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“Sooner or later, all the peoples of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.”

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

UNLIMITED LOVE: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Unlimited Love is to human love as the creation of the universe is to our limited earthly endeavors. Human love sometimes shines brightly, but it is nevertheless a dim reflection of love at its heights. And yet we cherish the human capacity for love above all other human capacities, nurture it, and derive from it a hope for something much grander in the human future.¹

Most of us have encountered some memorably unselfish, genuinely kind, and deeply generous individuals, some of whom have may even have put themselves at considerable risk in the service of others. We are struck by the emotional tone, intensity, and helping behavior of such good neighbors. On an existential level, they pose a question: Is generative love for others the main purpose of our life, the only enduring source of meaning and dignity, and the basis for lasting self-esteem?

We mortals live somewhere “betwixt and between” egoism and Unlimited Love. Should we take seriously those exceptional saintly figures who claim to have participated in the mystical reality of Unlimited Love, and who return from their experiences to serve the most marginalized and imperiled among us? Should we undermine their genuineness and dismiss them as egoists in disguise? Should we take their motives at face value and assert that such unselfishness violates the virtue of selfishness and the canons of ethical egoism?² Yet such individuals perceive a source of Unlimited Love that can quicken the spirit of beneficence in human events; they appear, anyway, to have a deep emotional attunement of gratitude for each and every life; they seem, at least, to affirm that every person without exception can be loved; they are ostensibly forgiving and patient; and they purportedly possess great energy in the service of others. Are such people gifted by God? Or have their imaginations, desperate for a sense of purpose, triumphed over reason? Is it our human destiny to emerge from our human origins in “selfish genes” and tribalism to a world of greater and greater love? Is Unlimited Love up ahead luring humanity into a future of loving kindness for everyone, as well as for nonhuman species both lower and higher? Is there some unfolding purpose to the evolution of our species that is related to love?

None of us would be so presumptuous as to think that we could live up to the ideal of “Unlimited Love,” which is generally used within the monotheistic world religions to describe the love that God has for undeserving humans. Perhaps most parents will love their infant in an unlimited manner, but to some extent this is based on the fact it is their own, and love may diminish when the child starts to talk back; in adolescence, of course, parental love is often stretched “to the limit.” Human love is different from that described by Shakespeare – “the quality of mercy is not strained.” Our natural human love is strained and to think that we can throw off all limits in some facile way has the ring of madness. Even the most unstrained and abiding human love for others cannot ignore the strategic necessity of

imposing limits on recalcitrant hateful behavior. As Reinhold Niebuhr argued, those “children of light” who wish to bring egoism under the control of love must have the wisdom and cunning of those who would assert selfishness, but none of their malice.³ Given the reality of a human nature flawed by narcissism and hatred, even Unlimited Love does not disparage strategic limits that are required in response to malice. We deem it acceptable to limit violent and abusive behavior, to defend the innocent against assault, and to defend a nation against unjust aggression and terror, even if some believe that the means to these ends should be nonviolent.⁴ Whether resistance to evil is nonviolent or violent, our actions can be motivated by a love that remains open to forgiveness and reconciliation.⁵ Jails are necessary, but so also is the effort to restore the criminal to a productive and good life.⁶

But even the above realities do not so much undermine the possibilities for love as highlight the extent to which “tough love” is an absolutely essential aspect of Unlimited Love. Whether love takes the form of necessary toughness or forgiving softness, it is still love. I am by no means a love utopian because all utopian systems naïvely forget the strategic necessity of love in its tough form in response to sinful self-assertion.⁷ There has never been a so-called “utopia” in which personality disorders and egoism did not surface to the dismay of a starry-eyed flock. Human evil is as real as human love, and love must contain the fury of egoism, rudeness, greed, and hatred until a time comes, if ever it does, when human nature becomes something much purer than it is. Rather shockingly, the young Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer decided that the only loving thing to do in Nazi Germany was to participate in failed the “officer’s plot” to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis in 1945 for his part in the plot. He appears from his writings to have maintained his grounding in *agape* love throughout these years of difficulty.⁸ It is remarkable that for Bonhoeffer tough love meant doing the only thing that he felt could benefit Hitler, which was to free him from his demonic evil.

Hope for the full human realization of Unlimited Love must be left to theologians willing to speculate on the end point of history,⁹ or perhaps to science fiction.¹⁰ Yet I do believe in human progress with regard to knowledge, affect, and behavior; with wisdom we will grow tired of the myths of egoistic fulfillment and the realities of tribal or religious conflicts if we do not destroy ourselves and our generative planet first. Call it a desperate act of imagination on the part of the theologically minded, but perhaps Unlimited Love is real and a sort of Master Poet behind the universe, fostering love in a still incomplete and chaotic human world. In the exemplars of love Unlimited Love draws forth latent human possibilities. Are our human potentialities for love are much greater than most of us think, and have we only seen the beginning of the internal pressure of Unlimited Love that quickens our kindness? If a spirituality worth having exists, it must have something to do with the ways in which we invite the presence of Unlimited Love into our hearts. Perhaps this is delusion and fancy, but if no such poet exists, there are still arguments to be made that the direction of human development has been toward greater cooperation and love as an evolutionary necessity.¹¹

The discontinuities between transcendent or Unlimited Love and earthly or human love are obvious, but so too must certain small hints of continuity. Many of us from time to time feel utterly absorbed by compassion and kindness toward others, including people we have never met beforehand. Unlimited Love is an energy that can absorb us to degrees under the right internal and external circumstances, and some people do seem to be so absorbed in this energy more often than not. These are the people who are reliably loving. For example, in my local church there is a woman named Amy who for years has directed the pre-school program. She clearly has a love for the children in her presence, and her affect as well as behavior have been remarkably consistent over the years. She would not want to be called a saint, but she has the gift of bringing love to the children she serves so well, and she thrives

year after year. Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, has reliably devoted his adult life to building houses for the poor after giving up his own wealth.¹²

The term “*Unlimited*” is used because it captures the gratuitous freedom of the unsolicited love that we commonly acknowledge with the popular phrase “random acts of kindness.” Such love is probably best understood and manifested by modeling one’s life after someone who seems to exemplify it, reading the stories of love, and purposefully controlling love’s myriad of polar opposites - such as hatred, fear, and despair. The love that interests us here is a creative emotional energy that unselfishly affirms the existence and worth of the other as he or she is, however mindful of the potentiality for higher levels of fulfillment. The root experience of love is, I think, the amazing realization that another person actually means as much – or more - to me as myself.

No human being has lived a life of Unlimited Love. Thus, the ideal of pure Unlimited Love is often attributed to a presence in the universe that is higher than our own, perhaps as manifested in a divine messiah figure as with Christianity. Unlimited Love is another way of speaking of God. *In essence, Unlimited Love is an abiding other-regarding perspective and emotional attunement that affirms and serves all of humanity without any exception whatsoever.* It can be contrasted with limited other-regarding love, which, however compassionate and altruistic, extends only to some subset of humanity such as one’s nearest and dearest, or one’s particular tribe, and ignores humanity as a whole. The great lovers of all humanity often find themselves pitted against the great lovers of some small part of humanity. Unlimited Love, then, is *truly universal*. It can also be contrasted with love that diminishes with time. Romantic love, described famously by Schopenhauer as a “trick of the species” for reproductive purposes, does not typically endure over the course of a lifetime, unless romantic love is supplemented by something deeper and more abiding. Unlimited Love, then, is *unchanging*. It can also be contrasted with any form of love that is rooted in

selfishness.. Much love in the world is solipsistic - i.e., the other is never loved as a separate reality, but only insofar as he or she revolves around a universe in which *I* am at the center and contributes to *my* agendas. Unlimited Love, then, is *unselfish*. It is a love that does not keep count of favors and kindnesses returned in a self-interested game of calculating tit for tat. Unlimited Love is completely *uncalculating* or *unconditional* with regard to its object's assets, qualities, and potential for reciprocity – although an expression of gratitude may be welcomed. It is then, for starters, universal, unchanging, unselfish, and uncalculating. Such love, to the extent that it is manifest in human experience, may still be healthful for its agent.

“Love” is a confusing term. If common language is revealing, some seem to assume that love must involve sexual expression. This is incorrect because friendship is a form of love, as is volunteerism or the care that parents give to children. It is unfortunate that we use the word “love” to describe a caprice of a few days' duration or a sentiment devoid of esteem. The Greeks were more careful to make linguistic distinctions. They had a myriad of words for love: *eunoia* refers to good will or benevolence, *physike* to kindness toward people of one's own race, *xenike* to kindness toward guests and strangers, *erotike* to sexual desire, *eros* to impassioned attraction, *philia* to friendship, *storge* to tenderness, and *agape* to a disinterested affection. *Agape* would be taken up by emergent Christianity and identified as the essential nature of God. This affectionate love for all humanity seems to have at least some place in all major religious traditions of the world. Unlimited Love is a way to speak of *agape* love in a contemporary world where most people cannot be expected to be versed in Greek or in the history of ideas, but who sense that there is an abiding limitless love that affirms them regardless of their failures and weaknesses.

The word at the center of the form of love we are considering, which is essentially equated with *agape*, is *unlimited* – and it has the ring of novelty. It emerges from a creative

essay by John Templeton.¹³ It suggests a form of love that rises above every conceivable limit to embrace all of humanity in joy, creativity, compassion, care, and generativity; it lies at the heart of all valid and worthwhile spiritual, religious, and derivative philosophical traditions; it is often associated with a divine presence that underlies the cosmos and makes life a meaningful gift. Indeed, the life of Unlimited Love probably begins with the sense that every life is a gift. One purpose of religion is to provide a larger theological construction for such love, to translate this ideal into some sacred narrative, and to encourage its uncoerced and gratuitous expression. Anyone who senses the limits of living *in anger, hatred, egoism, unkindness, sensate hedonism, rudeness, greed, grudge, tribalism, and violence* at least perceives some hint of the ideal of Unlimited Love.

The essence of all true spirituality, religion, and virtue is in the cultivation of a deep abiding love. Such enduring affection can be distinguished from fleeting emotional experiences, no matter how intense these might be, or how much they result in limited periods of enthusiasm. However one wishes to define the human “soul,” it serves metaphorically to focus attention on whatever is ultimate and essential in being human. I take the “soul” to be a complex place where our loving emotions struggle for ascendance. Fear, terror, anxiety, hatred, bitterness, violence, envy, resentment, greed, and perhaps pessimism try to roam unchecked, strangling the life out of our lives. Spirituality refers to the ascendancy and dominance of another set of emotions associated with love. The fruits of such love include peace, joy, gratitude, kindness, care, forgiveness, and concern. All true spirituality is a form of love, and is a matter less of creed than of affection.¹⁴ All true spiritual experience or conversion involves a shifting of the emotional balance towards love. In the words of William James, all genuine religious experience involves “an assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.”¹⁵ The ultimate expression of love is love for all humanity, and for all that is.

