

THE WISDOM OF WELL-BEING

SCIENCE *of* LOVE

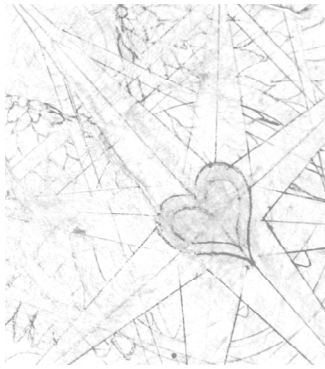


THOMAS JAY OORD

SCIENCE OF LOVE

Science of Love

The Wisdom of Well-Being



Thomas Jay Oord

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To Karl Giberson, Stephen G. Post,
and Sir John Templeton





PRE FACE

A PREVIOUSLY UNEXPLORED FIELD of scholarship is emerging in our day. I call this field of research the love-and-science symbiosis. Scholars engaged in this research investigate science and love as each contributes to how we understand God, ourselves, and the world in which we live.

From antiquity, many have at least implicitly affirmed a relationship between love and science. A major difference between the past and present, however, is that contemporary investigators address various issues arising in this relationship overtly and methodologically. Of course, rapid changes and advances in contemporary science generate questions and possibilities unknown to past civilizations, and new ways of thinking religiously and philosophically contribute to this symbiotic research.

Scholars and nonscholars alike are finding that exploring the connections between love and science inspires creative hypotheses for how we might understand both the sacred and the scientific. The eminent psychologist Abraham Maslow expressed the importance of such an exploration when he declared, “We *must* study love. We must be able to teach it, to understand it, to predict it, or else the world is lost to hostility and to suspicion.”¹

If love resides at the core of humanity’s moral and religious

concerns and if science continues to sculpt humanity's ways of living and worldviews, those probing the contemporary love-and-science symbiosis engage in matters of enormous importance. And importance, as Alfred North Whitehead put it, "nerves all civilized effort."²

This book introduces and explores issues at the heart of the love-and-science symbiosis. In the following chapters, we investigate scientific issues such as cosmology and the Big Bang, socio-biology and evolutionary psychology, neurology, organismic cooperation, sex and romance, and the role of emotions as each relates to love. We also look at religious, ethical, and philosophical issues such as virtue, *creation ex nihilo*, progress, divine action, agape, values, religious practices, pacifism, sexuality, friendship, freedom, and marriage. My hope is that this entire investigation itself is an *important* venture in love.

I dedicate this book to three whose efforts have inspired and encouraged me. Karl Giberson, friend, advocate, and former professorial colleague, suggested that I write these chapters as monthly installments in *Science and Theology News* (a publication then titled *Research News and Opportunities in Science and Theology*). As editor, Karl has been the architect of this influential periodical, which is widely regarded as the leading publication for news on the science-and-religion dialogue.

I also dedicate the book to Stephen G. Post. As leader of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love and as a friend, Stephen blazes new trails in love-and-science research. His stunning vision and tireless work set a high standard for the field in general and my own work in particular.

Finally, I dedicate the book to Sir John Templeton. His belief in both the importance of love and the power of science makes publishing this work possible. In so many ways, I am grateful to him and the John Templeton Foundation.

Words of appreciation are also due to many who have in one form or another encouraged and aided in the writing of the book. In addition to Giberson, Post, and Templeton, I thank Janet Calhoun, Steve Carroll, Philip Clayton, John Cobb, Tracey Cook, George Ellis, Shemia Fagan, Todd Frye, David Griffin, Bob Herrmann, Kurian Kachappilly, Diane LeClerc, Michael Lodahl, Bob Luhn, Steve McCormick, Peter Miano, Brint Montgomery, Nancey Murphy, Ralph Neil and my colleagues at Northwest Nazarene University, Cheryl Oord, John Oord, Jennifer Pavlisko, Thomas Phillips, John Polkinghorne, Kimberly Roots, Carol Rotz, Jeffrey Schloss, Eric Stark, Paul Steinhardt, Angela Swanson, Howard Van Till, Tiffany Triplett, Lynn Underwood, Don Viney, David Sloan Wilson, Ron Wright, Don Yerxa, Amos Yong, and David Zirschky. Most of all, I thank those near and dear whom I love in so many ways: Cheryl, Sydnee, Lexi, and Andee.



*Giving ourselves in unselfish love is transformative.
Religious traditions have always captured this insight in their narratives.*

STEPHEN G. POST¹



LOVE IN ANY LANGUAGE

FIGURING OUT what people mean when they use the word “love” is often difficult and sometimes seemingly impossible. The word is used in so many ways, and we intend it to mean so many different things. Consider the following explanations of love:

Love is a kind of warfare. —Ovid

Love is just one of many passions . . . and it has no great influence upon the sum of life. —Samuel Johnson

Love is a never-ending feeling. —Adeil Prince

Love is just another four-letter word.
—Tennessee Williams

Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs.
—William Shakespeare

Love kills. —Sid Vicious

Love ain't nothing but a heartache, hits you when you're down —Linda Ronstadt

Love means never having to say you're sorry. —Erich Segal

Love is a perky elf dancing a merry little jig, and then he suddenly turns on you with a miniature machine gun.
—Matt Groening

Theologian Mildred Bangs Wynkoop captured the problem well when she lamented that love is a notoriously ambiguous “weasel word.”²

Despite its wide range of meanings and uses, billions of people today and throughout history deem love the ultimate ground for how they understand reality, regarding love as the key to world peace, progress, and unity. Countless individuals deem love the key to healing broken and painful relationships.

Not long ago, I became more aware of the importance placed upon the power of love when my daughters were asked to use sign language to communicate the words of a wedding song. Their hand and finger movements combined beautifully with the words of “Love in Any Language,” the song chosen for the ceremony:

Love in any language, straight from the heart
Pulls us all together, never apart.
Once we learned to speak it, all the world will hear
Love in any language fluently spoken here.³

Although the lyrics were meant to reflect a romantic theme, I saw parallels between them and the fact that billions of people believe love is our ultimate ground of hope.

Why do so many regard love so highly? We explore this question in this book. Part of the answer is scientific; part of it is philosophical.⁴ To begin our exploration, however, I suggest that religion contributes an essential part of the answer to why so many regard love highly.⁵ In fact, a good argument can be made that love plays a significant role in *all* major world religions.⁶

When examining the part that religion plays, a focus on the concepts of love presumed by the major religious traditions seems appropriate. Of course, a thorough exploration of the world's major religions would require more than one chapter. Books could be written about each religion's understanding of love. Therefore, our exploration in this chapter is necessarily brief.

The transliteration of religious love words shows that love takes a variety of forms in religion. The diversity is rich, albeit occasionally bewildering: love in any language. This chapter's thesis is that all of the world's great religions, to varying degrees and with varying emphases, both teach and assume the priority of love. After looking at transliterations of religious love words, I conclude with a definition of love meant to account both for the diversities that I explore and to serve as an anchor in future chapters as we investigate the love-and-science symbiosis.

We begin our exploration with Hinduism, the major religion that most scholars consider the world's oldest. One might summarize the heart of Hinduism by saying that it advocates ways of living and paths (*yoga*) to unite us with the divine infinite. One such path is the way of love, which is transliterated *bhakti*. A medieval Hindu, Narada, defines *bhakti* as "intense love of God."

Hindus believe that the one taking the path of intense love of God—the *bhakta*—adores God with all of his or her whole being.⁷ *Bhakti* takes different forms depending upon the various relationships in which the *bhakta* is involved. The love expressed toward a spouse, children, friends, coworkers, family, slaves, etc., takes whatever form that love requires.

A second Hindu word for love is *kama*, which can refer either to sensuality or emotional attachment. Hindus do not necessarily regard *kama* as good, however, because it can represent improper attachment to this world. Such attachment impedes genuine love of God. In today's popular culture, *kama* is often associated with

sex and romance, rather than with an ethical or religious love ideal.⁸

Buddhism emerged in the context of Hinduism. Scholars transliterate Buddhism's love word as *karuna*, which is a Sanskrit word meaning "compassionate action." Buddhists believe that enlightened ones express *karuna* when acting to end suffering. Siddhartha Gautama, the first Buddha, believed that all things are interconnected. He taught that expressing *karuna* is the rational thing to do to terminate the suffering that distresses and afflicts these connections.

Mahayana Buddhists especially emphasize the way of compassion. This includes practicing an eightfold path and helping others to overcome suffering in their own search for nirvana (the absence of suffering). Today, the Dalai Lama of Tibet personifies the wisdom of a cool head and the care of a warm heart when he conveys *karuna*.⁹

A third major religious tradition, Confucianism, emerged several thousand years ago in Chinese culture. Ethics in this tradition are grounded in the transliteration of *jen*, which translators render "love." The word derives from the Chinese characters for "human" and "two." *Jen* is the supreme virtue, representing human qualities at their best. *Jen* entails proper actions toward others and oneself, and includes what might be called negative altruism (*shu*): "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself."

Rather than beginning with some abstract universal love of all, *jen* begins and establishes itself in the home with kind and loyal relations (*xiao*) enjoyed with one's grandparents, parents, and siblings. Only after one loves the family, says Confucius, can one love all humanity. The actual expressions of *jen* come through *li*, which are the external practices and customs of the Confucian.¹⁰

Moving from the East to the Middle East, one encounters

Judaism, a religion whose influence is disproportionately large compared to the number of its practitioners. The God whom Jews worship expresses love, which is transliterated in English as *hesed* (or *chesed*). A defining characteristic of this love is its persistence through time, and scholars translate *hesed* variously as “steadfast love,” “loving faithfulness,” or “loyalty.” *Hesed* refers to ideal ethical action established through an ongoing relationship.¹¹

According to Judaism, God expresses this steadfast love to Israel through various covenants, and Jews are to express love to God in obedient response. Laws and commandments might be understood as means by which humans are to respond to divine *hesed*.

A second Hebrew love word is transliterated *ahab* and *ahabah*. This word denotes the affection or friendship found between two companions, family members, or lovers.¹² This type of love is much less prevalent in the Hebrew Scripture.

Within both Islam and Christianity resides a love tradition derived from Greek philosophical influences. I call this tradition the “virtue and vice love tradition.” Those who adopt its linguistic contours employ the word “love” when speaking of any purposive action.

In the virtue and vice tradition, love resides at the basis of all deliberate movement. Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas, whom Aristotle convinced through his writing to adopt the virtue and vice language of love, put it this way: “every agent, whatever it be, does every action from love of some kind.”¹³ Christian theologian Paul Tillich exemplifies this way of speaking when he defines love as “the moving power of life” that “drives everything that is towards everything else that is.”¹⁴

When someone from the virtue and vice tradition speaks of love, a qualifier of some sort is often necessary. For example, love might proper or improper, perfect or imperfect, appropriate or

inappropriate, and fitting or unfitting. Love requires a qualifier, because it can refer to action that is either good or evil.

Western history is riddled with examples of those who failed to notice the virtue and vice love tradition's distinctive way of discussing love. Ambiguity and confusion result from this failure. In an attempt to steer clear of misunderstanding, I use the word "love" in this book only to refer to ideal (or virtuous) ethical action. As I see it, love can never be improper or inappropriate.

We turn now to one of the world's most important religious traditions: Islam. While the virtue and vice love tradition has influenced Islam to some degree, the common understanding of love as ideal ethical action is also present in this faith tradition. Islam's stress upon submission to the will of Allah has, however, mistakenly been regarded as reflecting opposition to the high priority of religious love,¹⁵ which is unfortunate in part because the Qur'an contains several words translated "love."

Muslims believe Allah to be compassionate and merciful toward the faithful and righteous. Allah expressed love when sending the prophet Muhammad and when providing the Qur'an as the guide for believers. In addition, one of the five Islamic pillars of faith instructs Muslims to give a portion of their income to the poor.

The Arabic transliteration *wadud*, when combined with *al* as in *Al-Wadud*, refers to Allah's love for obedient servants. Similarly, *hubb* is a warmhearted divine love reserved for those who do good; Allah does not express *hubb* to the infidels and unrighteous. In the cases of *wadud* and *hubb*, Muslims believe that Allah expresses love only to some.

While the Qur'an most often emphasizes that Allah loves only those in submission to the divine will, some passages do speak of universal divine love. Two Islamic love transliterations bear attention in this regard. *Rahmah* refers to Allah's essential mercy or compassion, and *rahim* refers to Allah's mercy and compassion in

action. In these two cases, Allah's love applies universally; *rahmah* identifies an essential property of Allah's nature, and *rahim* identifies divine actions proceeding from that nature.¹⁶

Christianity is the final religion that we need briefly to explore. Christianity shares much in common with both Judaism and Islam, but its connections with love are arguably stronger. In fact, Irving Singer, eminent philosopher of love, argues that "what distinguishes Christianity, what gives it a unique place in man's intellectual life, is the fact that it alone has made love the dominant principle in all areas of dogma. Whatever Christians may have done to others or themselves, theirs is the only faith in which God and love are the same."¹⁷

Because Christians consider the Hebrew Scriptures (often referred to as the Old Testament) to be inspired, my comments about *hesed* apply to Christian views of divine love. But Christians typically regard Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, as the fullest revelation of divine love. What the New Testament has to say about love, say Christians, fulfills and in some cases supersedes the vision of God manifest in the Old Testament.¹⁸

The New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek, and the influence of Greco-Roman thought affects the love meanings that the authors convey. Although nearly a dozen Greek words can be translated "love," scholars today typically cite three transliterations—*agape*, *eros*, and *philia*—as basically representative of all the other forms.

New Testament authors used *agape* and *philia* in their writings. An analysis of each case in which these words arise reveals that their meanings are frequently interchangeable, although writers use *agape* more often. One must discern the meaning of *agape* and *philia* by examining the context in which one finds each word. In addition, although *eros* and its derivatives are not found in the Christian canon, many scholars acknowledge that its general

meaning, a desire or attraction for the beautiful, is present in both the New and Old Testaments.

