sort of mad passion that might be thought characteristic of love, of which both Brogaard and her friend are eventually critical. For the 'exhilarating, jittery, joy' of love seems to have blinded Zoe to Brandon's uncaring disappearances and the manifest falseness to his whispered promises. Love, on this account, is a blinding and dangerous thing. If faith, hope, and love are irrational in this sense, then there is reason to be sceptical of their positive import.

B) The Theological Virtues as Outdated: Christian Love as a Case Study

Up to now, we have focused on criticisms that proponents of faith, hope, and love would have to overcome. In discussing these criticisms, we have taken particular examples of each of the three to show how the criticisms might be made. When we have drawn on examples of love, however, we have drawn on examples of erotic love or one stripe or another. Although there are some prominent theologians who describe the love for God as a sort of preferential relation—Augustine describes his love for God with strikingly erotic overtones and Aquinas characterises God's love as a kind of friendship—many focus on Paul's description of Christian love as agape, non-preferential and self-sacrificial love. In this section we shall sketch a line of criticism according to which agape has no place in the modern world and that it is, as such, an anachronistic hearkening to a different time. While we are focusing on love as a paradigmatic case, it is possible to

present similar arguments against faith and hope. By these lines of argument, faith, hope, and love have no place in the only sort of good life that is open to us in the present age.

We can begin to sketch the grounds for such a criticism from a potentially unlikely source: the Swedish theologian Anders Nygren. As we shall see, Nygren held that agape is fundamentally opposed to eros. Nygren concludes that this is so much the worse for erotic love; for Nygren, the opposition marks agape's 'triumph' over eros. But if we bracket theological presuppositions, and if Nygren is right to hold agape and eros to be fundamentally opposed, then we are left with a problem for those who would like to find a place for agape in non-theological contexts. For it could seem that the otherworldliness of agape, and its supposed incompatibility with eros, could only be corrosive for human, worldly life.

According to Nygren, eros and agape are not just two different sorts of love, they are two different forms of life, the differences between which he summarises in the following table:

Eros is acquisitive desire and longing.	Agape is sacrificial giving.
Eros is an upward movement.	Agape comes down.
Eros is man's way to God.	Agape is God's way to man.
Eros is man's effort: it assumes that man's salvation is his own work.	Agape is God's grace: salvation is the work of divine love.
Eros is egocentric love, a form of self-assertion of the highest, noblest, sublimest kind.	Agape is unselfish love, it "seeketh not its own", it gives itself away.
Eros seeks to gain its life, a life divine, immortalised.	Agape lives the life of God, therefore dares to "lose it".
Eros is the will to get and possess which depends on want and need.	Agape is freedom in giving, which depends on wealth and plenty.
Eros is primarily *man's* love; God is the *object* of Eros. Even when it is attributed to god, Eros is patterned on human love.	Agape is primarily *God's* love; God *is* Agape. Even when it is attributed to man, Agape is patterned on Divine Love.
Eros is determined by the quality, the beauty and worth, of its object; it is not spontaneous, but "evoked", "motivated".	Agape is sovereign in relation to its object, and is directed to both "the evil and the good"; it is spontaneous, "overflowing", "unmotivated".
Eros *recognises value* in its object—and loves it.	Agape love—and *creates value in its* object. (*Agape and Eros*, p.210)

By way of condensing these differences into a schema, Nygren draws a diagram showing the ways in which agape and eros differently accord value to self-love, love for God, neighbourly love, and God's love: where eros gives full marks to self-love, agape finds

no value at all; where agape gives full marks to God's love, eros accords it the least of its concern. Nygren explains his claims as follows:

> Agape […] excludes all self-love. Christianity does not recognise self love as a legitimate form of love. […] We must not overlook the fact that when a place is sought for self-love within the context of Agape, it is always a higher, refined and spiritualised self-love, a love for one's "ideal self" that is intended, and that a distinction is therefore drawn between a legitimate and a sinful self-love. But not even this distinction can prevent the love from losing its Agape-character. Agape recognises no kind of self-love as legitimate. (op. cit. p.217)

This way of marking the distinction between agapic and erotic love is likely to rankle those who, distancing themselves from theological presuppositions, focus on materiality. As a standard bearer for this sort of reproach we might turn to Theodor Adorno, who argues that the state of the world is such that the agapic love insisted on by Kierkegaard can be nothing more than a revered fantasy that is impossible to realise under conditions of advanced capitalism.