Unlimited Love does not require a response of any sort. It can be entirely unwarranted and undeserved, as well as dismissive of the purported imperative of reciprocation. While it “seeketh not its own,” it accepts and delights in gratitude and other responses, however much it does not require or expect them. Unlimited Love lets all these responses take care of themselves. It involves a daring, free, compassionate, and urgent dream that explodes through all the requirements of benefit to self.

This chapter is entirely devoted to describing what it is that I mean by “Unlimited Love.” There is one qualification necessary from the outset: the only way to understand Unlimited Love is to (1) try to live by it through stretching all the real and imagined limits that we think we have within us, and (2) see the joy of it being worked out in people’s lives.

1. THE ENERGY OF LOVE: ORDINARY GOOD NEIGHBORS AND SAINTS

It is easy to think of love as an energy, the sum total of which defines the goodness of any society. The total love energy of a society is, for the most part, a measure of the everyday compassion and helping behaviors of ordinary people, who are good neighbors and have an abiding concern for those around them and for the very neediest. These people are quite plentiful, especially in times of catastrophic events in which our common vulnerabilities are magnified. They can be counted on in tough times, as was witnessed abundantly in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks.

As the political scientist Kristen Renwick Monroe demonstrates by qualitative interviews with altruistic individuals, everyday altruists hold “perceptions of a common humanity.”¹⁶ As Pitirim A. Sorokin pointed out in his a classic 1950 study of good neighbors and saints, the great apostles of the most creative levels of altruism are relatively few and cannot provide anything like the sum total of love energy that a society requires to thrive.¹⁷

Ordinary good neighbors, who practice something that points toward Unlimited Love, do not always go unnoticed. There is, for example, the inspiring story of Patty Anglin and her family.¹⁸ The Anglins have fifteen children, seven of whom are biological and eight of whom are adopted. All of the latter have “special needs” – i.e., serious medical problems, ranging from cognitive deficits to the absence of limbs. While there have been many challenges, the couple writes that these have been overcome by their experience of answered prayers and miracles of coincidence. They describe their family as “a sort of mini-United Nations,” with children from a myriad of ethnic and racial backgrounds. The daughter of a physician and a mother who was “the most unselfish person I have ever known,” Patty Anglin grew up in the missionary fields of Africa. She and her husband now live on a farm in Wisconsin that is named *Acres of Hope*, spreading what they perceive as God’s love one child at a time.

There is nothing abstract about this love. The Anglins are not pontificating about love for all humanity while failing to actually and concretely address the needs of an identified person immediately in their presence. While they may not philosophize about their lives of love, the important thing is not the abstract concept but their faith active in deeds. As I have discussed elsewhere at length, people like the Anglins do not fall prey to the temptation of false consciousness. They can be contrasted with those described by Camus who loved humanity in general but “avoid having to love anybody in particular.”¹⁹ An especially astute discussion of this moral disengagement from the concrete work of love is found in William H. McGuffey’s dialogue entitled *True and False Philanthropy*. An American educator in the 19th century whose *Newly Revised Eclectic Reader* was perhaps the single most influential book for American students at mid-century. McGuffey contrasts Mr. Fantom, a philosopher who waxes eloquent about universal benevolence, with Mr. Goodman, who tries his hand at helping those within his reach as best he can.²⁰ Being a person of large

and eloquent views does not necessarily equate with a life lived in love. Neither does the sublime emotional experience of compassion necessarily translate into active works.²¹

Societies must define exemplars of love in order to allow degrees of emulation to occur. Love is less taught didactically than it is *transmitted* through models. If the moral health of a society depends on its total love energy, role models are essential. The philosopher Edith Wyschogrod, has argued convincingly that, despite all the complex academic accomplishments of ethical theory and moral philosophy over the last century, more good comes from the emulation of extremely good people than through the achievements of theories.²² While love is alive every day to some degree in our ordinary lives, in every generation individuals emerge who overcome internal and external challenges to manifest an exemplary affective love for all humanity that is usually focused on active service to some especially needful population. No one has ever achieved perfect Unlimited Love, of course, and any realistic biographies of the saints indicate that they are all too human and imperfect.

In modern times, these saintly individuals are well known. For example, Mother Teresa of Calcutta manifested an inspiring love for the poor that was based on a profound spirituality within the Christian tradition.²³ Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, applied the idea of absolute love for every human person without any exception to the non-violent struggle for freedom. His “law of love” was deeply metaphysical, akin in Gandhi’s mind to the law of gravitation, and his confidence in it was remarkable. According to Gandhi, “It is no non-violence if we merely love those that love us. It is non-violence only when we love those that hate us. I know how difficult it is to follow this grand Law of Love. But are not all good and great things difficult to do?”²⁴ This faith in love inspired not just all of India, but also the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, whose leaders from Howard Thurman to Martin Luther King, Jr., had either visited with Gandhi directly or were following his path.

More recently, the Dalai Lama has brought to light the powerful teachings of universal compassionate love that emerge from the Buddhist tradition.²⁵

History is replete with similar figures. One of my favorites is the American Quaker John Woolman (1720-1772), who for years to Quaker meetings across the colonies, witnessing to people one by one about the evils of slavery. “My heart was tender and often contrite,” he wrote, “and universal love to my fellow creatures increased in me.”²⁶ The modern anti-slavery movement began at the moment he could then no longer assist his employer in the sale of a slave. After convincing his fellow Quakers to give up slavery, Woolman went on to spread his message in England, where he died after a short period of intense endeavor. Many 18th-century Quakers both in the colonies and in England were century slave owners. Woolman set about the task of creating change through the art of loving persuasion. He visited his fellow Quakers individually, farm after farm, for most of the two decades of his adult life. As Robert E. Quinn in his study of visionaries and “deep change,” Woolman did not criticize people or anger them, but “by 1770, a century before the Civil War, not one Quaker owned a slave.”²⁷ Due to the efforts of one man who seems to have approached the ideal of Unlimited Love as nearly as anyone, the Quakers were the first religious group to denounce slavery. If there had been a John Woolman in every religious denomination, perhaps the institution of slavery could have been abolished without the need for civil war and its 600,000 casualties. A single visionary individual committed to change under the power of Unlimited Love can make a difference.

Not all those who exemplify hints of Unlimited Love or something close to it are religious in the sense of having an established belief system and tradition; neither are all of them theists. They probably all share a sense of common humanity, deep human equality, and a developed capacity for empathy and compassion. In many cases, religion does seem to enhance the human capacity for love when it teaches and inspires such a common humanity.

Yet, as we are all so painfully aware, religion is also capable of feeding off the violent and vengeful energies that are permanent features of humannature. In this sense, religion reflects the ambiguities that lie within the human heart. All worthy manifestations of religion focus on the positive virtues associated with love – care, forgiveness, generosity, compassion, kindness – and insist that they shape all human relations.

Religion at its best is a remarkably enhancing force. On August 28, 1963, King stood before the Lincoln Memorial and spoke of “all God’s children” participating in the American dream:

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!”

This religious content was not just rhetoric for the sake of emotional engagement. As Richard Neuhaus writes, many public commentators ignored or trivialized the religious conviction underlying King’s words and works because, “In recent decades we have become accustomed to believe that of course America is a secular society. That, in the minds of many, is what is meant by the separation of church and state.”²⁸ When one announcer covering King’s memorial service described him as “the son of a minister, Dr. King remarked, “They aren’t interested in the why of what we’re doing, only in the what of what we’re doing, and because they don’t understand the why they cannot understand the what.”²⁹ The point here is that Dr. King believed in human freedom and justice not merely because these were his values; as he perceived and felt them, they were the expression of *agape* love.

The “why” giving rise to the “what” of which King spoke is nicely represented at the international level in the thoughts and life of Dag Hammarskjöld. In him, the relationship

between the public servant and the inner religious self was well manifested. When he was killed in a plane crash over Africa in 1961, “the whole world knew that it had lost one of its most dedicated and invaluable public servants.”³⁰ As Henry P. Van Dusen continues, Hammarskjold’s leadership as Secretary General transformed the United Nations “from a forum of prolix and often ineffectual talk into an instrument of action by the Community of Nations for the safeguarding of peace and the furtherance of world order.”³¹ Like Lincoln’s reconciling forgiveness and King’s *agape* love, Hammarskjold’s mystical commitment to unlimited love (which was made public in his spiritual classic entitled Markings) and his remarkable political abilities matched exactly the needs of the hour. Hammarskjold wrote of his religious grounding in all that he did:

In the faith which is God’s marriage to the soul, you are one with God,
and God is wholly in you, just as, for you, He is wholly in all you meet.

With this faith, in prayer you descend into yourself to meet the Other,
in the steadfastness and light of th is union, alone before God, and that
each of your acts is an act of creation, conscious because you are a human
being with human responsibilities, but governed, nevertheless, by the
power beyond human consciousness which has created man.³²

The fact that 65 percent of American say that they believe religion is key to solving social problems, and 86 percent of African Americans share this view, is a tribute to faith in the ultimate importance of Unlimited Love.³³

What is this love that transforms individuals into servants of humanity and often changes the course of history in such dramatic ways? These servant leaders appear, at least by their self-perceptions, to be driven by a presence in the universe above themselves with whom universal love and its correlative, justice, are closely linked. Remarkable brilliant and competent individuals assert that there is a creative Unlimited Love underlying all of reality,

and that our participation in it elevates our otherwise limited capacities for love to a new magnitude of affective and effective being for others. Their authority typically emerges from their reputations as servants of humanity, not from some high formal position of power.³⁴ While grounded in spiritual beliefs, practices, and experiences, they possess remarkable practical wisdom and are able to effect change in society. Even those who do not have had this spiritual worldview acknowledge the astounding energies of those who have had such participatory experiences. It is imperative, however, to be skeptical of individuals who, as a result of their purported religious experiences, become increasingly dysfunctional or arouse attitudes of hatred and revenge.

But I do not wish to end this section without returning to the ordinary expressions of love that bring a unique flavor to the everyday world in which we live. Here is a story that nicely captures aspects of unlimited love's gratuitous freedom, told by a Mr. Barry Schlimme of Louisville, Kentucky.