Despite the diverse meanings of *agape* in the New Testament, however, many Christians have come to define *agape* as love expressed no matter the condition of the recipient. The widespread identification of *agape* with unconditional love is part of theologian Anders Nygren's legacy. His mid-twentieth-century book, *Agape and Eros*, is considered a classic with which contemporary love scholars must reckon.¹⁹

The loves *eros* and *philia* have received much less attention in the history of Christianity. Christians typically identify *philia* as pertaining to friendship, filial relations, or familial love. *Philia* suggests the warmth and affection that comes from long-lasting ties.

Christian *eros* might be described as acting to promote well-being by affirming what is valuable and beautiful. God's creating the world and calling it "good," say many Christians, provides a basis for believing that what is created has some measure of value. In later chapters, I propose that God expresses each of these love-types: *agape*, *eros*, and *philia*. And God desires for creatures to express these love-types in response.

Upon completing this brief survey, it seems natural to ask whether all of the love words we have examined share some characteristic or feature. In other words, is there a basic element or meaning present in each notion of love?

Of course, one must be careful to reject the reductionistic claim that all of these loves and the religious traditions from which they spring are identical. In fact, the overwhelming evidence is that diversity abounds. But is there a way both to affirm the diversity and yet find some unity amongst difference? Was Francois de La Rochefoucauld, the seventeenth-century French moralist, correct when he said, "There is only one kind of love, but there are a thousand different versions?"

How we answer this fundamental question affects how we understand the possibilities available for the love-and-science symbiosis. On the one hand, failure to identify some core similarity leads to a debilitating relativism in which “love” ultimately becomes an indiscriminate and meaningless word. On the other hand, failure to allow for various forms of love leads to strait-jacket exclusivism that undermines the spirit of what love is all about in the first place. While language may never fully encapsulate all that love entails, I believe that we must offer a provisional definition of love in order to avoid promoting ambiguity.

With the foregoing in mind, I suggest a definition of love meant to account for the core of each religious love and yet allow for, as La Rochefoucauld put it, “a thousand different versions.” I define “love” in this way: To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being. Love acts are influenced by previous actions and executed in the hope of attaining a high-degree good for all. In future chapters I return often to this love definition.

The heart of my definition, a definition that I believe the love words of a variety of religious traditions exemplify, is that love promotes well-being. Aristotle called well-being “*eudaimonia*”; Jesus called it “abundant life.” It has been equated with genuine happiness or excellence, and some simply call it “flourishing.” We might even say that well-being is merely a contemporary way to talk about blessedness.

As we have seen, the language of the major religions indicates that each tradition has its vision of love and way of promoting well-being—love in any (religious) language. Of course, this statement does not imply that all followers in these traditions act to promote well-being. History demonstrates that religious people—those alive today and those long since passed on—do not always love.

Furthermore, to say that all religions have a language of love does not imply that all religions promote love to the same degree. It may be that one or more religious traditions has better ways of talking and acting in love than do other religious traditions. At least many believers claim that their own religious tradition is in some way superior to other religious traditions.

My intent here is not to rank the religions as to the degree to which they promote love. Such a project would be far beyond the scope of this book and perhaps inherently impossible as an objective endeavor. Instead, my intent is to note—and then marvel at—the pervasiveness of love language in the major religions. Such a common occurrence pushes the inquisitive person to wonder, *Why?* The material we look at in the following chapters can help us to answer this question better. For now, we simply stand amazed at love, in any language.



“The way to find the most unity in the world is to see it as the expression of a single plan, and the only such plan conceivable is the love of God for the various forms of life and feeling, a sympathy flexible enough to appreciate simultaneously the joys and sorrows of all the uniform individuals inhabiting all the worlds. Thus the divine as love is the only theme adequate to the cosmic symphony.”

CHARLES HARTSHORNE¹

LOVE MAKES THE COSMOS GO 'ROUND

MADONNA, Perry Como, and the Powerpuff Girls all sing songs titled, “Love Makes the World Go 'Round.” The phrase has come to represent wishful thinking, fantasy, starry-eyed romance, and sappiness. To some, it conjures visions of Don Quixote chasing windmills.

A few theologians suggest that the phrase might tell us something essential about God's action in the world. If, as the Christian writer put it, “God is love,” and if God also creates and sustains the universe, it makes sense to derive theological meaning from “love makes the world go 'round.” But rarely have theologians developed the theme thoroughly enough for it to be taken seriously as a theological principle.

Science—at least “hard” science—appears to have no place for seeming sentimentality. Science considers facts, experiments with specimens, and tests hypotheses about the material world. Theories that entail values—and “love” is a value-laden word—supposedly find little or no place in the scientific realm. Besides, how can sentiment and wishful thinking originate or empower the universe?

Philosopher and theologian Nancey Murphy together with mathematician and physicist George F. R. Ellis may change how

we think of the phrase, “love makes the world go ‘round.” In a book they wrote together, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics*, Murphy and Ellis draw together research and hypotheses from a variety of disciplines to make a complex but convincing set of arguments about cosmology and love.

The authors begin by noting that, for some time, many physicists have professed the universe to be “fine-tuned” to enable the evolution of complex creatures like us. The laws of physics present at the Big Bang, together with the development of favorable environments during the evolution of the universe and planet, make possible the emergence and maintenance of complex life. Extremely small changes in any of the multiple cosmological conditions would apparently have eliminated the possibility of life altogether. These premises supply the basis of what is typically called the Anthropic Principle.

Of course, the question many ask when hearing that the cosmos is finely tuned is, “How did it get this way?” Unfortunately, one cannot design a scientific test to discover the ultimate causes in the creation of the universe. The scientific method is not capable of confirming theories about ultimate origins.

Many who believe that God exists have suggested that only divine action explains cosmological fine-tuning. Of course, the Anthropic Principle does not *prove* that God exists. But one might argue that a grand theory that includes a God hypothesis might incorporate fine-tuning in its attempt to offer a more adequate explanation of existence. Murphy and Ellis in fact make this kind of argument.

The novelty of the authors’ argument is their proposal that the finely tuned cosmos tells us something about how God acts. If we suppose that God set up the laws of the universe in the beginning, these laws and God’s noninterference of them might tell us something about deity. After all, God apparently works in concert

with nature, suggest the authors, never overriding or violating the very process that God created.

God acts in this way because the ultimate purpose of the universe is to make possible free moral responses to the creator. At the outset of creation, God decided to make a universe that includes freedom, and God voluntarily withholds divine power out of respect for that divinely bestowed liberty. The pair of authors sum up their argument by saying, “The fine-tuning of the cosmos can be taken up into a theology that sees God’s noncoercive respect for the freedom and integrity of creatures go all the way back to the initial design of an anthropic (intelligence- and freedom-producing) universe.”²

God’s cosmological acts—especially God’s refusal to override creaturely freedom—also tell us something important about the divine nature, say Murphy and Ellis. They tell us that God is love. God voluntarily became self-limited and continually renounces self-interest for the sake of the other, even when this self-renunciation causes God pain.

The evolution of life reveals that God’s loving creation of free beings can only be achieved through a slow, indirect, and painful route. The whole process of creation reflects “noncoercive, persuasive, painstaking love all the way from the beginning to the end,” suggest the authors, “from the least of God’s creatures to the most splendid.”³

Murphy and Ellis draw upon a Greek word found in Christian Scriptures to describe the self-renunciating love that God expresses when creating. The word is *kenosis* and it derives from a letter to a group of Christians in ancient Phillipi (Phil. 2:7). Biblical scholars typically translate *kenosis* as “self-emptying” or “self-offering.”

Kenosis as a descriptor of divine action also enjoys support among other scholars who consider issues in the love-and-science

symbiosis. John Polkinghorne edits and contributes to a collection of science-and-religion essays that employs the word in its title: *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*. Most of the book's contributors adopt *kenosis* to convey their belief that the Creator is voluntarily self-limited out of loving respect for creaturely freedom.

In his own essay, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," Polkinghorne agrees with Murphy and Ellis that divine self-limitation helps solve the age-old problem of evil. The amount of suffering in and from the world goes beyond any conceivable need. God does not cause excessive suffering. Evil occurs because creation has been allowed to make itself, and God refuses to override creaturely freedom. According to Polkinghorne, God can no longer be held totally and directly responsible for all that happens. The concept of God's perfect benevolence remains intact, because *kenosis* puts the onus for evil on free creatures.⁴

The foregoing leads to an important question: Does *kenosis*—as God's creative, self-giving love—allow us to claim coherently that love makes the cosmos go 'round? I think *kenosis* does, although two important modifications—one in cosmology and one in theology—need to be made to *kenosis* as Murphy, Ellis, and Polkinghorne conceive of it.

The modifications that the *kenosis* theory needs become evident when we look closely at the problem of evil. In its most robust form, this age-old conundrum does not ask why a loving God causes evil, but rather why a loving God would not *prevent* evil. To blame free creatures for causing evil does not entirely solve the problem. One must also posit a reason that God would not sporadically prevent creatures from inflicting evil upon innocent victims.

Kenosis, as described by Murphy, Ellis, and Polkinghorne, does not answer well why a loving God does not occasionally constrain free creatures intent on inflicting evil upon "the least of these."

The self-limiting God that they espouse is still ultimately culpable for failing to prevent evil.

Of course, one might claim that constraining or overriding another's freedom is never a loving action, but this claim flies in the face of our everyday judgments. For instance, our prison system functions, at least in part, as a way to constrain the freedom of criminals so that they do not commit additional crimes. We might see this constraint of freedom as an act of love toward society at large.

Or consider what is commonly believed to be good parenting. Good parents occasionally intervene to pull children out of harm's way. We would not consider a parent loving if she failed to prevent the death of her child, say, when the child freely rides a bicycle onto a busy street. We would not consider her loving if she defended herself by saying, "I just wanted to allow my child to express his freedom." In short, we all know that obstructing freedom—if we are able—is periodically the most loving thing to do.

The big question is: Why doesn't God occasionally override creaturely freedom to express love? To say it another way, why doesn't the self-limited God become un-self-limited, in the name of love, and act on behalf of tortured and abused sufferers? We must wrestle with these questions if we are to offer a satisfactory solution to the problem of evil.

Some people claim that God *does* occasionally shirk self-limitation to prevent evil, but they must contend with innumerable cases in which God apparently chooses not to prevent evil. The *kenosis* supporters rightfully argue that the amount of suffering in and from the world goes beyond any conceivable need. Pointless suffering is genuinely evil, and there is way too much of it.

This discussion leads me to suggest the first modification of *kenosis* for the love-and-science symbiosis. *Kenosis* advocates should affirm that noncoercion is an *essential* feature of how God lovingly

relates to creation; relating to creatures is necessary to what being God means. Instead of *kenosis* as God's entirely voluntary self-limitation, we should consider *kenosis* an essential attribute of deity. Self-giving love is part of God's very nature, not an arbitrary divine choice.

To say that God essentially relates to creatures in love provides a basis for affirming that God *necessarily* grants freedom to God's creation. The necessary provision of freedom is part of God's self-giving love. Our omnipresent God relates lovingly to all creatures by inevitably granting freedom to each one capable of so acting. As God provides freedom to each agent, each agent responds to the resulting choices.

The key to this theological modification is the claim that God necessarily provides freedom to all individuals as God essentially relates to the world. To suggest that God could fail to provide freedom to creatures makes no sense. In other words, God's essential love relations with the cosmos entails that God cannot fail to offer, withdraw, or override the power for freedom that creatures require in their moment-by-moment life decisions.⁵

This theological modification gets God off the problem-of-evil hook. In this altered *kenosis* theory, God cannot be held culpable for failing to prevent genuine evils. God cannot be culpable, because God essentially and lovingly relates to all creatures by providing them with power for free choice. God could no more choose to cease providing freedom to others than to choose to cease existing. The genuine evil of the world results from debilitating choices that free creatures make.

The second modification of the *kenosis* model is cosmological. Rather than suggest that God decided at the Big Bang to create a world in which freedom is possible, the *kenosis* model I suggest assumes that the metaphysical conditions for freedom were present prior to the God-initiated Big Bang. God's fine-tuning of this

universe did not occur through a coercive act to create something from absolutely nothing. Instead, God created our universe out of matter in chaos.⁶

Paul Steinhardt of Princeton University and Neil Turok of Cambridge University are physicists who formulate this cosmological modification well in their recent work. Their cosmological proposal is based upon the ancient idea that space and time have always existed in some form. Using developments in superstring theory, Steinhardt and Turok suggest that the Big Bang of our universe is a bridge to a preexisting universe. Creation undergoes an eternal succession of universes, with possibly trillions of years of evolution in each. Gravity and the transition from Big Crunch to Big Bang characterize an everlasting succession of universes.⁷

The Steinhardt/Turok cosmology recoups all of the Big Bang/inflationary theory's successful predictions, and addresses several questions left unresolved by the idea that time and space had an absolute beginning. For instance, it avoids the problem that arises in the claim that something can come from nothing. It also solves the arrow of time question by affirming what we all presuppose in our actions: that time always moves in one direction. The Steinhardt/Turok cosmology solves the fatalistic implications of Friedrich Nietzsche's cyclical "eternal recurrence of the same" by suggesting that new matter continually emerges. What goes around doesn't come back around.

Theologians here and there during the last several millennia have affirmed the basic idea that space and time have no beginning or end. In the mainstream Christian tradition, however, the idea has been rejected in favor of God's creation of space and time from absolute nothingness.⁸ Theologians employ the Latin phrase *creatio ex nihilo*, which literally means "creation from nothing," to describe creation by divine fiat.

The advantage that the Steinhardt/Turok cosmology offers to my proposed alternative theory of *kenosis* is that this cosmology allows one to suppose that God has always been lovingly related to and creating others. If there has always been some order of time and space, an everlasting God would always create it, love it, and grant freedom to creatures in it.

