RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE: HATING YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF

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Religion has been a constant throughout human history. Evidence of it dates from the earliest times. Religious practice is also universal, appearing in every region of the globe. To judge from recorded history and contemporary accounts, religious intolerance is equally widespread. Yet all the major faiths proclaim the golden rule, namely, to “love your neighbour as yourself.” When Jesus was asked by a lawyer, “Who is my neighbour?” he replied with the story of the good Samaritan—the man who bound up the wounds and looked after the Israelite who was neither his co-religionist nor a member of his race. Jesus’ example has been rarely followed. What is it in religion—and not just in the Christian religion—that leads its members to limit their conception of their neighbour? How is it that, in preaching the universal brotherhood of mankind, religions so often practice the opposite? In my paper, I suggest some answers by focusing on the notions of faith, ethics and finitude.

Religion has been a constant throughout human history. Evidence of it dates from the earliest times. The religious beliefs of Australian Aboriginals have been estimated to go back 60,000 years, while evidence of worship in Botswana is even older. Religious practice is also universal, appearing in every region of the globe. To judge from recorded history and contemporary accounts, religious intolerance is equally widespread.
We see it in the conflicts between the Buddhists and the Muslims in southern Thailand, among the Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and Christians in India, between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and in Iraq, and, until quite recently, between the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.

This intolerance is all the more surprising given that all the major expressions of faith proclaim the golden rule. We can read in the Hindu Mahabharata, “This is the sum of duty: do naught to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain.” The Jewish Talmud presents the same lesson in asserting “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour” (Shabbat 31a). Positively, the lesson is “Try your best to treat others as you would wish to be treated” (Mencius VII.A.4). This Confucian expression is matched by the Christian injunction to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:2). When Jesus expressed this rule, he was asked by a lawyer, “Who is my neighbour?” He replied with the story of the good Samaritan—the man who bound up the wounds and looked after the Israelite who was neither his co-religionist nor a member of his race. Jesus’ example has been rarely followed. What is it in religion—and not just in the Christian religion—that leads its members to limit their conception of their neighbour? How is it that, in preaching the universal brotherhood of mankind, religions so often practice the opposite? In what follows I shall try to provide some answers by focusing on the notions of faith, ethics and finitude.

The Practice of Faith

The difference between faith and knowledge has often been remarked upon. Faith involves not just what you know, but what you are. The statements, “I am a Buddhist” or “I am a Christian,” are not statements of knowledge, but rather of existence. They state what one is. Kierkegaard expresses this in terms of Socrates’ relation to the slave boy in Plato’s Meno. The boy, by responding to the questions put to him by Socrates, discovers that to produce a square with twice the area of an original square, one must construct it on the diagonal of the original. In Kierke-
gaard’s reading, the point of the dialogue is that the slave can acquire the truth by himself. He has the “condition” for acquiring it insofar as he can count, he can recognise when things are equal or unequal, and so on. The alternative, as Kierkegaard remarks, is that, in addition to providing the learner with the truth, “the teacher...must provide him with the condition for understanding it.” This means that “the teacher, before beginning to teach, must transform, not reform, the learner.” He adds: “no human being is capable of doing this; if it is to take place, it must be done by the god himself.” The god, in other words, in giving the learner the condition for understanding the truth, transforms him. As a result, “a change takes place in [the learner] like the change from ‘not to be’ to ‘to be.’” In the Christian context, this means, the learner moves from not being to being a Christian.

This move can be put in terms of Anselm’s famous formula: “I believe that I may understand.” Mirroring a similar statement by Augustine, Anselm takes it as affirming that “unless I first believe, I shall not understand.” Faith, in other words, gives one the condition for understanding. To interpret this phenomenologically, we have to take faith as a “motion of existence.” This motion, taken as a condition, has to be understood as a way of being, a way of existing through time that is expressed as a style of disclosive behavior. In Heidegger’s existential analytic, this style is guided by an understanding of being. What animates it is a criterion of the “real” that sets up the appropriate ways of dealing with and disclosing what “really” is. Faith substitutes for this criterion a relation to a “thou.” This fundamentally alters what may be called the “pragmatics of disclosure.”

