Coalescent Love: A Philosophical and Psychological Exploration of the Phenomenon of Love

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What do we mean by "love?" Historically, this question was answered by philosophers, poets, theologians, and laypeople, but it is only recently that we have begun exploring the question from a scientific perspective. I argue that, to understand love clearly, we must draw from a variety of academic disciplines. My research explores a variety of contemporary and historical views of love and synthesizes these sources in favor of a multidimensional approach to academic inquiry. I trace thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kierkegaard, Josef Pieper, Anders Nygren, and Erich Fromm and put their philosophies in conversation with a modern psychological theory, "Love as Mutual Communal Responsiveness." I propose that paradoxes that occur in both our psychological and philosophical systems (such as the "problem of unselfish altruism") can be answered only via an interdisciplinary conversation. I conclude that concepts such as altruism and self-love can only be studied psychologically insofar as they are understood philosophically and posit that this integration provides us with a more robust understanding of love.

Introduction

"The attempt has been made to trace the innumerable, widely different interpretations of the phenomenon of love... In the book that sums up the results, a very few characteristics... are found to recur in all characterizations of love. Among these is preference; 'to be loved... is normally to be singled out.'"

- Josef Pieper, from *Faith, Hope, and Love* (1)

Eros, Philia, Storge, Ludus, Pragma, Caritas: all refer to the oft-encountered, yet seldom understood, experience of love. Love is perhaps the most universally acknowledged experience among humans and its manifestations are widespread. We say, "I love you," to a child, friend, and lover. It is not uncommon to hear of one loving a celebrity, a stranger, or even a fictional character. Love is cited as the motivation for acts of service, personal sacrifice, and even martyrdom. The deliciously impossible question of what it means to love has plagued humanity for all its existence.

Philosophers and psychologists are proficient in exploring love from an academic perspective. From Plato and Aristotle to Saint Paul and Søren Kierkegaard, the Humanities have defended love's primacy among the virtues. And every psychologist from Freud to Gottman has suggested that love is one of the primary motivators of human behavior. However, just as the human perspective of love was impoverished before the birth of the psychological sciences, the preeminence of scientific reductionism is expelling the rich philosophical tradition that preceded it. Psychology tells us how we love. Philosophy, conversely, tells us how we ought to love. This is no small difference of semantics, but the cornerstone of my thesis: that psychology and philosophy, if taken alone, are incapable of an adequate depiction of love.

To demonstrate this idea, this paper will present a contemporary psychological theory of love and suggest that it fails to adequately define the concept. I will then exemplify how philosophy can enrich this poverty. I argue that psychology and philosophy should not conflict, nor stand alone, but must be synthesized to understand love properly. I have singled out a particular theory, Love as Mutual Communal Responsiveness, as the model for discussion. Communal Responsiveness, which is universally applicable to different relationships, is positive in nature and rooted in a non-contingent reciprocity norm.

This paper is organized in the following format. I begin with a brief outline of Communal Responsiveness crafted from a variety of articles, essays, and studies. I then present a problem with the theory, one that can only be solved via philosophy. I review some relevant thinkers and present my own thoughts, then conclude that both disciplines are necessary for understanding love as an academic concept.

Love as Mutual Communal Responsiveness

"Communal responsiveness is also, we firmly believe, the most important factor contributing to the now well-documented fact that having close, loving, relationships are tremendously beneficial to one's mental and physical health."

-Margaret Clark, Jennifer Hirsch, and Joan Monin, from *The New Psychology of Love* (2)

A great number of psychological theories seek to

explain the human phenomenon of love. Some, such as Robert Trivers' "Reciprocal Altruism," claim that love can be explained in merely evolutionarily selective terms. (3) Equity Theory, as proposed by Hatfield, Walster, and Berscheid, conceptualizes love as complicated reciprocity norms that ensure relationships involve the proper amount of giving and receiving. (4) Each theory draws upon various aspects of human psychology and biology to propose an accurate understanding of what we mean when we say, "I love you."

Because of the abundance of such theories, it is useful to settle on one for the purposes of this paper. This paper strives for depth by investigating only one: "Mutual Communal Responsiveness Theory." The theory's leading researcher, Margaret Clark, defines Communal Responsiveness as a strong, mutual relationship with another, in which each takes responsibility for the other's welfare, and it is marked by non-contingent care. One's partner in a communal relationship is varied: it can be a child, parent, friend, neighbor, co-worker, lover, or acquaintance. Crucially, one both gives and receives love, and both the caregiver and care recipient benefit from the relationship. (2) Communal Responsive relationships differ from those marked by an exchange norm insofar as acts of responsiveness are not expected to be reciprocated; in fact, most couples strive to avoid the reciprocity norm. (5)

Responsiveness is understood in a variety of ways. It includes merely assisting a partner with a task or picking up a small gift unprovoked. It can manifest itself in the *Michelangelo Effect* – helping a partner achieve their goals and dreams – or in offering forgiveness. (6) It is exemplified in a mutual relationship in which a constant give-and-take of active care occurs between parties, in which each partner oscillates between caretaker and caregiver. The lover accurately understands the beloved, properly praising, not flattering, another's good qualities. Responsiveness practices capitalization, that is, responding positively to another's sharing of good news. (7) The theory is proactive in nature, recommending positive behaviors for individuals to practice rather than encouraging the avoidance of certain negative actions.