Adopting the Steinhardt/Turok cosmology while rejecting *creatio ex nihilo* also permits one to discard the idea that God has ever coerced or unilaterally determined others. The creation of this universe did not entail divine coercion. The Big Bang suggests that God's creative energy would have been extremely influential at the origin of our universe. But divine influence, even in the Big Bang, would not have been strictly coercive.

Most importantly, the God not capable of coercion cannot be held culpable for failing to prevent genuine evil. It makes no sense to claim that "God is love" if a God capable of coercion has the power to prevent genuine evils and yet fails to do so. But this formulation of *kenosis*, as God's incessant bestowal of freedom to others, exonerates God from the charge of not deterring evil, which therefore supports the widespread intuition that God loves perfectly.

In short, *kenosis*, with the theological and cosmological modifications I have suggested, allows one to state cogently that love makes the cosmos go 'round. That's a whole lot more than just wishful thinking.



“Our brains link with those of the people close to us, in a silent rhythm that makes up the very life force of the body. These wordless and powerful ties determine our moods, stabilize and maintain our health and well-being, and change the structure of our brains. In consequence, who we are and who we become depend, in great part, on whom we love.”

THOMAS LEWIS, FARI AMINI, AND RICHARD LANNON¹

LOVE ON THE (TRIUNE) BRAIN

WHERE DOES LOVE ORIGINATE? Does it originate from the stomach or bowels, as many in antiquity believed? Are the poets correct that love derives from the heart? Or does it spring, as some in Hollywood have seemed to suggest, from the loins?

A growing number of voices in contemporary science suggest that the brain serves as love's origin—or at least as its crucial sculptor. Neurology, perhaps more than any other scientific discipline, confirms that biology strongly influences our capacity to love. Love is a mind activity.

Perhaps a quick “Brain IOI” might help. The human brain occupies the majority of the human skull, and it consists of various regions and subregions of cell collections. In the last century, various neuroscientific techniques have demonstrated that each sub-region guides a person's mental and physical activities.

Each brain cell that guides activity contains a neuron, and each neuron interacts with tens of thousands, perhaps millions, of other neurons. Billions of small gaps called synapses exist between neurons and between branched neural clusters that extend throughout the brain. The electrochemical firing of tiny neurotransmitters traverses these synapses. Because of rapid neural

interaction, our brains operate in ways we may never fully grasp.

Every thing from drinking coffee to calisthenics, from enjoying Mozart to memory recall, from depression to doodling on paper can stimulate brain interactions. An enormous array of objects outside the skull incites brain activity. In turn, neural activity profoundly shapes a person's response to these stimulants. Interaction and interrelationship characterize what occurs both within the brain and between the brain and its outside world. To sum up Brain 101, we might say that the give-and-take of information is the *modus operandi* of the brain's active constituents.²

Paul MacLean, research scientist at the National Institute for Mental Health and author of *The Triune Brain in Evolution*, has successfully argued that the human brain evolved slowly into three distinct but interrelated regions. The encephalic hypothesis about love's origin takes a distinct form when supported by evolutionary theory.

MacLean calls the first evolved region of the triune brain the "reptilian brain" (a.k.a. "R-complex"). This region extends from and coils around the top of the spinal cord. Its primary activities include the regulation of breathing, swallowing, heartbeats, and most other involuntary life functions.³

This reptilian brain region often continues to function in comatose persons, enabling them to maintain breath and a heartbeat even after "brain death." What we know as human love would not be possible without the reptilian region, but the reptilian region of the triune brain is important for love mainly because it keeps us alive.

The second region of the brain to evolve—the limbic (a.k.a. "mammalian" or "emotional") region—plays a powerfully formative role for love. This neural region is common to most mammals, and it drapes atop the reptilian.

The limbic area supports basic social activities, including vocal

communication, care for offspring, and playful activity. The region also supports our most basic feelings of empathy and care. While organisms possessing only a reptilian brain are to some degree social, the limbic region supports complex social activities and the highly developed love that can emerge thereby.

In their enchanting book *A General Theory of Love*, psychiatrists Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon emphasize the limbic region's importance for love. "The evolution of the limbic brain a hundred million years ago," suggest these authors, "created animals with luminescent powers of emotionality and relatedness."⁴

Humans and other mammals seek one another through resonance within this limbic region, these authors report, and mammalian physiologic rhythms follow the call of limbic regulation. In addition, limbic regulation between creatures—especially between parent and child—directs neurodevelopment, which means that social contact physiologically shapes and changes our constantly developing brains.

The importance of limbic development is well-illustrated in research upon rhesus monkeys deprived of limbic regulation. Rhesus monkeys raised in isolation cannot conform to emotional rules. The loss of neural organization in these socially stunted primates leads them to act capriciously, erratically, and viciously. The infant monkey's attachment to its caregiver is a prerequisite for normal development of the infant brain's neurotransmitter systems.

Because of this diverse research on primate brains, the authors of *A General Theory of Love* conclude that "limbic resonance, regulation, and revision define our emotional existence; they are the walls and towers of the neural edifice that evolution has built for mammals to live in"; "because we change one another's brains through limbic revision, what we do inside relationships matters more than any other aspect of human life."⁵ Love, at least in the

complex social forms that we know it, requires a limbic system developed by social relationships.

The third, more recently evolved, region of the human triune brain is the largest. This region—the neocortex (a.k.a. “neomammalian” or “rational” brain)—plays the greatest role in supporting conscious awareness, speech, complex reasoning, abstract thinking, sensory evaluation, and conscious volition. Research suggests that the neocortex supports the complex communication of our day-to-day existence, including my typing this chapter and your reading of it.

While comprehension requires all regions of the triune brain to function together, the neocortex provides the grounds for our conscious awareness of feelings—including feelings of love. While all the entities that compose our brains and other bodily members are interrelational, the neocortex allows conscious reflection upon this interrelatedness. The existence of a neocortex in animals like household pets, marine mammals, and primates provides justification for attributing love to such nonhuman mammals.

The life and injury of Phineas Gage has often served as “exhibit A” in neuropsychology’s case for how the neocortex influences human love. Malcolm Macmillan’s award-winning book, *An Odd Kind of Fame: Stories of Phineas Gage*, provides the most in-depth exploration available into factual and mythical aspects of the Gage case. The book also clarifies why this historical narrative appears in more than half of all psychology and neuroscience textbooks.⁶

As Macmillan tells the story, Gage was working for the Rutland and Burlington Railroad in September 1848. As foreman of a construction crew preparing the ground for tracks, Gage placed explosives in rocks needing removal. On September 13, he unintentionally ignited an explosion. The blast blew a three-and-a-half-foot iron rod up under his left cheekbone, behind his eye socket, and out the top of his head.

Explosions were not rare in mid-nineteenth-century America. But what happened to Gage was rare indeed. Despite having a cylinder of empty space in his head and despite having lost the left side of his frontal neocortical lobe, Gage was treated in a hospital and discharged within ten weeks of the accident. Within a year, he was ready to resume work.

Gage's speedy recover did not make him neuropsychology's prime exhibit for the importance of the neocortex. Rather, the even more remarkable change in his personality assured his place in neuropsychology annals. Gage went from being the crew's most reliable, efficient, and well-balanced member to an irrevocable and unsympathetic scoundrel. While previously shrewd and confident about future actions, the post-accident Gage was capricious, indecisive, and seemingly unable to plan for the morrow. "Gage was no longer Gage," his crewmates famously remarked.⁷

One might offer a number of reasons for Phineas Gage's radical change. Perhaps the event's trauma led him to conclude that life as an upstanding and future-oriented human is not so rewarding after all. Perhaps his changed social status—from being a respectable leader to a hole-in-the-head freak—impelled him to adopt a different disposition. Perhaps wondering why a loving God could permit such a tragedy led him to a godless lifestyle. No one really knows.

The dominant hypothesis in neuroscience, however, is that Gage's character changed because of neocortex damage. Recent work by Antonio and Hanna Damasio, professors of neurology at the University of Iowa, further supports this hypothesis. The Damasios document a number of contemporary cases in which the neocortical neurons necessary for empathy have been destroyed or have become dysfunctional from brain damage.

The Damasios studied thirteen adult patients who experienced damage to their prefrontal cortices. The wife of one patient

reports what was commonly said about other patients. She testified that prior to her husband's brain damage, he was caring and affectionate. After the brain lesion, however, he reacted with indifference when she became upset or distressed. Her husband lacked empathy despite the fact that his verbal and performance IQ scores ranked in the high 90th percentiles.

The Damasio find that adults with damage to their neocortical frontal lobes can learn factual knowledge. Patients can even ascertain factual knowledge about social and emotion-related behavior. But adults with damaged frontal lobes cannot employ social and emotional facts to respond sympathetically.

Another study by the Damasio and their colleagues analyzed two individuals in their early twenties who had suffered prefrontal neocortex damage before age two. Although both subjects were academically capable, early in life both showed signs of deficient behavior control and poor peer interaction. Both lacked friends and maintained limited social interactions. In addition, neither demonstrated a sense of guilt or remorse for actions that would seem obviously immoral to others.

As with the results of research on adults with neocortex lesions, research on those who sustained brain damage early in life shows that they cannot maintain social behaviors critical to interpersonal relationships. "After damage to this system," notes Hanna Damasio, "empathy, as well as emotions such as embarrassment, guilt, pride, and altruism, is not evoked, and personal and social decisions become defective." "Without the prefrontal cortex," she concludes, "empathy, along with other adaptive social behaviors, becomes impaired."⁸

The evidence from neuroscience strongly suggests that our physiology, especially that of the brain, shapes the nature and extent of our love. The brain itself is an intra- and interrelational structure, and social interactions shape its very makeup. Because

mammals need relatedness for their neurophysiology to coalesce correctly, argue Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, most of what makes a socially functional human comes from connection, the shaping physiologic force of love.

To say that the brain shapes the nature and extent of our love is not the same, however, as saying that love originates in the brain. Neuroscientific evidence does not suggest that one can locate love's origin in one set of neurons or one subregion of the brain. Love is not neuron-specific.

While loving action apparently requires a well-functioning triune brain, our love intentions rely upon and are influenced by a wide array of influences within and beyond our heads. Experience suggests that the causation of love is multilateral. Interrelatedness within and between the three brain regions, and between the brain and other bodily members, makes pinpointing a unilateral cause implausible.

But can the sum of all creaturely causes—within the triune brain, between the brain and body, between the person and his or her community, between complex creatures and the rest of the natural world—account for the origin of love? The majority of the world's religions answer this question in the negative. After science brings all it has to the table, an adequate explanation of love requires a supporting deity hypothesis. In a variety of ways, these religious traditions insist that a holy force or divine person instigates love.

Research in neuroscience, however, reveals deficiencies in some love explanations that theologians of yesteryear have given. A prime example might be the love hypotheses of Anders Nygren, the twentieth century's most influential Christian theologian of love.

Nygren's *Agape and Eros* initiated the present-day interest in agape as a significant love category. Contemporary ethicist Gene

Outka suggests that Nygren's writings "so effectively posed issues about love that they have had a prominence in theology and ethics they never had before." Outka concludes that, "whatever the reader may think of it, one may justifiably regard [Nygren's] work as the beginning of the modern treatment of the subject."⁹

Over the decades, scholars have criticized the particular meanings that Nygren gave agape. Nygren argued that his definition of agape—as unmotivated, spontaneous, disinterested, wholly divine love—coincided with the way Christian Scripture employs agape. Numerous theologians and biblical scholars, however, have demonstrated the inadequacies of this argument. Even so, the practice of adopting agape as a distinctive love word continues. A number of scholars working in today's love-and-science symbiosis follow this practice.

Many of Nygren's agape hypotheses appear at odds with neuroscience. The concluding segment of *Agape and Eros* especially reveals this incongruity. There, Nygren champions his interpretation of Martin Luther's love theology. Nygren believes himself to be following Luther by referring to the Christian as a "channel" for God's downpouring love. "Divine love employs man as its instrument and organ," suggests Nygren.

We see clearly Nygren's view of humans as channels for love when he compares Christians to cylinders. "In relation to God and his neighbor, the Christian can be likened to a tube. . . . All that a Christian possesses he has received from God, from the Divine love; and all that he possesses he passes on in love to his neighbor. He has nothing of his own to give. He is merely the tube, the channel, through which God's love flows."¹⁰

The tube analogy supports Nygren's contention that creatures make no contribution whatsoever to the genuine love that God expresses through them. Such a denial is important for Nygren and Luther, because both consider humans thoroughly corrupted

and incapable of acting in love. In fact, Nygren believes that God's agape for the world must be unmotivated and indifferent to its object's value, because nothing about sinful creation could motivate, or be considered valuable to, God.

Nygren's line of argument presumes that our genuine love for others, what he calls agape, must be untainted by any thing human. But unless we want to make the demoralizing claim that we never love genuinely, this doctrine opposes what neuroscience tells us. The neurological evidence suggests that our physiological structures play a huge role in shaping, conditioning, and fashioning genuine love. Nygren's agape hypothesis does not jibe with neuroscience.

Just because Nygren's hypotheses are not in accord with neurology, of course, does not mean that religion is fundamentally at odds with science. Other religious love hypotheses may be much better suited to fruitful science-and-religion dialogue.

A theological doctrine based upon the notion that God inspires us to love and that we act synergistically with God when loving, for instance, seems consonant with neuroscientific evidence. If God "sweetly woos," as the eighteenth-century theologian John Wesley put it, or *per suades* and lures, as contemporary process theologians put it, the possibility that God initiates love and that creatures contribute responsively seems more plausible. In these cases, love involves multilateral causation.

My own definition of love adopts the multilateral approach. Recall that I define love as acting intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (which includes God), to promote overall well-being. Among other things, I intend with this definition to account for both the inspiration of deity and the conditioning and constraints of neural activity. Our sympathetic response is our reaction to the conditions, constraints, and inspirations of entities and individuals within and beyond our skulls.