According to Adorno, the Christian doctrine of love for the neighbour can only be realised in material conditions that allow for one individual to relate to another as a 'concrete individual'. This is the lesson that Adorno takes from the parable of the good Samaritan: to love the neighbour means to respond to her simply and immediately as a human being in need. However, Adorno holds that our current historical situation is marked by reification, such that pervasive market forces have transformed the relationships between individuals into relationships between objects. In the time of the Gospels, the 'people whom one knows […] [had] their established locus in a life of simple production which can be realized adequately by immediate experience'. The possibility of relating immediately to the needs of another, however, were lost with the development of abstracted modes of production and alienated labour.[3] By Adorno's lights, then, the current historical situation is one that excludes the possibility of loving the neighbour, as conceived in the Gospels, since we have lost the possibility of the immediate relation to another's concrete needs that the doctrine presupposes.

[3] Adorno's view is characteristically brash, even appearing dogmatic: he simply asserts, without argument, that reification is so prevalent and deep-seated that neighbourly love is impossible. A defender of Adorno might insist that his intent is rhetorical, but it is difficult to see what rhetorical goals are achieved in this way.

Despite insisting on the prevalence of reification, Adorno appears to hold that there remains a slim possibility of love among human beings. However, Adorno supposes that to grasp this possibility one has to see it for what it is, within the contemporary context that shapes it. Having been acutely aware of the contemporary problem of reification, Adorno argues, Kierkegaard could only model his account of Christian love on the sort of love that is described in the Gospels: no contemporary model could suffice. But Kierkegaard failed to grasp that Christian love could not be realised in the contemporary setting. Adorno thus argues that by setting up an anachronistic ideal of love as a contemporary standard, Kierkegaard deprives the sense from both the 'abstract concept of man' and 'the Christian neighbour', thereby depriving himself (and those who take him seriously) 'of the last chance of love by moulding love after the pattern of frugal conditions which are not valid any longer'. Rather as you might close yourself off possibilities in the here and now by hankering after lost possibilities from your youth, so too, Adorno argues, Kierkegaard shuts off the possibility of recognising the ways of loving now by setting up a historically distant possibility as a contemporarily relevant ideal. On the basis of these reflections, Adorno accuses Kierkegaard of falling in for reactionary fantasising as well as a pernicious misanthropy. Since the contemporary setting is incapable of meeting the archaic standards Adorno accuses Kierkegaard of harbouring, his attitude to the crowd can only be marked by resentment.

Now one might find any number of bones to pick with Adorno's reading of Kierkegaard. The challenge his reading represents is, however, clear enough. How are we to conceptualise, let alone defend, a non-theological form of agapic love if this love is conceived as opposed to the form of love as we find it in modernity? How is hope to be defended, if it rests on outdated eschatological assumptions about history? And finally, how are we to hold on to faith if, as it appears to many, it belongs to a past, superstitious age?

We shall now move on to discuss another route by which one might argue that faith, hope, and love are not necessary for the good life. By one such argument, faith, hope, and love are too submissive and quietist, inclining one to acquiesce to that which one should really fight against. To see what I have in mind, let us take as a case study the role of hope in Martha Nussbaum's recent monograph on anger and forgiveness.

C) The Theological Virtues as Quietist: Anger and Compassionate Hope as a Case Study.

In her *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, and Justice*, Nussbaum argues the case that compassionate hope is a more rational response to a situation than anger and is, for that reason, to be preferred. Nussbaum holds to a broadly Aristotelian conception of anger. According to her, anger involves a perceived down-ranking of oneself or people close to oneself, that has been wrongfully or inappropriately done, which is accompanied by pain, and which brings with it a desire for retribution (17). On the basis of this analysis, Nussbaum argues that anger can develop in three ways. Firstly, anger might be focused on correcting a status imbalance caused by the slighting. You have hurt me and, thereby, positioned yourself 'above' me in the social rank. My anger is directed at bringing you down a notch or two and, thereby, bringing myself up, relative to you. According to Nussbaum, the desire for retribution that is directed at correcting such a 'down-ranking' is normatively problematic, since it is focused narrowly on one-upmanship rather than healing the injury. This sort of anger does at least make sense, however, since one's social rank can genuinely be restored this way. Secondly, anger might involve a desire to make things better through hurting the person who has caused the harm. Nussbaum thinks that this is normatively reasonable, since it is focused on healing the injury rather than one-upmanship, but that it does not make sense, since one has to engage in some 'magical thinking' to suppose that anything might be healed by hurting someone else. Thirdly, the angry person might realise that her anger is either normatively problematic or otherwise fanciful, such that her anger is transformed into a desire for general welfare. By this route, the once angry person seeks to find ways of making a difference for the better. Thus, Nussbaum concludes:

> [When] anger makes sense, it is normatively problematic (focused narrowly on status); when it is normatively reasonable (focused on the injury), it doesn't make good sense, and is normatively problematic in that different way. In a rational person, anger, realizing that, soon laughs at itself and goes away. […] I shall call this healthy segue into forward-looking thoughts of welfare, and, accordingly, from anger into compassionate hope, the Transition. (p.31)

In Nussbaum, then, we find a proponent of the rationality of compassionate hope. As we have seen, her argument depends on a particular analysis of anger, according to

which anger constitutively involves a feeling of having been 'down-ranked'. It is only the basis of this interpretation of Aristotle that she can argue that the desire for retaliation, if this is a desire to restore one's relative rank, is normatively problematic. But is this a viable analysis of anger?