People who practice communal responsiveness are more grateful, resulting in deeper relationship satisfaction. If one desires to increase the responsiveness of his relationship, merely practicing more gratitude will have that effect. (8) Performing and receiving visible acts of responsiveness results in members of a dyad (two individuals in a relationship) feeling closer with each other and reduces the cognitive load of self-awareness, allowing individuals to focus on caring for more than just themselves. (9, 2) Virtue cycling occurs when one partner in a relationship acts responsively and influences the other to do the same. A positive feedback loop emerges as each individual invites the other to practice acts of responsiveness, exponentially improving the relationship. (7)

Projection is a component of Communal Responsiveness that has far-reaching consequences for how partners can affect each other's perception of feeling loved. Projection broadly refers to the tendency for a person to assume her feelings regarding a relationship are shared by her partner. If we love a partner, we presuppose they feel the same way about us. If we are insecure in a relationship, we will tend to believe our partner is also insecure. One study found that we anticipate the level of care a partner will provide for us based upon how caring we feel towards them. And people who doubt a partner's care (even if their estimation is incorrect) will distance themselves from their partner in response. (10) Lemay and Clark's *Projection of Responsiveness to Needs* reports that "people who provide support project this supportiveness and care onto their partners, perceiving their partners as similarly supportive and caring. Likewise, those who do not care for their partners may see them as similarly uncaring." (11) This research suggests that it is not important to know how caring a partner feels towards us, but that we cultivate a proper sense of caring for another. Another study invited college roommates to set various goals for the semester. Some were compassionately based ("I want to make a positive impact on my roommate's life") and others were self-image related ("convince my roommate that I am right"). Unsurprisingly, compassionate goals resulted in higher levels of responsiveness, while self-image goals lowered responsiveness. (12)

One of the greatest applications of Communal Responsiveness has been examining chronic illness patients and their spousal caregivers. The long-term, end-of-life care that some spouses are required to provide for their ailing partners can be a debilitating period in one's life. One study that looked at diabetes patients' relationships with their spouses discovered links between communal coping and better mood and self-care practices. (13) Parkinson's Disease sufferers profited from *benefit finding*, looking for opportunities for growth despite challenges, which led to a reduction in cognitive and motor challenges. (14) The same is true for caregivers. Depressed caregivers are more likely to provide unhealthy care to their partners, but if the pre-illness relationship was marked by high levels of care, then this trend disappears. (15) Thus, the nature of the relationship before illness onset is a critical predictor for how the couple will fare during the spousal caregiving phase. It is not merely enough to decide to be caring when tragedy strikes; the best relationships are marked by responsiveness during the average course of ordinary

life.

The Problem of "Unselfish Altruism"

"All of this is not the result of communal relationships being completely unselfish and we do not equate love with unselfish altruism (which is another definition of love - but not ours.)" (2)

- Clark, Hirsch, and Monin, from the *New Psychology of Love*

What is unselfish altruism and why is Communal Responsiveness so opposed to it? Unselfishness refers to behavior that acts without self-interest. Altruism, as defined by James Ozinga in *Altruism*, is "doing something good for another at some cost to oneself." (16) Thus, unselfish altruism is defined as care for another without regard for self-interest. Communal Responsiveness is opposed to this concept because such a relationship could become pathological. Scenarios in which one partner ceaselessly gives while the other lazily receives are not models of love. Usually, when such imbalances arise, relationships terminate or require maintenance.

Few people would desire such a disproportionate relationship, but culturally, individuals who practice sacrifice earn the highest praise for their actions. Martin Luther King Jr. is praised for sacrificing his life to a social cause and Maximillian Kolbe has been granted sainthood for his actions in a Nazi concentration camp. Everyday heroes, ranging from firefighters to social workers, are extolled for their giving of self.

This spirit of sacrifice is instantiated in Christ's commission that, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (17) If taken seriously, such a statement has far-reaching consequences for how a life ought to be lived. Is it responsible for a psychologist to make such a recommendation to her patient? Is such a suggestion even possible in a clinical setting?

It would be both unwise and impractical to give such direction. As stated previously, psychology is helpful insofar as it can recognize and propose healthy behaviors, but it lacks the faculty to make suggestions that transcend these limits. No questionnaire or assessment test could be taken to determine whether someone ought to live a life of sacrifice.

Sacrifice can be synonymous with unselfish altruism. The following sections demonstrate that philosophy can clarify this apparent contradiction between what we idealize and practice. I have separated the problem into two components: the problems of selfishness and altruism. I deconstruct these obstacles and make recommendations for how we might better understand these concepts philosophically. I argue that such an exercise both provides us with a better understanding of love and demonstrates the dangers of approaching an academic subject unimodally.