Evidence from research on the triune brain reminds us that a person's neurophysiological capacities largely shape the character and capacity of one's sympathetic love response. And, of course, other nondivine and nonneural factors likely also limit the range of possible ways a person expresses love. All of this influence does not mean that the brain is hardwired. Elasticity, including the adaptation inherent in limited freedom, is also part of the process of expressing love.

Neurology contributes to the love-and-science symbiosis in crucial ways. While neurologists may never convincingly argue that the triune brain is the ultimate origin of love, its evidence plays a vital role in understanding love's limits and possibilities. To say that we have "love in mind" might be both figuratively and literally true.



“On the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength, not to escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself but to assert herself—on that day love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not of mortal danger.”

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR¹

THE ALTRUISM OF TERRORISM, THE EGOISM OF WAR

EVEN TODAY I feel conflicted emotions when I think back to the early months of 2003. The George W. Bush administration was threatening war against Saddam Hussein and Iraq. Bush and Great Britain's prime minister, Tony Blair, offered evidence suggesting that Hussein was preparing weapons of mass destruction. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell presented data to the United Nations suggesting that the threat from Iraq was imminent. All three indicated that Hussein had connections—even if not direct—with the international terrorist group, Al-Qaeda.

I wasn't the only one in angst during those days. Our basic problem was uncertainty. What should we think and do about the potential U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the U.N. Security Council, Bush, Hussein, Blair, Al-Qaeda, the give-and-take of diplomacy, the fear of some Muslims that the United States was initiating a new Crusades, the innocent peoples of Iraq, terrorism of all sorts, the innocent victims of 9/11, arms inspections, or the French-led opposition to war?

We had other, related concerns to deal with as well. What should be done about the nuclear crisis in North Korea, the con-

tinuing conflict within and reconstruction of Afghanistan, nuclear bombs, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the argument that oil drives all of these clashes, and the pain and suffering that always characterizes war?

The question of how to love in the face of war had my stomach churning in early 2003. I found myself fretting over these questions almost by the hour. What should a lover do? In the midst of war and rumors of more war, how does one express love?

As I wrestled with how best to respond to the dizzying scenarios and foreboding possibilities, I began to consider pacifism an appealing option. After all, many lovers have adopted pacifism as their way of expressing love in response to war. Nonviolence is the pacifist watchword and song. The response to violent action cannot be retaliation with violence, contend these lovers. Violent responses to violent action only lead to further violence. Pacifists preach our mothers' oft-quoted line: "Two wrongs don't make a right."

In the face of conflict, pacifism has sometimes been effective in securing peace. Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent life served as a major factor in ending British colonialism in India and instigating Indian social and political reform. While Gandhi could not entirely control all of the competing forces at play, his commitment to nonviolence undoubtedly helped prevent widespread brutality.

Gandhi recognized that humans cannot calculate fully which actions will bring about a better world and which will not. For this reason, he argued that we ought to rest satisfied with acting nonviolently, and to "fearlessly leave the end to take care of itself." He, like most pacifists, admitted that violence can bring temporary peace. But he believed that such peace cannot justify violent means. In the long run, he argued, violence only yields further violence.²

One of America's most influential Christian theologians at that

time was also a deeply committed pacifist. Duke University theologian Stanley Hauerwas believed that the Christian witness demands nonviolence. In an interview with *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, Hauerwas spelled out his reasoning succinctly: “I believe that I need to be nonviolent because that’s what God was on the cross. That is the ultimate display of how God deals with evil—namely, God dies on the cross to forever undermine the powers of evil.”³ While I could not agree with his theology entirely, his pacifist position had some appeal.

In one sense, the pacifist option is the easiest. It bypasses the calculations that other options require. When asked the question, Should country X wage war on country Y? the pacifist response is automatic: No! While calculating *how* to resist nonviolently remains necessary, gauging when violence is and is not appropriate becomes unnecessary.

In the end, however, I could not then and cannot now adopt the pacifist position. While I respect those who choose this route and I find many aspects of pacifism appealing, I cannot align myself with full-scale pacifism.

Why? Perhaps I can explain my reasons. To begin, I doubt I could live nonviolently even if I made promises that I would. While I may turn the other cheek when personally assaulted, I know that I would use violence to defend “the least of these,” and I would feel quite justified in that use of violence. I believe that protecting others is often an expression of love.

If my young daughters were to become the victims of a random assault, for instance, I would feel warranted in using a variety of violent actions to rescue them. In fact, I would consider myself a poor father if I were to refrain from using some form of violence for their sake. My sense of acting—violently, if need be—on behalf of innocent victims is too strong. I cannot be a full-blown pacifist.

Charles Hartshorne, an eminent twentieth-century philosopher, once wrote: “faith in love is not belief in a special kind of magic whereby refusal to use violence against violence automatically results in the least harm, still less in appeasing the violent.”⁴ I think he’s right.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is the model for Christians who value nonviolence but ultimately reject absolute pacifism. Although the pacifist position attracted Bonhoeffer and he even wanted to visit Gandhi, he felt impelled to participate in a plot to kill Adolf Hitler. As he put it, he had to “cut off the head of the snake.” Bonhoeffer never explained in detail his decision to use violence, but his action seems to many the most loving thing he could have done given the options. He eventually died in a Nazi concentration camp for his part in the attempted assassination.⁵

Some have claimed that religion requires pacifism. But I know of no “proof” in sacred writings that pacifism is always the proper religious response. In fact, as far as I know no major religion offers crystal-clear commands for lovers about whether violence is always forbidden. Most religions encourage reconciling conflict, when possible, in nonviolent ways. Of course, various religious traditions have movements within them that have embraced total nonviolence. But the world religions and their followers do not speak with one voice on the complex matters of nonviolence, pacifism, and war.

What about science? Does science provide lovers with a blueprint for how to act in the face of war? Does science declare pacifism our ethical imperative?

In the past twenty years or so, sociobiology has been the dominant playing field for questions of this type. Sociobiology pertains, as E. O. Wilson explains, to “the biological basis of all social behavior.” Most scholars today point to Wilson and Richard Dawkins as the provocateurs of the contemporary discussion

about sociobiology's moral element. Because war is a species of social behavior and because it has moral dimensions, perhaps sociobiology might help us as we struggle with how to love in the face of war.

Dawkins and Wilson accept as empirically justified the claim that organisms must act selfishly if they are to survive, thrive, and be reproductively successful. Selfishness allegedly drives the engine of evolution. Self-interested organisms have the best genetic structures—or, as Dawkins infamously puts it, “selfish genes”—required to live and dispatch their genes to future generations.⁶

The claim that all creatures—humans included—are inevitably and inherently selfish provides a scientific rationale for war. After all, if we are all naturally interested in our own gain, we should expect conflict at least sometimes with others who are interested in their own benefit. When egoists compete in a dog-eat-dog world, it stands to reason that what emerges is “nature, red in tooth and claw.”

In apparent opposition to the selfish gene thesis, scientists from Aristotle through Darwin to the present have observed altruistic behavior both in humans and nonhumans. Almost all species sometimes act in ways that undermine their personal and reproductive interests. In recent decades, sociobiologists have proposed various theories to account for this altruistic action.

Many of the recently proposed theories assume that whenever organisms act altruistically, selfishness actually motivates them and allows them to be evolutionarily successful. For instance, the tit-for-tat or reciprocal altruism explanation suggests that an organism acts self-sacrificially only when expecting a beneficial response. Kin-selection altruism suggests that organisms only act self-sacrificially to propagate their genetic lineage. To put it differently, the selfish inclination to ensure the proliferation of one's

genes motivates altruistic action toward those whose genes are most like the altruist's.⁷

Within the recent sociobiology and evolutionary morality discussion—especially as played out in the science-and-religion dialogue—group-selection theory has emerged as a plausible alternative theory of evolution. In their influential book, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*, Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson propose an alternative explanation for altruism based upon the theory of group selection.

This alternative theory suggests that altruists can thrive as a group when in competition with other groups composed of selfish individuals. “To be sufficient,” argue Sober and Wilson, “the differential fitness of groups (the force favoring the altruist) must be strong enough to counter the differential fitness of individuals within groups (the force favoring the selfish types).”⁸ Group-selection theory, then, provides evolutionary justification for the emergence and continuance of altruism. In fact, in a subsequent book, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society*, Wilson extends the group-selection argument even to account for the emergence of religion.⁹

Sober and Wilson do not pretend, however, that the group-selection theory explains all possible forms of altruism. In fact, group-selection theory suggests that “niceness” can predominate within a group while “nastiness” prevails between groups. After all, as a group the altruists compete with groups of egoists for resources. Accordingly, altruism toward those outside one's group remains unexplained by group-selection theory. Those altruists who act for the interest of those outside their own group are aberrations.

And, ironically, the group-selection theory of evolution has the counterintuitive result of regarding terrorists as altruistic. When individuals come together and pledge themselves to act self-sacrificially for others in the group—even to the point of death—we

find an example of Sober and Wilson's group-selection thesis. Because terrorists typically see their own group in competition with other groups, they act altruistically toward one another to further their group's cause. In this sense, suicidal terrorists are quintessential altruists.

Of course, to describe terrorists as altruists does not necessarily mean that terrorists express love; at least terrorists do not express love as I define it. Terrorists do not act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others, to attain *overall* well-being. Their interests are typically restricted to the concerns of a small cadre. In short, although terrorists may act self-sacrificially, their goal is not to promote the common good.

Perhaps recognizing that terrorists are altruists can provoke those in the love-and-science symbiosis to realize that establishing a biological basis for altruism does not, in itself, produce a sufficient explanation of love. Love increases overall well-being, and altruistic acts may or may not promote well-being for the whole. When defined as acting self-sacrificially for the sake of those near and dear or for one's own group, altruism is not synonymous with love.

While the war waged by terrorists may be motivated by altruism for one's circle of associates, war can also be the quintessential act of egoists. Seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes champions the idea that war is egoistic, and his philosophy of life is similar to the one advanced by selfish gene theorists.

Hobbes believes that humans naturally act selfishly, and selfishness typically leads to conflict. According to him, war occurs for three reasons:

1. Competition for limited resources
2. Distrust that other selfish people will take one's own resources
3. Personal pride

War, then, is a natural expression of human nature.

People are wise to join together in a social contract, argues Hobbes, so that they may defend their self-interest against the interests of others. Doing so, however, means giving up personal rights so that a sovereign authority might act on their behalf. Although this sovereign person or governing body may be selfish and even ruthless, it is better to find safety in its protection than to act independently in competition with other egoists who have also formed groups.¹⁰ It's a dog-eat-dog world out there, and we're better off leashed together and subject to a master's hand.

Not long after the invasion of Iraq began in 2003, historian Martin Marty wrote a devastating critique of George W. Bush. Marty suggested that Hobbes's third reason that war occurs—pride—was the basis for Bush's decision to go to war. In his *Newsweek* article titled, "The Sin of Pride," Marty wondered if the president acted egoistically in self-assured arrogance. It appeared that Bush believed he knew best how to handle Saddam Hussein's noncompliance. In the attempt to be viewed as a self-confident leader, Marty claimed, the president's pride made it difficult for him to admit error.¹¹

A "no compromise," "my way or the highway" position can be an expression of selfish *hubris*. If Marty is correct about Bush, the president's egoism was one cause of the war in Iraq. Of course, egoism also likely drove Hussein's apparent reluctance to disarm fully. Pride comes before a fall—perhaps in the cases of both leaders. Simply acting for one's own interest, however, does not always mean that one fails to love. Just as love may or may not be expressed in altruistic acts, egoistic acts may or may not be done with love in mind. In an interrelated universe, one's actions to secure some personal good may increase the common good. Our failure to increase our own well-being may sometimes mean a

decrease in overall well-being. Loving oneself may increase general flourishing.

Those engaged in feminist studies have been proclaiming for several decades the message that self-interest can sometimes be necessary to produce greater overall well-being. At numerous times throughout history women have failed to act upon a sense of proper self-pride. Instead, they have acted self-sacrificially to their own and other's detriment, which is not love.

Daphne Hampson states succinctly the feminist criticism of those who say that humans should give up self-interest and seek only the interest of others: "For women, the theme of self-emptying and self-abnegation is far from helpful as a paradigm."¹² Women have often felt the brunt of ideologies that fail to call for acting in appropriate egotism. In sum, sometimes love involves self-actualization at the expense of another, but for the good of the whole.¹³

So, what's a lover to do in times of uncertainty and terror? If absolute pacifism cannot suffice, what then? If neither religion nor science provides unambiguous instructions, what should be done? If egoism and altruism may or may not ultimately be loving, how should a lover act?

As one who wants to love, I am not sure what concrete steps lovers should take. I can imagine many possible actions. An instrument of peace might play an array of healing, reconciling, or corrective tunes.

I have come to one conclusion, however. I believe that love—whether in the midst of war or in a time of peace—acts intentionally for the common good. The concrete ways in which lovers act vary, of course. And what is loving in one context may not be loving in another. Securing the common good clearly involves considerable listening, empathy, and assessment, but it also involves creative planning and bold action.

Complex times call for complex responses, and we live in complex times. We should not be surprised that perhaps the most complex response of all—love—requires our very best to determine how it must be expressed.

May we *all* follow love's leading . . . today and tomorrow.



When friendships were the noblest things in the world, charity was little. Nature has made friendships and societies, relations and endearments; and by something or other we relate to all the world; there is enough in every man that is willing to make him become our friend. Friendships are, like rivers, the strand of seas, and the air, common to all the world; but tyrants, and evil customers, wars, and want of love, have made them peculiar.

JEREMY TAYLOR¹



WHY CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS?

WHEN IT COMES TO LOVES, agape and eros grab most of the attention. We think it remarkable when someone loves by turning the other cheek when unjustly injured, and we take notice when the love sparks of desire and passion fly.

But what about philia, the love between friends?