To begin with, we might question her translation of Aristotle's oligōria as 'down-ranking'. Both Joe Sachs and, on many occasions, George Kennedy prefer 'belittling'. There is textual ground for this translation. Aristotle's own elaboration of oligōria is as follows: '[oligōria] is an actualisation of opinion about what seems worthless' (Kennedy); '[oligōria] is a putting to work of an opinion to the affect that something appears worthless' (Sachs). There is quite a difference between being ranked as less worthy to something else and seeming altogether worthless. After all, something that seems less worthy might still appear to be worth something, while something that seems worthless must appear to have no worth at all. For this reason, it is not altogether obvious that Aristotle's conception of belittling is one of being down-ranked.[4] Consideration of some examples of anger might offer support for this reading of oligōria over Nussbaum's.

Let us say that you are standing in a queue and someone forcibly pushes you aside, without giving you so much as a second glance. You might feel the swell of a wave of anger rising in your chest, only for it to break upon seeing that the person who pushed you aside is a paramedic on the way to help an injured person in need of medical attention. We need not think that your anger involves feeling socially demoted in order to think that it involves feeling belittled. In this example, you could feel belittled just because it appears to you that you were taken as nothing more than an obstacle by the person who pushed you aside. Once you see that the paramedic was quite right to push you aside, you may not feel angry any more, you might even be relieved that the person is being cared for and feel some embarrassment at your initial reaction. But this need not involve a feeling of reassurance over one's social position.

To recall, on the basis of her translation of oligōria as 'down-ranking', Nussbaum argues that although it would make sense to seek retaliation, it would be normatively problematic, since one-upmanship is not a justifiable pursuit. If oligōria can manifest as

[4] To be sure, Aristotle's descriptions of cases of anger often make recourse to a social down-ranking. So one can experience oneself to be belittled through being down-ranked. But Aristotle does not always draw on such examples. It seems sensible to adopt a translation of oligōria that is broad enough to encompass all those cases of anger that Aristotle describes.

the experience of being deemed worthless, however, then the desire for retaliation need not be a desire for up-ranking, so to speak. If one feels angry upon experiencing oneself to have been treated as worthless, for example, the desire for retaliation might conceivably take the form of a desire to assert that one has some worth. It is much less obvious that this pursuit would be normatively problematic, as we can see from the following example.

Nussbaum focuses her discussion on the anger felt by a woman (Angela) after the rape of her friend (Rebecca) on a university campus. Nussbaum holds that rather than seeking angry retaliation against the rapist, the rational thing for Angela to do would be to engage in a compassionate, hopeful process of reform, which might include setting up support groups for rape victims, drawing attention to the problem of campus rape, and so on. If oligōria can be the experience of being treated as worthless, rather than social demotion, however, then it does not follow that Angela would be irrational if she continued to be angry, even if she accepted that no good would come simply from punishing the rapist, just so long as she continued to be conscious of having been deemed worthless.

Angela might, for example, become newly conscious of the depth of the problem with campus rape and the apparent unwillingness of her university to do anything meaningful about it. In other words, she might perceive that the safety of her and her friend is worthless in the eyes of her university. To be sure, Angela's anger would have transformed. It would no longer be directed at the rapist, whom she might even regard as beneath her concern, but at that institution whose perceived complacency she holds responsible for the dangerous campus culture. Regardless of its transformation, however, her anger would be rational, at least by Nussbaum's standards. Since the desire for retribution is directed at forcing the aggressor to acknowledge the worth of the aggrieved, no magical thinking need be involved. Moreover, the end to which the desire for retribution would be directed is not obviously normatively problematic. Far from being a desire for a certain social status, the desire for retribution is directed at forcing an acknowledgement of one's worth. On this picture, then, Angela's anger meets the standards Nussbaum sets for anger's rationality: it both makes sense and is directed towards a normatively justifiable goal.

With this in mind, we might push the argument a little further. For in light of these considerations anger might appear to be a more rational response than the compassionate hope Nussbaum recommends. If anger is a response to a perceived belittling, and if the belittling in question is the expression of an opinion of worthlessness, it is not altogether obvious how the problem might be redressed by means of practices motivated by compassionate hope. Consider again Angela's case: she is angry because the university has failed to take women seriously. If the university does not already take women seriously, however, then it is arguably in no position to hear the calm petitioning of women engaged in projects guided by compassionate hope. If the institution needs a wake-up call, it is not obvious that this can be effected through processes that the university is already prepared to condone. By this line of argument, compassionate hope does not seem a particularly effective candidate for a means of forcing the institution to take the matter seriously. Indeed, anger might appear to be much more appropriate, since anger is directed precisely at making the aggrieved matter to the aggressor. Since Nussbaum takes the effectiveness of a response to be a criterion of its rationality, one pursuing this line of argument might conclude that it is the person who responses compassionate hope that has to engage in 'magical thinking', since she would have to think that effective change might come about without the forceful assertion of her own worth.