For Heidegger, such pragmatics correspond to an area of relations (a Bezugsbereich) determined by a dominant conception or standard of being. If, for example, the standard is food, then the kitchen

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3 Ibid.,14–15.
4 Ibid.,19.
with its various implements forms the appropriate area of relations for disclosure. Similarly, if our standard is matter in its mathematically describable relations, then the laboratory with its experimental apparatus and measuring instruments forms the area where we can perform the activities necessary to disclose it as such. To take a final example, if, as Heidegger suggests, Nietzsche’s notion of will to power determines our current conception of the real, then all the apparatus of modern technology from computers to power dams to the “financial technology” of global capitalism comprise the Bezugsbereich that governs our behaviour for disclosing the “real” world of power.

For the religious consciousness, however, what determines behaviour is not a concept, but an individual. Disclosive behaviour becomes a life practice that a “thou” imparts to one. This thou can be the lord Krishna, Jesus, the Buddha, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or some other religious figure or divinity. What is important is that the life practice imparted gives your passage through the moments of time—your motion of existence—a definite style. The identity provided by this style makes one exist as a Hindu, a Christian, a Buddhist, a Jew or a member of some other faith community. The members of such communities disclose the world according to the practices that embody a specific style. What they disclose gives them the material for their understanding. Thus, the Buddhist, having accepted the life practice advocated by the Buddha, engages in “mindfulness”; the follower of Islam

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Heidegger’s “Von Wesen der Wahrheit,” in Wegmarken (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), 79–80, describes the notion of a Bezugsbereich.

7 The basic insight here is Kierkegaard’s. What distinguishes existence from the concept is motion in time. Thus, “Existence without motion is unthinkable, and motion is unthinkable sub specie aeterni” (Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, trans. Howard and Edna Hong, 2 vols. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992], I, 308. Concepts are timeless, but existence is not. Motion, however, demands continuity. In Kierkegaard’s words: “Inasmuch as existence is motion, it holds true that there is indeed a continuity that holds the motion together, because otherwise there is no motion” (ibid., p. 312). His point is that for there to be motion, there must be a continuity, one given by the style of moving. But such a style, in giving continuity to motion, makes possible existence as motion. It does this by giving us the identity across the moments of time—the identity of a distinct style—that is the existent.
accepts the practice of submission to the will of Allah that he finds in the Koran as interpreted by Islamic law; the Christian finds his life practice in the Gospels, more particularly, in the figure of Christ whom he imitates; the orthodox Jew finds his in following the law as given by God in the Torah and interpreted in the Talmud. Each, having believed, gives his life the appropriate motion. They become what they believe insofar as they embody this in the motion of existence that defines them as practicing believers. They, thus, have the “condition” for understanding since the world that they disclose through such motion yields the evidence for the faith they possess.8

One can speak here with Heidegger of a “pre-understanding of being,” that is, of a way of looking at the world that guides its disclosure. What distinguishes the religious expression of this, however, is that it is set by a “thou.” The relation to this thou is one-to-one. In Kierkegaard’s words, in it, “the individual as an individual stands related absolutely to the absolute.”9 The relation is not to a concept or to some universal standard of being. It is to an individual. As Kierkegaard expresses this, “The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual…determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute.”10 This absolute is “not a doctrine.” Rather, “[t]he object of faith is the actuality of another person.”11 The absolute, in other words, is an existing individual. One cannot “know” this individual—that is, comprehend him through concepts.12 As a movement of existence, the object of faith can only be engaged in. One relates to the exist-

8 Such disclosure is probably what Pascal has in mind when he advises, “You would want to be cured of unbelief and you ask for the remedy: learn from those who … know the road you wish to follow … They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally” (“Pensée 418,” Pensées, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer [London: Penguin Books, 1995], 152).
10 Ibid.
11 Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 326.
12 Kierkegaard’s words, “The particular cannot be thought, but only the universal” (ibid.). Cf. Aristotle’s assertion that we cannot define the particular. We can only apprehend it “through intuitive thinking or perception” (Metaphysics VII, x, 1036a 2–7).
ing individual by imitating the individual, that is, by practicing the individual’s style of existence. Doing so, one becomes like this individual. Thus, imitating Christ in his charity, one becomes a Christian; imitating the Buddha in his mindfulness, one becomes a Buddhist; imitating Mohammed in his submission to the will of Allah, one becomes a Muslim; and by imitating the patriarchs—in particular, Abraham, the “father of faith—in their submission to God, one becomes a faithful Jew.