Perhaps friendship love seems too mundane. It typically gets relegated to an afterthought, if it even gets a thought at all. What role can or should philia play in the love-and-science symbiosis?

Moral theologian Edward Collins Vacek, S.J., considers philia the most important love of the three great love archetypes. According to him, philia resides at the very heart of an adequate love ethic. Unfortunately, when we think of saints, he argues, we think mostly of those who sacrifice themselves and not of those who nourish friendships. Vacek believes, however, that philia is the foundation and goal of the virtuous life.³ Genuine saints are genuine friends.

One way that philia is different from agape and eros is that philia requires sustained mutuality. Individuals who express philia act in ways to enhance the well-being of those with whom they enjoy ongoing relations. To say it another way, philia expressions

require prosocial relations. In time, the heritage of positive ongoing relations provides a strong bond of friendship. Shortcuts to deep friendship do not exist.

Developing *philia* relationships overcomes what many consider the bane of modernism: isolated individualism. Neither *agape* nor *eros* stress the communal relations inherent in flourishing societies and personal interaction. *Philia*, however, reminds us that the work to attain well-being, which is the core of love, requires a community of at least two. Perhaps the love-and-science symbiosis can contribute to the push of postmodernism by emphasizing the crucial role *philia* might play in overcoming modernity's individualistic bent.

Vacek's emphasis upon friendship love may be uncommon in popular culture and uncharacteristic of contemporary scholarship, but it is not without precedent. About twenty-four hundred years ago, Aristotle argued for the indispensability of *philia*. In fact, Aristotle has likely influenced Western thinking about friendship more than any other individual.

Aristotle believed that *philia* provides the foundation of a flourishing society. Individual and group well-being both require genuine friendship. He believed that the solidarity required of *philia*, however, comes in three forms.

First, people might become friends based upon the usefulness that such friendship affords. For instance, political leaders may consider themselves friends purely because of the benefits their relationship provides.

Second, some become friends based upon the pleasures each partner can give. The mutual pleasures that come from romance and sex might serve as a basis for this type of friendship, although *eros* also typically plays a role in these drives for pleasure.

The friendship that Aristotle thought of greatest worth, however, is the third form: friendship that exists between those of

parallel excellence. When two who are good become friends, mutual admiration and respect characterize their friendship. Their commitment can be unqualified, because this third form of friendship does not require that those involved remain useful or pleasurable. Aristotle admits, however, that such unqualified friendship is rare.

Aristotle did not limit friendship to relationships among humans; he also observed it in nonhumans. "Friendship seems to be naturally present in parent for offspring and in offspring for parent," he notes, "not only among human beings but among birds, too, and most animals." Furthermore, as this consummate empiricist observed, friendship extends beyond intra-species bonds. It is present "in members of each species towards other species." Here we find Aristotle affirming friendship as a natural phenomenon in the interactions of nonhuman creatures.³

It may be hard to imagine animals being friendly if the poet Tennyson correctly described nature as "red in tooth and claw." How can human and nonhuman friendships be sustained if, as philosopher-scientist Thomas Huxley put it, existence is struggle and only the fittest survive? Amidst global crisis and war, to say that human friendliness is natural seems especially odd.

Yet from antiquity to the present, various philosophers, scientists, and religious scholars have preached of friendship's pervasiveness. Scientists in particular have observed characteristics of friendship, such as solidarity and cooperation, among nonhumans. Charles Darwin was one such scientist. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin noted the "common mutual service in the higher animals" and claimed that the most common was "to warn one another of danger by means of the united senses of all."⁴

The twentieth-century scholar who perhaps most championed the idea of friendship among nonhumans was the Russian prince turned naturalist, Petr Kropotkin. His influential book on non-

human cooperation, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*, first appeared in 1902 and was written largely in response to Huxley's scientific philosophy of egoism.

Kropotkin argued that the cooperation of friendship is common in nonhumans, because creatures must cooperate against debilitating forces in their environments. In his day, evolutionary theories emphasizing competition had ignored this evidence of amity. But Kropotkin found that a hostile environment—for example, the harsh winters of the north—can only be survived by those who act in solidarity.

In *Mutual Aid*, he argues specifically that

while fully admitting that force, swiftness, protective colours, cunningness, and endurance to hunger and cold, which are mentioned by Darwin and Wallace, are so many qualities making the individual, or the species, the fittest under certain circumstances, we maintain that under *any* circumstances sociability is the greatest advantage in the struggle for life. Those species which willingly or unwillingly abandon it are doomed to decay; while those animals that know best how to combine, have the greatest chance of survival and further evolution.

Kropotkin concludes that he has observed in animal life “mutual aid and mutual support carried on to an extent which made me suspect in it a feature of the greatest importance for the maintenance of life, the preservation of each species and its further evolution.”⁵

In science today, biologist Alan Dugatkin's work in animal cooperation validates Kropotkin's statements. Dugatkin's *Cooperation among Animals: An Evolutionary Perspective* offers numerous examples of friendship among nonhumans. He finds that the

social activities of birds, for instance, illustrate the great degree of cooperation found in the nonhuman world. Birds regularly hunt together and provide information to one another about where food can be found. In addition, many species of birds provide warnings about predators, thereby establishing a means by which they can survive and thrive through cooperation. Many animal species both hunt cooperatively and work together to warn others as to the whereabouts of predators.

Perhaps the clearest example of friendship among animals is the mutual grooming that occurs in many species. As early as the 1930s, primatologists documented the mutual benefits that this practice affords nonhuman primates, and recent studies corroborate earlier claims that primates enjoy numerous benefits from cooperative grooming. The custom removes parasites, reduces emotional tension, fosters relational bonds, and can be a commodity to exchange for other benefits.

After surveying the research related to cooperation in fish, birds, insects, and mammals, Dugatkin concludes that, “while not ubiquitous, cooperation is certainly widespread in the animal kingdom and sooner or later we will . . . come up with a solid fundamental understanding of the evolution of cooperation.”⁶

The best examples of friendship love available to science come from the friendships among humans. The scientific disciplines of sociology, psychology, and anthropology provide rich data from which to articulate theories of *philia*. Human cooperative friendship is often much richer and more complex than nonhuman cooperation, because humans possess superior capacities for language, rationality, consciousness, and long-term planning. Social sciences support Ralph Waldo Emerson’s declaration that a friend “may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.”⁷

When asked, many people report friendship as the key to their own emotional well-being. Harold Koenig’s recent work on the

health of the elderly, *Purpose and Power in Retirement*, documents the benefits to physical and mental well-being that friendship affords.⁸ Stories in various media offer ample anecdotal confirmation of friendship's significance.

While vast amounts of evidence point to philia as enhancing well-being, we must not assume that friendship should always be equated with love. After all, sometimes friendly alliances generate ill-being. For example, assassins can form friendships to pursue evil ends. Nations can form partnerships to prevent people from gaining equal access to goods and services. Like altruism and egoism, we must ask whether friendship increases or inhibits overall well-being to determine if such friendship expresses love.

Religious philosopher Confucius helps us to comprehend that friendship should not simply be equated with love. "There are three friendships which are advantageous and three which are injurious," he explains. "Friendship with the upright, friendship with the sincere, and friendship with the man of much observation, these are advantageous." However, says Confucius, "Friendship with the man of specious airs, friendship with the insinuatingly soft, and friendship with the glib-tongued, these are injurious."⁹

What makes philia, as an expression of love, different from other love types is that it promotes overall well-being by seeking to establish deeper levels of cooperative friendship. When philia does not promote overall well-being, it should not be identified as "friendship love." Philia that promotes ill-being is perhaps better labeled an evil conspiracy or a malicious alliance.

I also believe that the issues pertaining to philia extend beyond human and nonhuman cooperation. For theists, philia is a religious matter as well, because it concerns the possibility of friendship with God. This theological concern may be a key to greater insight and research in the love-and-science symbiosis.

While Aristotle's comments about the friendship between nonhumans have enjoyed limited influence upon modern-day science, his comments on the creaturely inability to enjoy friendship with God have unfortunately impacted theology greatly throughout the centuries. It is likely because of Aristotle that scholars in the two largest monotheisms—Christianity and Islam—have not often spoken of creaturely friendship with God. In fact, many have outright rejected it as inherently impossible.

To grasp better Aristotle's influence on theology, we need to look at three more of his beliefs about *philia*. First, he argues that friendship requires that friends be relatively equal. Second, friends must also be relatively similar, or alike. And, finally, Aristotle contends that friendship requires that friends be relatively near.

Each of these friendship requirements, combined with his view of God as the Unmoved Mover, make friendship with God inconceivable to Aristotle. "It is not possible to define exactly up to what point friends can remain friends, for much can be taken away and friendship remain," argues Aristotle. "But when one party is removed to a great distance, as God is, the possibility of friendship ceases."¹⁰

Additionally, Aristotle's God, who is unmoved in the sense of being wholly unaffected by the world, cannot exercise give-and-take friendship relations with creatures. This aloof Thinker, who only thinks divine thoughts, does not possess the capacity for reciprocal relations that friendship requires. Irving Singer, an eminent philosopher of love, remarks that, "to Aristotle, the idea of mutual love between man and God would have been blasphemous."¹¹

Aristotle's influence can be seen in the thought of Anders Nygren, whose concept we have addressed in previous chapters. Creatures cannot be friends with God, says Nygren, because this notion "presupposes an equality between Divine and human love

which does not exist.”¹² The God that Nygren envisages is also immutable in all ways and not capable of the mutuality of give-and-take love.

What makes the theological denial of friendship with God strange is that the sacred documents of the aforementioned monotheisms speak of friendship with God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, which both Christians and Muslims accept as authoritative, the Psalmist says, “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them.” Furthermore, Moses and Abraham are examples of individuals whom God loved as friends. Enoch, Noah, and Adam are also counted as God’s friends. Job fondly remembers a time when “the friendship of God was upon my tent.”¹³

Within the Christian New Testament, *philia*, both the word and the concept, plays a prominent role. Early Christians shared fellowship with each other, because, as the writer John put it, their “fellowship was with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ John also writes that God loves the disciples with *philia*.¹⁵ The early Christian missionary Paul urges his readers to practice *philia* toward the Lord and says that God *philia* loves creatures.¹⁶

What theologians influenced by Aristotle seem to lack—at least in their formal theological assumptions—is what contemporary theologians typically call a “relational” view of God. Instead of God being the Unmoved Mover, a relational God is the Most Moved Mover. A Christian chorus says it warmly, “What a friend we have in Jesus . . .”

A God of love, who interacts with creatures in give-and-take relations, can express *philia*. And a friendship heritage can develop between God and creatures as they express mutual influence. Such *philia* promotes overall well-being as God seeks to establish deeper levels of cooperative friendship and creatures respond in kind. “God is the friend of the world,” suggests the-

ologist Sallie McFague, “the one committed to it, who can be trusted never to betray it, who not only likes the world but has a vision for its well-being.”¹⁷

A number of theological traditions espouse some vision of God as relational. Among those are Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, feminist, liberationist, openness, process, social Trinitarian and Wesleyan traditions. Among prominent science-and-religion scholars, Ian Barbour, Philip Clayton, John Cobb, Niels Gregersen, David Griffin, John Haught, Nancy Howell, Nancey Murphy, Arthur Peacocke, Ted Peters, John Polkinghorne, Stephen Post, Howard Van Till, Keith Ward, and others espouse some version of a relational deity.

If *philia* plays a vital role in the nonhuman interaction, if it is indispensable for human relations, and if it can even be a component in our relationship with God, perhaps *philia* is not so mundane after all. Perhaps the love-and-science symbiosis would benefit from looking at *philia* in depth.



“My ultimate intuitive clue in philosophy is that ‘God is love’ and the idea of God is definable as that of the being worthy to be loved with all one’s heart, mind, soul, and entire being . . . love in its most generalized sense is the principle of principles.”

CHARLES HARTSHORNE¹

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF LOVE

VIRTUALLY ALL PEOPLE act as if they have some idea about what love is. But very, very few take the time to construct a definition of love. The dearth of definitions is astounding, given the pride of place that love supposedly enjoys in the experiences and aspirations of so many.

Undoubtedly one reason so few have defined love is that the word is used in so many different ways. We love pizza, our country, Mom, a movie star, our “significant other,” our pets, New York, etc. We make love; love hurts; true love waits; and God is love. It can get confusing. Comedian George Carlin put it this way: “Griddle cakes, pancakes, hotcakes, flapjacks: why are there four names for grilled batter and only one word for love?” The situation is such that many philosophers today give up trying to define love and rest content in simply trying to figure out what “love” means given the context, or “language game,” in which it is used.

Also, although many people esteem love highly, very few ask what the basic fundamentals of love might be. Very little literature exists on love’s fundamental elements—at least literature that is scientifically, religiously, and philosophically informed. The dearth of love definitions goes hand in hand with the failure to reflect upon love’s basic elements. The current state undoubtedly

hinders the work of those wanting to make progress in science and religion.

While not taking the time to define love, some scholars have offered hypotheses pertaining to love as it relates to their particular field of inquiry. For instance, religious scholars in the theistic traditions often suggest hypotheses and creeds about divine action as these pertain to love. We have seen neuroscientists suggest that specific brain regions must function if creatures are able to express love. Biologists explore the social interaction of species and suggest hypotheses about the altruistic or egoistic motivations and/or impetuses behind such interaction, and a few philosophers have classified various types of love according to their motivations and/or objects.

But scholars rarely ask the bigger questions that lie beneath and conjoin investigations and hypotheses in religious, scientific, and philosophical disciplines; these questions must be asked when identifying the fundamentals of love. Such questions might encourage us to consider what general theory of love might be adequate for the love-and-science symbiosis.

The enterprise of formulating a grand hypothesis that accounts for the fundamentals of love falls under the domain classically called “metaphysics.” Participants in the science-and-religion dialogue often recognize their need for philosophy in general and metaphysics specifically as a third voice in their interdisciplinary discussion.

Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, whose thought has especially influenced contemporary science-and-religion scholars, identified the importance of a three-way discussion between science, religion, and philosophy. Whitehead professed, “You cannot shelter theology from science, or science from theology; nor can you shelter either one from metaphysics, or metaphysics from either one of them. There is no shortcut to the truth.”²

Contemporary metaphysics in the realist-empiricist tradition of Whitehead entails constructing a comprehensive proposal for how all things work. Such an enterprise seems desirable, because we all presuppose that things work in particular ways and for particular reasons. When our general ideas and experiences are critically analyzed and elaborated, explicit metaphysical thinking occurs. The endeavor to construct a persuasive metaphysics involves a rigorous attempt to proffer an all-embracing hypothesis to explain the wide diversity of life's experiences.

The love-and-science symbiosis can benefit from a well-constructed metaphysics that draws from religious and scientific experience. A well-constructed metaphysics provides explanatory, predictive, and analytic power. In this chapter, I suggest four fundamentals of love that compose components of a metaphysics potentially helpful for the love-and-science symbiosis.

Defining love well is essential to identifying what love's fundamentals might be. As we have seen in previous chapters, I define love as acting intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being. Loving acts are influenced by previous actions and executed in the hope of increasing the common good. This definition corresponds to our intuitions, experiences, and carefully considered concepts of love. It also corresponds well with what Stephen G. Post, president of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, calls "unlimited love."³

The first fundamental of love—a fundamental required for any love expression—is that individuals exist and are in relation to others. One might call this prerequisite "relational individuals." As theologian Daniel Day Williams puts it, love requires "individuality in relation."⁴ Experience tells us that love requires at least two, although individuals typically love in the presence of countless others.

The “relational” side of this love fundamental suggests that individuals—whether human or nonhuman—must be mutually influencing. The influence of one upon another entails that relations partially constitute the one being influenced. To love and be loved requires relatedness.

In my definition of love, the phrase “in sympathetic response to others” is meant to account for the relatedness that love requires. One’s intentional love always represents a response to the influence of others—whether those others are the members of one’s body, other humans, nonhumans, or the divine. Whitehead called this “a feeling of a complex of feelings.”⁵

The relational individuals fundamental does not exclude love for oneself. When we say that we love ourselves, we can mean a variety of things. We may mean that we act for the well-being of our bodily members—for example, feet, hands, heart, and lungs. We may mean that we are acting in appreciation for what we’ve done in our past interactions. Or we may mean to act intentionally to promote our future well-being—the self we will be. All of these actions to love oneself involve relations with those who have come before.

The idea that we love ourselves when we act to promote our own future well-being is important for understanding what is best meant by a self, for the self is not strictly identical through time; rather our personal identity comprises a serially ordered succession of self-events. Charles Hartshorne identifies why understanding the self in this way is crucial for comprehending love: “We can love the other *as ourselves* because even the self as future is also another. . . . On this ground alone I would not give up the event doctrine without the most rigorous proofs of its erroneousness.”⁶

Attaining overall well-being often, but not always, includes attaining well-being for oneself. The act to secure the common

good often results in the lover enjoying the benefits secured for all. Jesus of Nazareth expressed this concept when he urged his listeners, “give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”⁷ Love need not always be self-sacrificial.

Sometimes, however, lovers love at their own personal expense. The author of I John in the Christian Scriptures puts it this way: “We know love by this, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”⁸ Various religious traditions appreciate and encourage this altruistic love. What these religions share in common is the belief that sometimes creatures must sacrifice their own well-being for the good of the whole. Because of the cost to a lover’s own well-being, altruistic love is highly admirable.

The second fundamental of love included in a metaphysics suitable for the love-and-science symbiosis is that a degree of power be present in individuals. We might call this fundamental “power for agency and freedom.” To love is to act, and power is necessary for any action. The role of power is present in the phrase of my love definition that pertains to intentional action.

Just as it seems self-evident that love requires individuals to exist in relation, it also seems self-evident that love requires power. A common belief of many in the sciences is that any actual being requires energy in order to be. Some philosophical traditions have labeled this energy “creativity” to identify the underlying power manifest in the sheer ongoingness of space-time. Contemporary Eastern philosophers have portrayed this sense of sheer power as pure energy. Philosopher of nature Henri Bergson calls creativity “reality itself.”⁹ Creativity is not an actual object. Rather, it is the power of causation expressed in *all* actual objects.

Power also provides the basis for talking about the freedom

inherent in love. Many in the science-and-religion dialogue develop the commonsense intuition that love is meaningless if individuals are not free. The common belief that love cannot be coerced indicates the necessary role of an individual's free agency.

One need not believe that free agency involves total spontaneity or completely unhindered choice, however. The power for love arises within concrete circumstances, and these circumstances entail real limitations. Williams says it well: "Freedom is never absent from love, neither is it ever unconditional freedom."¹⁰ But because love requires free agency, and power makes agency possible, love requires power for agency.

The claim that love requires intentional action and therefore freedom leads to important questions about creaturely mentality, consciousness, and self-determination. Some in the science-and-religion dialogue speculate that the evolutionary process led to the emergence of mentality, consciousness, and freedom in only the more complex species. Others speculate that all existing species—from the largest and most complex to the smallest and simple—have some degree of mentality and self-determination. This second hypothesis suggests that consciousness is the only wholly emergent phenomenon of the three. Further scientific research may provide evidence to sway the majority of scholars to adopt one explanatory hypothesis over the other.¹¹

A third fundamental of love has to do with multiple values. One might call this fundamental "valued possibilities." Love requires that existence possesses genuine value, and an actor chooses from a set of genuine value-laden possibilities when choosing to whether to love.

Values pertain to that which we appraise as morally better or worse, more or less beautiful, more or less truthful, and so on. To love is to actualize a possibility, within the range of what is possible in a given context, that secures a degree of overall well-being

greater than would have been secured had another possibility been actualized. When an individual chooses a preeminent possibility presented in a given situation, that individual loves.

The social sciences—anthropology, psychology, sociology, and so on—have often been more cognizant than the natural sciences of the fundamental role that values play for love. While scientists in both general domains operate from their own personal values, those in the social sciences more readily identify the role of value in their subjects, because these values are more evident in complex subjects, like primates, that they investigate. For instance, the very title of the recent work in “positive psychology” points to the importance of values in this recent investigative endeavor.¹²

The work of two individuals—one dead, one living—is helpful for understanding valued possibilities as a metaphysical fundamental of love. Pitirim Sorokin, whose mid-twentieth-century work *The Ways and Power of Love* is extremely important for the contemporary science-and-love symbiosis, stressed the significance of value. Sorokin defined value as “the quality of being of use, being desired, being looked upon as good,” and he argued that love requires that value be a constitutive aspect of existence.¹³ Social scientist Frank Richard Cowell suggests that Sorokin’s contribution to sociology in general and the topic of love in particular allows us to develop “a viable, philosophically established theory of value.”¹⁴

The other scholar whose recent three-volume work establishes the metaphysical significance of value for the love-and-science symbiosis is the philosopher Frederick Ferre. Ferre suggests that “the whole domain of actuality is a pulsing field of achieved and achieving value.” Only in what he calls a “kalogenetic universe”—a universe in which all existing things are intrinsically valuable—can one meaningfully account for valued possibilities as fundamental to love.¹⁵

We all suppose that some things are better than others, and the best actions done to enhance well-being are those that we typically identify as loving. This is one reason that so many esteem love highly. Because we suppose that our lives and choices are value-laden, including valued possibilities among the metaphysical fundamentals of love makes sense.

The final love fundamental may be the most controversial of the four. I follow the theistic religious traditions in arguing that love requires divine activity. This fourth fundamental of love might be labeled, an “active and relational deity.” An analysis of love is incomplete without reference to divine influence.

The probability is high that the vast majority who read this book believe that God exists. Most will be sympathetic to the claim that divine influence is fundamental to love. But some who do not affirm that God exists may be more skeptical. “Why does love require an active and relational deity?” they might ask.

To answer this question, I return to my definition of love and what it implies. First, the line, “in sympathetic response to the actions of others,” provides the conceptual home for the claim that divine action is fundamental to love. God is one of the “others” to whom lovers respond. In fact, God may be the only individual to whom all creatures must respond.

Second, in order for an individual to act to attain a high degree of well-being, a vision of something better, an agent who entertains that vision, and that agent calling upon creatures to enact the vision are all necessary. An active and relational deity possesses this vision and does the active calling. Creatures—both human and nonhuman—cannot alone be the basis of this vision. They cannot because their views are limited. Creaturely love requires divine inspiration.

In order for creatures to express unlimited love, they need access to one with an unlimited perspective. To use the language

of Sorokin, unlimited love requires maximal “extensivity.” “The extensivity of love,” he argues, “ranges from the zero point of love of oneself only, up to the love all mankind, all living creatures, and whole universe.”¹⁶ Localized individuals possess limited perception and the limited knowledge that accompanies such perception, and these limitations prevent creatures from possessing a vision large enough to judge what the common good requires.

Only someone who is omnipresent possesses maximal extensivity and therefore can know precisely what love requires. Whitehead puts it this way: “Morality of outlook is inseparably conjoined with generality of outlook,” and only God’s outlook is maximally general.¹⁷ Creatures require an omnipresent individual with the knowledge that accompanies universality to guide them to act in ways that secure overall well-being. An omni-relational and omni-active deity fulfills this love requirement.

While no religious tradition has the inside scoop on God, some traditions are more helpful than others. Those that present God as genuinely open and related to, while active in, the universe are most helpful for the love-and-science symbiosis. The God envisaged in these traditions is the ground of each creature’s moment-by-moment existing.

Not only does God know all things and possess a vision for a better tomorrow, this active and relational deity also inspires, better yet, entices creatures to love. Having surveyed what is possible, God calls each individual to choose the option whose effects will likely attain the highest degree of well-being. When creatures respond positively to this divine calling, they love. A high degree of well-being can only be attained if, as Whitehead put it, God “with tender patience [leads the world] by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.”¹⁸

Some theologians have called the divine inspiration required for creaturely love “prevenient grace.” Grace that is prevenient

means that God initiates each moment of a creature's life. When initiating each moment, God presents value-laden possibilities to creatures capable of loving. In acting this way, deity calls creatures to actualize the love possibilities offered instead of those possibilities available that will not increase the common good. This gift takes into account the previous actions of all other creatures. God acts so that the ideal possibilities for each individual will have the maximum chance for implementation.¹⁹

The doctrine of prevenient grace that I suggest also accounts for the theistic belief that all life depends upon God.²⁰ Christian theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher called this dependence "utter," and he argued that religious piety originates from the feeling of being utterly dependent upon God.²¹ My proposed doctrine of prevenient grace, however, suggests that all species—both human and nonhuman — are dependent upon God's moment-by-moment initiating activity of grace.

The love of an active and relational deity, however, does not guarantee that creatures will love. Increased well-being is not assured, because creatures may freely choose an available possibility emergent from previous acts that have generated ill-being. Furthermore, God does not coerce individuals to select what is ideal.

A deity adequate for the love-and-science symbiosis must be considered unable to squelch entirely the freedom of finite individuals. Prevenient grace as I portray it entails that while God provides freedom to creatures, deity cannot withdraw, fail to offer, or override the power for freedom that creatures require in their moment-by-moment life decisions. That God provides but cannot veto creaturely freedom is important to account for the occurrence of genuinely evil events, for the billions of years of evolution of life, and for the fact that love does not always prevail.

Having described the active and relational deity fundamental

of love, I should add one further point. To argue that a metaphysics adequate for the love-and-science symbiosis requires an active and relational God does not imply that those who do not believe that God exists cannot love. One may be inspired to love even though not conscious of the impetus of that inspiration.

Atheists, agnostics, and those of nontheistic religious traditions may join theists in recognizing and promoting the primacy of love. Of course, theists will differ from others as to love's explanation and inspiration, and they will likely believe firmly that this difference is highly significant. But varying visions of the Holy, while extremely significant and well worth discussing, need not be seen as the litmus test for who can and who cannot express love. It may be, however, that some visions more adequately explain the phenomena of life, provide a better basis for its purpose and meaning, and empower us to love more often. Those visions ought to be championed.

The enterprise of metaphysics in general and the exploration into the fundamentals of love in specific are ongoing ventures. As those engaged in the love-and-science symbiosis continue their work, perhaps a clearer vision of the metaphysical fundamentals of love can be attained. For now, I offer these suggestions as a considered starting point for dialogue.



I end by returning to the first question—“What is love?”—and by confessing that, in the case of romantic love, I don’t really know. But, if forced against a brick wall to face a firing squad who would shoot if not given the correct answer, I would whisper, “It’s about 90 percent sexual desire as yet not sated.”

ELLEN BERSCHIED¹



THE SCIENCE OF SEX AND LOVE

IF THE LYRICS of much poetry and song is any guide, love is all about sexual attraction. Harlan Ellison once put it this way, “Love ain’t nothin’ but sex misspelled.”

The view that love and sex are identical may seem simplistic, wrongheaded, or crass. But the two words are often swapped. Few of us could honestly deny the intense sexual attraction that generally accompanies the experience of what is commonly called “falling in love.” Because we can recall the feelings of attraction in some past romantic relationship, we might surmise that some basis exists for the widespread intuition that love and sex are at least related, although perhaps not identical.²

We who have once fallen in love also know that the initial burst of romantic attraction does not last forever. The flames of romance almost inevitably disappear. Often only glowing embers—and sometimes even dust and ashes—remain. And when the fire dims, we wonder if it is really love that keeps our relationships together. Perhaps it is friendship instead, perhaps habit, or perhaps social customs.

The ancients proposed a myth for why two lovers seek each other. As Aristophanes tells the legend, humans were originally joined together in pairs. The first humans had four legs, four arms,

two heads, and displayed the characteristics of both males and females. These people were in all ways complete and self-sufficient, and they possessed great insight and strength.