Self-Love

Communal Responsiveness claims that it cannot be completely unselfish. Self-esteem – how you value yourself – is critically important from a psychological perspective. In fact, it may be one of the core parameters which determines an individual's capacity for loving another person. From a philosophical perspective, however, perspectives differ upon whether self-love is the foundation or impediment to loving another person. Can self-love and self-esteem be considered the same thing?

I argue that self-esteem and self-love are synonymous. *Caritas*, a Latin term for love (rendered "charity" today) means something like, "dearness" or that which one would pay a "high price" for. (18) Properly understood, then, self-esteem is the proper valuation, and thus love, of the self. Psychologists and philosophers will disagree on this precise definition, but broadly speaking, proper valuation ought to be a helpful way of understanding these complex concepts. This section will seek to explore self-esteem from the Responsiveness tradition, examine what the relevant philosophy has to offer, then present a conclusion as to if self-love/esteem is a healthy component of love.

Some may disagree with my equating self-love with self-esteem. Simon May, author of *Love: A New Understanding of an Ancient Emotion*, criticizes those (namely Kant, Rousseau, and Frankfurt) who mistake self-love for self-esteem. May argues we can hold individuals in high regard even if we do not love them (e.g. a celebrity) and can love an individual whom we do not necessarily like. (19) I disagree with May insofar that I believe that radical affirmation of one's existence is indeed synonymous with love. When speaking of valuing someone, whether ourselves or another, we might do so inordinately. For example, figures in the public eye who are highly regarded for athletic prowess, entertainment value, or widespread influence may be esteemed for their accomplishments, but this does not mean that we love them. Likewise, parents can take pride in the accomplishments of their children, but such admiration ought not to be the conditions upon which they love their posterity.

From a psychological perspective, self-esteem is the subjective sense of worth we have of ourselves. Heatherton and Wyland cite various pieces of literature that explains the nature of self-esteem. Individuals with high self-esteem are adept at coping and are confident in their social relationships. Low self-esteem people, however, suffer from a decreased ability to enjoy the

world around them and are more likely to experience depression and loneliness. (20) Since Communal Responsiveness is equally interested in the wellbeing of the other and self, it proposes that a healthy sense of self-esteem is necessary for a proper ordering of one's relationships. Humanity's default capacity for social self-esteem is relatively poor. One study examined the "Liking Gap," Boothby and Clark's term for our tendency to assume other people like us less than they do. In a variety of situations, individuals tended to believe that they were underappreciated when meeting new people and these effects could span semesters for college roommates. (21) It also appears that individuals with more positive self-appraisal have an easier time entering new social situations. Clark, Beck, and Aragon found that individuals low in the trait avoidant attachment had less trouble in novel social situations and merely inducing a person to recall a time in which they were treated unresponsively will decrease the probability they will enter a new social situation. (22)

Self-esteem has important implications for how partners treat each other. Individuals low in self-esteem will dissociate themselves from an unflattering partner, resulting in a vicious cycle. Conversely, individuals high in self-esteem will not distance themselves from an embarrassing partner but will work to mitigate the harm their partner is experiencing. (23) Additionally, self-esteem is crucial for how one can receive love. Low self-esteem results in a chronic distrust of the world. Such individuals may refuse others' goodwill, misinterpret acts of kindness, overemphasize negative situations, and invite caution from others. (7) A person who is unable to properly accept the responsiveness of another undermines a healthy relationship.

Communal Responsiveness portrays self-esteem as critical for mutual relationship satisfaction. Healthy self-esteem is important for both giving and receiving love in a relationship. People may be genetically or socially predisposed to poorer senses of self-judgement, but learning about this research is crucial in preventing and managing relationship stress induced by a partner's insufficient self-esteem. Given this psychological basis, a philosophical investigation of self-love will now commence.

Both Aristotle and Aquinas believe that self-love is an important component of loving others. Aristotle, in his Nicomachean Ethics, answers the question of self-love in respect to its actor: a virtuous person ought to love herself, a vicious person ought not to. Vicious people, who chase after temporal pleasures, are unconcerned with the states of their souls, and so selfishly hoard objects of their affection. Contrarily, virtuous individuals love the highest good and have an affection for their capacity to seek it. They, as Aristotle notes, will "profit

by doing noble acts, and will benefit [their] fellows." (24) Aristotle's reasoning is straightforward: we desire the good for ourselves, and it benefits both the self and society to do so. Thus those who are properly seeking the good ought to love themselves. Aquinas concurs with Aristotle on the matter. He acknowledges that, while he could never love himself in a friendship, he could seek his own highest good and thus love himself. (25) It is not selfish to wish the good for oneself. Indeed, we ought to behave in a manner that maximizes our capacity to be good humans.