**Faith and Ethics**

There is, in each of these examples, a certain exclusivity. The one-to-one relation to a “thou” focuses on an actual individual. As Martin Buber writes in this regard, “Every actual relationship to another being in the world is exclusive. Its thou is freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness. It fills the firmament—not as if there were nothing else, but everything else lives in its light.” Since everything else does “live in its light,” this exclusivity also involves a certain inclusivity. As Buber adds, “In the relation to God, unconditional exclusiveness and unconditional inclusiveness are one. For those who enter into the absolute relationship … everything is included in the relationship.”

Phenomenologically, it is included because everything is seen in terms of the life practice imparted by the thou. The practice shapes one’s motion of existence and hence the disclosure of the world that corresponds to this. The “light of faith” is, here, shed by the thou that guides this practice.

The special nature of this “light” can be seen by contrasting it with Kant’s conceptual approach to the divine. For Kant, to reverse Kierkegaard’s phrase, the universal is higher than the individual. It is, in fact, that by which we recognise the absolute. Thus, for Kant, “Even the holy one of the Gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is recognized as such.”

Jesus, in other words, is simply an example of moral perfection. It is our conception of the ideal that allows us to recognise him. As Kierkegaard notes, this view returns

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us to the Socratic position. As an example, Jesus simply serves us as a reminder of what we already know. Like Socrates’ questions to the slave boy, Jesus’ actions cause us to “recollect” our ideal of moral perfection.

To understand the nature of this recollection, we have to note that, for Kant, this ideal consists in a set of universal laws that apply to everyone. We grasp (or recollect) these by universalising the principle or “maxim” of our actions. Thus, if I want to know if it is moral to make a false promise—for example, promise to repay a debt when I cannot— I ask: what would happen if everyone did this? Could I universalise the maxim that it is permissible to make a false promise to get out of financial difficulties? Doing so, I see that nobody would believe this promise and, hence, a universal law with this as its content is impossible.\footnote{In Kant’s words, “I then become aware at once that I can indeed will to lie, but I can by no means will a universal law of lying; for by such a law there could properly be no promises at all since … others … would not believe my profession” (ibid., 71).}

As Kant makes clear, our access to the universal laws that comprise ethics depends upon our ability to abstract ourselves from our particular circumstances. The “condition” it depends upon is that of reason. For the slave boy in Plato’s Meno, reason was our ability to grasp and apply certain basic notions like equality, inequality, sameness and otherness, etc. This, with his ability to count, was what allowed him to “recollect” the solution to the geometrical problem Socrates posed. For Kant, reason is the faculty that we employ in asking what if everyone, regardless of their circumstances, were permitted a certain action. For both Plato and Kant, reason is not something given to us by a particular thou. We have it innately. We can employ it to solve mathematical problems as well discover the rules for ethical behavior.

The case is quite different when an exclusive, one-to-one relation with a thou guides our behavior. At this point, the light of faith has replaced that of reason. We are no longer within the realm of ethics understood as a set of universal rules accessible to everyone. In Kierkegaard’s terms, there is a “teleological suspension” of the ethical in favor of the relation to the absolute.\footnote{Fear and Trembling, 85.} This absolute can require an action that cannot be universalised such as God’s demanding that Abraham kill Isaac. Seen in the light of the faith, this appears as a “sacrifice.” Grasped in terms of
ethics, it appears as “murder.” Which is it? According to Kierkegaard, we confront a paradox:

The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual...determines his relation to the universal [that is, to the ethical] by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal. The paradox can also be expressed by saying that there is an absolute duty toward God; for in this relationship of duty the individual as an individual stands related absolutely to the absolute.

The paradox, then, is that of a duty that cannot be universalised, a duty that transcends duty in the Kantian sense.

To resolve it, we would have to find some mediating ground between the light of faith and that of reason. We would have to find some perspective that would embrace both faith’s one-to-one relation to the absolute and ethic’s demand that we relate ourselves to the universal. Barring this, we are open to what Kierkegaard calls the “demonic.” In his words, “The demonic has that same property as the divine in that the individual can enter into an absolute relation with it.” This is because, “by means of the demonic,” one can “aspire to be the single individual who, as the particular, is higher than the universal.” Both the relation to God and that to the demonic are one-to-one relations. Both stand outside of the universal. Thus, the person who enters into them is outside of the intelligibility imparted by the universal concepts of reason.