We need not take any of this to be decisive in order to see that by certain a line of argument, hope and compassion are not fit for purpose in conditions of political injustice of a certain sort, namely, where there is a failure to acknowledge worth. Anger is, arguably, a much more effective response, since it can be directed at forcing the aggressor to see the worth of that which has been belittled and the acknowledgement of which is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of campaigns guided by compassion and hope. A similar case might be made against love and faith. For if the efficacy of projects guided by faith and love is dependent upon the recognition of the agents involved as having worth, such project will also be subject to criticisms that along the lines of that sketched above. What are the good of faith and love under conditions of failed acknowledgement?

A defender of the theological virtues could respond by pointing out that no one has ever really claimed that faith, hope, and love are *all* we need in order to attain the

good life. Aquinas help, for example, that they perfect the cardinal virtues, rather than replace them. The question remains, however, how the theological virtues would be *compatible* with the sort of comportment which is arguably required for the self-assertion necessary when one's worth is not acknowledged. For an Aristotelian might well concede to Aquinas that faith, hope, and love transform the cardinal virtues, but insist that this transformation is something of a malformation, turning the otherwise self-confident agent into one meekly submissive: the theological virtues could be seen in such context as adaptive preferences. To defend them as virtues, one would have to show how they are compatible with a self-confident character or otherwise deny that the latter is necessary for the good life.

We have seen that there are a number of objections one might raise against the project of habilitating faith, hope, and love conceived as *theological* virtues constitutive of the good life. But might there be a way of 'secularising' faith, hope, and love, thereby avoiding the criticisms that respond to the theological character of the three? We shall now turn to more general theoretical problems with a project of 'secularising' faith, hope, and love. As we shall see, it is no small task to identify and defend the operative conception of 'secularism'.

Section Summary:

- There are at least three broad lines of criticism by which one might argue that faith, hope, and love are not constitutive of the ethical good.
- Faith hope and love are irrational because either a) they yield irrational judgement or action; b) they yield judgement or action by irrational means; c) they are irrational states.
- Faith hope and love are outdated; while they may once have been central to the good life, they are not relevant to current circumstances.
- Faith hope and love are quietist. By this route, faith, hope, and love are detrimental to those cases in which the agent must forcibly assert her worth.

3. Secularisation, Secularism, the Secular: a new path for faith, hope and love as virtues?

The preceding criticisms have not addressed the question of whether it is possible to 'secularise' the theological virtues. The criticisms aim, instead, to show that we have

reasons to think that they are not constitutive of the good life. In the next phase of the project, we shall address the more general questions of whether the theological virtues can be secularised and whether they are viable in contemporary contexts. Our answers to these more general questions will have to deal with the sort of criticism we have just outlined. In this section, we shall present a number of theoretical questions that will need to be addressed before we can begin to answer the question of the viability of secularising the theological virtues. For before we can ask whether the theological virtues can be secularised, we should ask what such secularisation would amount to, and this is quite a difficult task.

We encounter problems as soon as we start to try to define secularisation, secularism, and the secular. A number of candidates present themselves. Firstly, Secularisation may refer to a process by which religion is 'bracketed' from the discussion of phenomena and concepts which may have first appeared to have been essentially religious. As a case in point, we might consider the example of Knud Løgstrup, who took it as his explicit aim to describe the demand to love the neighbour in 'strictly human terms' (see Løgstrup, p.1ff). A second sense for secularisation is more common in sociology. As Steve Bruce has it, societies in the West have been increasingly secularised insofar as they experience '(a) the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy; (b) a decline in the social standing of religious roles and institutions; and (c) a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind, and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs' (Bruce, p.3). Secularisation, so understood, is the object of study of disciplines such as sociology, which aim to explain the causal or genealogical history of this development, broadly understood as the reduction of religion in both the political and personal spheres. This description of secularisation covers only the first two senses of secularism identified by Charles Taylor in the introduction to *A Secular Age* (see Taylor, pp.1-24). According to Taylor, as well as the reduction of the presence of religion in political life and the decline of the number of religious believers, 'secularisation' can also refer to a more fundamental transformation. By this transformation, Taylor argues, religion has gone from being a background to all experience against which possibilities for action are foregrounded, to having become itself foregrounded, in the sense that it is experienced by those in the