Andres Nygren, a Lutheran theologian and author of *Eros and Agape*, detests all notions of self-love. In fact, Nygren connects our evil will with our natural condition of self-love and proposes that a proper neighborly love frees us from this bondage. (26) Nygren argues that both St. Paul and Martin Luther oppose self-love. Paul, according to Nygren, would find a spiritual self-love as "alien," and Luther believed Christ's commandment of love (thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself) meant "the rejection and condemnation of all self-love whatsoever." (26) Nygren claims no Christian can claim to practice self-love and recognizes it as the primary obstacle to loving God and loving others. Nygren's opinions are harsh and divisive. Self-love is no longer a prerequisite for loving another, rather, it is an obstruction to encountering the other. May believes self-love to be essentially impossible, as it, "lacks love's intrinsic condition: the grounding presence of another whom we experience as radically distinct from us." (19) May's position is unique insofar as he is not concerned that self-love is a hindrance to loving others, but rather an impossibility.

The Thomist philosopher Josef Pieper, conversing with Nygren, proposes the centrality of self-love. Pieper traces the history that resulted in the divorce of self-love from Christianity. He explores why thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas were convinced of self-love's primacy, ultimately opposing Nygren's thesis that self-love is a vice. Pieper thinks that human nature is of central importance when thinking about love. Pieper (alongside Aristotle) believes human nature is to achieve existential fulfillment – to reach out towards our highest good. We do not seek the highest good to obtain some other objective. The purpose of our life is the achievement of this good. We ought to approach the possession of the good in a selfish manner, knowing that our attainment of virtue does not undermine our neighbor's pursuit of the same goods. Virtue is not subject to scarcity – one person's virtue does not decrease when her neighbor's increases. It is existential fulfillment as Pieper puts it that humans seek, the sense of proper order and satisfaction achieved only by being excellent humans.

Bluntly stated, self-love "is the basic form of love, on which all others are founded and which makes all others possible," according to Pieper. (1) Self-love is the model (for better or worse) upon which we craft our other loves. A proper estimation of the self results in a caring individual. A wounded self cannot properly love others. Attachment theorists are convinced of the vital role of a child's relationship with his mother in the development of his social life. One study posits that children in mutually responsive relationships are better predisposed to developing strong consciences, maintaining a happy disposition, and behaving prosocially. (27) We might be wise to explore the same phenomenon within one's relationship to themselves.

The literature strongly supports the notion that everything from the initiation, to maintenance, to cessation of a social relationship is rooted in self-appraisal. It predicts whether you will assist a partner in distress and how you will influence prosocial behaviors around you. (28) Indeed, a vicious (or what modern psychology might call a "narcissistic") individual should not love their inordinate selves. But is Nygren's argument, that self-love is a hindrance to loving others, a point worthy of commending? A distinction must now be drawn between self-love and selfishness. Selfishness is the harm done to the self and others when an individual excessively seeks her own temporal goods. It manifests itself in a variety of interpersonal situations: the husband who cannot wash the dishes without an expectation of reciprocity, the mother who insists on a child's athletic involvement for her own pleasure, or a friend who dominates conversation. Self-love, conversely, is the proper affirmation of one's goodness so the self has the confidence to love others. It desires to be excellent for its own sake and wishes the same for others. Recognizing the inherent stability of the inner life, self-love projects that same sense of cohesion upon its surroundings, holding fast to a deep sense of trust in the universe.

Erich Fromm, the psychoanalyst who wrote *The Art of Loving*, adequately understood the pathology of selfishness as compared to the healthfulness of self-love. He argues that the selfish person does not love himself too much; he hates himself. (29) Turning inwards and failing to affirm his own goodness, he endlessly turns outside for external validation. Other people, instead of being instantiations of goodness for him to explore and interact with, become means to achieving his internal stability. Selfishness, then, is the inability to affirm one's own intrinsic goodness and the tendency to seek that corroboration from others.

Hannah Arendt's treatment of Augustine's conception of *cupiditas* and *caritas* in her dissertation *Love and Saint Augustine* is helpful in delineating between positive and negative self-love. *Cupiditas* is the love of things not guaranteed, the esteem of others being an excellent example. *Caritas*, by contrast, is concerned only with the attainment of the "highest good" and thus finds its fulfillment not in transient things, but in the eternal. This inclination towards the eternal, argues Arendt, allows the self to become self-sufficient. (30) *Caritas* does not require the opinion of others to love oneself, but rather, in the striving after existential fulfillment, is able to exist independently of one's reputation.