Given this, how can one distinguish the relation of faith from that of the demonic? Kierkegaard asserts that the relation to the demonic is that of being in sin. In his words, “By sin the individual is already higher (in the direction of the demoniacal paradox) than the universal, because it is a contradiction on the part of the universal to impose itself

17 Fear and Trembling, 60.
18 Fear and Trembling, 98.
19 Fear and Trembling, 123.
20 To demand an intelligible account of his actions, as Kierkegaard writes, is to involve oneself in “the most absurd contradiction, namely that the single individual who stands precisely outside the universal be brought in under universal categories when he is expressly to act as the single individual outside the universal” (Fear and Trembling, 99).
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upon a man who lacks the *conditio sine qua non.*"  

In sin, we lack the condition for acting ethically. Our being in original sin means that our nature has been corrupted. Thus, for Kierkegaard, to assume that ethics requires a god-given condition is to transcend it. In his words, “An ethics which disregards sin is a perfectly idle science; but if it asserts sin, it is *eo ipso* well beyond itself.”  

This is because it assumes a principle beyond that of our innate rationality. From the standpoint of such rationality, we cannot distinguish the relation to the demonic from that to the divine. We cannot tell whether Abraham is sinning or acting upon a divine command since neither is intelligible once we step outside the perspective of faith. Outside of faith, we lack these categories and Abraham’s action appears as unethical. Within it, we have the condition; we can disclose the world according to the same thou as Abraham does. Doing so, we can recognise the action as a sacrifice and not as a sin.

As Buber recognised, the demonic can achieve a political dimension. The I-thou relation can focus on an individual whose “mission requires him to know only his association with his cause and no real relation to any thou, no present encounter with any thou, so that everything around him becomes [an] it and subservient to his cause.” Such, according to Buber, was the case with Napoleon. “He was the demonic thou for the millions and did not respond; to ‘thou’ he responded by saying: ‘it.’” The “it” was his cause, his world-view. This provided the standard for his followers’ disclosure. As Buber emphasises, there is no reciprocity in the relation to the demonic thou. The person embodying this thou does not see things in the light of those who follow him; rather “a thousand relations reach out toward him but none issues from him. He participates in no actuality, but others participate immeasurably in him as in an actuality.” What Buber wrote of Napoleon in the 1920’s proved prophetic with regard to Hitler in the 1930’s. Denis de Rougement wrote of attending a Hitler rally in 1935, “I thought I was participating in a

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22 *Ibid*.

23 Once we leave the perspective of faith, murder is not a “sin,” but a violation of the ethical. Thus, an atheist can recognise the immorality of murder without adopting the essentially religious category of “sin.”

24 *I and Thou*, 117.

mass meeting, a political rally. But they were celebrating their cult. A liturgy was being celebrated, the great sacred ceremony of a religion that I was not a member of and that rolled over me and forcefully pushed me back” like a wave. The force he experienced was greater than the mere “physical force” of “all those terribly tightly packed bodies.”

It was religious. In fact, as he reports, Hitler’s followers had an essentially religious relation to him. Replacing its Christian analogue, this relation shaped their world-view (Weltanschauung). Belief in Hitler, in other words, gave the “condition.” It set a standard for disclosing the world by imparting a motion of existence. When one engages in it, one does not just believe in a set of doctrines. One is a Nazi.

**Intolerance and Recognition**

The best way to grasp intolerance is in terms of the way that we recognise others as subjects like ourselves. As Edmund Husserl pointed out, the basic structure of this recognition can be described in terms of an analogy that we are continually making and adjusting in our relations with others. This analogy has four terms. Three of them are directly experienced, the fourth term (much like a “fourth proportional” in mathematics) is filled in or “solved” in terms of the other three. Two of the experienced terms are the appearing of myself and my other. I directly observe my own behavior and speech. I also observe the other’s behavior, which includes his conversing with me. The third term is my consciousness of my inner life. I experience immediately the intentions and interpretations that explain what I do and say. I cannot, of course, directly observe those of the other. This fourth term, which consists of his conscious life, must be filled in by me. I do so when I see the other behaving as I would in a given situation. I then fill in this fourth term by transferring to him the intentions and interpretations that I would have were I in his place, i.e., those that would guide my behavior. Doing so, I acknowledge him as making sense of his situation in the same way that I would and, thus, recognise him as a subject like myself. As Husserl