At a fund-raising dinner for a school that serves learning-disabled children, the father of one of the school's students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he offered a question.

"Everything God does is done with perfection. Yet, my son, Shay, cannot learn things as other children do. He cannot understand things as other children do. Where is God's plan reflected in my son?"

The audience was stilled by the query.

The father continued. "I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like Shay into the world, an opportunity to realize the Divine Plan presents itself. And it comes in the way people treat that child."

Then, he told the following story:

Shay and his father had walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they will let me play?"

Shay's father knew that most boys would not want him on their team. But the father understood that if his son were allowed to play it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging.

Shay's father approached one of the boys on the field and asked if Shay could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates.

Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said, "We are losing by six runs, and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and I'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning."

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three.

At the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the outfield. Although no hits came his way, he was obviously ecstatic just to be on the field, grinning from ear to ear as his father waved to him from the stands. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again. Now, with two outs and bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base. Shay was scheduled to be the next at-bat. Would the team actually let Shay bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball. However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay could at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed.

The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, "Shay, run to first. Run to first." Never in his life had Shay ever made it to first base.

He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled. Everyone yelled "Run to second, run to second!" By the time Shay was rounding first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman for a tag. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions had been, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Shay ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home.

As Shay reached second base, the opposing shortstop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third!"

As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams were screaming, "Shay! Run home." Shay ran home, stepped on home plate and was cheered as the hero, for hitting a "grand slam" and winning the game for his team.

"That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face," the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of the Divine Plan into this world."

Love affirmed Shay and endowed his life with a new level of hope and meaning.

All the self-interest and competition of the game was randomly set aside in order to shape a social world in which love could reign.

2. A SCIENTIFIC STARTING POINT IN THE WORK OF SOROKIN

If we leave the domain of love to the philosophers and theologians, the tough-minded empiricist will dismiss love as “soft” or “touchy-feely.” While prominent scholars in these disciplines have much to contribute, they need to be brought into fruitful dialogue with science if knowledge is to progress effectively. Moreover, science is, with regard to cultural impact, the dominant shaping force.

Most scientific studies on other-regarding love capture it under the broader term of “altruism,” which emerged in modernity as a secular replacement for *agape*. Altruism, which can be grounded in love, refers to genuinely motivated helping (beneficent) actions that may or may not involve significant risk to self. Such altruism might be a manifestation of: a purely rational Kantian imperative (“this is what pure reason dictates”); a sense of self-identity and expectation associated with social context and super-ego (“this is what someone like me is expected to do”); of an innate compassion that reacts immediately and instinctively to an imperiled other. There is no need to diminish the value of these three sources of genuine altruism. *Altruistic duty, altruistic self-identity, and altruistic impulse are not, however, altruistic love, which is in large part a deep underlying attunement of the emotional self that is seemingly palpable.*

Altruistic love was best studied by Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889–1968), a towering figure in twentieth-century sociology who was born in Russia, and died near Boston. One might introduce his *The Ways and Power of Love* with a summary of the author’s life, which would indeed be fascinating.³⁵ As a young man in Russia, he was imprisoned first by the Czarists and then by the Bolsheviks; he concluded that Czarist prison was the more comfortable of the two. After immigrating to the United States in 1923 to teach at the University of Minnesota,

he went on to become the founding chairman of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University in 1931. In 1945, anxious over the human condition in the wake of World War II and Hiroshima, he determined to found a program on *creative altruism*. This was called the Harvard Research Center for Creative Altruism. Here Sorokin's autobiography, entitled *A Long Journey* (1963),³⁶ becomes essential. Sorokin expressed pessimism about potential political or other attempts to bring about peace without the "notable altruization of persons, groups, institutions, and culture."³⁷ He was hardly sanguine about the role of extrinsic religion, because his own studies indicated that a "purely ideological belief in God or in the credo of any of the great religions" rarely results in more altruistic behavior.³⁸ He became increasingly interested in investigating "scientifically this unknown or little known energy" of love: "The phenomena of altruistic love were thought to belong to religion and ethics rather than to science. They were considered good topics for preaching but not for research and teaching."³⁹ In a voice that has since been heard by the *positive psychology* movement of the 1990s, Sorokin noted the tendency of scientists to focus research on the disease model:

While many a modern sociologist and psychologist viewed the phenomena of hatred, crime, war, and mental disorders as legitimate objects for scientific study, they quite illogically stigmatized as theological preaching or non-scientific speculation any investigation of the phenomena of love, friendship, heroic deeds, and creative genius. This patently unscientific position of many of my colleagues is merely a manifestation of the prevalent concentration on the negative, pathological, and subhuman phenomena typical of the disintegrating phase of our sensate culture.⁴⁰

The above point has not been lost to positive psychologists, although the contemporary movement does not yet recognize its resonance with Sorokin's legacy.

Sorokin's publicly disseminated statement describing the Center indicates his assumption that "none of the prevalent prescriptions against international and civil wars and other forms of interhuman bloody strife can eliminate or notably decrease these conflicts."⁴¹ He also wrote this: "Our second assumption was that this unselfish, creative love, about which we still know very little, potentially represents a tremendous power – the veritable *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – provided we know how to produce it in abundance, how to accumulate it, and how to use it; in other words, if we know how to transform individuals and groups into more altruistic and creative beings who would feel, think, and behave as real members of a mankind united into one intensely solidary family."⁴²

As one would expect, Sorokin's first task with the Research Center was to collect all the useful data he could. In 1950, he published an important book entitled *Altruistic Love: A Study of American Good Neighbors and Christian Saints* (cited at the outset of this chapter).⁴³ At the beginning of this impressive empirical work, Sorokin wrote that while "for decades Western social science has been cultivating, *urbi et orbi*, an ever-increasing study of crime and criminals; of insanity and the insane; of sex perversion and perverts; of hypocrisy and hypocrites," it has "paid scant attention to positive types of human beings, their positive achievements, their heroic actions, and their positive relationships" (p. 4). This study looks at the typical characteristics of altruistic persons (sex, age, occupation, economic status, social position, education, and other features), and discusses their types, as well as how they became altruistic. Four years later, *The Ways and Power of Love* appeared. Arguably Sorokin's greatest work, it is classic text because it transcends the limits of any particular era.

An Abundant Intellectual Passion

The Ways and Power of Love was published in 1954, when Sorokin was leading the Harvard Research Center in Creative Altruism. Like the author's earlier works on the

dynamics of cultural change, this book received considerable attention. The philosopher Robert G. Hazo, for example, lauds *The Ways and Power of Love* in his classic 1967 work on the history of the idea of love, published in Mortimer J. Adler's *Concepts of Western Thought Series*:

Sorokin treats love as a separate subject in a treatise devoted exclusively to it. His elaborate discussion and analysis of love, its causes and effects, its human and universal significance, its higher and lower forms, and its implications for other subjects constitute one of the most extensive treatments to be found in the systematic literature about love. *The Ways and Power of Love* is an ambitious attempt to subject analytical schemes to a phenomenon that Sorokin claims has both a human and a cosmic dimension.⁴⁴

Indeed, nothing that Sorokin wrote over his brilliant career lacked this ambitious character.

While the sheer scope and dimension of love in the thought and science of Sorokin is impressive to the contemporary integrative mind, the increasingly rigid disciplinary style of most of his contemporary social scientists resulted in a very mixed reception for the book. Sorokin challenged the narrow and technocratic aspects of sociology, which he felt was captive to small fragments of data while lacking in any larger systematic, cultural-historical framework that would make these data meaningful or interesting. Indeed, some sociologists viewed Sorokin to be at times more a philosopher of history than a methodologist – a critique that he would take as a compliment. Sorokin is probably best described as a creative and idealistic social thinker, devoted to scientific observation but with too wide-ranging an intellect to be content with a purely technical rationality. Sorokin was perhaps at his controversial best in laying out the cosmic as well as the human aspects of love. To fully appreciate his nonconforming genius, however, we must delve briefly into his distinctly Russian intellectual roots.

“Integral Knowledge” and Its Detractors

Sorokin inherited the Russian tradition of nineteenth-century thought associated with Nikolai Fedorov, Sergei Bulgakov, Feodor Dostoyevsky, Prince Peter Kropotkin, and Vladimir Solovyov, among many others. This distinctive intellectual tradition centered on the pursuit of *integral knowledge*, bringing together religious, psychological, ontological, cosmological, ethical, metaphysical, sociological, and biological knowledge. In addition to *integral knowledge*, these Russian thinkers ascribed to the key principle of *sobornost*, or “all-togetherness.” They recognized the natural capacity for mutual assistance and cooperation, a theme articulated in the context of evolutionary science by Prince Kropotkin, that today enjoys a significant renaissance in the related fields of game theory and evolutionary biology.⁴⁵

In *The Ways and Power of Love*, Sorokin indicates the special influence of Solovyov (1853–1900), a close friend of Dostoyevsky who synthesized philosophy and mysticism in his classic work, *The Meaning of Love* (1894). Of love and its contrasts, Solovyov wrote:

The basic falsehood and evil of egoism lie not in this absolute self-consciousness and self-evaluation of the subject, but in the fact that, ascribing to himself in all justice an absolute significance, he unjustly refuses to others this same significance.

Recognizing himself as a center of life (which as a matter of fact he is), he relegates others to the circumference of his own being and leaves them only an external and relative value.⁴⁶

Positively stated, Solovyov described the nature and value of love thus: “The meaning and worth of love, as a feeling, is that it really forces us, with all our being, to acknowledge for another the same absolute central significance which, because of the power of our egoism, we are conscious of only in our own selves. Love is important not as one of our feelings, but as

the transfer of all our interest in life from ourselves to another, as the shifting of the very center of our personal lives.’⁴⁷ Solovyov, like Sorokin, understood human love as a partial reflection of, and, at its height, a participation in, divine love.

It is against the above background of Russian tradition, then, that Sorokin’s broad concept of love can be most fully grasped. One can only imagine how foreign this tradition appeared to the academic world of western positivist sociology in the 1940s and 50s, as it sought legitimacy through a narrower methodological model. Sorokin often wrote of the futility of sociology when stripped of deep integral reflection, for then it sacrifices interpretive insight and makes an idol of quantitative data. Although he was committed to scientific methods, he had a broader vision of his discipline than many of his contemporaries.