When it comes to practicing love, it is not merely enough to maintain relationships with others, but the integrity of the self is of tantamount importance to experiencing flourishing relationships. The literature is clear: positive evaluation of the self is the foundation for building proper relationships. But with all talk of self-love, we must make one thing abundantly clear: we ourselves cannot fill this void. Something ontologically superior – whether that be God, a belief in elevated love, or conviction in the supreme importance of loving another person – necessarily must be the object of our self-love. Self-love, at its fundamental level, is a humble acceptance of the fragile relationship between our interior lives and the world around us. We cannot retreat to our innermost self and be ultimately satisfied. The line dividing self-love from selfishness lies precisely in this distinction: humans are at their worst when they claim themselves as the highest good. May proposes that love offers us rootedness, "the existential import" of being loved by another person. (19) The dizzying notion that we ourselves are incapable of creating our own happiness and fulfillment is indeed terrifying to modern society. We like to think of the best among us as perfectly self-sustaining. But self-love, properly understood, is a dependence on the highest good in a way that directs our own fulfillment.

Gregory the Great's treatment of self-love offers a fitting conclusion to this section. Benedict XVI relates Pope Gregory the Great's commentary on the necessity for *agape* and *eros* in his encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. Pope Gregory utilized the image of Jacob's ladder to encourage people to spend time receiving love from God (i.e. contemplation) in order to take care of others (i.e. doing good works). It is not enough to give, Gregory argues, we must also receive. (31) Such reciprocity mirrors the development of human beings. In the incipient years of life, children are entirely dependent upon others, desiring food, shelter, and care from their parents. The privation of any of these items has serious physical and social implications. We are incapable of loving others if we ourselves have not been properly cared for in our youth. It is an act of humility to allow ourselves to be loved. Such an admission frees us from

the bondage of being the source of our own fulfillment and allows us to be cared for as we care for others.

Altruism

This section will introduce the biological basis for altruism and the effects such a prosocial norm has on society. Altruistic behavior was explained evolutionarily by Robert Trivers' 1971 paper: "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism," which explained how seemingly self-destructive acts (i.e. altruism) were reconcilable with natural selection. Trivers was interested in determining the evolutionary significance of selflessness, as it appeared contradictory to the preservation of one's life. A father leaping into a body of water to save his drowning daughter, argues Trivers, does not constitute altruism: he is acting in his own self-interest to preserve his genetic material. (3) Of interest to Trivers, then, are the cases of non-kin altruism, seemingly selfless acts that do not benefit one's direct kin. Trivers' thesis, that, "natural selection favors [certain] altruistic behaviors because in the long run they benefit the organism performing them" suggests that humans' prosocial actions are ultimately self-directed.

Trivers posits that over an extended lifetime, individuals will interact with relatively consistent populations of people and by acting altruistically, "the causal chain [an individual] initiates with his altruistic act will eventually return to him and confer, directly or indirectly, its benefit." (3) Trivers proposes a way of understanding human social interaction that dichotomizes behavior into two modes: reciprocity and cheating. Human psychology, his theory argues, has developed emotions to regulate these behaviors: cooperators form relationships of mutuality (friends) by seeking out other cooperators and cheaters are punished for refusing to reciprocate.

Robert Axlerod and William Hamilton's 1981 paper describing reciprocal altruism's application to a Prisoner's Dilemma-style game tournament conveys the value of evolutionary theory in describing human behavior. The Prisoner's Dilemma, a game theory puzzle, allows its players to either cooperate with one another or defect. The largest payoffs occur when one player cooperates but the other defects (an example of cheating), but the most stable payoff occurs when both parties elect to cooperate. Axlerod and Hamilton hosted a Prisoner's Dilemma tournament and invited participants to propose various strategies for long-term success in the game. The strategy that was most successful in reference to the authors' criteria of robustness (success amid other strategies), stability (resistance against mutant strategies) and initial stability (the circumstances for such a strategy to become viable) was TIT-FOR-TAT, a relatively straightforward strategy that involved initial cooperation, then mimicking whatever the other player performed previously. (32)

Axlerod and Hamilton's research suggests that a "tit-for-tat" morality is observable in a variety of species and maximizes benefits across individuals. Importantly, they note that "an individual must not be able to get away with defecting without the other individuals being able to retaliate effectively." (32) This is the basis for the sociological and psychological norms of reciprocity today. The researchers argue that we must be able to keep track of non-cooperation and be prepared to punish noncompliance to maximize net benefit across social networks. Though the tools for maintaining equity vary across species, the paper argues that humanity's advanced facial recognition capabilities allow for ease of recall of past non-conformers. And since reciprocal altruism depends on the promise of continual contact, when an individual anticipates the cessation of interaction with a particular face (a friend moving away, a partner's death), that individual may be inclined to cheat, as the punishment for such an action would be limited. (32)

These theories are fundamental for explaining the biological basis for our universal proclivity towards social interaction. They are useful for understanding why we have a propensity towards preferring kin to strangers or why it might be practical to play fair. But Communal Responsiveness is not solely concerned with base levels of morality, but rather the intense care and devotion shared between loved ones. Thus, it is necessary to consider what is really meant by care, which is best explored from a philosophical perspective.