Humans were so strong, in fact, that they began attacking the gods. In response, Zeus struck upon a plan to cut humans in two to weaken them. He along with the other gods did just that. Since this time of the great separation, we humans have been condemned to roam the earth seeking our other (“better”?) halves. The moving force in this seeking is love itself, and we find satisfaction and strength when we locate and embrace our soul mate.

This ancient myth identifies the attractions that apparently all humans feel. It suggests that romantic and sexual acts are powerful expressions of the deeper urge to reunite with one from whom we have been separated. The myth of love is the story of reattachment.³

In the pop culture of the contemporary West, the myth of Aristophanes runs a distant second to the holiday named after St. Valentine when it comes to amorous attraction, romance, and sex. But several divergent explanations of the holiday’s origins exist.

One story has it that ancient Romans chose February 14 to honor Juno, the queen of Roman gods and goddesses. On that day, each young boy drew from a jar the name of a young girl, and the two would be partners for the next day’s festival feast of Lupercia. Sometimes these pairings seemed so appropriate that the two youngsters would marry.

The problem with this festival ritual, however, was that the Roman emperor found that young men became unwilling to leave their maidens to fight for Rome. Consequently, he banned the pairing practice and cancelled all engagements.

A Roman priest named Valentine took pity on the youth who had found love. Out of sympathy for them, he secretly married

engaged couples despite the emperor's ban. For his disobedience, Valentine was sentenced to be executed on February 14. Additionally, Valentine fell in love with the jailer's daughter while awaiting his death. His farewell note to the girl was allegedly signed, "From Your Valentine."

For contemporary people seeking serious answers to the questions of love, romance, and sexuality, the ancient myths and stories of Valentines have largely been replaced by the explanations of science. In particular, many anthropologists, biologists, and psychologists speculate that the association of sex with love has a strong evolutionary history. Studies of our primate relatives—including lemurs, chimpanzees, monkeys, and apes—provide evidence for a variety of evolutionary theories about human sexuality. If human mating habits have evolved over time, it seems likely that the study of nonhuman primates could give us clues about the sexuality of human primates.

Research on nonhuman primates reveals that all primates are social. Social behavior is a prerequisite both for primate reproductive sex and for love. Sociality is vital for caring for the offspring that sexual activity often produces. Research on human and nonhuman primates also suggests that the urge for sex has a genetic basis. It would make sense, of course, to expect a strong genetic component to our own desire for sexual expression given the role that genes apparently play in shaping who we are.⁴

Many human sexual practices differ from the practices of nonhumans, however. For instance, humans are more likely than nonhuman primates to commit themselves to one sexual partner. This ability to commit is possible in part because we seem to have more self-control than other primates when responding to sexual urges. Notice that I said "more" self-control, not "total." And unlike nonhumans, marrying and marriage are phenomena of all human cultures. To date, scientists have not observed events in nonhuman

primate societies similar to the public ceremonies, rituals, and traditions that accompany human matrimony.

Explaining why humans are significantly more sexually faithful to one partner than nonhumans has become a task for scientific theorists. Some speculate that the secrecy of human female ovulation is the evolutionary explanation for human monogamy. Unlike females of many other species, human females show little or no sign of their fertility. Female barbary macaque, for instance, display puffy red backsides when ovulating. Other nonhuman females emit strong odors that indicate to males that they want to copulate.

According to this explanation, human monogamy arises because males who are unaware of female ovulation patterns are more likely to restrict their sexual activity to a single female. The risk that another male would fertilize the female with whom a male is sexually active is too great to leave her unprotected. And because all members of a species seek to extend their genetic heritage, the need to protect one's sexual partner led humans to commit to exclusive pair-bonds.

A second explanation for human pair-bonds and sexual monogamy relates to the first. According to this theory, human sexual monogamy serves the genetic interests of both males and females by providing a better environment for the protection and nurture of children. A solitary female is more vulnerable to forces that may prematurely end the lives of a couple's children.⁵

Although according to these theories both females and males are concerned about their reproductive success, the reasons that females choose a mate differ from those of males. Females want to reproduce with males who have status, power, and wealth, so the theory goes. Such males are more likely to protect the female's offspring. Females will also choose males who will likely help with child-rearing and not abandon them to copulate with other

females. Because females select males with such traits, an evolutionary tendency toward monogamy emerges through female selection practices.

Males want healthy and sexually faithful females as reproductive partners, because healthy females are more likely to produce and care for more offspring than unhealthy females. Also, sexually faithful females will often not carry children produced by another male. Because males select females with these traits, the evolutionary tendency toward monogamy is strengthened by these selection practices.

Although these evolutionary explanations for sexual faithfulness and pair-bonding have validity, many suggest that they do not fully explain human sexual and marital behavior. To say it another way, romance, sex, and marriage cannot be entirely explained by genetics or the evolutionary drive toward reproductive success.

Others have offered theories for why humans marry and seek sexual monogamy. Sigmund Freud, for instance, believed that our desire for our opposite-sex parent drives us to find union with someone just like that parent. Less scientific explanations include the belief that an unknown magnetic force brings together very different people: males and females. The maxim that opposites attract may indicate that aesthetic forces unite couples. Marxists and social constructionists claim that concerns for economic gain and increased power unite lovers.⁶

Most, if not all, of these explanations surely possess a measure of truth. But surveys of the motivations behind human sexual activity and marriage reveal a wide variety of alternative explanations, and these explanations have little in common with the theories we have looked at thus far.

If we are to ask people what motivates them romantically and sexually, the most common response is personal attraction. These

attractions can be physical—for example, another's body features, mannerisms, gait, or voice quality. Or they can be nonphysical—for example, perception of status, intimacy, friendship, or wealth.

Psychologist David Buss notes that all major studies reveal that the first and most important factors humans consider when choosing the ideal mate are factors related to caring, kindness, generosity, and other such personality traits. In one study, he interviewed more than ten thousand people and asked his subjects to rate eighteen possible qualities of a mate. Both men and women rated the same qualities among their top five most important. These qualities included dependability, emotional stability, a pleasing disposition, and so on.⁷

Although a great many factors affect our sexual and matrimonial choices, one element unites them all. All of these factors reveal that *attraction* is the driving force behind our choices to be romantic and sexually active, and to marry. As we have seen, this attraction may be to something physical about the other; to what the other has to offer in terms of power, wealth, security, or status; or to something about the other's character or personality.

The word “eros” perhaps best accounts for this attraction for the other. Unfortunately, however, contemporary people use eros and its derivative “erotic” to refer exclusively to sexual matters. The classical uses of the word “eros” are much more expansive in their references.

Plato's ideas about eros, delivered in his writings through the mouth of Socrates, have shaped the way many throughout history have understood attraction. We find in Plato the core meaning of eros as desire for, or attraction to, the beautiful, valuable, or good. He and those who came after him did not equate eros with sexual attraction. One could express eros for the gods, society, the good life, one's country, and a host of other nonsexual things. We express eros, according to Plato, because we want to be fulfilled.⁸

For those today who want to speak clearly and consistently about love, an important semantic choice presents itself. One must decide whether to equate eros with love or to think of love as something greater than eros. In one sense, of course, eros must be the same as love, because the word is so often translated “love.” But we typically use the word “love” to talk about the way we sometimes act toward those to whom we are not attracted or do not find highly valuable.

Many of our religious experiences and traditions have shown us that love may not involve attraction to the beautiful, valuable, or good. Christians, for instance, are instructed to love their enemies. Presumably, these enemies are not deemed beautiful, valuable, or good in any immediate sense.

To help gain clarity about what we might mean by love, I define “love” throughout this book in the following way: to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others, to promote overall well-being. This definition suggests that love’s goal is what might variously be called overall flourishing, general happiness, blessedness, or the common good.

According to my love definition, we must identify *eros* with the promotion of well-being if we are to speak of it as a *love*. We might say, then, that the love-type eros entails intentional response to promote well-being when attracted to what is beautiful, valuable, or good. Given this definition, sex and romance may or may not be love expressions. When sex and romance promote well-being, they are acts of love. When sex and romance promote ill-being, they are not.

Distinguishing between 1) love as sex and romance and 2) love as promoting well-being is so difficult that I propose a semantic shift for our culture—a semantic shift I have been personally undergoing in my attempt to be clearer. I propose that we no longer use the word “love” when talking about sexual attraction,

romantic feelings, or sexual activity. Instead, let's reserve "love" for those acts that promote well-being, and let's use words like "fondness," "affection," "passion," "attraction," "romance," "sex," "intercourse," and other such words when we talk about our feelings and urges related to sexuality.

Of course, I'm not altogether optimistic that—at least in the short run—the entire culture will change its language so that "love" refers only to acts that promote well-being. Part of the problem is undoubtedly the history of love language, and part of the problem is that sexual or romantic acts can sometimes enhance well-being. But I suspect that we would all gain a greater appreciation and respect for the word "love" if we were more careful how we use it. At least that's what I am finding.

To sum up: Love is not sex misspelled, but sex and romance may be acts of love. And our falling in and out of sexual or romantic attraction need not lead us to conclude that we've fallen in and out of love. Love seeks well-being when the fires of romance rage. But love also promotes well-being when our attractions and passions die down to embers or even ashes.



“The time has come for humanity not only to begin to understand the nature, forms, and how and why of love, but also to endeavor to design more efficient techniques of its production. We already understand that the ‘love commodity’ is the most necessary commodity for any society; that without its minimum no other commodities can be obtained in abundance; and that at the present time it is a commodity on which depends the life and death of humanity.”

PITIRIM A. SOROKIN¹

CAN LOVE MAKE PROGRESS?

THE IDEA that humans can make progress strikes some as naïve. With every war and its chaotic aftermath, looming ecological disasters, and the deviance reportedly inherent in human nature, it seems absurd that things can get better. In fact, say some, things seem to be getting worse.

Of course, even pessimists admit that improvement of a certain sort has been made. Humans have made progress, if we mean an increase in the quantity of commodities. For instance, the numbers and complexity of computers are clearly increasing. Because of such increases, some speak of the inevitable progress of technology, and who can argue that more people have access to more information than ever before?

But, say pessimists, increases in commodities or access to information do not indicate genuine progress. What we all want is an increase in our quality of life. Ironically, commodities that we thought would make life better—for example, computers—sometimes decrease our overall quality of life. What we all really want is the proliferation of overall well-being. An increase in genuine happiness would represent authentic progress.

In the first half of the twentieth century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr was an advocate of the idea that authentic progress was

impossible. Instead of calling those who hold this stance “pessimists,” however, he called them “realists.” Niebuhr was reacting to the liberal optimism that had preceded him. Most liberals had assumed a particular view of evolution and had great faith in science. Because of this faith, they believed that progress was inevitable.

Liberals argued that each individual must decide to work with the grain of inevitable progress or against it. To go against the grain may cause a temporary setback in our journey toward a better world. But a better world was sure to come eventually, because there’s no stopping progress.

Niebuhr’s *The Irony of American History* most clearly reveals his disbelief in progress. “Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history,” he writes. “The irony of America’s quest for happiness lies in the fact that she succeeded more obviously than any other nation in making life ‘comfortable,’ only finally to run into the larger incongruities of human destiny by the same achievements by which it escaped the smaller ones.”²

Niebuhr believed that religion—at least Christianity—placed its hope in a God who comes from beyond history. Christians should see history as an ironic enterprise, because what was at first thought to be good and progressive inevitably ends up generating evil. Christians, says Niebuhr, “discern by faith the ironical laughter of the divine source and end of all things.”³

In contrast to Niebuhr, Bertrand Russell, one of the twentieth century’s greatest philosophers, believed in progress. Rather than believing that religion offers an adequate explanation to life, Russell argued that religion actually prevents genuine progress. When religious people place their hope in something beyond or outside history, they and their “hopes” slow the march toward a better world.

For Russell, science provides a trustworthy basis for progress.

Like the evolutionist Herbert Spencer who believed that progress is not an accident but a necessity, Russell was optimistic that science could make the world a better place.

At the conclusion of his famous essay, "Why I Am Not a Christian," Russell put it this way: "In this world we can now begin a little to understand things, and a little to master them by help of science, which has forced its way step by step against the Christian religion, against the churches, and against the opposition of all the old precepts. Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make this world a fit place to live in."⁴

A few scholars in the contemporary science-and-religion dialogue, perhaps most notably John Hedley Brooke, have shown that Russell was wrong about at least one point. Religion has not been predominately antagonistic to science and to progress. "Serious scholarship in the history of science has revealed so extraordinarily rich and complex a relationship between science and religion," notes Brooke. "Members of Christian churches have not all been obscurantists; many scientists of stature profess a religious faith, even if their theology was sometimes suspect. Conflicts allegedly between science and religion may turn out to be between rival scientific interests, or conversely between rival theological factions."⁵

In fact, some scholars alive during the first half of the twentieth century affirmed a *necessary* role for both religion and science in the unavoidable march of progress. Liberal theologian Shailer Mathews, for instance, synthesized with his theology the science of his day, including evolution from the hard sciences and theories of social development from the soft sciences. Mathews believed that Christianity provides the basis for inevitable progress. "Jesus has furnished the bases for lasting social progress,"

he argued, and “there is no power in earth or hell that can prevent the realization of the noblest social ideas of which the world has dreamed.”⁶

So, whom should we believe? What should we say about progress?

The preceding seems to leave us a choice between two options. Either nothing can make the world a better place, or the world will necessarily become better. To say it another way, progress is either impossible or inevitable. Which do we choose?

A third option exists. This option says that progress is possible, but not inevitable. In terms of moral progress, we might say that love can make progress. But we can also step backwards, fail to love, and witness evil’s increase. In either possibility, there is no inevitability. Love *may* or *may not* make progress.