In *The Ways and Power of Love*, Sorokin considered love in seven aspects, following the tenets of *integral knowledge*. The *religious aspect* of love identifies it with a Higher Presence, however symbolized in the great spiritual and religious traditions; the *ethical aspect* of love identifies love with goodness itself; the *ontological aspect* of love defines it as a “unifying, integrating, harmonizing, creative energy or power” that works in the physical, organic, and psychosocial worlds (p. 6); the *physical aspect* of love is shown in “all the physical forces that unite, integrate, and maintain the whole inorganic cosmos in endless unities, beginning with the smallest unity of the atom and ending with the whole physical universe as one unified, orderly cosmos” (pp. 8–9); the *biological aspect* of love is evident in procreation and parental care.

The sixth aspect of love is the *psychological*: “In any genuine psychological experience of love, the ego or I of the loving individual tends to merge with and identify itself with the loved Thee. The greater the love, the greater the identification” (p. 10). He views love as a “life-giving force” because of studies that show that people who are altruists live

longer than egoists do (p. 11). Love is also defined as “the loftiest form of freedom” (p. 11), for where there is love there is no coercion. Sorokin refers to the writings of St. Paul on this point. He was also conversant with a Russian contemporary, the theologian Nicholas Berdyaev, who emphasized that love nailed upon a cross compels no one. On the psychological level, Sorokin also notes that love overcomes fear, as exemplified by the life of Gandhi, whom he much admired as a modern saint: “Love does not fear anything or anybody. It cuts off the very roots of fear” (pp. 11–12). In a manner that brings to mind the various spiritual-ethical writings of the contemporary Dali Lama, Sorokin associates love with “the highest peace of mind and happiness” (p. 12).

Seventh is the *social aspect* of love: “on the social plane love is a meaningful interaction – or relationship – between two or more persons where the aspirations and aims of one person are shared and helped in their realization by other persons” (p. 13). Sorokin quickly qualifies *aspirations* with the adjective *wise*.

In *The Ways and Power of Love*, Sorokin focused mainly on the psychological and social aspects of love, but always with an eye toward its spiritual-religious aspects. In a passage that sums up his broad perspective on love and also captures the depth of his integral thinking, he wrote, “Concentrating on these planes, however, we shall always keep in mind the manifoldness of love as a whole, because without its religious, ethical, and ontological aspects we cannot truly understand a ‘visible’ part of this cosmos, its psychosocial empirical aspects” (p. 14). Here Sorokin is being true to his Russian intellectual tradition, with its wide-spectrum *integral knowledge*. Methodologically committed to new scientific knowledge that can move our understanding of love forward, he was also attentive to a wider cosmic context and to the fullness of human experience and history. Obviously, any scientific thinker working with these various contextual axes would have struggled for credibility in an era

such as the 1950s, when the strictest diminution of the significance of metaphysical speculation was so dominant in major universities.

Sorokin's commitment to *integral knowledge* was addressed at an American Sociological Forum in 1959, which was convened by leaders of American social science and included such luminaries as Oxford historian Arnold Toynbee and the eminent sociologist Robert K. Merton, Sorokin's former student at Harvard. The fact that Sorokin received such attention is testimony to his continuing status, despite degrees of professional marginalization due in part to rise of positivism. Joseph P. Ford devoted a presentation at this forum to the topic of "integralism" in Sorokin's work, pointing out his creatively integrative mind while acknowledging that the strict disciplinary emphasis of the time meant that considerable numbers of academics could not take Sorokin with appropriate seriousness.⁴⁸ In this same volume, Toynbee indicated the value of Sorokin's thinking on the history of civilizations, which allowed him to see rhythms between alternating ways of life based on ideational, idealistic, and sensate values. Toynbee offered a critique that was largely appreciative, and suggested that Sorokin's sweeping integrative perspective was not unlike his own.⁴⁹ There was a resonance between Sorokin and Toynbee, and both went out of vogue as historians came to specialize on short periods of history devoid of rhythmic sweeping perspectives on the larger picture of the rise and fall of civilizations. For the reader who approaches history and thought with "big picture" questions in mind, Sorokin still makes interesting reading.

Integral knowledge, now a more acceptable notion in academic institutions, ran against the grain of most of the second half of the twentieth century. Sorokin did pay a price. In one of the most famous in-fights in modern sociology, Talcott Parsons was able to absorb Sorokin's Department of Sociology into Harvard's then newly established Department of Social Relations in 1946, effectively superseding the more integrative Sorokin. In particular, Sorokin was criticized by Parsons and others for his ideas about cultural patterns and trends.

Yet noted scholars of the era still referred to Sorokin as “the pre-eminent social philosopher of our age.”⁵⁰ While sociologists continue to debate Sorokin’s contributions, he was among the most prolific, creative, and widely-translated sociologists of his generation long before he turned specifically to the topic of altruistic love.⁵¹

“The Five-Dimensional Universe of Psychosocial Love”

Sorokin’s scientific mind led him to develop a remarkable five-dimensional model of love as a heuristic device for the articulation of core researchable questions. These questions still have importance to any research on love, and therefore should be highlighted here as they are developed in chapter two of *The Ways and Power and Love*.

Sorokin’s first dimension of love is *intensity*. Low intensity love makes possible minor actions, such as giving a few pennies to the destitute or relinquishing a bus seat for another’s comfort; at high intensity, much that is of value to the agent (time, energy, resources) is freely given. While Sorokin does not fully develop the different potential forms of intensity, his point remains clear. While the range of intensity is not scalar - i.e., research cannot indicate “how many times greater a given intensity is than another” (p. 15), it is often possible to see “which intensity is really high and which low, and sometimes even to measure it” (p. 15).

Sorokin’s second dimension of love is *extensivity*: “The extensivity of love ranges from the zero point of love of oneself only, up to the love of all mankind, all living creatures, and the whole universe. Between the minimal and maximal degrees lies a vast scale of extensivities: love of one’s own family, or a few friends, or love of the groups one belongs to – one’s own clan, tribe, nationality, nation, religious, occupational, political, and other groups and associations” (p. 16). Sorokin’s extensivity resonates with the classic western discussion of the “order of love.” How does one balance love for family and friends (the nearest and

dearest) with love for the very neediest of all humanity? Although the monotheistic faiths have appreciated the importance of special relationships such as family and friendship, they have asserted the centrality of love for humanity as a whole. Yet it is also possible for someone to be so focused on the needs of all humanity that the importance of special relationships is missed. Various religious and philosophical traditions have sought to resolve this tension in different ways. In this regard, Sorokin was especially concerned with in-group love because, as he argues toward the end of his book, insular group loyalty is rather typically the source of hostility against the out-group. With the advent of weapons of mass destruction, he feared such insularity might doom humanity. His purpose in doing research was in large part to better understand how insularity might be overcome. As an example of the widest extensivity he offers St. Francis, who seemed to have a love of “the whole universe (and of God)” (p. 16).

Sorokin next added the dimension of *duration*, which “may range from the shortest possible moment to years or throughout the whole life of an individual or of a group” (p. 16). For example, the soldier who saves a comrade in a moment of heroism may then revert to selfishness, in contrast to the mother who cares for a sick child over many years. Romantic love, he indicates, is generally of short duration as well.

The fourth dimension of love is *purity*. Here Sorokin wrote that pure love is characterized as affection for another that is free of egoistic motivation. By contrast, pleasure, advantage, or profit underlie inferior forms of love, and will be of short duration. Pure love – i.e., love that is truly disinterested and asks for no return, represents the highest form of emotion (p. 17).

Finally, Sorokin included the *adequacy* of love. Inadequate love is subjectively genuine but has adverse objective consequences. It is possible to pamper and spoil a child with love, or to love without practical wisdom. Adequate love achieves ennobling purposes,

and is, therefore, anything but blind or unwise. Certainly love is concerned with the building of character and virtue, and will shun over-indulgence. Successful love is effective.

These five dimensions of love allow us to ask empirical questions about how strength or weakness in one dimension varies with other dimensions. How intense, extensive, enduring, unselfish, and wise is any particular manifestation of love? Sorokin argues that the greatest lives of love and altruism approximate or achieve “the highest possible place, denoted by 100 in all five dimensions” (p. 19), while persons “neither loving nor hating would occupy a position near zero” (p. 19). Gandhi’s love, for example, was intensive, extensive, enduring, pure, and adequate (effective).

In addition to allowing us to grade the total, five-dimensional quality of love in any individual, this method allows us to develop various ideal types, such as high intensity and very low extensivity, high intensity and very short duration, and low purity and short duration. Such an analysis invites researchers to classify “the types of love activities and of loving persons, and to learn which types and combinations are more frequent in a given human universe” (p. 20). The implementation of such an empirical survey would still provide useful data today. We might be surprised at what the findings would tell us about human nature; these findings might even run counter to the prevailing myth of self-interested individualism that seems to permeate the social sciences. We could also learn whether high purity correlates with long duration, and so forth. As Sorokin noted, “At present our knowledge of these relationships is rather meager” (p. 20). Nearly a half century later, this is still the case.

Sorokin did develop some interesting hypotheses regarding these dimensional relationships, all of which are worth pondering. For example, “The greater the five-dimensional magnitude of love, the less frequent it is in the empirical sociocultural world” (p. 21); “Other conditions being equal, the intensity of love tends to decrease with an increase of

its extensivity or the size of the universe of love” (p. 21); “the intensity of love tends to decrease with an increase of duration, when the love expenditure of a given person is not correspondingly replenished by an inflow from other persons or other sources, empirical or transcendental” (p. 24); “intensity, purity, and adequacy of love are somewhat more frequently associated positively than negatively or not at all” (p. 29); “adequate love is likely to last longer than inadequate love” (p. 35).

The Theological Features

Of special interest to Sorokin was the love of figures such as Jesus, Al Hallaj, Damien the Leper, and Gandhi. Despite being persecuted and hated, and therefore without any apparent social source of love energy, they were nevertheless able to maintain a love at high levels in all five dimensions. Such love seems to transcend ordinary human limits. Sorokin argued that it seems to suggest that some human beings do, through spiritual and religious practices, participate in a love energy that defines God.

Sorokin was convinced that such perfect or Unlimited Love can best be explained by hypothesizing an inflow of love from a higher source that far exceeds that of human beings. Following the Russian tradition of *integral knowledge*, Sorokin was willing to hypothesize the existence of a higher source of love in the universe in which degrees of human participation are possible. He writes quite metaphysically of the exemplars of love at its fullest, many of whom were despised and had no psychosocial inflow of love to sustain them:

The most probable hypothesis for them (and in a much slighter degree for a much larger group of smaller altruists and good neighbors) is that an inflow of love comes from an intangible, little-studied, possibly supraempirical source called “God,” “the Godhead,” “the Soul of the Universe,” the “Heavenly Father,” “Truth,” and so on.