Fromm is an excellent starting point for understanding how our biological impulses to love might be elevated to something higher. He argues that a mother has two tasks in raising a child: to take responsibility for a budding human so that it may grow, but also to affirm the goodness of existence, to instill in a child that existence is supremely valuable. (29) Ensuring that a child's physical needs are met is a necessary function of raising a stable society of posterity and the incentive to raise healthy children is self-evident. But to demonstrate to a child that existence is undeniably good is to go beyond the requirements of child rearing. Such a demonstration requires that the mother herself has accepted the premise that life is fundamentally good and is willing to persuade her children of this.

The distinct care that a mother has for her child is most reminiscent of C.S. Lewis' conception of *storge*, or what we might call affection. *Storge* is love felt for familiar objects (33) and it manifests itself as a fondness for someone in their particularity. Incipient love is always affectionate. Relationship initiation necessarily

includes a phase in which we recognize that we are drawn to another in their particularity. *Storge* seems to be connected to the capacity to see and recognize faces. Whether we gaze upon the sight of our newborn child, a stranger panhandling on the street, or our husband of many years, it is this affection for a particular person that motivates relationship onset.

But love cannot merely be affectionate. *Storge,* as Lewis notes, is "the love in which our experience seems to differ least from that of the animals." (33) Affection is insufficient for two reasons: because we are mutable creatures and because we must love even when it is not natural that we ought to. Humans are characterized by their volatility, both in their biology and psyches, and time is the enemy of affection. Our beloved changes, and we ourselves with her. Lewis speaks of the "jealousy" that accompanies learning a loved one has ceased to be what he once was. (33) If humans were only capable of *storge,* love would not endure. Trivers, Axlerod, and Hamilton discuss a purely natural affection: a desire to treat others equitably insofar as social benefit is maximized. Like *storge,* such an ethic is natural and important, but it is not enough to call that love.

The ancients always understood love as something divine or supernatural. The two most important images of divine love – *eros* and *agape* – are crucial for understanding the role of love in relation to spirituality. For Plato, love was a mediator between the gods and men, the son of Poverty and Plenty. The classical term for love in the Western tradition is *eros,* the desirous love explored by Plato in the Symposium. Eros is best understood as a lack that can be fulfilled only by a certain object. Diotima, a priestly speaker in the Symposium, declares *eros* to be, "the love of generation and of birth in beauty." (34) The siren that draws objects towards itself via its splendor and generation, beauty is the necessary consequence of love, whether a physical birth or intellectual development. Plotinus, the Neoplatonist, described *eros* as "the expression of a lack; the subject is conscious of insufficiency and, wishing to produce beauty, feels that the way is to beget in a beautiful form." (35) Augustine speaks of love drawing him upwards towards the dwelling place of God, a place where "we may have no other desire but to abide there forever." (36)

Eros is most associated with romantic love but depreciating it to mere infatuation is an error. *Eros* reminds an individual of her necessity to be taken care of. Humans are *de facto* needy creatures. We do not possess within ourselves the capacity to be self-sustaining. *Eros* might be synonymous with humility, an honest understanding about one's relationship to others and our radical dependency on objects outside of ourselves for proper self-fulfillment. The product of such a love is eternal beauty, whether that be understood in terms of our posterity, the cessation of desire, or beatitude.

Agape, the highest form of care, is the sacrificial, divine love of unconditionality. *Agape* is a self-gift that transcends reciprocal altruism insofar as it never expects reward for its benevolence. Nygren offers two characteristics of *agape* that are of particular interest. First, Nygren argues that *agape* is unmotivated, that is, it is not induced by anything in its object. (26) *Agape* does not prefer to love a person because she will be especially useful, pleasant, or virtuous, nor does it love with an expectation of reward. Nygren's view of *agape* is entirely antithetical to the psycho-evolutionary models that opened this chapter which argue people ought to love cooperators and hate defectors. *Agape* is always responsive, regardless of whether it will be reciprocated and irrespective of the character of the beloved. Within a Communal Responsiveness Model, *agape* cares for one's partner, but also for the neighbor and stranger as well. Being unmotivated, *agape* does not care because it has a particular fondness for one's partner, but rather cares for all individuals indiscriminately.

Nygren's second characteristic of *agape* is that it is "indifferent to value," that is, it refuses to consider the dignity of its beloved. (26) It is *agape* that powered Christ's fellowship with the sinners and hypocrites, not because He claimed such individuals were better than the righteous (like some sort of absurd inversion of morality), but because Christ saw beyond the dignity of the people he spent time with and recognized the sanctity of their human nature. In his book *Political Agape*, Timothy Jackson frames his thesis around the assertion that sanctity, not dignity, is the standard upon which we ought to care for other people. Dignity, the value we assign to another because of his earned worth, garners the respect of peers and maximizes social capital. (37) Dignity is a constant striving to better one's social outcomes by making cooperation with oneself more attractive. A dignified society operates similar to Axlerod and Hamilton's computer simulations: players make themselves useful to others and maximize their future benefits via reciprocity. Jackson takes particular care to note that dignity "underlies the calculation of rewards and punishments." (37) Dignity orders things towards the proper merit-earned ends.