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notes, this transfer is verifiable insofar as it is based on the observed similarity of our behavior. Since, in fact, I transfer to him my conscious intentions, I must, at least initially, take my behavior as guided by these as a standard for verification.29

This does not mean that the other whom I recognize is limited to being a mirror image of my subjectivity. Were this the case, any recognition I had of him would only be a self-recognition. This would mean that my own interpretations could never be corrected by his. I could never learn from him that I was mistaken. In fact, in speaking with the other, I expect that he will add something new to our conversation—not simply repeat what I say. In other words, given his distinct personal history, I assume that he will bring to our conversation a different perspective, one shaped by experiences I have not had. Given that the interpretations and anticipations growing out of this different history shape his behavior, I do not expect that his behavior will always mirror my own. This does not mean that I abandon my own interpretative standards. It does, however, signify that I must allow these to be called into question by the other. Thus, in my encounter with the other, I do not just assume that he will behave as I would in his situation, thereby taking myself as a standard for his selfhood; I also assume that were I in his situation, I might act differently. Doing so, I also take his behavior as a standard for verifying my own selfhood. Thus, to recognize another person as a sub-

29 In Husserl’s words, “The experienced animate organism of the other continues to manifest itself as actually an animate organism solely through its continuously harmonious behavior.... The organism is experienced as a pseudo-organism precisely when it does not agree in its behavior” (Cartesianische Meditationen, ed. S. Strasser [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963], 144). “Harmonious,” here, means harmonious with my own behavior. The other's actions must “agree” with this in order to establish the similarity necessary for the transfer. As Husserl expresses this, the other’s ego is “determined as thus governing his body (and, in a familiar way, constantly confirms this) only insofar as the whole stylistic form of the sensible processes that are primordially perceivable by me must correspond to what is known in type from my own governing my body” (ibid., 148). This is also the case with the “higher psychical occurrences”—such as verbal behavior. They have “their style of synthetic connections and their form of occurring which can be understandable to me through their associative basis in my own style of life, a style empirically familiar to me in its average typicality” (ibid., 149).
ject like myself is to assume that, like me, he also uses his own behavior as a standard of verification. Mutual recognition thus demands that we each place ourselves imaginatively in the situation of the other. Each has to regard the world in terms of the other’s categories, interpretations, and ways of making sense of the world in which we encounter each other.

The “tolerance” that functions in this recognition recalls its Latin root, *tolerare*, which signifies to bear, support, sustain, and endure. In mutual recognition, each party must imaginatively enter into and, thereby, sustain the world of the other. Thus, in recognising the other, each overlays the sense he makes of the world with that bestowed on it by the other. My awareness of the incomplete coincidence of these senses does not just give me an awareness of the otherness of the other, it also exhibits the finitude and contingency of my own perspective. It is finite since my interpretation does not exhaust the senses that can be made out of a given situation. It is contingent since my very ability to imaginatively take up the other’s standpoint shows me that my own standpoint could have been different. The interpretation that expresses my perspective is thus deprived of any inherent necessity. It is situated as one of many possible interpretations. My ability to sustain this awareness is a measure of my tolerance. Negatively such tolerance signifies that I let the other be other, that I not force him to behave as I do. Positively, it demands that I affirm the other’s ideals, his standards of sense-making, as his. As Husserl puts this, in mutual tolerance, I affirm “his ideals as his, as ideals which I must affirm in him, just as he must affirm my ideals—not, indeed, as his ideals of life but as the ideals of my being and life.” Such affirmations involve our sustaining not just each other’s ideals, but also our bearing or enduring the contingency and finitude of our own. Tolerance, thus, involves a recognition of our humanity as capable of possessing multiple ideals, multiple standards of sense-making, multiple modes of disclosure. To be tolerant is to affirm that

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31 Ms. E III 1, p. 7. The same point holds with regard to different societies. Societies are “not egotistical” — i.e., *not intolerant* — Husserl writes, if they can affirm one another’s “particular goals and particular accomplishments” (Ms. A V 24, p. 4). I am grateful to the Husserl Archives in Leuven, Belgium for permission to quote from the *Nachlass* of Husserl.
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disclosure can have a plurality of conditions resulting in a plurality of possible motions of existence, all of which can characterise our humanity.