Our growing knowledge of intra-atomic and cosmic ray energies has shown that the

physico-chemical systems of energies are able to maintain themselves and replenish their systems for an indefinitely long time. If this is true of these “coarsest” energies, then the highest energy of love is likely to have this “self-replenishing” property to a still higher degree. We know next to nothing about the properties of love energy.

Theoretically love may have its own “fission forces” that make its reservoir inexhaustible. When a person knows how to release these forces of love he can spend love energy lavishly without exhausting his reservoir. (p. 26)

As evidence, Sorokin resorts to radical empiricism - i.e., the legacy of human experience. Specifically, he refers to all the martyrs of love who, when surrounded by adversity, call out to a higher presence in the universe. Our understanding of such exemplars is very poor because science has not given them the attention they merit. Sorokin believed such enhanced understanding could increase love within individuals and society and between groups (p. 42).

Sorokin’s hopes that a scientific understanding of love might transform the world were grounded in human history and the “enormous power of creative love” (p. 48). He lists innumerable cases in which love stopped aggression and enmity, fostered love in turn, contributed to vitality and longevity (pp. 60-61), cured mental illness, sustained creativity in the individual and in social movements, and provided a basis for ethical life.

Sorokin openly asserted a view of human nature that included the *supraconscious*. This anthropological position underlies so much of *The Ways and Power of Love* that one cannot reasonably fail to consider it.

Briefly stated, Sorokin speaks of the *biologically unconscious* aspect of the person, and assigns to it a somewhat diminished value: “Man is an animal, and all the reflexological, instinctive, and unconscious excitations and inhibitions, drives and activities of the human organism necessary for animal life, growth, and survival make up the lowest aspect of human personality – its biological needs, drives, energies, and activities. (p. 84)” Although Sorokin

pre-dated the emergence of ethology and evolutionary psychology, much of the reflexive or instinctive rescue behavior (altruism) that places the self at risk and that seems so deeply hard-wired into human nature emerges from this biologically unconscious dimension of the self. Although Sorokin takes this level of human nature seriously, his view of love clearly emerges from higher cosmic energies rather than from the biology below. Related to this biologically unconscious aspect of the self is the *bioconscious in man*, by which Sorokin means all the solipsistic consciousness related to the pursuit of biological needs and ego development. Thirdly, he describes a *socioconscious in man*, including the “sociocultural egos, roles, and activities” that we have as members of families, citizens of the state, occupational and religious groups, etc. (p. 90). He is keenly aware of how much we are dominated by these social roles and personas, often to the point of being overwhelmed. With a note of determinism, he describes the socioconscious as powerful and binding. This is relevant to his greatest concern, which is the foreboding specter of in-group insularity and inter-group conflict in a technological world able to destroy itself.

Finally, Sorokin describes a “still higher level in the mental structure of man, a still higher form of energies and activities, realized in varying degrees by different persons – namely, the *supraconscious* level of energies and activities” (p. 96). This *supraconscious* level is explored in chapters six through nine in *The Ways and Power of Love*; it is at this level that genuinely creative love resides. Of course, Sorokin was running against the grain of the social sciences, with their “materialistic and mechanistic metaphysics” (p. 98), and he therefore felt compelled to “lay down the very minimum of evidence” (p. 98) for the reality of the *supraconscious*. This evidence, as Sorokin offers it, includes the *supraconscious intuition* that informs so much of the highest human creativity (and the work of child prodigies) in virtually all fields, from mathematics to ethics and religion (ch. 6). The *perfectly integrated creative genius* achieves the highest level of creativity without strenuous effort. In

ego-centered love – i.e., love “of low intensity, narrow extensivity, and short duration, impure and inadequate” (p.125), no supraconscious is involved. However, “quite different seems to be the situation with the supreme forms of creative love – intense, extensive, durable, pure, and adequate. Like supreme creativity in the field of truth or beauty, *supreme love can hardly be achieved without a direct participation of the supraconscious* and without the ego-transcending techniques of its awakening” (p. 125, italics in original). Sorokin gathers empirical support for this statement from the testimony of “innumerable eminent apostles of love” who, across cultures and generations, describe themselves as instruments of the supraconscious: “God, Heaven, Heavenly Father, Tao, the Great Reason, the Oversoul, Brahma, Jen, Chit, the Supreme-Essence, the Divine Nothing, the Divine Madness, the Logos, the Sophia, the Supreme Wisdom, the Inner Light” (p. 127).

In Part Four, the longest section of *The Ways and Power of Love*, Sorokin sets out ideal typologies of loving and altruistic persons. He surveys the various techniques of altruistic transformation embedded in world religious traditions with an enormous scholarly depth. I suggest that this segment, entitled *Techniques of Altruistic Transformation of Persons and Groups*, is by far the finest summary of such practices and rituals available.

The final part of the book, *Tragedy and Transcendence of Tribal Altruism*, consists of a single chapter, entitled *From Tribal Egoism to Universal Altruism*. This is the last and most pessimistic chapter. Sorokin asserts a general law:

If unselfish love does not extend over the whole of mankind, if it is confined within one group – a given family, tribe, nation, race, religious denomination, political party, trade union, caste, social class or any part of humanity – such in-group altruism tends to generate an out-group antagonism. And the more intense and exclusive the in-group solidarity of its members, the more unavoidable are the clashes between the group and the rest of humanity. Herein lies the tragedy of tribal altruism not extended

over the whole of mankind or over everyone and all. An exclusive love of one's own group makes its members indifferent or even aggressive towards other groups and outsiders. (p. 459, italics in original)

Sorokin's concern with in-group insularity pervades his writings, especially in his many passages regarding the extent to which apostles of universal love have clashed with tribalists and been imprisoned, banished, tortured, and killed. In addition to exemplars of unlimited love for all humanity, innumerable groups have themselves been destroyed by the collective egoism of group loyalty. As Sorokin writes, "Whether in the form of a cold or a hot war, this intergroup warfare has gone on incessantly in human history, and has filled its annals with the most deadly, most bloody, and most shameful deeds of Homo sapiens" (p. 461). In-group exclusivism has "killed more human beings and destroyed more cities and villages than all the epidemics, hurricanes, storms, floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions taken together. It has brought upon mankind more suffering than any other catastrophe" (p. 461). Religious, ethnic, tribal, caste, and class wars have thus far defined much of human history and experience. What is needed, argues Sorokin, is enhanced *extensivity*. His recommendation is that the power of hatred be focused on threats to the whole of mankind, such as disease, ignorance, and poverty. He also recommends that competitions be sponsored on the basis of new values: "Unselfish love and humility can successfully be one of the most important competitive values" (p. 468). Indeed, *humility* was a core value in Sorokin's approach to a better human future.

In a visionary conclusion, Sorokin places his faith in science: "Science can render an inestimable service to this task by inventory of the known and invention of the new effective techniques of altruistic ennoblement of individuals, social institutions, and culture. Our enormous ignorance of love's properties, of the efficient ways of its production, accumulation, and distribution, of the efficacious ways of moral transformation has been

stressed many times in this work” (p. 477). Science can help us achieve the supreme good of “*sublime love, unbounded in its extensivity, maximal in its intensity, purity, duration and adequacy*” (p. 485). It is certainly right to hope, with Sorokin, that progress in knowledge about love can move humanity forward to a better future.⁵²

In summary, what should the reader take from this discussion of the remarkable and controversial Sorokin? The message is that love and unlimited love can be captured by certain conceptual categories for potential measurement. *In Sorokinian terms, then, “Unlimited Love” – a term he never used, but which fits his thinking well- is love that is very high in intensity, extensivity, duration, purity, and adequacy.* Human love can become impressive in various of these aspects to significant degrees. The humanists among us, who perhaps eschew science and embrace only the subjective narrative of love, may scoff at the scientific approach. I hope that this summary of Sorokin’s work may at least somewhat mitigate any such animosities. Because the story of the experience of love is important place, we now turn to the narrative description of Unlimited Love.

3. THE CORE OF “LOVE”

As suggested above, “love” is a word that is applied somewhat promiscuously. Serious definitional work is imperative, especially when popular culture seems to equate love with acts of physical intimacy. While it is true that love is somewhat ineffable, as are most complex phenomena, we cannot rightfully set aside the task of definitional analysis just because the perfect definition sought is elusive. The scientific examination of love requires some clarity of terms.

Love is not reducible to empathy, although empathy has a role in love. The innate and evolutionarily complex empathic capacity is affective in quality. It is an emotional feeling into the experience of the other that may result in altruistic actions. But the capacity

to sense the experience of the other has no inherent moral direction, and it is well recognized that some persons with developed empathic abilities may use them for manipulative or even nefarious purposes. Compassion, on the other hand, does clearly contain a morally beneficent direction, and can be defined as the linkage of empathy with goodness.

Neither is love reducible to compassion, although compassion is a vitally important modulation of love in the context of suffering. Compassion requires empathy and seeks to achieve good in the context of suffering, and implies a readiness to be of help. Compassion is, therefore, a moral emotion in a sense that empathy is not; it affirms the goodness of the other as other, rather than as a means to the further the interests of the agent.

I maintain that the very core of love includes a *grateful celebration* of the other's very existence that has no particular correlation with suffering. Love is a radical affective affirmation of the other that is manifested by a desire to be with, and a willingness to participate in the life of, the other. The reader will perhaps be surprised that this definition of love does not attempt to elevate compassion above all other manifestations of love. Instead, following more closely the insights of Buber and Levinas, *I identify the core of love with an almost sacramental appreciation and affirmation of the other.* This foundational disposition precedes any of love's other manifestations or modalities.

Thus, love is to person as compassion is to person-in-suffering. Compassion means literally "to suffer with." Unless we are all suffering all the time, love must take different forms and expressions than compassion. For two decades, I have been astounded by the elegant writings of the great Spanish poet and thinker Miguel de Unamuno. In his classic work, entitled *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1912), Unamuno pictures all love (other than carnal) as a form of pity and compassion born of suffering and sorrow: "To love with the spirit is to pity, and he who pities most loves most."⁵³ Unamuno continues:

Men aflame with a burning charity toward their neighbors are thus enkindled because they have touched the depth of their own misery, their own apparentiality, their own nothingness, and then, turning their newly opened eyes upon their fellows, they have seen that they also are miserable, apparential, condemned to nothingness, and they have pitied them and loved them.⁵⁴

For Unamuno, love is compassion or it is absent. He laments the “vanity” and “tedium” of existence, while asserting that “all consciousness is consciousness of death and suffering.”⁵⁵ Love has no other expression than compassion, he argues, because in reality there is nothing but suffering in life if we see it for what it is. He contends that God’s love is also a matter of pity alone.