West as just one option among many, a possibility to take up or reject. Secularisation in this sense, which Taylor takes as his special object of focus, refers to the transformation of the conditions of experience, by which religion has gone from being the horizon of the world to just another path within another horizon. To these four senses of secularisation we might add a fifth, more radical alternative. Nietzsche and Stanley Cavell discuss the possibility that religious concepts have completely lost their sense.[5] By this line of thought, although our lives and language have been formed by the history of Christianity, this history has so to speak come to an end. By this view, the secularisation of our age is not just the gradual reduction of the number of people or institutions for whom religious belief is central, nor, with Taylor, the transposition of religion from a background condition to foregrounded option, but, more radically, the loss of the sense of many of our concepts and much of our practice. As Stephen Mulhall puts it, in discussion of Nietzsche's famous 'madman' passage:

> We are God's murderers. His presence was real, part of the living tissue of our culture, our responses, our most intimate self-understanding. His destruction is therefore a radical act of violence, not only against Him but also against ourselves. Hence, the madman compares the death of God to the wiping away of our horizon, to the swallowing up of an ocean, to a loss of spatial orientation; such comparisons assume that God is not so much an entity as a medium or a system of coordinates, and thus that a belief in God is best understood not as the addition of one supernatural item to the supposed furniture of the universe, but rather as an atmosphere or framework that orients us in everything we say, think, and do. (Mulhall, p.22)

We have, then, a number of different ways of thinking about secularisation. It might be the procedure by which religious concepts and language are bracketed from the discussion of phenomena, the withdrawal of religion from public life (understood broadly as the social sphere, rather than state politics), the reduction of the prevalence of religious belief and practice, the transformation of religion from a background condition of experience to a foregrounded option within experience, or the loss of sense to many of the concepts and practices central to our way of living. If we understand secularism as the project of individuals, groups, or institutions to deliberately further the process of

[5] See Cavell, pp.163-179

secularisation, however, and if there are ways of thinking about secularisation, there must also be different ways of thinking about secularism.[6]

Following the first three examples in brief taxonomy we have noted above, the secularist might be one who took as her end either a) analysing phenomena having 'bracketed' religious concepts; b) furthering the separation of religion from political life (broadly construed), or c) furthering the decline of religious belief. The first case might be exemplified by the practices of, Løgstrup and Scheler, which we have already mentioned. The second case might be exemplified by The National Secular Society, which campaigns in the UK for the separation of church and state. The third case might be exemplified by the work of the new atheists, particularly the notorious bus campaign that inveighed Londoners to stop worrying about God and just get on with enjoying their lives. The fourth and fifth senses of secularisation present more difficult challenges, however, since the secularisation they refer to do not bring with them easily identifiable projects by which they might be furthered. For Nietzsche, the death of God has already happened. We are, after all, living in its aftermath. For Taylor, the transformation of the conditions of experience is presupposed by all experience and so cannot easily be understood as an object of intentional transformation within experience. In neither case it is easy to see what furthering secularisation could amount to. Nonetheless, we can conceive of what a project of secularism might be, in light of either of these conceptions of secularisation. For, by either alternative, a distinctive challenge remains: how are we to live well in light of the event of secularisation? On this understanding, then, the project of secularism would not be one of furthering a process of religious withdrawal, but rather to find the best way of living in light of the particular sort of transformation diagnosed in each case.

In summary, there are a number of things one might mean by secularisation. One might refer to the bracketing of religion from discussion of concepts and phenomena, the withdrawal of religion from public life, the reduction in the prevalence of religious practice and belief, the foregrounding of religion into one possibility among others, or the loss of the meaningful centre to our world. As we have suggested, each of these different senses of secularisation would bring with it a difference conception of secularism.

[6] Of course, one need not be a secularist in any sense in order to affirm that the West has undergone or is undergoing secularisation in any sense, since one can think that there is secularisation without thinking that secularisation either can or should be furthered.

Secularism could be the project of analysing concepts and phenomena independently of religious understanding, furthering the withdrawal of religion from public life, or the project of furthering the reduction of religious belief and practice. Alternatively, secularism might be a project of learning to live well in light of the event of secularism, considered either as the foregrounding of religion, or the emptying of sense from the world. These different projects of secularism may well be opposed to each other. Løgstrup, for example, would plainly be opposed to projects that sought to further reduce the prevalence of religious practice. Indeed, his project is one of showing how the message of the New Testament is intelligible to a secular audience, not that it can be reducible into secular language entirely. To complicate matters further, however, secularisation and secularism can be distinguished from the secular. For we might use 'the secular' to refer to that which is neither conceptually, institutionally, nor existentially dependent upon religion.[7] On this reading, 'the secular' is neither a process of societal change nor a project of furthering such change but, rather, that category of phenomena which can be understood, institutionalised, or lived without religion.