The idea that moral progress is possible but not inevitable has several implications. Some may seem obvious, others less so. One implication, for instance, is that some actions or events are better than others. To say that love can make authentic progress implies that we think some ways of being are more valuable than others. Saying that progress in love implies judgments about value makes sense when love is the matter at hand. After all, love is a value-laden word.

To say that our love can make the world a better place also implies that we can make accurate judgments about which actions are better and which are worse, which does not mean that we all have to agree about what actions are best or worst. The point is that we all show by our everyday actions our hard-core conviction that choosing to act in some ways is better than choosing to act in others.⁷

Progress in love, in other words, presupposes that we have at least a vague notion about which actions promote well-being and which do not. We entertain a vision for what a better tomorrow

might be. Or as Henry David Thoreau put it, “Love is an attempt to change a piece of the dream-world into reality.”

If love can make progress but such progress is not inevitable, it also seems reasonable to assume we are free to some degree. If we are entirely determined either by the heavens above or the atoms below, progress would seem either inevitable or impossible. But we must be free—even though our freedom be limited—if progress in love can be made.

Acknowledging that we are free to make progress in love protects us against feelings of despair, indifference, and personal insignificance. If progress to attain greater well-being is impossible, feelings of hopelessness and apathy seem appropriate. And if progress is inevitable, we might have a hard time believing that anything we do has genuine significance. Life just doesn’t matter either way.

Finally, the idea that progress is possible but not inevitable places into doubt the claim that an all-controlling deity exists; at least it undermines the idea that if such a deity exists, this God is good. Presumably an all-controlling, good deity would guarantee progress in love. But because genuinely evil events occur, the existence of an all-controlling, good deity seems implausible.

Of course, one could believe that a good God exists who is *not* all-controlling. This belief would not conflict with the notion that progress is possible but not inevitable. In fact, if we all have vague notions about which actions promote well-being and which do not, this strengthens the belief that such a God exists. There are other plausible grounds for belief in God as well. In sum, a variety of implications arise from the idea that progress in love is possible but not inevitable.

Let’s shift gears as we conclude this book. I am confident that our theoretical exploration of the idea of progress in love is important. But if that progress is possible yet not inevitable, we

understandably want more than a theoretical discussion. We also need to talk about practice. Most, if not all, of us actually want to witness love making progress. We want love in action, and we would love to be a part of that action.

To conclude, then, permit me to suggest seven general arenas in which we might make progress in love. A whole book could be written on each suggestion (and some books have), but I greatly limit my comments on each suggestion. Here is the list, in no particular order.

WE CAN MAKE PROGRESS IN LOVE IF WE . . .

I. PROMOTE THE EXEMPLARS

A few weeks after 9/11, the late Fred Rogers of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* fame answered this question from a reporter: "Mr. Rogers, what should parents tell their children now?" His words are worth taking to heart: "Tell them to keep their eyes on the helpers."⁸ In terms of love, we might say that progress can be made if we keep our eyes on the lovers.

Models, mentors, and exemplars of love put flesh on the abstract idea of loving one's family, neighbor, and enemy. We need not only to encourage those we know to become love exemplars, but we also need to promote such lovers in the public square. What would the world be like if altruists were pasted on billboards instead of models, musicians, and athletes?

In their book *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment*, social scientists Anne Colby and William Damon look at the influence of twenty-three moral exemplars. "Exemplars create for themselves a world of certainty rather than doubt," write Colby and Damon, "a perspective of faith rather than despair. Despite the frustrations and disappointments that inevitably

await those who try to make the world a better place, the exemplars consider themselves fortunate to be in a position to try.”⁹ Today more than ever, we must promote the exemplars as lovers to be imitated.

2. PRACTICE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

For centuries, religious people have found help in following various religious practices. Such practices have enhanced the well-being both of those who practice them and those with whom these practitioners relate. Love can make progress when we follow religious practices that engender wholeness and genuine happiness.

Speaking as a Christian, William C. Spohn notes the value of spiritual practices: “The ritual of baptism, sharing life in community, solidarity with the poor, meditating on scripture, and mutual forgiveness are some of the concrete practices that make up the Christian way of life. . . . They are worthwhile and meaningful activities because they are good to do, not primarily because they produce something else. . . . They have a formative effect on our characters when they are done well, because through them our relationship with God in Christ develops.”¹⁰

Not all religious practices enhance well-being, of course. Just because an act is religious doesn’t mean that act is good. For love to make progress, therefore, we must make decisions about the helpfulness of various religious practices. This process is personally and politically charged. But perhaps love can become the measuring stick for believers as they ponder how they might best practice religion and as they make judgments about the fruitfulness of practices in which they do not yet engage. And as we saw in the first chapter, a variety of religious practices may promote the common good.

3. INCREASE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

An increase in scientific knowledge, by itself, does not necessarily mean progress in love, but increases in scientific knowledge related to the giving and receiving of love can be helpful. In his American Psychological Association presidential address fifty years ago, Harry Harlow declared:

Because of its intimate and personal nature, [love] is regarded by some as an improper topic for experimental research. But, whatever our personal feelings may be, our assigned mission as psychologists is to analyze all facets of human and animal behavior into their component variables. So far as love or affection is concerned, psychologists have failed in this mission. The little we know about love does not transcend simple observation, and the little we write about it has been written better by poets and novelists.¹¹

There is much to be done—by psychologists, biologists, neurologists, sociologists, cosmologists, anthropologists, and scientists of other stripes—that could increase our scientific knowledge of love.

The Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, headed by Stephen Post, has taken the lead in funding scientific research that can help love make progress. To date, the institute has funded more than twenty major projects related to research in areas such as autism, childhood development, neuroscience, psychology, general healthcare, trauma disorders, sociology, organ donorship, sociobiology, evolutionary theory, marriage development, and so on. The results of this research may help us overcome obstacles to the progress of establishing greater well-being.¹²

Also funding scientific research on love is the Fetzer Institute.

This institute is a private foundation that supports research, education, and service programs exploring the integral relationships among body, mind, and spirit. The organization has funded more than twenty-five major projects, mostly of a social science nature, examining such topics as the influence of the brain on love, altruism on television, love and war, and compassion.¹³

4. THINK DEEPLY ABOUT THE MEANING OF LOVE

Learning how to use our reasoning powers can be a powerful aide in the progress of love. Of course, this does not mean that the most brilliant are also the most loving. But being as clear as we can about what love means allows us to bypass the errors of rampant ambiguity. And using our reasoning abilities can help us to think creatively about how both to love and to overcome love's obstacles.¹⁴

Unfortunately, those who are often most passionate about the philosophical importance of love are also the very ones least likely to define exactly what they are talking about. The dearth of love definitions prompted Edward Vacek to remark that "most philosophical and theological writing, when it speaks of 'love,' does not analyze what love is, but rather assumes it has an evident meaning."¹⁵ Philosophers and other rational individuals can help us all by reflecting deeply about what is.

It has sometimes been said that a reciprocal relationship exists between wisdom and love. The most profound expressions of love are often accompanied by a series of wise decisions. Progress requires us to act both for the love of wisdom and for the wisdom of love.

5. PARTICIPATE IN AND ADVOCATE THE GROWTH OF LOVING COMMUNITIES

In this period many call postmodernity, we are beginning to see that Western culture has generally over emphasized individualism to the neglect of community. Alasdair MacIntyre preaches the

importance of community in his highly influential book *After Virtue*. He writes, “What matters [now] is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained.”¹⁶ MacIntyre’s emphasis upon community is vital to understanding and practicing love.

If love is relational, community is essential to the progress of love. And not just any community will do. After all, communities can be hotbeds for hatred as well as workshops of love. One way that love can make progress is by participation in and the advocacy of communities that promote love. For it takes a world to change the world completely.

6. SPEAK OUT AGAINST

NEGATIVE CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Progress in love requires proactive behavior to support activities and structures that promote well-being. But progress also comes through reactive behavior that opposes activities and structures that generate ill-being. Becoming a voice for the oppressed against the oppressors—in their many guises—is an act of love that increases the common good.

Although opinions vary about the specifics, the majority of social scientists point to aspects of culture that thwart the establishment of well-being. Progress in love requires lovers to be social activists and cultural critics. Maximal progress in love cannot be made by individual or community activity alone. The broad structures of culture must be evaluated by the prophets of love.

7. ENDORSE A VISION OF GOD

AS THE SOURCE OF LOVE

Some religious traditions better support the idea that progress in love is possible. Those traditions that consider creatures to be free to some degree, that acknowledge standards of good and evil

and also encourage their adherents to seek something better, are likely the most powerful religious forces in the progress of love.

Theistic traditions may be more convincing and appealing if they understood God to be both the source of our love and the one who loves steadfastly. This step seems to be an important one toward resolving the age-old problem of evil that challenges the faith of both theists and atheists alike. If we all want to attune our lives to the ways of the Ultimate Being, and if we believe that the Ultimate Being loves us all steadfastly, we have grounds to trust that we make progress in love when we attune our lives to the Ultimate Lover. To put it in the simple words of the apostle Paul, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.”¹⁷

Can things get better? Yes! Can love make progress? Yes! It is not inevitable, but progress in love is possible. People who believe and act accordingly are not being naïve.



NOTES

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CHAPTER 4: THE ALTRUISM OF TERROR,
THE EGOISM OF WAR

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2. See Louis Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* (New York: New American Library, 1989).
3. *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week507/feature.html.
4. Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Chicago: Willet, Clark and Co., 1941), xvii.
5. See Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).
6. Richard Dawkins's and E. O. Wilson's most influential books have been, respectively, Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), and Wilson, *Sociobiology: On Human Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).
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8. Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 26.
9. David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
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12. Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 155. See also Sarah Coakley's essay, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," in John Polkinghorne, ed., *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 192–210.
13. This point and other religious feminist ideas are presented in a classic collection of essays, Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

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2. Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994).
3. See Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
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13. Job 29:4.
14. 1 John 1:3.
15. See John 5:20; 16:27.
16. See 2 Tim. 3:4; Titus 3:4.
17. Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 165.

CHAPTER 6: THE FUNDAMENTALS OF LOVE

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2. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 79.
3. See Post's explanation of unlimited love in *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003), part I.
4. Daniel Day Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 126.
5. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 211. For discussions of the importance of affect, emotion, or influence for love, see Robert G. Hazo, *The Idea of Love* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 11, *passim*, and

- Stephen Pope, "Love in Contemporary Christian Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 23 (Spring 1995): 167.
6. Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1970), 198.
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 8. I John 3:16.
 9. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911).
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 11. For more on emergence, see Steven Johnson, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* (New York: Scribner, 2001), and Harold J. Morowitz, *The Emergence of Everything: How the World Became Complex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
 12. See Alan Carr, *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Michael E. McCullough et al., *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001); and Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Free Press, 2004).
 13. Sorokin's classic work on love is *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors, and Techniques of Moral Transformation* (1954; repr., Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002).
 14. F. R. Cowell, *Values in Human Society: The Contributions of Pitirim A. Sorokin to Sociology* (Boston: Sargent, 1970).
 15. Frederick Ferre, *Being and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Metaphysics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 373. This volume is the first in a trilogy on value, which includes *Knowing and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Epistemology* (1998) and *Living and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Ethics* (2001).
 16. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 16.
 17. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 15.

18. Ibid., 347.
19. A theological tradition called “process theology” best describes this idea. See John B. Cobb Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965); *God and the World* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969); with David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976); and Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).
20. The doctrine of prevenient grace is prominent in the Christian Wesleyan theological tradition. John Wesley called it “preventing grace,” by which he was thinking of the Latin words “pre” and “vene.” These literally mean “to come before.” Randy L. Maddox calls it “responsible grace” in *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994).
21. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (2nd ed., 1830; repr., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989). The translation of *schlechthinig* as “utter” is my own, but this translation is not unique to me.

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2. For an accessible yet academically respectable presentation of romantic love, see John Armstrong, *Conditions of Love: The Philosophy of Intimacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).
3. See Plato’s *Symposium*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892).
4. Meredith F. Small provides a nice summary of much of this research in her book *What’s Love Got to Do with It? The Evolution of Human Mating* (New York: Anchor, 1995).
5. For an engaging discussion of this, see *ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*

7. The study is published as David M. Buss, "Sex Differences in Human Mate Preferences: Evolutionary Hypotheses Tested in 37 Cultures," *Behavior Brain Science* 12 (1989):12–49. See also his book, *The Evolution of Desire* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
8. In addition to Plato's *Symposium*, see his *Phaedrus*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892).

CHAPTER 8: CAN LOVE MAKE PROGRESS?

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2. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribners, 1952), 63.
3. Ibid.
4. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian, and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 22.
5. John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5.
6. Shailer Mathews, *The Social Teaching of Jesus: An Essay in Christian Sociology* (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 197.
7. David Ray Griffin puts it this way: "We can be confident that particular ideas belong to our set of hard-core commonsense beliefs, insofar as we see that they are inevitably presupposed by all human beings, regardless of cultural-linguistic shaping." He means that any scientific, philosophical, or theological theory is irrational to the extent that it contradicts whatever notions we inevitably presuppose in practice (*Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001], 362).
8. From Stephen Post, *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003), 3.
9. Anne Colby and William Damon, *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment* (New York: Free Press, 1992), xii.

10. William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 45.
11. Harry Harlow, Address of the President at the Sixty-Sixth Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, August 31, 1958. Published in *American Psychologist* 13 (1958): 573–74. For a dramatic telling of Harlow's life and thought, see Deborah Blum, *Love at Goon Park: Harry Harlow and the Science of Affection* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002).
12. See the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love Web site for a more thorough explanation of its activities and interests: www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org. A description of the first projects funded by the institute is available in Post's book, *Unlimited Love*.
13. For more information, see the institute Web site: www.fetzer.org.
14. Among the better philosophy books on love, Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God, and the Logic of Theism* (New York: Willett, Clark & Company, 1941); Robert G. Hazo, *The Idea of Love* (New York: Praeger, 1967); Mike W. Martin, *Love's Virtues* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); and Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
15. Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 34.
16. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 263.
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