Unamuno is among the most graceful of the Spanish poets. His insights into suffering are profound. There is a pathetic aspect to our lives in that we do all suffer and fall short before the power of finitude. Yet Unamuno distorts human experience by omitting the *homo ludens* (“man the player”) of play, celebration, and joy in the gift of life. Johan Huizinga coined this expression in his classic work describing play as an essential indispensable mode of human existence. He moved far beyond play as essential only to the child. Huizinga saw play as a deep human reality upon which is based many of our highest spiritual accomplishments.⁵⁶ William A. Sadler, in an exhaustive phenomenology of love, wrote that play is connected with love: “This is precisely what the world of love provides: *love gives man a home in which it is safe to play.*”⁵⁷ Certainly love is contrary to fear and the inhibition of the playful nature of humanity.

Compassionate love is important and worth studying, but it is erroneous to think that love must always be in compassionate form. Love is associated with joy, play, and celebration in relational freedom. To cite Sadler again, “Phenomenological investigations indicate that *the playground of freedom is love.*”⁵⁸ I do not wish to trivialize compassion or

suggest that life is as playful as Huizinga suggests. But life is somewhat playful, and *play can be an expression of love in its joyful affirmation of, and participation in, the sacredness of the other*. Many aspects of religious ritual represent love in the modulation of play. When the typical parent comes home, tired out after being at work all day, the first thing a young child wants to do is play; on this parent-child axis, joyful play with an inexhaustible child is surely a profound expression of love.

Neither is love reducible to care. Care, like compassion, is a vitally important modulation of love. Love is to person as care is to person-in-need. The caregiver tends to the needs of the other, but the person may not always be in need. What then? Does love stop? The tendency in the contemporary literature to speak almost exclusively of care rather than of love (except in love's romantic aspects) is remarkable, suggesting that we have lost sight of the higher meanings of love that give rise to the very existence of care and that are larger in scope than this particularly important manifestation.

Love is also not reducible to altruism in its broad sense, which includes groundings in capacities other than love. Love includes a strong element of loyalty (covenant, fidelity, patience), which may be entirely foreign to the instinctive altruist who dives into the cold sea to save a fellow sailor (perhaps at some peril to self). After the life-saving intervention, the altruist may simply walk away in search of some other opportunity to do good. The altruist may have no particular affective warmth or joy in the presence of the other even in the fleeting moment of passing encounter. I do not mean to imply that altruists are all lonely long-distance runners. The point is that altruism and love are not identical, however closely they may be related. Altruism can be purely instinctive, rooted in some primeval genetic force, or a purely reasoned act of duty. But altruistic love implies affection.

We turn briefly to Scheler and Toner, two key phenomenologists of other-regarding love. The German philosopher and phenomenologist Max Scheler was correct in

distinguishing the “big picture” of love from compassion, which he saw as “pity at its strongest.”⁵⁹ It is pity, of course, that, when genuine, “should lead to acts of beneficence.”⁶⁰ But love, Scheler argues, is too large a concept to be derived from compassion. He argues that such helping actions do not exhaust love. For Scheler, love is more a creative presence than a reaction to suffering or need. Love is expansive: “But love is a movement, passing from a lower value to a higher one, in which the higher value of the object of person suddenly flashes upon us; whereas hatred moves in the opposite direction.”⁶¹ Love is about the vision of fullness and value in the other, and all the intentional acts that this implies. In the widest affirming and enhancing sense possible, love is a “creative force.”⁶² In summary, “love is that movement wherein every concrete individual object that possesses value achieves the highest value compatible with its nature and ideal vocation; or wherein it attains the ideal state of value intrinsic to its nature. Hatred, on the other hand, is a movement in the opposite direction.”⁶³

There was no greater American phenomenologist of love than the Jesuit Jules Toner, whose writings established an important school of thought in the last three decades of the 20th century. His work, *The Experience of Love*, is considered a classic in the field.⁶⁴ It is immediately clear that love emerges from the whole agent, rather than from any single capacity: “In the full concrete experience of love, our whole being, spirit and flesh, is involved: cognitive acts, feelings and affection, freedom, bodily reaction – all these are influencing each other and all are continually fluctuating in such a way as to change the structure and intensity of the experience.”⁶⁵ By “*cognition*” Toner means memory, judgment, imagination, conceptualization, insight, and perception. By “*affection*” he means the experiences of joy and sorrow, love and hate, desire, hope, fear, and alike. By “*freedom*” Toner means the “power of self-determination by choice which is not determined by any condition or cause whether extrinsic to the agent or intrinsic to the agent but extrinsic to the

act of choosing. It is the power by which a man can responsibly approve or disapprove, affirm or negate, his spontaneous affective responses.⁶⁶ By “*bodily reactions*” he means everything from heartbeat to facial expression. (It is important to keep this full picture of the agent in mind, for it suggests that love can and should be empirically studied with all these psychic and somatic aspects of the person in view.)

Toner goes on to ask whether love is simply the composite of a number of affections, or whether it is unique. He sees the importance of empathic *care* for those in need, leading to the desire to assist altruistically, and appreciates why some will think of this as the root element of love. But such thinking is erroneous because love precedes and is wider than care: “And so, if love is basically caring or taking responsibility for someone, then it is never possible to love anyone unless I think he is in need. Nor is it even possible to love one whom I know is in need unless I am here and now considering his need.”⁶⁷ Love includes such things as a mother loving her child “in a moment of joyful security and careless playfulness,” for love as “affection toward someone as a radical end without regard to need has a priority over care.”⁶⁸ In essence, “when care and need cease, love does not cease. If all need were to be fulfilled in the loved one, that would not mean the death of love. Care is only the form love takes when the lover is attentive to the beloved’s need.”⁶⁹ The object of love is the actuality of the person whether or not he or she is in need.

If radical love is not to be equated with care, what of the affection of *joy*? Toner sees joy as an essential constituent of love—i.e., “joy in the happy actualization of the one rejoiced over for and in himself.”⁷⁰ Other-regarding love involves joy in a deep and broad sense. But love is not to be equated with joy, for love can bring suffering and sadness when the other is diminished.

In the final analysis, argues Toner, “radical love” is “a response to the fundamental actuality of the beloved, to his [or her] radical act of personal being.”⁷¹ Radical love does

respond to lovable qualities and actions. Yet, “love fails to be radical love of the other if in the other’s qualities the lover fails to love the person for and in himself.”⁷² It is, nevertheless, “easier to respond to the person for himself when he shows the beauty of his personal act of being in gentleness and generosity than when he distorts it by harshness and avarice.”⁷³

In a brilliant summary, Toner offers the following description of love:

It is a response to the beloved’s total reality. It is directly and explicitly a response to his actuality, fundamentally and in every instance to his fundamental actuality as a personal act of being; secondarily, to his qualitative actuality revealed in his acts and partially revealing his act of being. It is indirectly and implicitly a response to his potentiality, dynamism, and need. This response is experienced as liberation of the subject’s energy for love and liberation from the confinement of individual being. It is at the same time experienced as a willing captivity to the beloved.⁷⁴

It can be noted that preferential love is perfectly acceptable by this definition, so long as the assessment of the other’s attractive qualities does not supercede a more foundational love based on the value of his or her existence.⁷⁵ Throughout, Toner emphasizes that love is an attentive, consonant, affective affirmation of the other as a personal being. The consummation of radical love is communion with the other, although love is not dependent on communion and does not require this conditionally. Love seeks the good of the one loved, and leaves secondary effects such as reciprocity to take care of themselves.

I have not attended here to the vast history of ideas on love, although this has been the topic of previous work.⁷⁶ Instead, focus is placed on the experience of love, considered in the context of phenomenology.

A useful example of love emerges from the Russian tradition of the *ars moriendi* (“art of dying”) literature, as represented for modern readers by Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. Ivan is a remarkably unloving individual, callous and cold even toward family

members; before his death, he realizes that his life has been wrong. He rather *suddenly realizes and fully feels* that his schoolboy son has a life that is as meaningful as his own. This full emotional transformation away from solipsism toward the other enables Ivan to love the child.⁷⁷ Because Ivan's son is in tears, Tolstoy describes the first modulation of love as compassion. Various modulations of love include compassion, celebration, acceptance, patience, loyalty, care, joyful sacrifice, forgiveness, and resistance to destructive powers.

The literature on love is immense, and academics have approached it with rigor and occasional acrimony. I propose to build from love here from the descriptions of love furnished by prominent practitioners who have reputations for goodness through service to humanity. Such individuals have probably had some level of experience that elevates their degree of insight beyond mere abstraction. Epistemologically, I am interested in individuals who have knowledge *of* love, and not just knowledge *about* it.

Thus, I trust the definition of love that comes from men and women devoted to its practice. I refuse to take terribly seriously those who write about the nature of love as a matter of intellectual interest and scholarly advancement. While I am interested in the history of philosophical and theological thought on love, I do not believe that further interpretation of the history of ideas is an adequate beginning point for analysis. I prefer to focus on experience, practice, and subsequent scientific analysis.

4. THE PRACTICE OF LOVE

Let us begin with Jean Vanier, founder of l'Arche (1964), a faith-based international network of more than one hundred communities in thirty countries for people with intellectual disabilities. His discussion of the nature of love is found in a book, *Becoming Human*, which builds on his experiences in living with and serving persons with developmental cognitive disabilities.⁷⁸ Writing of his experiences in l'Arche, Vanier

describes the rejection felt by persons with these disabilities. He writes of the importance of their feeling loved: “In our l’Arche communities we experience that deep inner healing comes about mainly when people feel loved, when they have a sense of belonging. Our communities are essentially places where people can serve and create, and, most importantly, where they can love as well as be loved. The healing flows from relationships – it is not something automatic.”⁷⁹ Vanier describes Claudia, a 7-year-old autistic girl welcomed into a l’Arche community in Honduras: “Her anguish seemed to increase terribly when she arrived in the community, probably because in leaving the asylum, she lost her reference points, as well as the structured existence that had given her a certain security...She seemed totally mad, her personality appeared to be disintegrating.”⁸⁰ He continues:

Twenty years after she first arrived at Suyapa, I visited the community and met Claudia again; I found her quite well. She was by then a twenty-eight-year-old woman, still blind and autistic but at peace and able to do many things in the community. She still liked being alone but she was clearly not a lonely person. She would often sing to herself and there was a constant smile on her face.⁸¹

Vanier interprets her experience as a migration from loneliness and insecurity through community and love to inner peace. What does Vanier mean by love? Fortunately, he is specific about its seven aspects: to *reveal*; to *understand*; to *communicate*; to *celebrate*; to *empower*; to be *incommunity*; to *forgive*. I will present these aspects with some interpretation, and then segue to a phenomenological treatment of love based in part on the writings of Max Scheler and Jules Toner.