Tolerance, so defined, is not an easy virtue to practice. To have one’s standards for being and behaving called into question can be disturbing. At the extreme, it is felt as a traumatisms, as a shaking of one’s defining motion of existence. In such cases, our sense of self-protection prevents us from granting the other an authority equal to our own. It prompts us to insist on our own categories, that is, to refuse to see our own modes of disclosure as contingent and finite. Doing so, we cannot recognise others who do not follow our standards as genuine subjects. In other words, we become intolerant. We refuse to bear or sustain the alterity of others. Rather than acknowledging humanity as capable of multiple ideals, multiple ways of making sense of our common world, we see such alterity as a threat to ourselves. At stake in our insistence on our way of disclosing the world is, we feel, the very selfhood that enacts this disclosure.

Religious intolerance gives a divine sanction to this insistence. Given that what guides behavior is a relation to a specific thou, alternative modes of disclosure are seen in terms of alternative thous. Such

32 Tolerance so defined does have its limits. Understood as a positive ideal, its goal is the “fullness” (or filling out) of the possibilities of being human through the maximum of cultural diversity consistent with social harmony. By “social harmony,” I mean that such possibilities must be compossible, that is, that their mutual actualisation must not be impossible. The limits of tolerance involve those actions that do undermine such actualisation. A few common examples will make this clear. Tolerance, understood negatively as a prohibition—ultimately, as a prohibition of intolerance—forbids lying and theft. The first, to the point that it is collectively actualised, undermines the possibility of speech to communicate verifiable information. Thus, lying undermines those human possibilities, such as civil society, which presuppose this possibility. Theft, when collectively actualised, has a similar effect on the possibility of possession and, hence, on the possibilities, such as commerce, springing from this. Insofar as lying and theft cut off such possibilities, they result in a narrowing of human potentialities and are actually acts of intolerance. For a more complete account of this, see the chapter, “Sustaining the Other: Tolerance as a Positive Ideal” in James Mensch, Embodiments: From the Body to the Body Politic (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009).
“foreign gods” do not just determine alternative religious and life practices and, hence, distinct motions of existence; they call into question one’s own thou and, hence, the very motion of existence that defines one’s selfhood. A divide thus opens up between those who follow a particular faith and those who do not. The first have the “condition.” The second do not. The first “have seen the light.” The second “live in darkness” since they do not have the condition that is required for understanding the truth. Thus, the nonbeliever becomes the unintelligible other who neither behaves nor discloses the world as I do. We cannot recognise each other since, as long as we do not share the same thou and, hence, the same life practices, we cannot make the transfer of sense required for intersubjective recognition. In such a situation, not sharing the same thou translates into not having the same ontological condition, which translates into not actually possessing the same subjectivity.

What makes this situation especially fraught is the lack of recourse to a common source of evidence that would allow us to understand each other. To the point that the world discloses itself according to our different life practices, it fails to yield a common basis for such understanding. Moreover, as long as we remain within the one-to-one relations definitive of our respective faith practices, we suspend our relation to the ethical understood as a set of universal rules. This undermines the possibility of our recognising others as subjects like ourselves by seeing their actions in the light of Kant’s categorical imperative. The appeal to the “light of reason” that occurs when we ask about “everyone” acting a specific way is replaced by the “light of faith” as determined by the one-to-one relationship to the divine. Entering into it, we suspend the intelligibility that proceeds through universal concepts. In Kierkegaard’s words, “Faith itself cannot be mediated into the universal, for in that case it would be cancelled [as a one-to-one relationship]. Faith is this paradox, and the single individual is quite unable to make himself intelligible to anyone” on a conceptual level.33

When we combine this with the possibility of the relation to the demonic, which is also outside of the universal, the negative possibilities of this “paradox” become clear. As I noted above, outside of faith, we cannot distinguish the divine from the demonic. Both embrace a one-to-one relation that suspends the ethical. The temptation to conflate the two

33 Fear and Trembling, 99.
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can be overwhelming in times of distress. In the shaking of our selfhood that occurs when we confront an alternative faith, our self-protective instinct can result in a reaction whose violence is both senseless and immoral: senseless since it is outside of the universal, immoral since the ethical is unavailable to it. In fact, our being outside of these parameters opens up our relation to the thou to the worst forms of instrumentalization. This occurs when the role of the “thou” is assumed by a charismatic figure. Our one-to-one relation to him gives him a power that has no ethical limits and that can be employed to persecute others in defense of the selfhood that this relation defines. All the demonic possibilities of such persecution are present insofar as our access to the humanity of the persecuted has been blocked. Thus, we may continue to believe that we should treat others as we would like to be treated, all the while excluding the enemies of our thou from the golden rule. This is because, lacking the relation to this thou, they do not possess the condition, the “motion of existence,” that would allow them to be recognised as genuine subjects.