Although this is not the place to go into this distinction in detail, a rough sketch will help to see what we have in mind. A phenomenon can be considered conceptually independent of religion, just in case we can give a sufficient account of that phenomenon without use of religious concepts. For example, electrons would be conceptually independent of religion just in case we could give a sufficient account of what an electron is by reference to nothing more than physical laws. The extent to which religious concepts and phenomena *can* be 'bracketed' from the analysis of a phenomenon is the extent to which it is conceptually secular, by this understanding. A phenomenon would be institutionally independent of religion, in contrast, just in case it could be present outside of the practices of a religious institution. For example, singing would be institutionally independent of religion, just in case it is possible to sing outside of church or other religious institutions. The practice of confirmation, by contrast, is plausibly given

[7] One might object that this way of defining the secular is too narrow, since it seems to rule out that an age such as our own might be secular, given that our age is defined as one in which religion is an option among many. We might try to fix this problem, however, by suggesting that secularity admits of degrees: an age can be more or less secular depending on the degree to which it has a) separated political life from religion; b) experienced a loss in religious practice. Notably, however, the third sense of the secular does not admit of degrees. By this third sense, an age is secular insofar as religion has entered into the world as a possibility, rather than being a horizon of all possibilities.

its shape and content by the specific institutional structures of the Catholic church such that there could be no such practice independently of that established church. Finally, a phenomenon is existentially independent of religion just in case it can be lived by that individual without lived commitment to religion. This final distinction is harder to specify, since it builds in notions such as 'lived commitment' which are themselves in need of analysis. But we can see something of the phenomenon by turning once again to Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard. For all three, genuine love is directed towards the beloved in her distinctiveness and individuality. It is argued that such love, however, is only possible given that one loves or trusts God. If this is right, then love would be existentially dependent in the sense I am gesturing towards, since love would only be liveable through a way of comporting oneself towards God.

Given the variety of senses to secularisation, secularism, and the secular, any proponent of the secularisation of the theological virtues would have to first identify and defend the secularism in question. In the next phase of the project, we shall investigate this avenue, the difficulties that attach to it, and will propose an evaluation of its chances of success.

In the following section, we shall consider a number of possible responses to the objections to the claim that faith, hope, and love can be rehabilitated as virtues constitutive of the good life..

Section Summary:

- There are a number of different possible interpretations of 'secularisation'. This may refer to either:

1. The bracketing of religious concepts from the analysis of phenomena;
2. The process of withdrawal of religion from public life (broadly construed);
3. The reduction in religious belief and practice;
4. The transformation of religion from a background condition of experience to a foregrounded possibility within experience;
5. The loss of sense to languages and practices once rooted in a religious form of life.

- Given these five interpretations of 'secularisation', there are corresponding forms of 'secularism':

1. The practice of analysing phenomena having bracketed religion;
2. The project of furthering the withdrawal of religion from public life;
3. The project of furthering the reduction in religious belief and practice;
4. The attempt to find a way to live in light of the event of either a) the foregrounding of religion, or b) the loss of sense to language and practices.

- As well as these different interpretations of 'secularisation' and 'secularism', we have identified three senses to 'the secular'. A phenomenon may be

1. Conceptually secular, if a sufficient analysis of the phenomenon can be given without recourse to religious concepts;
2. Institutionally secular, if the phenomenon can be present outside of religious institutions;
3. Existentially secular, if the phenomenon can figure in the life of an individual without a concomitant (explicit or tacit) commitment to religion.

- Any project aiming at secularising the theological virtues would have to identify and defend a guiding conception of the secularism pursued. This is a substantial theoretical task in its own right, one which we will look into in the third year of this project.

4. Lines of Response

The project of rehabilitating faith, hope, and love in contemporary settings is, then, faced with the task of either defending itself against the sorts of criticism sketched above, or otherwise accepting that the three are not constitutive for the good life and finding another role for them, by which their rehabilitation might be justified.

As a start, we might note that the claim that even granted that faith, hope, and love play no constitutive role in the ethically good life, they still might be necessary for the good life, if not as constitutive features of that condition then as genetic preconditions for it. By this route, faith, hope, and love are a necessary stage of the agent's ethical education on the way to her attainment of the ethically good life. Is this suggestion in any

way plausible? We cannot offer a detailed answer to this question here, but by way of a first stab, we can at least start to sketch what such an answer might look like.