The first feature of love is the *revelation of value*: “Just as a mother and father reveal to their children that they have value and beauty, so, too, did the therapist and the others who lived with Claudia reveal to Claudia her value and beauty. To reveal someone’s beauty is to reveal their value by giving them time, attention, and tenderness.”⁸² In contrast to altruistic

actions alone, *“To love is not just to do something for them but to reveal to them their own uniqueness, to tell them that they are special and worthy of attention. We can express this revelation through our open and gentle presence, in the way we look and listen to a person, the way we speak to and care for someone.”*⁸³ The revelation of value can take time, but without it, Claudia’s screaming madness was a viable response to a world that had rejected her.

I think the agent of love lives in an enchanted world where the other has sacred value. How can we become so enchanted, and can we see even the most downcast outsider in this bright Rembrandt-like ray of light? The revelation of value typifies *all* forms of love. Parental love reveals to the child his or her inestimable and unique value in a way that would seem impossible outside of parental investment and even infatuation. In conjugal love, each spouse reveals value to the other in ways that may, to some extent, be rooted in romantic infatuations; this value must be grounded more deeply in affirmation of being if it is to last. The great world religions all begin with the affirmation of value and meaning in all humanity, for all life is above all a gift over which we are stewards. Lovers of all humanity see unique and inestimable value even in the most devastated, imperiled, and seemingly unattractive human lives. It seems that the great lovers of humanity either find or bestow a special value in each person and can point this value out to the world. People want to be valued for what they are - not in spite of what they are not.

Such revelation inevitably provides the other with comfort, safety, and a release from anxiety. It is in stark contrast to the malignant social psychology that makes the other feel that his or her very being rests on a mistake; love is a revelatory affirming participation in the being of the other.

Vanier’s second and third features of love are *understanding* and *communication*. Claudia “needed to be understood. If no one understood her how could they help Claudia to

find inner peace and growth? Her screams were not only a sign of her inner brokenness, darkness, and anguish but also a cry for help.”⁸⁴ *Understanding precedes compassion and care, for the lover must become aware by understanding the other’s suffering and need.* Most people, including children, who feel unloved will lament that they were never listened to and, therefore, were never understood. Love manifests a readiness to understand the history of malignant devaluation. Empathy is certainly an aspect of this process of understanding, although such understanding involves a degree of intentionality and skill that is much more than empathy alone. Someone who loves must be communicative, a process that moves back and forth in an open truthful flow of information, and that allows full and trusting articulation.

Vanier’s fourth feature of love is **celebration**. “To love people,” he writes, “is also to celebrate them.” Love involves laughter, joy, and play: “The Claudias also need laughter and play, they need people who will celebrate life with them and manifest their joy of being with them.”⁸⁵ Love relieves people from the perception that life is only a tragedy.

Love is not, in my view, best understood as a form of pity so much as an abrogation of rejection through the creation of a celebratory relationship. Negative self-esteem is finally conquered through celebration. It is the ultimate expression of inclusion, acceptance, and “being with.” Celebration allows the fulfillment of the will to exist and the will to belong.

Vanier’s fifth aspect of love is **empowerment**. As he writes of love, “It is not just a question of doing things for others but of helping them to do things for themselves, helping them to discover the meaning of their lives. To love means to empower.”⁸⁶ Claudia has to learn that she is responsible for her body, her life, and her choices. Further, “Empowerment meant that Claudia had to learn how to observe the structures of the community and make efforts to respect and love others.”⁸⁷ Those who love do not attempt to possess or control or program, but rather wish to create community in empowered freedom. Empowerment allows

one to have an identity based on a distinctive life journey, and to act in the light of that identity. *An empowering love requires that the other be cared for with respect to needs, but it also wishes to teach the other to care for self; love will take the form of service as need demands, but it wants to encourage responsibility as well.*

Vanier's definition of love evolves to include a sixth aspect, *to be in communion*.

Through revelation, understanding, communication, celebration, and empowerment, Claudia is now able to participate in mutual trust and mutual belonging. Communion is the sustaining end point of love, "it is the to-and-fro movement of love between two people where each one gives and each one receives."⁸⁸ Communion is not static, but constitutes an "ever-growing and ever-deepening reality that can turn sour if one person tries to possess the other, thus preventing growth."⁸⁹ Vanier writes of openness to one another, growth in freedom, and, above all, of trust as essential to communion. In trust, "Claudia entered into a relationship of belonging. But we can only give of ourselves if we trust that we will be well-received by someone. At what moment is trust born? There was a secret moment, known only to Claudia, when she recognized that she was loved."⁹⁰

In communion, the other has been discovered and accepted as worthy, and nurtured into trust and mutuality. The solipsistic tendency to view the other as valuable only insofar as he or she furthers "my" agenda has been completely set aside in all directions.

Vanier's final and seventh aspect of love is *forgiveness*. This aspect of love is central to communion, for we all need to be forgiven and to forgive. Forgiveness precludes the hatred and violence that destroy communion.

Love is a remarkably complex term used to mean anything for anyone. I believe Vanier has discovered its central meaning, and it is less a definition than a sketching out of aspects in chronological order: to reveal value; to understand; to communicate; to celebrate; to empower; to be in communion; to forgive. These are the observations of a man whose life

has been devoted to creating a healing world of love for those imperiled by harsh rejection. The opposite of love is *invalidation of being*, and the related objectification, mockery, disparagement, and destruction of being.

We move now from Vanier, whose ideas emerge from his experience as a person of unlimited love, to Tom Kitwood, known worldwide for his work with the most deeply forgetful – i.e., with persons who are demented. In his book *Dementia Reconsidered: The Person Comes First*, Kitwood writes, “I suggest that we might consider a cluster of needs in dementia, very closely connected, and functioning like some kind of cooperative. It might be said that there is only one all-encompassing need – for love.”⁹¹ Kitwood’s cluster is resonant with Vanier’s. He begins with *comfort*, which “carries meaning of tenderness, closeness, the soothing of pain and sorrow, the calming of anxiety, the feeling of security which comes from being close to another.”⁹² Kitwood then turns to *attachment*, which provides reassurance when bonds have been broken and the world is full of uncertainty. *Inclusion* follows, emphasizing the social nature of human life “related to the fact that we evolved as a species designed for life within face-to-face groups.”⁹³ The need for inclusion comes to the fore in dementia because the loss of memory and communicative capacity have cut the person off from so many forms of community. Kitwood then refers to *occupation*, some way of drawing on a person’s remaining abilities and powers to give him or her a sense of active agency. Finally, he includes *identity*, which flows from supportive community over time. Kitwood argues that love preserves personhood in the face of diminishing capacities. While Kitwood does not describe the chronological phenomenology of love as Vanier does, he too worked with a community of individuals who, however cognitively compromised, still needed to be loved and were often quite capable of returning love. (I remain convinced that we often are so busy that we forget about the centrality of love to human existence, and that

persons with cognitive disabilities serve to remind us of our most basic human needs and nature.⁹⁴⁾

5. DEFINITION REVISITED

What, then, of the word “*Unlimited*”? The word “limit” derives from the Latin *limis*, which means “boundary.” By dictionary definition (Oxford), a limit is “a point, line, or level beyond which something does not or may not extend or pass. “Unlimited” means without limit, or with no restriction whatsoever. Unlimited Love is love for all humanity and, on a lesser ontological level, for all living creatures. “Unlimited Love” means that there will be no insulating boundaries drawn to separate “them” from “us,” that love for the neediest stranger must deeply and honestly challenge any over-indulgence of the near and dear, that even the most vile enemy must be forgiven at some level.

To quote Templeton: “Unlimited love was called *agape* by the ancient Greeks to distinguish the divine love from earthly emotions. *Unlimited love means total constant love for every person with no exception.*”⁹⁵ Such love, argues Templeton, is productive of health and peace in the world.

Unlimited Love is resonant with *agape*, as I already have mentioned. This form of love is present in all the major world religions, from the Jewish notion of *hesed* (“steadfast love”) and the Buddhist ideal of *karuna* (“compassion”) to rough equivalents in Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Native American spirituality. Such love was the centerpiece of works by Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and Erich Fromm. Teilhard de Chardin commented that the scientific understanding of the power of this love would be as significant in human history as the discovery of fire.

The question, of course, is how to harness the creative energy of Unlimited Love. We need to better understand the obstacles to Unlimited Love, and how to overcome them.

Delving into the history of ideas and practice of love may be helpful, but the frank reality is that unlimited love has not been fully realized even in those traditions that most eloquently extol it. *Thus, there is a need for immense new knowledge of love that is based on the best scientific methods and that can, therefore, move our understanding forward, allowing for more effective pedagogy of the young and the old, and the transformation of culture and society.*

What, then, do we mean by Unlimited Love?

The essence of love is to affectively affirm and to gratefully delight in the well-being of others; the essence of Unlimited Love is to extend this form of love to all others in an enduring fashion. In addition to being understood as the highest form of virtue, Unlimited Love is often deemed a Creative Presence underlying and integral to all reality. Participation in Unlimited Love is considered the fullest experience of spirituality, giving rise to inner peace and kindness, as well as to active works of love toward all humanity. Depending on the circumstances of others, Unlimited Love is to degrees expressed in a number of ways, including empathy and understanding, generosity and kindness, compassion and care, altruism and self-sacrifice, celebration and joy, and forgiveness and justice. In all these manifestations, Unlimited Love acknowledges for all others the absolutely full significance that, because of egoism or hatred, we otherwise acknowledge only for ourselves.

One definition in the theological literature that I think captures the root of the experience of love and points in the direction of Unlimited Love is that of H. Richard Niebuhr:

By love we mean at least these attitudes and actions: rejoicing in the presence of the beloved, gratitude, reverence and loyalty toward him.