Hating Your Neighbour as Yourself

The above should not be taken as implying that we experience the followers of “strange gods” as lacking subjectivity altogether. Behind every non-recognition of the other, there lurks a hidden recognition. As Levinas remarks, if I did not recognise the subjectivity of the other, “the deployment of violent force would reduce itself to labor.”

34 My action on him would reduce itself to the labour I employ on an inanimate object, for example, a tree that I cut down and make into boards. In fact, it is only as a subject that the other’s alternative faith can threaten my own. I must already have assumed his world as a possibility open to me to find it threatening. My nonrecognition of him must, then, be active. It must involve the suppression of the identity that I secretly recognise. Concretely, this occurs through projection. The thou that determines my motion of existence is supposed to give me the condition for understanding and acting ethically. I project upon the other those aspects of myself that I find to be incompatible with this desired condition. Since these aspects lack any sanctioned mode of disclosure, they are normally repressed.

They represent what I cannot acknowledge, what, in fact, I am called upon to hate by my thou. When I project them on the other, I both recognise and do not recognise him as a subject like myself. He is like me insofar as I transfer to him my intentions and interpretations. He is unlike me insofar as these are repressed. They are, in Lacan’s words, “the chapter of my history … that is the censored chapter.” They are my “unconscious.” Projecting them, they reappear in the other.35 The result is that I hate the other as I hate myself. He has the intentions and interpretations that I cannot acknowledge. So regarded, the alterity he assumes is not his own. It does not spring from his ideals, his modes of making sense of the world. Having repressed these, I replace them with the censored chapter of my own consciousness. He is seen as actively engaging in those activities that I experience as “temptations.”

A religion’s intolerance to its predecessors and successors is a special case of the above. What it cannot acknowledge are the similarities that link them. The result is what Freud called the narcissism of small differences. In its attempts to distinguish itself from its rivals, a religion does not just repress the similarities it shares with them; it stigmatises its rivals by projecting traits that are designed to emphasise their differences.36 We find this in Judaism’s relation to the Semitic religions in Canaan. It also appears in Christianity’s relation to Judaism. Here, what is repressed are the Jewish origins of this faith and, more specifically, Christ’s existence as a Jew. The fact that Jesus was executed by gentiles—that is, Romans—becomes transformed and projected so that the Jews become Christ’s killers. Similar instances of transformation and projection can be found in Islam’s conception of Christianity and

36 Derrida, reflecting on these facts, saw religion as a victim of an “autoimmune reaction.” In biology, this term refers to the body’s turning its immune reaction on itself. Systems designed to protect the body to immunise it from biological attacks from without turn inward attacking its own structures. As Derrida observes, religion can suffer this fate in its attempts to preserve itself. Doing so, it fails to grasp its own self-identity. Like the body suffering the autoimmune reaction, it takes as “other” what is actually part of itself. (Jacques Derrida, Rogues [Stanford: Stanford University Press, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, 2005], 36).
Protestant conceptions of Roman Catholicism. The savagery that has often marked their relations comes from the fact that their actions, as guided by faith, transcend ethics. Thus, God can command the Israelites to destroy the Amorites and others. He can also be invoked by the Crusaders when they massacre the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem. Such examples witness the reverse of the positive stereotyping that occurs with regard to co-religionists. Those who share our faith do have the condition. All that we love with regard to the condition, we project upon them. They are our neighbours and we do love them as we love ourselves. Both the hatred of the unbeliever and the love of the believer are, in fact, just two sides of the same coin—that of the condition given by a relation to a thou.

Finitude and Transcendence

The above presents, I admit, a rather bleak view. Can we not envisage a future in which religions can coexist, one where each, exercising tolerance, would affirm the ideals of other religions as theirs even as it would expect its own ideals to be recognised and respected as its own? Against such a prospect is the lack of a common ground for this mutual understanding. In the paradigm of pragmatic disclosure we have been following, such understanding would require that the members of different

37 In each case, we seem to have an instance of Jacques Lacan’s doctrine, mentioned above, that the “unconscious,” being that aspect of myself I refuse to recognise, is “the censored chapter of my history.” This refusal does not just result in my projecting what I repress on to the other. Insofar as the other is actually part of my identity, it results in a distorted self-knowledge. What I project on the other results in a gap. In Lacan’s words, my self-knowledge is, thus, marred by “the distortions necessitated by the linking of the adulterated chapter to the chapters surrounding it” (“Function and field of speech and language,” p. 50). The anti-Semitism of Christianity, given that it was originally a Jewish sect, can be considered as an example of such distortions.