To begin with, we might make some general observations about relationship between faith and ethics in the theology of Martin Luther. According to Luther, faith should be understood as trust in God's promise of salvation. Rather as you might doubt that your forgiveness has been accepted if a friend continues to try to make it up to you, so too Luther doubts that those Christians who try to attain justification by their own action have really taken to heart God's promise of salvation. Luther holds that it is only by accepting that there is nothing we can do to become justified before God that we are able to trust God to keep his word. In this way, we are freed from the anxiety that comes from trying to be worthy of God's love. Consequently, rather than self-interestedly busying ourselves with the attempt to be worthy of salvation, by trusting in God we become able to direct our concern outwardly in the form of love for the neighbour. In the thought of Luther, then, faith is a precondition of entering into the kind of relationship with others in which one can genuinely be concerned for their well-being, as opposed to one's own standing with respect to God. In this respect, Luther holds that faith as trust opens up the field of ethics. Prior to faith in God's promise, all our dealings with others twist back into self-concern. Thus, Luther arguably holds that faith in God is a genetic precursor to a properly motivated ethics. Might we think that there could be a similar role for faith as trust in non-theological accounts of ethical education?

Consider the following example, discussed by John McDowell (see McDowell, p.21ff). If you are not yet educated in jazz, you are in no position to see what is good about some particular piece of jazz in comparison to another. In fact, to your ears they may sound rather similar, and not better off for it. Once you are educated, however, you may be able to tell if one track is pretentious and the other more subtle. Since the value of jazz records is something which you can only appreciate after you have been educated, however, in being educated into jazz you have to take it as a matter of trust that the tracks whose value you cannot recognise is something you will come to see. Since you cannot see the value before being educated, only something like faith in that value could motivate one's education.

Similarly, if there is a decisive role for exemplars within ethical upbringing, then there is a similar role for a kind of trust in those exemplars. Prior to your ethical upbringing,

you are in no position to discern good from bad, ethically speaking. If the process of ethical upbringing involves accepting some member or members of your environment as exemplars, however, then this acceptance can plainly not be based on a rational assessment of the relative ethical merit of the exemplar, since one does not yet have access to the norms by which one could make that assessment. If exemplars play a decisive role in ethical education, then there is plausibly a role for trust in being brought into ethical maturity.[8]

This sort of trust, however, is rather different from that which Luther described. For Luther, our trust in God's promise provides a sense of security in salvation, on the basis of which one is freed to care for others, such that the ethical field is opened up for the first time. Indeed, Luther describes faith in terms that suggest a child's trust in the love of its parents. This reflection suggests another way in which a case could be made for faith as a necessary feature of a child's ethical upbringing. Consider, for example, the work of Donald Winnicott, in particular his development of the concept of a 'holding environment'.[9] Winnicott argued that during a period of a child's development, the child is dependent on security provided by its parents, in particular its mother, such that it can go through certain processes that result in the psychological independence of the child. As Winnicott puts it: 'The ego support of the maternal care enables the infant to live and develop in spite of his being not yet able to control, or to feel responsible for, what is good and bad in the environment' (p.585). According to Winnicott, the holding relationship is maintained through various stages of the child's awareness of its dependence on the parent, which awareness leads to the possibility of deep insecurity, just in case the awareness of the child's dependence is coupled with an awareness of the unreliability of that upon which it depends, namely, its parent's love.

> Holding includes especially the physical holding of the infant, which is a form of loving. It is perhaps the only way in which a mother can show the infant her love of it. There are those who can hold an infant and those who cannot; the latter quickly produce in the infant a sense of insecurity, and distressed crying. (p.591)

[8] We make no claim that this is decisive. For one thing, one might think that trust requires an act of placing trust and that placing one's trust requires, at the very least, conscious awareness of one's vulnerability. The child, one might argue, simply takes whoever happens to be around her as the exemplar; there is no question of trust here, since the child places no trust.

[9] Here I draw on Winnicott's influential 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship' (1960)

We need not go into the details of Winnicott's proposal here, nor defend it against its detractors. The point is just to indicate the initial plausibility of suggesting that something like faith as trust might have an essential role in the ethical upbringing of a child. In this spirit, we might have also pointed to more recent work in the psychology of child development, in which interpersonal trust is often accorded central important (see Rotenberg et. al. (2013)), or older studies, such as those of Erik Erikson, whose catalogue of stages of psychosocial growth includes 'basic trust' at the earliest stage of the infant's development. According to Erikson:

> The infant's first social achievement, then, is his willingness to let the mother out of sight without undue anxiety or rage, because she has become an inner certainty as well as an outer predictability. Such consistency, continuity, and sameness of experience provide a rudimentary sense of ego identity (p.222)

It is not, then, obviously implausible to think that some form of faith might have an important role in ethical upbringing. We have said nothing about hope and love in this regard; we are letting faith bear the weight of the three. A full account would have to show that all three have a role to play, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that the sort of faith we have described above is plausibly 'secular', and so brings with it the problems of secularisation that we have outlined in the previous section. Even if we could find a genetic role for faith, hope, and love, then, they would still be subject to the problems we identified above.