Conversely, sanctity is "gifted inviolability," formulated in "impersonal essence" and "wills the good for someone independently of merit." (37) It is not distributed on the basis of worthiness and cannot be added to or detracted from. Jackson notes that "a sanctified party is not approached from within economics of exchange," but recognizes that human beings are "beyond price." (37) Sanctity is irreconcilable with a morality that is the result of evolutionarily

selected fairness. It does not undermine such a morality, but rather clarifies and elevates it. Sanctity is the leap from "eye for an eye," to "turn the other cheek." It is an elevated human conscience that seeks not brute egalitarianism, but encounters the other, seeking relationships. Dignity can be measured and boasted about. Sanctity is incorporeal and, at the worst of times, can be difficult to identify. Kierkegaard would add that in our universal identity of neighborliness, we all possess the duty to love each other and be loved. (38) We are not given special treatment due to status or attractiveness, but by virtue of our humanity, we are cared for universally.

A love that is unmotivated and indifferent to value is difficult to reconcile with Communal Responsiveness. No person would claim to love her husband, friend, or child irrespective to desire. Humans care for others because they desire to look after a specific individual. While it is normative for a parent to sacrifice his livelihood for his child, it would be bizarre to make the same sacrifice for a stranger. It seems impossible to love those with whom we are not familiar.

It is useful to consider those instances in which we love someone that we do not know. Ordinary life gives us plenty of opportunities to interact with individuals that we may never encounter again: the exhausted waiter taking care of your table, the lonely man sitting on the bus, and the individual experiencing homelessness we meet on the street corner. Caring for these persons is unmotivated by default. We may never again meet the stranger for whom we leave a kind tip, share a good conversation with, or for whom we purchase a hot meal. And when we love them out of sanctity, not because we pity their exhaustion, loneliness, or difficult economic situation, but because we recognize their humanity, we love them indifferent to value as well.

But *agape* also extends to familiar relationships. We perform acts of service for our children, our spouse, and our friends. No matter how strong the bond, however, it is impossible that our loved ones remain themselves, strictly speaking. It becomes more difficult to feel affection for our loved ones as they change with passing time. And as our beloveds change, the affection that once inspired our love may disappear. Our children age into resenting teenagers. Our spouses get lazy. Our friends become ungrateful. This is when our love becomes free – when we recognize that we still care for our loved one, even after she has changed. In loving variable beings, we liberate ourselves from the necessity to possess the beloved and instead focus on our capacity to love them. "No-" says Max Scheler, the German author of *Ressentiment*, "the value is love itself, its penetration of the whole person - the higher, firmer, and richer life and existence of which its movement is the sign and

the gem." (39) To love is not to acquire something for yourself, but to practice an action.

Projection, as presented earlier, is the tendency to assume a partner feels similarly about a relationship as we do. This could be an obstacle to Communal Responsiveness, as it suggests our egocentric bias might prevent us from authentically understanding how another person loves us. This restriction is alleviated by Kierkegaard in his *Works of Love* when he discussion the presupposition of love:

"But what then, is love?" "Love means to presuppose love; to have love means to presuppose love in others ; to be loving means to presuppose that others are loving." (38)

Projection is trust and faith – trust that others can give and receiving love and faith that if we conduct our lives in trust, we will adequately care for others. Scheler asks his reader the following question: when you encounter malevolence, do you ever stop to ponder if the evildoer might turn from her ways if you loved her enough? (39) If we presupposed another to be loving, would that transform their own self-image?

Projection is also empowering. In presupposing love, it can turn even the most wicked heart away from itself to the joy of loving another. Kierkegaard puts it thus: "remember that the prodigal son's father was perhaps the only one who did not know that he had a prodigal son." (38) The presupposition of love is irreconcilable with a stable evolutionary strategy. Defectors must be punished, not trusted. Presupposing love in another is illogical, dangerous, and potentially destructive, but is also the most efficacious strategy for eliciting the love of a despairing human being. To be treated as though you are loving, argues Kierkegaard, is a gift beyond reckoning. It reminds an individual of what they could potentially be, or perhaps, what they really are.

Conclusion

"[It is not] love to my neighbor - whom I often do not know at all - which induces me to seize a pail of water and to rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and sociability which moves me." (16)
- Peter Kropotkin, quoted in *Altruism*

Peter Kropotkin, the author of this section's epigraph, was a Russian geographer who studied the presence of altruistic, mutual aid within species and applied the behaviors he observed among other species to humans. (16) After he observed this prosocial behavior in other species, he assumed that human

relationships operated in the same manner. It is not a love for a particular human being that encourages us to sacrifice our own goods for another, but a fuzzy sense of widespread human connection.

Such a perspective on love, as this paper has demonstrated, is insufficient. We cannot exclusively look to psychology, or philosophy, or biology to make claims regarding human nature. We must pull from a variety of authorities. The task of this conclusion is to diagnose and treat some of the pathological views that have resulted from such a narrow perspective.