38 “As for the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is going to give you as an inheritance, you must not allow a single living thing to survive. Instead you must utterly annihilate them— the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—just as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that they cannot teach you all the abhorrent ways they worship their gods, causing you to sin against the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 20:16–18)
faiths behave and, hence, disclose the world in similar ways. The motions of existence that define their subjectivities would, thus, have to overlap. But this would require that the thons determining such motions converge. Barring this, such members are limited to their own faith practices, their own modes of disclosure. What makes this divide unbridgeable is the very finitude of disclosure. One cannot, for example, engage in Buddhist mindfulness—limiting one reflections to the immediate now—and let one’s life be ruled by one’s eschatological hopes of a final coming. Our very finitude limits us to engaging in one motion of existence, one program of disclosure at a time. What is incapable of being transcended here is our finitude. As a defining function of our motion of existence, it is irreducible and inabsorbable.

The only response to such finitude is tolerance. We have to accept and sustain the fact that our human finitude is capable of multiple conditions, multiple ways of relating to a thou and, hence, multiple ways of disclosing the world. Above all, we have to accept the finitude of disclosure itself—that is to say, its non-translatability into an overriding perspective. Can religious consciousness come to terms with this? Jesus, when responding to the question “who is my neighbour?” did. The good Samaritan manifested his love of God in his actions for someone who worshiped elsewhere. The etymological root of the word “religion” has been traced to the Latin, ligare, “to bind,” religare signifying “to bind fast.” In a curious way, the parable leaves us with religion without religion, a binding that unbinds. The Samaritan had a relation to his thou that undid the constraints of his particular religious community. In combining the love of God with such unbinding, this parable is, from the religious perspective, extremely disturbing. A mark of this was that its author, Jesus, was put to death. He, himself, was a victim of religious intolerance.

Does this mean that such unbinding is antithetical to the faith that Jesus founded? Is it by definition excluded? Christianity shares with the other religions of the book, Judaism and Islam, the belief that there is only one God. The monotheism that they share is marked by exclusivity and, hence, is particularly susceptible to intolerance. It also, however, contains an element of openness coming from the belief in a transcendent, creator God. Such a God exists before the world he creates. This means, not just that he is independent of it, but also that he in-
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herently transcends all definitions taken from its terms.39 Not being of the world, he cannot be defined by it. As all three see mankind as the “image” of God, they necessarily acknowledge, each in its own way, an analogous transcendence of individuals. This means that human beings cannot be completely defined. There is something within them that escapes all categorisation in worldly terms, something that, in Levinasian terms, can be characterised as a radical “alterity.” The result of this aspect of religion is a radical openness to the one who should count as a neighbour. This is because, in his or her identity with the divine, no human being can be stereotyped. One cannot, for example, say that women, children, slaves, or people of different races do not, as such, bear this image. Of course, in the long history of religious intolerance, this has often been asserted. The fact that slaves were kept throughout biblical times has allowed people to use the Bible to justify slavery. Such usage, however, stands in direct contradiction with their bearing the image of God. It contradicts the belief, as Levinas puts it, that “[t]he face signifies the Infinite.”40 The transcendence of the divine, when thought through, unbinds the binding that religions impose. It leads us to assert, with Anselm of Canterbury, that God is not just “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” God is “also something greater than can be thought.”41 The “thou” of religious presence, when approached in this way, gives one a religious practice that unbinds even as it binds. As such, it both gives one a context of sense and exceeds it. As the parable of the Good Samaritan suggests, it can open up the concept of the neighbour to include those of different faiths.

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39 Including, of course, that of being defined as a “he.”
40 Emmanuel Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, tr. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 105), 105.
41 “Therefore, Lord, not only are you that than which nothing greater can be thought, but you are also something greater than can be thought (quidam maius quam cognitari possit). For since it is possible to think that there is such a one, then, if you are not this same being, something greater than you could be thought—which cannot be.” (St. Anselm’s Proslogion, 137).