Still, it might be that even having accepted the initial plausibility of supposing that faith, hope, and love have a necessary role in the ethical upbringing, we come to discover that they are not, in fact, necessary for the good life, either constitutively or genetically. Even by this conclusion, however, there is scope for arguing that faith, hope, and love are of quite crucial ethical value. In other words, even if we accept that faith, hope, and love are only of secondary importance, we might still think that they are still important enough to deserve serious study.

Medical practice offers us a model by which we might think of the importance of faith, hope, and love. Rather as we might need palliative care when remedial medicine is unavailable, so too we might need palliative virtues in cases in which we experience the good life to be beyond us. Just as it is important not to simply ignore the question of

what it might mean to live well in light of one's failing health, so too it is important not to blind oneself to the question of what it might mean to live well in light of experiences of diminished capacity to attain the good life, as described by complete catalogues of the virtues. Before we move on to conclude, we shall briefly sketch the contours of this idea.

In our first two Green Papers, we focused on experiences of powerlessness in healthcare. On our analysis, individuals experience themselves to be powerless when they experience a loss of familiarity with themselves, increased insecurity, and existential loneliness sufficient to undermine their confidence in their ability to be themselves. By this analysis, those who experience themselves to be powerless find themselves unable to carry on being themselves. A growing literature surrounding such experiences points to phenomena such as compassion, listening, and care as helpful responses to such conditions, in which individuals experience themselves to be incapable of attaining the good life, as they understand it.

It is possible, then, to find oneself in a position of ethical powerlessness, in which one is unable to attain the good life. To take another example, experiences of remorse can leave the agent feeling somehow excommunicated from the good by their own action, inconsolable and suffering from an ethical wound that they feel cannot be healed. We might think that these and other similar situations require a distinct set of virtues. Since such individuals experience themselves to be beyond the possibility of the ethical good, we can hardly appeal to the cardinal virtues as a viable response: it is precisely these virtues which are experienced to be out of reach. How might faith, hope, and love offer aid in these cases?

As we have noted, experiences of powerlessness as experienced in end-of-life care, remorse, and so on, prototypically involve a sense of being unable to identify an ethically valuable way of carrying on. Faith, hope, and love could seem promising responses to this condition, since they are traditionally conceived as virtues by which the agent is receptive to a good transcendent of the agent's understanding of what is good for her. In the thought of Augustine and Aquinas, for instance, the good to which we become oriented through receiving faith, hope, and love is radically transcendent of nature. Perhaps we need not go this far to recover some of the promise of faith, hope, and love, so long as we could find a way in which the three might help in the emergence of a good transcendent of an agent's current understanding of what is good for them.

This route may offer an alternative to the full 'secularisation' of the virtues, if this means describing the three in terms immanent to the world. Might there be a way of accounting for the transcendence of virtues such as faith, hope, and love without appeal to the divine? Again, we postpone full discussion of this question until the next phase of the project.

The criticisms we have outlined above argue that faith, hope, and love are not constitutive of the good life. In this section, we have argued that even conceding this point, the three may still have a crucial role to play, either as genetic preconditions for ethical maturity or otherwise as secondary virtues which can aid those who experience themselves to be beyond the good life, as they understand it. Since faith, hope, and love have traditionally been conceived as modes of receptivity to a *transcendent* good, they seem viable candidates for virtues for those who find themselves in need of finding a new good by which to live.

Section Summary:

- Responses to the sort of criticism we have outlined above may take two forms: a) direct rebuttal; b) qualified acceptance.
- Granted that faith, hope, and love are not virtues constitutive of the good life, proponents of their rehabilitation may still argue that they are necessary genetic preconditions to the good life.
- Even granted that faith, hope, and love are neither constitutive nor genetically necessary for the good life, proponents may still argue that they play a crucial secondary role in the lives of those who experience the good life to be out of their reach.
- Since faith, hope, and love were traditionally conceived as geared towards the reception of a transcendent good, they seem viable candidates for virtues for those in need of an emergent good.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have aimed to sketch out a conceptual map of the difficulties that face any inquiry into the viability of rehabilitating faith, hope, and love as virtues within non-theological contexts. In the first section, we reviewed a number of objections to the claim that faith, hope, and love are constitutive of the good life. In the second section, a more general theoretical problem of identifying and defending the conception of secularisation, secularism, and the secular whose viability is in question. Finally, we considered a

number of possible responses to these objections, according to which an important role can be found for the theological virtues, even granted that they are not constitutive of the good life. It remains a question, however, whether faith, hope, and love can possibly be rehabilitated in either of the restricted senses that we have indicated above, given an answer to the questions concerning secularisation we noted above. It remains an open question as to whether or not the theological virtues can be secularised and whether they are viable in contemporary contexts. In this paper, we have been concerned to present problems which answers to these questions shall have to address. In the next phase of the project, we shall begin to answer these questions.

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