Firstly, there are the "collective humanitarians," such as Kropotkin, who prefer the collective to the individual. Consider the transformation of the word charity, for example. Charity, or *caritas*, traditionally referred to the divine love that "loves the unlovable," but modernity has shifted its meaning into an unenthusiastic "organized care for those in need, together with the necessary apparatus." (33,1) A word that originally was reserved for God's love for particular individuals has been revised to refer to organizational aid. Scheler, attuned to this problem, clarifies that Nietzsche's complaint of the Christian transvaluation of morals (i.e. Christianity's insistence that the "blessed are the meek" as opposed to the strong) ought not to have been aimed at *caritas*, but rather, humanitarianism. Love, argues Scheler, is "essentially a spiritual action and movement," whereas humanitarian love is "a feeling, and a passive one." (39) Love must always begin with the particular. In Socrates' speech on love in the *Symposium*, he relates that to love is to go "from one to two, and from two to all bodily forms." (34) Pieper speaks of the "intensity of love turned towards a single partner... [that allows the lover to realize] the goodness and love-ableness of all people." (1) The point in these illustrations is that love begins with an instantiation--whether that is a particular other or even oneself – and then extends towards other beings. It is the joy at having loved one's neighbor that would demonstrate one's capacity to love the world as a larger whole, not the other way around.

Charitable systems are not only necessary, but highly laudable. The problem with thinkers such as Kropotkin, however, is that it is impossible to equate a fondness for the human race with love. Consider Paul's hymn of charity:

"And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have *caritas*, I am nothing. If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have *caritas*, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have *caritas*, I gain nothing." (17)

This passage demonstrates the complexity of loving another. One must, as Kiekegaard puts it, pay attention to, "how the word is said, and, above all, how it is meant" when one performs an act of love. It is not enough to show mercy; we must mean to do well by our actions. (38) Even if we maximize beneficence in practicing altruism, we would hardly appreciate an individual who provided for us out of mere duty. We want to recognize empathy, active care, and concern for those who are assisting us. (40) In her work *Beyond Virtue*, Liz Jackson explains the position of Lawrence Blum, who argues that an empathetic person is better disposed to acting out his supposed care. Blum argues that this disposition allows us to assist a partner, even if there are no concrete ways in which we might alleviate suffering and posits that our beloved would be disturbed to learn that our care is merely out of a sense of duty. (41) We must recognize, as Benedict XVI posits, that "practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man." (31)

Secondly, we must discern how we are to love those that we are not in a defined relationship with. Communal Responsiveness is an excellent model for framing our familiar relationships, but are we to do with the multitude of others we interact with daily? Ought we to show the same noncontingent care for a stranger on the bus? For a disagreeing individual on the other side of a computer screen?

Kierkegaard has a harrowing answer: absolutely. In fact, while loving our friend or spouse is important, loving our neighbor is even more vital in our quest to be good human beings. Who is our neighbor? "There is in the whole world not a single person who can be recognized with such ease and certainty as one's neighbor," answers Kierkegaard, because our neighbor is anyone we might chance upon during our everyday lives. (38) He believes we possess a duty to love our neighbor, making the pledge to care for one another eternally secured. Friends can move away or spouses perish, but our neighbor is always just a short walk away. Indeed, we are entering territory that eclipses the demands of Communal Responsiveness. It is a dangerous idea to apply this conception of loving to those outside our daily circles of interaction. The philosopher himself wonders at the "divine authority" required to "turn man's natural conceptions and ideas upside down with this phrase [to love your neighbor.]" (38)

In order to love, practice responsiveness. Forget trying to love your community, country, or world. Start with, as Kierkegaard recommends, your neighbor (conveniently spotted right outside your front door). In your relationships, understand what it means to care for another. Heed the advice of Fromm: "to love somebody is not just a strong feeling - it is a decision, it is a judgement, it is a promise." (29) Remember it is sometimes harsh

and demands the good, not the comfortable. Practice *agapic* care. Ask yourself - "can I provide this same level of care on days my partner is not being his best self? Or if my partner was a stranger?" Understand self-love. Recognize the absolute necessity of securing existential happiness for others and yourself. And when it comes to understanding unselfish altruism, have a little faith. Take the courage required to love someone beyond their qualities and without expectation of reciprocity, but also be open to that same love. Perhaps, most practically, put down this essay, heed the advice of Kierkegaard, and remember, "Love to one's neighbor is not to be sung about--it is to be fulfilled in reality." (38)

I was recommended W.H. Auden's *O Tell Me the Truth About Love*, a poem about the trickiness of discovering love. In the final stanza, Auden poses a few questions regarding the arrival of love: "will it come without warning… will it knock on my door in the morning?" (42) We ask similar questions, both in our personal and public lives. When will I find one? When will the ceaseless debate end? When will justice rear its head? If my research has provided me with any answer it is this: love will arrive the moment you choose to practice it.

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