Love is rejoicing over the existence of the beloved one; it is the desire that he be rather than not be; it is longing for his presence when he is absent; it is happiness in the thought of him; it is profound satisfaction over everything that makes him great and glorious.⁹⁶

Rejoicing, gratitude, reverence, and loyalty are all constituent elements of unlimited or *agape* love. Love is gratitude or thankfulness for the existence of the other; it is a reverence that seeks not to absorb the other or refashion her as an image of the self; it is a loyalty that would rather allow the self to be destroyed than have the other cease to exist.

6. LOVE OF SELF

The love that interests us here is not reciprocal. It makes no bargains. It is pure in the sense of affirming the other as other, rather than for some ulterior selfish motive. Yet somewhat paradoxically, in its effects such love contributes to the development of the self in profound ways. It allows the agent of love to treat the inner life of emotion and thought, as well as the outer life of word and deed, as an opportunity for ethical and spiritual beauty.

Love for others does not preclude love of self in unselfish ways, by which I primarily mean caring for self primarily with others in mind and in the process discerning higher levels of dignity. Unselfish love of self does not engage in the calculations of “impartiality” by which the needs of self are placed on a scale and balanced evenly with the needs of others in the tradition of an Aristotelian mean. When a parent sets aside concern for self in order to care for an ill child, or when a caregiver accepts the risks involved in tending to the very neediest in time of epidemic, sacrifice of the self and its autonomous interests comes with the territory.⁹⁷ The routine social desire for reciprocity more or less vanishes; the demands of self have escaped motivational consciousness.

I do not agree with the assumption that we need to love ourselves before we can love others. It is sometimes argued that we must reflect on our own deep primal experience of self-love before we can fulfill the ideal of love for neighbors. While the primacy of love of self as prior to loving others is widely expounded, it seems chiefly to endorse egoism. Is it not more salutary to focus on others rather than self, and in this way, discover a whole new self that is more abundant? Love thy neighbor, and thereby discover the paradox of happiness in the forgetting of self.

The self who has forgotten self-centeredness and live close to Unlimited Love will of course want to engage in self-care, but this is shaped *not by self-interest but by a totally different level of being*. Those who approach Unlimited Love will never be self-indulgent, but they will be good stewards of their minds and bodies as instruments of love. Good self-stewardship remains important, for otherwise the agent of love will be subject to unnecessary emotional and physical deterioration that hampers the capacity to care for others. Secondly, the agent of love is also the object of divine love, and therefore has a responsive duty to tend to his or her dignity. One might work out, take a vacation, catch a movie, and alike, but this is never a matter of self-indulgence; instead, at some level, one has in mind the need to “get away from it all” so that one might afterwards return to tasks refreshed, and at another level, one wishes to maintain a dignified presentation of self that conveys the significance of one’s ideals. A parent takes care of self not for self but for others, in this case children; a full-time volunteer for L’Arche or Habitat for Humanity cares for self in order to be able to care well for others; a rescuer at Ground Zero rests in the pews of St. Paul’s Chapel and takes times for nourishment so that the rescuing might continue and so that he or she might live on to care for loved ones. As the great African-American theologian Howard Thurman prayed, “Teach us how to respond to the needs of Thy children in ways that do not undermine the self but inspire and enliven the spirit.”⁹⁸

Self-stewardship requires that the agent of love is not always in the mode of “doing.” Kirk Byron Jones, a theologian and Baptist minister at Andover-Newton Theological School, writes that we need to see value in simply being, rather than measure our worth through a calculus of activity: “Before you are a pastor, before you are a parent, spouse, or friend, you are a child of God, a person whom God loves unconditionally.”⁹⁹ In a useful distinction, Jones asks that we not “discard legitimate personhood along with the garbage of selfishness and egoism.”¹⁰⁰ A great deal of the care of the self, argues Jones, involves taking the necessary time for silence, meditation, contemplation, and prayer, in order that one’s life might flow from God-centeredness rather than self-centeredness.

To a large degree, true love of self is captured under the rubric of *inner piece*. The Dalai Lama, for instance, writes of spirituality as “those qualities of the human spirit— such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony – which bring happiness *to both self and others* [italics mine].¹⁰¹ While he speaks of a “radical reorientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self” that gives rise to helping behavior, this does not result in self-immolation but rather in self-discovery.¹⁰²

I would hypothesize that living a life of love will, in the generalizable epidemiological sense, reduce morbidity and enhance longevity. Good care of the self for the sake of others is probably more effective and enduring than care of self for the sake of self, which seems ultimately less than fully meaningful. But longevity can never be counted on, as there will always be those who have died young and well for loving purposes – e.g., Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. – and we should have no illusions about the costs of such discipleship. The idea that living more for others than for self is healthy, however, is clearly worthy of scientific assessment.

It seems clear that love for others contributes to self-esteem. We discover inner peace and self-worth as we take care of others. The struggle to achieve self-esteem is often monumental in life, and claims the lives of growing numbers of adolescents. Many lives are diminished, ruined, or lost in the cycle of *anomie* and self-destruction that results from the low self-esteem of a solipsistic or narcissistic life. *The best way to achieve a sense of self-worth is through genuinely loving and serving others.* As many admissions officers at outstanding schools will attest, many of the finest applicants typically have some significant experience in a voluntary association or faith community that teaches the joy of service to humanity. People who find meaning in love for others have found meaning for their lives, and they are thereby liberated from the pain and imperilment of purposelessness. They are freed from the malaise of existential despair. In the process, they may discover new talents and abilities because they have something worthwhile around which to focus their energies other than themselves. Paradoxically, then, those who lose themselves will find their truer selves (Luke 9:24). In passing love on to others the self discovers itself in its fullest potential.

7. RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Against the background of the above discussion, I wish to conclude with a more concise definition of unlimited love, and some initial comments on the importance of the science of love.

The concept of love is ineffable because if “God is love,” then love, like God, admits of linguistic approximations but escapes the full grasp of words. This is why love is learned by transmission and example, rather than by word and definition. Nevertheless, words are helpful for clarification:

The essence of love is to affectively affirm as well as to gratefully delight in the well-being of others, and to engage in acts of care and service on their behalf; Unlimited Love extends this love to all others without exception, and in an enduring and constant way. Widely considered the highest form of virtue, Unlimited Love is often deemed the creation of God, and a creative energy underlying and integral to all of reality, participation in which constitutes the fullest experience of spirituality. Unlimited Love acknowledges for all humanity the absolutely full significance that, because of egoism, hatred, and group conflict we otherwise acknowledge only for ourselves and for those closest to us. It is love that demonstrates, in Sorokian measures, the highest intensivity, extensivity, duration, purity, and adequacy.

In a time when cultural myths, images of human nature, and international conflicts may lead us to doubt the possibility of love and its manifestation in the world, we are inspired by those who devote their lives to serving the neediest among us regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, or class.

The idea of Unlimited Love will strike some as peculiar and naïve. Yet it has been affirmed across cultures and traditions as perennial truth. For example: “My humanity is bound up with yours, for we can only be human together” (Desmond Tutu); “He who hath compassion upon others receives compassion from Heaven” (Talmud); “We can do no great things – only small things with great love” (Mother Teresa); “The very core of peace and love is imagination. All altruism springs from putting yourself in the other person’s place” (Harry Emerson Fosdick); “Kind speech and forgiveness is better than alms followed by injury” (Qur’an); “God’s love allows no limits to be set for it by the character or conduct of man” (Anders Nygren); “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (I John); “Grandfather, Sacred One, Teach us love, compassion, and honor that we may heal the earth and heal each other” (A prayer of the Ojibway people of Canada); “Where there is

hatred, let me sow love” (St. Francis of Assisi); “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus); “Love is the vital essence that pervades and permeates, from the center to the circumference, the graduating circles of all thought and action” (Elizabeth Cady Stanton); “A coward is incapable of exhibiting love; it is the prerogative of the brave” (Mohandas K. Gandhi); “I believe that love is the greatest thing in the world; that it alone can overcome hate; that right can and will triumph over might” (John D. Rockefeller, Jr.); “He prayeth best who loveth best. All things great and small; For the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge); “Love cures people - both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it” (Dr. Karl Menninger); “Kindness in giving creates love” (Lao Tzu); “Love seeks only one thing: the good of the one loved. It leaves all the other secondary effects to take care of themselves” (Thomas Merton).

Perhaps the most eloquent poet of love in Christianity was St. Paul, who wrote as follows:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends... (I Cor. 13:1-8).

No matter what we try to accomplish in life, and no matter how successful and impressive we might be, in the absence of love there is no real worth in what we do.

In the next chapter, we will consider more contemporary social scientific and evolutionary assessments of the possibility for genuine other-regarding love in *Homo sapiens*. Some, like Sorokin, view humans as having at least a rudimentary capacity for such love that is enlivened by a participation in divine love. Yet some social science, for example Freudianism and, to some extent, classical evolutionary biology or evolutionary psychology, have painted a portrayed human nature as consisting of a thin veneer of altruistic and loving motivation over a boiling cauldron of wanton self-interest. While I do not think that such conclusions are credible, we begin to doubt ourselves and our better instincts unless we discuss such views with care. Lives of love and unlimited love can always be reduced to extraordinary efforts at enhanced self-reputation for social gain, or to hedonic efforts to assuage the pains of the superego. I do not think that science supports this conclusion, and dialogue with science is tremendously important in this domain.

The dominant paradigm of our time is scientific, and thus dialogues between science, religion, and ethics are vital to intellectual and practical progress. The scientific study of how ordinary good people give other-regarding love is important. What are their typical characteristics? What is their course of human development, their age and sex? Do they live relatively fulfilled, happy, healthy and long lives in comparison with egoists? How did their parents influence them, if at all? The Anglins do not seem to be bound by the chains of selfish genes and tribal insularities. We might ask how they developed an interest in special needs adoption. These sorts of questions might also be directed toward truly exemplary individuals whose lives of unlimited love become ensconced in the legacy of sainthood.

As Sorokin wrote:

We have studied the negative types of human beings sufficiently – the criminal, the

insane, the sinning, ... and the selfish. But we have neglected the investigation of positive types of *Homo sapiens*—the creative genius, the saint, the “good neighbor.”

We know a great deal about the general characteristics of the subsocial types. But we know precious little of the general or typical properties of creative persons. What, if any, are the typical characteristics of altruistic persons?¹⁰³

Many of these characteristics await empirical discussion in chapter 5. In the next chapter, we take up the general scientific problem of possible altruistic motivations in *Homo sapiens*. If one were to make a small dot in the middle of a large whiteboard, the dot would represent what we really know about love; the white represents what we don't know - which is a great deal. We proceed, then, with humility.

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